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# IGBO ONTOLOGY OF PERSON AND ENVIRONMENT

Chiedozie Okoro, Uduma Oji Uduma and Igbán Kalu Odím

## Abstract

*The human person and the environment are intricately interwoven and interdependent. This complementary and symbiotic co-existence is buttressed by the fact that human beings or human persons derive their sustenance from the environment. In some sense, human beings are said to have evolved from the biotic environment; at least, this is the thesis espoused by Charles Darwin in his theory of evolution. Technically therefore, the environment comprises the human community and the non-human community as well as the inter-relationship between them. This inter-relationship between human persons and the environment raises fundamental questions that border on the ontological constitution of the human person, the place of the human person in the cosmic environment and the purpose or end (telos) of the human person on earth. Hence, in this essay, the Igbo world-view of the ontology of the human person and the environment is discussed from three basic perspectives which are; the ontological, the cosmological and the teleological. Put differently, in this essay an **ontologico-cosmologico-teleologico-cyclic** view of the universe is espoused. This is done with the singular intention of re-enforcing the point that personhood or human beingness is unattainable outside the environment.*

**Keywords:** Cosmology, Environment, Ontology, Person, Teleology.

## Introduction

Ontology is that aspect of metaphysics which studies Being as Being as different from beings. In “The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics”, Martin Heidegger declares as follows: “The truth of Being may thus be called the ground in which metaphysics, as the root of philosophy, is kept and from which it is nourished”.<sup>1</sup> Because metaphysics

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics”, *Philosophy of Recent Times vol. II: Readings in Twentieth-Century Philosophy*, (Ed. James B. Hartman), New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967, p. 433.

studies beings instead of Being, it is defined as the study of reality and as such “a science of the roots”.<sup>1</sup> or what Edmund Husserl calls the *rhizomata pantheon*.<sup>2</sup> Since ontology is the science of Being and Being is the ground in which metaphysics is rooted, ontology can thus be described as the science or theory of foundation. With regards to the human person or the human being, ontology would apply to the study of the *self*, which, as the source of human transcendence, constitutes the ontological essence of human beings. The preceding point is reiterated by Heidegger who states thus: “Every philosophy which revolves around an indirect or direct conception of transcendence remains of necessity essentially an ontology”.<sup>3</sup>

The ontological study of the *self* is an integral part of the discourse on human nature which falls under the purview of ontology of man. The discourse on human nature, with particular reference to the *self*, is the basic preoccupation of philosophy of mind where theories are replete about the nature and structure of the *self*. From the innate to the bundle theory of mind, idealistic and materialistic conceptions of mind; interactionism, occasionalism, parallelism, phenomenalism, epiphenomenalism, physicalism, quasi-physicalism and the integrated theory of mind also known as the transcendental theory of mind. But since the ontology of man is concerned with the treatment of the *self* as that endowed with the innate power to institute both transcendence and immanence, in this essay, the integrated theory of mind is privileged over and above other theories of mind. This apart, going by the principles of duality and complementarity in Igbo (African) metaphysics, the *self* is seen as an integrated whole.

But what is the *self*? It is a technical way of defining the human person or the human being as pure and holistic consciousness capable of both

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Philosophie als Wissenschaft*, excerpts in *The Ways of Knowing and Thinking*, by E. A. Ruch (1977), New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Ltd., 1965, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Heidegger, 1967, op. cit., p. 441

transcendent (metaphysical) and immanent (physical) deliberations and activities. The *Encarta English Dictionary*<sup>4</sup> defines person as a synonym for human being. The expression human being reflects the duality of the *self* as a person. Therefore, from the purview of “integrative metaphysics”,<sup>5</sup> *self* or *person* comprises a duality of the immaterial and the material. Beyond this duality, *self* or *person* is also tripartite, consisting of the transcendent (immaterial), immanent (material) and transcendental (interconnectedness or interdependence of the immaterial and the material). It is in this later sense that human being is said to consist of spirit, mind and body.

Fundamentally, the integrative conception of person is directed at portraying the human being as an entity capable of transcendence. Transcendence is the imaginative power in humans to visualize or image the world in trance form, which entails going transcendental or a going beyond experience into the not experienced, a going from the known to the unknown; an act that challenges the nothingness in humans to always rise to the occasion of deciphering better ways of constructing and reconstructing the environment. It is by the act of transcendence that meaning or form is given to the world.

Transcendence makes humans meaning seekers and meaning makers, problem posers and problem solvers, and by this act of giving meaning (form) to the world, harmony is brought into chaos of the environment. Hence, it is by the power of transcendence that humans instruct unity into divert and resolve the heterogeneity of experience into a homogeneity. Transcendence is the human ability to negate or to alter situations (for good or for bad). This power to regularize, formalize, configure, organize and transform manifests in the forms of creativity, invention, discovery

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<sup>4</sup> *Encarta English Dictionary*, Microsoft Corporation, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Chiedozie Okoro, “The Notion of Integrative Metaphysics and its Relevance to Contemporary World Order”, *Integrative Humanism Journal*, (A Publication of the Department of Classics and Philosophy, University of Cape Coast, Ghana), Vol. 1: No. 2, (September 2011).

and revelation. Thus, transcendence makes the human person both an ontological and an ontic being.

Person, as ontological, is a transcendent being capable of going beyond experience. As an ontic being, person is immanent and manifests existential capability to relate with the environment. This wise, the human person's relationship with the environment is transcendental in the sense that as a creative agent seeking to transform the environment, the human person unwittingly destroys the environment. This transformative and destructive capacities of human persons constitute a serious concern for the environment, especially in contemporary times when the activities of human beings have become monumentally destructive to the environment. The serious concern being talked about borders on the question: Which conception of person promotes a complementary and symbiotic understanding of and inter-relationship between human beings and the environment and by so doing comprehensively ameliorates human destructive tendencies towards the environment?

*Microsoft Encarta* defines environment as:

All of the external factors affecting an organism. These factors may be other living organisms (biotic factors) or nonliving variables (abiotic factors), such as temperature, rainfall, day length, wind, and ocean currents. The interactions of organisms with biotic and abiotic factors form an ecosystem. Even minute changes in any one factor in an ecosystem can influence whether or not a particular plant or animal species will be successful in its environment.<sup>6</sup>

It further defines the ecosystem as: "Organisms living in a particular environment, such as a forest or a coral reef, and the physical parts of the

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<sup>6</sup>*Microsoft Encarta*, Microsoft Corporation, 2009.

environment that affect them”.<sup>7</sup> It also explains that: “The term *ecosystem* was coined in 1935 by the British ecologist Sir Arthur George Tansley, who described natural systems in “constant interchange” among their living and nonliving parts”.<sup>8</sup> It is obvious from the preceding that the environment is the natural habitat where both the human community and the non-human community find expression, making persons and environment to be intricately interwoven and interdependent.

### **Igbo Ontology of Person**

Igbo word for person is *mmadu* or *mmadi*.<sup>9</sup> Igbo ontology of person is integrative in the sense that *mmadu* comprises *mmuo* (the spiritual of immaterial part of the human being) and *ahu* or *aru* (the physical or material part of the human being). *Ahu* consists of the physiological, biological, psychological and neurological functions of the body and is subject to the laws of permanence and change as depicted by the four governing elements *eke* (representing water), *orie* (representing air), *aho* or *afo* (representing earth) and *nkwo* (representing fire). These four elements can further be grouped into two. Whereas *eke* and *aho* represent permanence, *orie* and *nkwo* represent change. *Aho* as earth is the container, *eke* symbolizing water is the contained. *Orie* represents speed (of light or wind), *nkwo* symbolizes decomposition or alteration. For the Igbo, the four elements are four ways in which spirit manifested itself in physical form.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Chiedozie Okoro, “Integrative Metaphysics and Justice System in Africa: Relevance to Contemporary Africa”. *The Humanities and the Dynamics of African Culture in the 21st Century* (Eds. J. A. I. Bewaji, K. W. Harrow, E. E. Omonzejie and C. E. Ukhun), (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017a); Chiedozie Okoro, “The Logic and Epistemology of Life-force in African Philosophy”, *Awise Agbaye: The Voice of the Oracles; Essays in Honour of Professor Ogunwande Abimbola at 85*. (Eds. Akin Ibidapo-Obe and Chiedozie Okoro), (Lagos: Concept Publications, 2017b).

<sup>10</sup> Kalu I. Odim, *An Afrocentric Deconstruction of Immanuel Kant's Conception of Imagination and Symbolism*, Being a Ph.D thesis submitted to the Department of Philosophy and approved by the School of Postgraduate Studies, University of Lagos for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in Philosophy, 2019.

Within the confine of traditional Igbo-African thought system *mmadu* is conceived to be essentially transcendental or simply spiritual. D. E. Idoniboye amplifies this point when he states thus: “Spirit is the animating, sustaining, creative life-force of the universe. It is what gives anything its individuality. In human bodies it becomes the *mind* or *soul* so that the individual mind or soul shares in the collective mind-or-soul-stuff of the universe”.<sup>11</sup> As stated earlier, the duality of *mmadu* comprises *ahu* and *mmuo mmadu*. *Mmuo mmadu* depicts man as pure spirit (i.e. pure consciousness) or simply the vital-force (i.e. causative agent) that animates the human body (*aru*) with consciousness.

It is the invisible or intangible part of *mmadu* which as the source of life is associated (though not identified) with the breath. *Mmuo mmadu* or the immaterial part of the person further consists of *éké* (facticity), *agwu* (fallenness) and *chi* (the source of human transcendence or existentiality). As a living entity, *mmadu* is at the states of *aho* and *eke* in the sense that the body (*ahu*) becomes a container for the spirit (*mmuo mmadu*). On the reverse order, *mmuo mmadu* is contained in *ahu*. It is in this sense that the Igbo say that *mmadu* is both physical and spiritual (*okara mmadu okara mmuo*). At death, *mmuo mmadu* departs to *orie* (the spirit world) while *ahu* departs to *nkwo* (the process of decomposition).

The duality of *mmadu* portrays humans as beings that are both sentient or immanent and transcendent. Physicality depicts *mmadu* as an immanent finite being with fallible tendencies, while pure consciousness depicts *mmadu* as a transcendent being with the infinite capacities to create, invent and discover, thereby making *mmadu* an ontological being with the propensity to transcend a given situation. Fundamentally, the whole talk about transcendence and immanence concerns which faculty of the mind institutes both subjectivity (which depicts the human ontological power to

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<sup>11</sup> Dagogo E. Idoniboye, “The Idea of African Philosophy: The Concept of Spirit in African Metaphysics”. *Second Order*, (Ed. J. O. Sodipo), Vol. II, No. 1., 1973, p. 83.

institute transcendence) and objectivity (which depicts the human ontic ability to relate with experience).

From biological, neurological, physiological and psychological perspectives, *ahu* or *aru* consists of the five senses and this include *anya* (eyes) for *ifuzo* (sight), *nti* (ears) for *inuiche* (hearing), *imi* (nose) for *inuinsi* (smell), *ire* (tongue) for *inuto* (taste) and the *ahunile* (the whole-body system) for *mmetuta* (touch or feeling). *Mmetuta* further consists of *mmetuta ahu* (feeling of solidity or coming into encounter with conditions such as heat or cold, of liquid or of gas) and *mmetuta obi* (emotional feeling). The Igbo *obi* or *mkpuruobi* refers to the heart which has both physical and spiritual essences. Encounter with the environment is made possible by the fact that *mmadu* is endowed with physical body to feel the world, and spiritual and mental capacities to interpret experiences of the world.

It is instructive from the above submissions that *mmuo mmadu* is the source of human personality (the Igbo *onwe*). *Onwe*,<sup>12</sup> translated as the human personality or the *self*, further comprises *éké*, *agwu*, and *chi*. *Éké* is the fulfilled path, the determined path or yesterday. It deals with the past which we can do little or nothing about. In existentialist term *éké* would refer to human facticity. *Agwu*, in the most ordinary sense refers to human fallenness which portrays humans as emotional sentient weak entities that have the tendency to backslide, loose focus, be fallen or become entirely prostrate. Again, we notice the human conflicting nature come into play. As a sentient being, *mmadu* is not different from the animals over which he/she rules and should one decide to rue the past, one will definitely fail to utilize one's *chi* possibilities.

To lead life at the levels of *éké* and *agwu*, is to lead life at its ebb and the ebbing of life simply amounts to self-abandonment, to forfeiture. However, this is just the negative side to *agwu*. *Agwu* has its positive side.

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<sup>12</sup> Chuka A. Okoye, "Onwe: An Inquiry into the Igbo Concept of the Self". doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/og.v8i1.4>. 24/11/2019. DOI: 10.13189/sa.2019.070302, 2011.

As the middle point between *éké* and *chi*, *agwu* also plays a mediating role. In other words, *agwu* plays a dual role. The duality to the function of *agwu* is that one who lacks self-discipline can easily be fallen. But one in a complete state of awareness or self-control has the privilege to exercise his/her will power and in the process, turns adversity into advantage. And this is what it means to be a *dike*. *Dike*, in Igbo, is a wise, brave and courageous person who exercises the strength or will power to alter situations for the common good. Therefore, *agwu* has the tendency to either facilitate one's misfortune or amplify one's fortune.

*Chi*, represents the human ego, super ego, or transcendental self, endowed with the ability to institute transcendence, making *mmadu* a being of possibilities, a being of boundless potentialities. *Chi* therefore, represents man's futuristic essence which is why it is used to depict man's destiny. Anyone who must strive to surpass the vicissitudes of life has no choice but to call upon one's *chi*. It is in this sense that the Igbo proclaim the transcendentality of *chi* thus: *onye kwe chi ya ekwe*, meaning if one affirms one's *chi* will affirm. Hence *chi* as one's transcendent essence is the fountain of one's will to power.

### **Igbo Cosmology of Person and Environment**

Cosmology is the science about the structure and evolution of the Universe on the large scale, its past, present and future.<sup>13</sup> Igbo cosmology of person and environment is fully expressed in Igbo culture which consists of *ntoala* (Igbo spirituality cum metaphysics), *odinala* (Igbo scientific understanding of the environment) and *omenala* (Igbo value system of interaction in the society and within the environment).

Igbo cosmology is at once dualistic, tripological, cyclical and hierarchical. Duality in Igbo world-view is different from the principle of dualism in classical Western philosophy. Whereas in dualism the individuality and

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<sup>13</sup> S. S. Komissarov, *Cosmology*, email: [S.S.Komissarov@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:S.S.Komissarov@leeds.ac.uk), 2016, p. 5, Accessed 21/03/2025.

independence of opposites or contraries is propagated, in the duality principle, opposites or contraries are seen as incomplete, interdependent and complementary. S. B. Oluwole uses the expression “opposition dualism”<sup>14</sup> to describe the principle of dualism in classical Western metaphysics, she describes the principle of duality in African metaphysics as “complementary dualism”.<sup>15</sup> Duality in Igbo cosmology is expressed in Igbo doctrine of cosmic evolution which is pantheistic. Like it is typical of every traditional African world outlook, the Igbo do not understand the creative source of the universe as a being or person(s), but simply as a force.

For the Igbo, the physical universe is a manifestation of the almighty or universal force. In essence, the physical universe is the body of God as the most supreme force (i.e. force of forces), implying that the most supreme force lives in the physical universe. It further implies that every physical thing is alive, endowed with and activated by the cosmic force principle. It also explains why the African universe is described as that which is pregnant of forces or simply force populated; it is a universe of force dynamism or plenum of forces. This pantheistic world-view of the Igbo-African is known as the principle of vitalism which has been variously described as the theory of force by Placid Tempels,<sup>16</sup> the doctrine of spiritual primacism by C.S. Momoh, the theory of the interpenetrability of forces by K. C. Anyanwu or simply the force thesis.

Duality in Igbo cosmology is the basis for the tripological synergy between human beings, the society and the cosmic environment. In this tripological synergy, “the cosmic or universal order is replicated in the societal order, the societal order is further replicated in the self or

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<sup>14</sup> Sophie B. Oluwole, *Socrates and Orunmila: Two Patron Saints of Classical Philosophy*, (Lagos: Ark Publishers, 2014), p. 132; See also Campbell S. Momoh, (Ed.), *The Substance of African Philosophy*, (Auchi: African Philosophy Project Publication, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>16</sup> Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959).

individual order and vice versa”.<sup>17</sup> The world in which we live consists of the spirit world, the human world and the world of animals, plants and minerals. In the same vein, society is structured on the family, the age grade and the guild all of which are extended and interconnected. The human person is seen as a composition of spirit, mind and body. The affinity between human beings and the environment is vividly seen in the fact that the human person and the four elements that sustain the earth (*eke, orie, aho* and *nkwo*) have the same ontological structure.

Recall that it was earlier stated that *mmadu* in Igbo consists of *ahu* and *mmuo mmadu*, which constitutes the *self* (Igbo *onwe*). That *ahu* is susceptible to the four governing elements *eke* (water), *orie* (wind), *aho* (earth) and *nkwo* (fire). It was also stated that the Igbo *onwe* (the self) comprises *éké*, *agwu* and *chi*. It is interesting to note that in Igbo cosmology, the internal structure of each of the four governing elements (*eke, orie, aho* and *nkwo*), is permeated and directed by the primordial forces of *éké*, *agwu* and *chi*.

It is in the above sense that the Igbo say that in appearance (*na ihe*) there are four visible elements which are *eke, orie, aho* and *nkwo*, each of which is structured by three hidden or invisible (*ihe dina nzizo* or *ihe di omi*) forces which are *éké*, *agwu* and *chi*. It is also in this light that the Igbo confidently proclaim that the days of the week are four, those who say that the days of the week are seven are stupid (*ubochi di ano, ndi si na ubochi di asa bu ndi nzuzu*). Visible in the foregoing analysis is the inseparable and interdependent affinity between human persons and the environment.

Logically, the tripological nature of Igbo cosmology becomes the anchor for the cyclical and hierarchical structure of Igbo world-view. The Igbo (African) hold the view that the world rotates on a tripod which is represented with the aid of an equilateral triangle and is responsible for

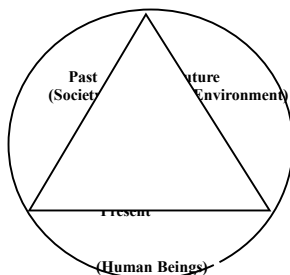
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<sup>17</sup> K. C. Anyanwu, “African Political Doctrine”, *African Philosophy: An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa*, (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1981), p. 371.

the quarterly mutation of things. When transposed into a circle, the circle immediately becomes divided into three equal halves, thereby providing the foundation for the tripological and cyclical interaction and interdependence of things on equal basis. Hence, the Igbo (African) considers man and society to be embodiments of spirit and matter, which in turn rotates upon the cyclical triad (i.e. the tripod). Ancestors, living humans and unborn children represent the past, the present and the future respectively.

This cyclical triad is most visible in the age-grade system. According to M.A. Onwuejeogwu: “Age-grade is seen as a movement of the future through the present into the past, the future is transformed into the present by various ceremonies; the present is transformed into the past by retirement and mortuary rites; and the past is transformed into the future by reincarnation”.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, Igbo world outlook professes a holistic understanding of the environment. For the Igbo, there is necessarily interdependence between human beings, society and environment. This can be illustrated with the aid of a diagram.

**Figure1: Diagram Representing Igbo (African) Dualistic, Tripological and Cyclical World Outlook (Portraying Interdependence)**



<sup>18</sup> Onwuejeogwu, M. A. *Afa Symbolism and Phenomenology in Nri Kingdom and Hegemony: An African Philosophy of Social Action*. Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1997, p. 115.

Following the hierarchical and cyclical orders forces are arranged according to their order of importance in such a way that higher forces affect lower forces, negatively or positively. The forces are also arranged according to their identical nature. As Anyanwu put it, the arrangement of forces in the ordinance of their hierarchy and their identical nature requires that:

All forces be strengthened and not weakened, that an individual should be seen in the light of the whole and that meaning, significance and value depend on the art of integration.<sup>19</sup>

By implication, world reorientation and social reconstruction should begin from the enlightenment and reformation of the self, for the re-atonement of the self-order to the social and the cosmic orders. Elsewhere Anyanwu states that in the tripological, hierarchical and cyclical conceptions of the cosmos, forces are interfused. Hence, we do not speak of disunity or dissociation, but of association, co-existence and co-operation. We do not

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<sup>19</sup> Anyanwu, 1981, op. cit., p. 371.

speak of isolated activities, but of symbiosis. In the universe of holism, things are not compartmentalized, departmentalized and fragmented.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure2: Diagram Representing Igbo Hierarchical view of the world<sup>21</sup>**

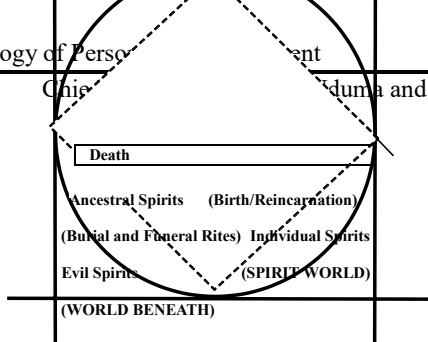
**SKY SUPREME BEING**

**Major Divinities  
Minor Divinities  
Patron Spirits  
Nature Spirits  
Earth Goddess  
EARTH Animate and Inanimate Beings  
Human Beings  
(HUMAN WORLD)**

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<sup>20</sup> K. C. Anyanwu, "Presuppositions of African Socialism", *The Nigerian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 3. (1983), pp. 53-54.

<sup>21</sup> M. A. C. Nwoye, "Igbo cultural and religious worldview: An insider's perspective", *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 3(9), pp. 304-317, Available online <http://www.academicjournals.org/IJSA>, (2011), p. 308.



Obvious in the above diagram is the fact that in Igbo cosmology, the hierarchy of forces portray inter connectivity and interdependence. It is also obvious that for the Igbo, the totality of the earth environment is sacred. From the earth core, to the mantle, the crust, hydrosphere, biosphere, terrestrial life, the atmosphere and the stratosphere are all sacred to the Igbo. This explains the reason why the earth is represented in the image of a mother. For the Igbo, the earth is not just female, it is the mother of all entities, organic or inorganic. For this reason, Igbo ethics extends beyond the human society to the environment as exemplified in the concept of *nso ala*. *Nso ala* are those acts considered as abominable to mother earth. *Nso ala* set moral limits that must not be infringed upon and should one trespass upon or transgress this moral limit, the Igbo consider it a heinous crime against nature. Such moral transgression attracts severe penalties.

For instance, no one is expected to sell or kill a pregnant female animal (especially domestic animal). Likewise, a herbivorous wild animal escaping from the hot chase of a predator animal should not be harmed but protected. Generally, for the Igbo, animals are not to be hunted for game but only for food. Besides, of all the deities, mother earth and the female deities are the most benevolent. The Igbo high reference for the earth environment is further demonstrated by the act of oath taking. In matters of great importance, offenders are made to swear on the earth. Anyone who swears by the earth deity and goes ahead to tell falsehood cannot escape the wrath of the earth and this is because human persons (as it is

for all other creation) derive their existence and sustenance from the earth. In fact, by the principle of pantheism, all things on earth, animate or inanimate, are composed of the elemental forces of the earth, making for an integrated kind of existence.

### **Teleology in Igbo Ontology and Cosmology of Person and Environment.**

In a work of this kind teleology would simply refer to human destiny. The real question here is not about whether there is design or purpose to human life on earth? Rather, the big question is: How do human beings create a plan for a symbiotic relationship with the environment? The relevance of the preceding question lies in the undeniable fact the human persons need the environment more than the environment needs us. The truth of the matter is that the environment will fare better without us (human persons). The environment in itself is self-sufficient. So, it obviously has no need for us (human persons) and our destructive activities. Therefore, at this point, there is the need to re-echo the primary question that is germane to this essay: Which conception of person promotes a complementary and symbiotic understanding of and inter-relationship between human beings and the environment and by so doing comprehensively ameliorate human destructive tendencies towards the environment?

Igbo ontology and cosmology of the human person and the environment is teleologically oriented. Igbo conceptions of the society, human person, ethics, law, education, and culture are all configured to ensure that persons live in societal and environmental harmony. For the Igbo, the universe extends beautifully and humans are epitomes of this cosmic beauty. This point is reiterated by Nwala thus:

According to the story, the first word man learnt from the Supreme Deity (Chukwu) is *mma-mma* ... the Supreme Deity told the first parents: *This is your*

*home. Everything here is for your good and they are so intended.*<sup>22</sup>

Following from the above, F. U. Okafor argues that contrary to the West, Africans express a “cosmological optimism”<sup>23</sup> about the world. He explains that “the Igbo regard the world as ontologically good, perfect in structure, beautiful in design, and one whose architect is admirable and adorable”.<sup>24</sup> The beauty, perfection and goodness of the world are captured by the Igbo in the song *Oyooyo uwadiya* which translates thus: *Beautiful the world extends*.<sup>25</sup>

*Mma* (i.e. *Nma*) or the good in Igbo is both metaphysical and ethical. *Mma* or *nma* derives from the goodness of Being. The goodness of Being is that as the fountain of life, it radiates light. Being in Igbo is aptly captured by the word *du* or *adu*. *Du* or *adu* refers to that which has the propensity to generate life or light. Thus, while *adu* refers to the *is*, *what is* or *that which is*, *du* would simply translate as *to be*, *to give life* or *light*. It is in this sense that the Igbo would say: *ndu* meaning life, *ihe di ndu* meaning what has life or *ihe na du adu* meaning that which has the potency to grow or develop. In human persons the cosmic beauty and goodness become most manifest. Human persons are conceived as the - good that behold the world’s beauty and perfection. As Chukwuemeka Ekei explains, “conceptually, the Igbo equivalent meaning of human being or human person is *mmadu*”.<sup>26</sup> An analysis of the Igbo *mmadu* reveals that the term

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<sup>22</sup> T. U. Nwala, “Omenala”, *Odinani: The Sacred Arts and Sciences of the Igbo People – An Igbo Cyber Shrine*, culled from Google, posted online November 10, 2010 by Ekwuatu Omenka Nwa-Ikenga, (2010), p. 43

<sup>23</sup> F. U. Okafor, *Igbo Philosophy of Law*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., Ltd, 1992, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Chukwuemeka Ekei, *Justice in Communalism: A Foundation of Ethics in African Philosophy*, (Lagos: Realm Communication Ltd., 2001), p. 92.

is a compound word that consists of the prefix *mma*, which could mean beauty or goodness and the suffix *ndu*, which translates as life or existence. Therefore, the Igbo *mmadu* could actually be pronounced *mma-ndu* (i.e. *nma-ndu*), which could variously translate as “the beauty of life, the goodness of life, or the spice of existence”.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, what all this boils down to is that human persons are the “intrinsic goodness”.<sup>28</sup> Shedding further light on this matter, Ekei draws inspiration from Edeh and Mozia. Edeh captures the term human being in the concept *mma-di* (i.e. *nma-di*) meaning “good that is”.<sup>29</sup> It can also be translated as - the goodness that is there. This does not mean that man is the *good in se*, but that he shares the attribute of the cosmos as perfect goodness or beauty and that of his “maker as the highest good”.<sup>30</sup> M. I. Mozia on his own part thinks that the concept human being is best captured in the expression *mma-ndu* (*nma-ndu*), meaning “the goodness of life or the synthesis of all that is good in creation”.<sup>31</sup>

From the section on Igbo cosmology of the human person and environment, it is clear that human beings and the elements that make up the earth have the same metaphysical and physical compositions; implying that the environment and humans share affinities of beauty and goodness. Igbo culture is configured to necessarily create a symbiosis between human persons and the environment. For instance, Igbo traditional education system is meant to develop character (*agwa*) and conscience

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>29</sup> Emmanuel Edeh, *Towards An Igbo Metaphysics*, (Chicago: Layota University Press, 1985,) p. 100; cited in Chukwuemeka Ekei, *Justice in Communalism: A Foundation of Ethics in African Philosophy*, (Lagos: Realm Communication Ltd, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> C. Ekei, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>31</sup> M. I. Mozia, *Solidarity in the Church and Solidarity among the Igbo of Nigeria*, (PhD Thesis at Lateran University, Rome, 1982), p. 185.

(*nkpuruenkobi* or *nkurunkobi*<sup>32</sup>) that enables persons to live in harmony with the environment so that the human community can attain its destiny on earth. This traditional education system is further propped up on an ethical foundation that is meant to protect the environment. Central to Igbo ethics are the concepts of *ugwu* (dignity), *nso ala* (taboo) and *arú* (abominations). The Igbo see the totality of nature as the dignity (*ugwu*) that bestows upon the earth environment her beauty and goodness, which must be preserved and conserved. In this sense *nso ala* are prohibitions (taboos) forbidden by the Earth Deity (*Ala*) meant to preserve and conserve earth's beauty and goodness. Contravening these prohibitions amounts to *arú* (abominations). Human persons are taught to strictly observe these tenets and avoid those actions that are considered injurious to the society and destructive to the environment. Infringement on these moral rules attracted severe punishment. For the Igbo, adherence to the rules meant for the preservation and conservation of earth's beauty and goodness is obligatory.

In Igbo ethics, persons and society are seen as extensions of the cosmos and the cosmic forces, hence, the principle of life-force is invoked to keep persons, society and the environment in harmonious relationship. Cosmic forces are imaged in the forms of divinities grouped to cover the four basic elements of earth, water, air and fire. There are earth-based divinities, water-based divinities, air-based divinities and fire-based divinities. *Kamalu* or *Amadioha* for instance, is a fire-based divinity, used to symbolize justice, while *Ala* or *Ani* is an earth-based divinity used to symbolize motherhood and fertility. However, by the interpenetrating and all-permeating essence of spirit-force, all the divinities are interdependent;

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<sup>32</sup> Chiedozie Okoro, "Nkurunkeobi\* as a Moral Principle for Character Formation in students", *African Moral Character and Creative Thinking Principles*, Vol. 3, (Lagos: Philosophers Association of Nigeria (PAN), 2019).

especially with the earth divinity. And since the society is an extension of the cosmos, offence against the land is seriously frowned against, in the sense that such offence can invoke the wrath of other divinities.

Igbo traditional legal system is meant to reinforce the ethical system that protects the environment and promotes symbiosis between persons and the environment. Hence, *Ala* (earth deity) becomes Igbo symbol of morality and law.<sup>33</sup> This is done with the singular intention of conserving nature and ensuring that societal existences enhance environmental harmony. For the Igbo, the earth is the womb that nurtures, protects, preserve and renews. It is “the custodian of moral conscience, the protector and provider of human society”.<sup>34</sup> For the Igbo, this earth vivaciousness must be reciprocated in order to ensure the survival of the earth itself. This is the idea behind the practice of totemism and the practice of declaring a richly endowed flora as evil forest. Totemism and evil forest were ways of preserving nature.

The much reverence paid to the earth by the Igbo is premised on the fact that human destiny is unattainable outside the earth environment. All that human persons need to achieve their destinies lie within the earth. This is further buttressed by the Igbo divination system which is structured on the four-day week system (*eke, orie, aho* and *nkwo*) and the three invisible forces that govern each of the four market days (*èké, agwu* and *chi*). In other words, the earth, *afa* (the Igbo divination system) and the human person have the same ontological and cosmological compositions. Given that the constitution of the earth and *afa* is the same as that of the human person, divination for the Igbo is meant to harmonize the individual self order with the social and cosmic orders. This explains why *agwu* constitutes the centrality of Igbo *afa*. *Agwu* is the coordinator or mediator

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<sup>33</sup> John A. Umeh, (1999). *After God is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Divination and Sacred Science in Nigeria*, (London, Karnack House, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Udoka N. Ukwamedua and Victor Omokpo, “The Ontology of Destiny and Freedom among the Igbo-African: A Discourse in Existential Metaphysics”, *Idea – Studia nad strukturą i rozwojem project*, (filozoficznychuktura I rozwojem project, Xxviii/2 Białystok, 2016), p. 277.

between *éké* and *chi*. Thus, the act of divination (*igba afa*) in Igbo is to ensure that *éké* and *agwu* tilt towards *chi* so that one's *chi* possibilities are enhanced with a view to facilitating one's destiny. One's *chi* possibilities constitute what the Igbo call *Ikenga*, which stands for one's "talent, strength, enterprise and achievements".<sup>35</sup> Hence, for the Igbo, central to human destiny are three cardinal factors *ala*, *afa*, and *ikenga*.

Leadership for the Igbo is fundamentally structured to uphold those fundamentals and rudiments of culture that derive from the understanding of the earth environment and the cosmic order. This for the Igbo is obligatory. This is why Igbo tradition requires every leader to hold an *ofo* upon which active oath is sworn never to derail from the established structure. The foregoing submission opens up a fresh dimension to this discourse. This concerns the point whether Igbo culture promotes a radical or deterministic or totalitarian form of communalism also called communitarianism as Ifeanyi Menkiti seems to have propounded in his work: "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought".<sup>36</sup> In the said work Menkiti stated categorically thus: "As far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories, whatever these may be. And this primacy is meant to apply not only ontologically, but also in regard to epistemic accessibility".<sup>37</sup> In making this bold claim, Menkiti took a cue from John Mbiti's assertion about the structure of African communitarianism, which for Mbiti is anchored on the maxim: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am".<sup>38</sup> To this claim of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ifeanyi I. Menkiti, "Person and community in African traditional thought", *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Ed. Wright R.), (New York: University Press of America, 1984).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp.170-80.

<sup>38</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophies*, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1970), p. 141.

Menkiti, Kwame Gyekye objected. In the chapter two of his work: *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, Gyekye propounded the theory of “moderated communitarianism”,<sup>39</sup> in which he pointed out that, distinct from the norms of the community, the human person has ontological endowments that determine his/her personality. Enyimba Maduka, in his concept of *madukakuism*<sup>40</sup> rejected the views of Menkiti and Gyekye. He also rejected Ike Odimegwu’s theory of “integrative personhood”,<sup>41</sup> which seeks for a middle point between Menkiti and Gyekye. Maduka then went ahead to propound an anthropocentric view of communitarianism.

The ontologico-cosmologico-teleologico-cyclic view espoused in this essay accommodates all four doctrines espoused by Menkiti, Gyekye, Odimegwu and Maduka. Igbo culture has all the features of communitarianism outlined above. As it pertains to a person’s interaction in the society and within the environment, Igbo culture is at once deterministic, moderate, integrative, anthropocentric as well as eco-communitarian. Going by the principle of duality the Igbo acknowledge that persons have ontological endowments that distinguish a person from another person and persons from the society. The Igbo also acknowledge the ontological distinction of persons from the environment. However,

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<sup>39</sup> Kame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> Eyimba Maduka, “A Critical Exposition of *Madukakism* as a Theory of Being Human in Contemporary Africa”, *Sociology and Anthropology*, 7(3), (2019), pp. 126-131, <http://www.hrpub.org> DOI: 10.13189/sa.2019.070302, p. 126.

<sup>41</sup> Ike Odimegwu, *Integrative Personhood: A Communalist Metaphysical Anthropology*, London: Transaction Publishers, 2008; cited in Eyimba Maduka, “A Critical Exposition of *Madukakism* as a Theory of Being Human in Contemporary Africa”, *Sociology and Anthropology*, 7(3), (2019), pp. 126-131, <http://www.hrpub.org> DOI: 10.13189/sa.2019.070302, p. 127.

going beyond duality to the tripological, the cyclical and the hierarchical orders of relations, the Igbo think that if the dichotomy that exists between persons to persons, persons to society and society to the environment is not mediated to a point of harmony, there will ensue monumental conflicts capable of paralyzing all meaningful activities.

Based on the principle of the irreducible two (duality) the Igbo pursue the path of complementarity and interconnectedness, which should allow for symbiosis or interdependence. In the process, individuality is not lost, just as collectivism is sustained. Hence, the watchword for Igbo culture is interconnectivity between the individual and the collective. By recognizing the distinctness of every individual and making persons the center of the hierarchy of beings, Igbo culture is anthropocentric. By ensuring that the identity of the individual is not lost amidst the collective sea, Igbo culture is moderately communitarian. By seeking to create harmony between persons, persons and the society, and between the society and the environment, Igbo culture is integrative. Yet, by insisting that the communitarian orientation established should not be tampered with, Igbo culture is radical but not extreme. Above all, by making it clear that the destiny of humankind (whether as individuals or groups) is unattainable outside the environment, Igbo culture is eco-communitarian.

### **Conclusion**

Analysis done so far shows that Igbo ontology of person and environment is integrative. This integrative metaphysical understanding of the world further rotates on the principle of duality. Duality in Igbo ontology is the doctrine that the universe is structured on the interdependence and

complementarity of two irreducible elements which are opposite or contrary in nature. These two irreducible opposite elements are incomplete and as such, necessarily solicit for each other. This dualistic nature of the universe further allows for cooperation, coordination, conciliation and reconciliation at tripological, cyclical and hierarchical levels, thereby enabling symbiotic inter-relationship between persons, the society, and the environment.

Consequently, the Igbo acclaim the beauty and goodness of the universe. They assert that since human persons are incarnations of the universe order, then human persons represent the beauty, the goodness, the essence and the totality of the environment. The Igbo argue that society must be structured to reflect the beauty and goodness in nature, hence, Igbo culture is holistically patterned to uphold and preserve the beauty and goodness of nature. They insist that all societal institutions must be fashioned to train human persons to act in ways that encourage the preservation of nature. They insist that these precepts are obligatory and must be upheld by the Igbo traditional leaders. They submit that the environment is ultimate source of human destiny.

From the above, it is instructive that Igbo world-view about persons and the environment is both anthropological and eco-communitarian. Igbo (African) world outlook is tailored towards building interconnectivity. It abhors extreme individualism or extreme collectivism. The Igbo traditional understanding of community is one in which the individual and the group are equi-primordially predisposed. Individuals make up the group and the group consist of individuals. The Igbo liken the relationship between the individual, the community and the environment to that between fish and water. Water in its natural unpolluted form must harbor fish and fish must live in water. Hence, the Igbo prayer, let the river not dry, let the fish not die (*ma imiri atala, ma azu a'wunla*)

Looking at the world picture, it is obvious that the future of the earth environment is largely determined by the activities of human persons.

Whether the earth will live longer or its span will be cut short all depends on how wise or stupid we choose to be. That we need the environment to survive is indisputable. This makes the question of human destiny on the earth environment a collective decision.

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NOUMENA AND PHENOMENA REALMS IN KANTIAN CONSTRUCTIVISM

Modupe Olajumoke

## Abstract

*Immanuel Kant made a fundamental distinction between the **noumena** and the phenomena realms in his philosophy. The **noumena** realm, he posits, is a world of things-in-themselves, which is unknowable to human beings; meaning that the **noumena** exist independently of the human mind. Conversely, there exists a **phenomena** realm or the world of appearances, which is constructed by the human mind through the application of a priori categories. While the failure of Kant to perfectly reconcile the two realms is acknowledged, this study dwells on the intricate relationship between them. Ultimately, this paper contends that although the **noumena** realm remains elusive, it serves as an essential limit to human knowledge, which prompts us to acknowledge the limits of our understanding and the subjectivity of our experiences.*

**Keywords:** Noumena, Phenomena, Realm, Kant.

## Introduction:

The debate on the source of our knowledge of the external world has led to the emergence of two opposing schools of thought in Philosophy – rationalism and empiricism. Both hold opposing views on how we can come to know the external world. The rationalists hold that we can only have adequate knowledge of the world through reason while the empiricists opposed this thesis with the opposing view that we can only have indubitable knowledge through experience. Immanuel Kant tried to reconcile both views by incorporating insightful elements in rationalism and empiricism. Epistemology or the question of what we can know is

one of the major aspects of philosophy according to Kant.<sup>1</sup> In Kant's view, the human perception of the world is a mixture of sensation and mental interpretation. However, the critical question is about what is hidden behind this layer of experience? Philosophers have been grappling with this basic subject-matter for ages. Kant provided a novel viewpoint on this matter by positing a philosophy of noumena and phenomena. This study explores the complex interaction between these two domains within the framework of Kantian constructivism. According to Kant, the phenomena depict the world as we perceive it, which is molded by the intermingling of mental and sense categories. It is in this sense that Kant postulated that space and time, are not inherent in the world but are methods our minds use to arrange and make sense of the sensory information we are exposed to. On the other hand, Kant argues that the noumena represent the realm of the unknowable. He holds that we can never directly know things as they are in themselves as our senses and mental frameworks limit us to phenomena.

This work aims to analyse the core tenets of Kantian constructivism to bring to the fore, its relevance in contemporary debate on knowledge, perception and the nature of reality.

## **The *Phenomena* realm**

Phenomena refer to facts, objects, or occurrences perceived by our senses. It broadly refers to objects of our senses; of touch, sight, smell, and hearing as opposed to what is known through the faculty of reason or via the intellect. Phenomena in modern philosophy, is understood to mean objects that are immediately apprehended by our senses before any judgment or interpretation.

Phenomena in Kant's philosophy means the world as we interpret it or the world as we constitute it. They are things of the world as experienced,

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<sup>1</sup> W.S.W. Abdullah, "Noumenon and Phenomenon: Reading On Kant's Prolegomena", *Journal Usuluddin, Bil*, Vol. 27, (2008), pp. 25-40.

which is opposed to how the world is in the real sense, independent of our experiences and interpretations. Kant believes that as human beings, we cannot know things the way they are, that our interpretation of reality is shaped by our experiences. Rationalists claim that our senses are prone to error in the process of perceiving phenomena. They uphold the faculty of reason as the source of certain knowledge of phenomena. To illustrate, if we go by the sense of sight, the immediate environment would appear to be in motion for one who is in a moving car. On a second look, our understanding makes us to realize that this particular sensation is false. Hence, phenomena, as the world appears to us, stand in contrast with noumena, which refer to the substrata of appearances that ought to be comprehended by human understanding.<sup>2</sup> Phenomena are not considered as real but illusions as they require our interpretations, meaning that the very real things are the **noumena** which supposedly should comprise beings of the understanding.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, Kant argues that we do not and cannot know **things-in-themselves**. In other words, we can only know things the way they appear to us. Nevertheless, like Andrew Chignell argues: “people not only have mental and moral features; experience happens to us in our daily activities not just as appearances but as real occurrences”.<sup>4</sup>

### The *Noumena* Realm

Jacoby observed that without the doctrine of **thing-in-itself**, it is impossible to enter into Kant’s philosophical system”.<sup>5</sup> **Noumenon** in Kant’s philosophy refers to the **thing-in-itself** (das Ding an sich) as opposed to phenomenon, which refers to the thing as it appears to the

<sup>2</sup> Douglas J. Soccio and Andrew Fiala, *Archetypes of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy*, (Belmont: Wadsworth Pub., 1998), pp. 394-395.

<sup>3</sup> James Messina, “The Content of Kant’s Pure Category of Substance and Its Use on Phenomena and Noumena”, *Philosophers’ imprint*, Vol.21, (2021), pp.1-22.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Chignell, “Kant’s One-World Phenomenalism”, *The Sensible and Intelligible Worlds: New Essays on Kant’s Metaphysics and Epistemology*, (Eds. Schafer Karl and Stang Nicholas), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, July 2022), pp. 337-359.

<sup>5</sup> T. I. Oizerman, “Kant’s Doctrine of the ‘Things in Themselves’” *Noumena Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 41, No. 3, (1981) pp. 333-350.

perceiver. **Noumena** is the plural for **Noumenon**, while **phenomena** is the plural of **phenomenon**.

Kant wanted to show that the things we claim to know are just appearances. With this distinction, Kant aimed to demonstrate that our knowledge is merely about the appearance of reality, cloaked in the a priori forms of space and time and wrapped in a category.<sup>6</sup> What Kant infers is that we are incapable of knowing anything in its original state, divested of forms and categories. **Phenomenon** is known sensibility while **noumenon** is the ideal object. **Noumena** entities for Kant, are known as ideas of reason. He attempted to show that apart from the scientific knowledge which relies largely on the phenomena entities, there is a spiritual realm which science cannot penetrate.<sup>7</sup>

Appearances, so far as they are thought as objects according to the unity of the categories, are called phenomena. But if I postulate things which are mere objects of understanding and which, nevertheless, can be given as such to an intuition... such things would be entitled noumena.<sup>8</sup>

He argues that objects which we perceive through sensibility and yielded by intuition are phenomenon and they are also determined by the unity of the categories. **Noumenon** is not regarded as an object of understanding because it is beyond the sensible realm. Hence, there is need for a higher kind of intuition. Kant distinguishes between two senses of the **noumenon**; the negative sense and the positive sense. About the former sense, he says; "... a thing so far as it is not an object of our sensible

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Kanterian, "Bodies in Prolegomena: Noumena or Phenomena"? *Hegel Bulletin*, Vol.34 (2013), pp.181–202.

<sup>7</sup> Pati Subhankari, "The Study of Unknown and Unknowability in Kant's Philosophy", *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research*, Vol.1, (2012), pp. 2277-7881.

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (Trans. N. K. Smith), (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd 1973), pp. 265-256.

intuition, and so abstract from our mode of intuiting it..."<sup>9</sup> In the latter sense, he says: "An object of a non-sensible intuition, we thereby presuppose a special mode of intuition, namely, the intellectual".<sup>10</sup>

The intellectual intuition is a different kind of intuition that is beyond the reach of any individual. Human or individual knowledge is limited to the realm of the phenomena. It is for this reason that the **noumena** are referred to as the unknown and unknowable. Knowledge of the existence of noumenal entities and issues, such as soul, spirit, live after death, freedom of the will and so on, are considered to be beyond the boundaries of experience. Kant argues that everything present in the world is phenomena but reason seeks for that which is unconditioned. Since everything in the empirical world must have a cause, it is impossible to cause anything as unconditional in the empirical world.

Consequently, noumena cannot influence our senses or be conceptualized in terms of appearance, they are neither the cause nor the ground for appearance.<sup>11</sup> **Things-in-themselves** are never limiting concepts, Kant uses the term **noumena** to describe them as unknown and unknowable, meaning that appearances are representations or depictions of things that are unknown and unknowable in and of themselves. The material element in the phenomenal world is called **thing-in-itself**.

### Kant's Constructivism

The argument about the source of our knowledge is a hot debate between the rationalists and the empiricists. The rationalists held that reason and reason alone is the source of our knowledge. The empiricists oppose the rationalist's conclusion and hold that whatever the senses cannot furnish us with does not exist. In other words, we can only come to know reality through our senses. As a result of this divide, Immanuel Kant tries to reconcile both schools of thought. His approach was mediatory in that he

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Subhankari, op. cit., pp. 2277-7881.

tried to incorporate the insightful elements in rationalism and empiricism. He argues that both were partially true and partially wrong. Kant agrees with the empiricists that knowledge begins with experience and must be related to experience. He disagrees with their submission that all forms of knowledge are experience bound<sup>12</sup> Kant believes that human beings are composed of epistemological sources which are; sensibility and understanding.<sup>13</sup> “Sensibility is the capacity of the human mind to receive the contents of sense perception which are representations of objects. Understanding is the active power, of thinking about the objects of sense perception or intuition”.<sup>14</sup> In other words, through sensibility, we receive objects and through understanding we are able to process the objects received. Without sensibility, we cannot have access to real objects, and without understanding there will be no thought, making both to be interdependent. It is on this basis that Kant stated that: “Thought without content is empty, and intuitions without concepts are blind... these two powers or capacities cannot exchange their functions.”<sup>15</sup>

Kant argues that there are pure forms of sensibility, and pure forms of understanding. He argues that space and time are the pure forms of sensibility that make perception possible. The nature of our minds is such that objects can only appear to us except in space and time. This is so because they serve as the referential framework that allows us to receive objects. In the pure forms of understanding, there are categories or general structure of thought of the human mind that make *a priori* cognition possible. The human mind synthesizes the objects of perception for analytical unity through the categories. The categories are the rules of understanding. Kant therefore describes the knowledge that is derived through this process as synthetic a priori knowledge. In contrast to the exclusive nature of

<sup>12</sup> Kant, op. cit., p.171.

<sup>13</sup> K. A. Ojong and A. A. Ibrahim, *Fundamental Problems of Epistemology*, (Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers 2011), p. 171.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Jessica Leech, “Kant on the Necessity of Necessity”, *History of Philosophy & Logical Analysis*. 2021. [https://brill.com/view/journals/hpla/25/1/article-p66\\_4.xml#:~:text=As%20Kant%20famously%20put%20it,\(CPR%20A51%2FB75\)](https://brill.com/view/journals/hpla/25/1/article-p66_4.xml#:~:text=As%20Kant%20famously%20put%20it,(CPR%20A51%2FB75)). Last visited: Nov. 04, 2024.

rationalism and empiricism, Kant's constructivism views knowledge as a result of the contribution of inputs from sense experience and mental ability. The human mind is not a passive recipient of sense experience, rather, it actively structures these experiences using rational principles that are innate to us. The senses provide the content while the mind provides the form. Constructivism is therefore the position that knowledge is constructed from the joint efforts of both the senses and mind.

### **Kant and Plato on the Matter of Cognition**

Kant's approach to cognition is similar to that of Plato and is at the same time, fundamentally divergent to Plato's approach. While it may be difficult to synthesize Plato's different thoughts into one single outlook (i.e. on the ground of his divergent views about knowledge in his dialogues), we will nonetheless, focus on a brief analysis of Platonism, which is the generic idea that is often attributed to Plato.<sup>16</sup> Platonism is the position that there are two realms of reality; the world of appearance and the world of forms. The world of appearance are those things that are in the physical realm, while the world of forms constitutes things in their real nature. For Plato, physical objects that constitute the world of appearance are imitations of the original ideas in the world of forms.<sup>17</sup> If we regard Plato's concept of forms as Kant's things-in-themselves, Plato's concept of the physical world as Kant's notion of appearances, a major demarcating point between Plato and Kant, is Kant's introduction of the idea of thing-in-itself. This refers to the object of experience independent of our sensation, perceptions and categories of the understanding. It follows that for Kant, we can never know the mind independent of reality.<sup>18</sup> This is Kant's constructivist claim; that we can only know what we in some sense, construct.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Tom Rockmore, *German Idealism as Constructivism*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2016), p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

### **Criticism of Kant's *Noumena* and *Phenomena* distinction.**

There are certain levels of contradictions in Kant's notion of **things-in-themselves**. On the one hand, he asserts that the **things-in-themselves** are the sources or causes of appearances, on the other hand, he maintains that **things-in-themselves** cannot be considered as sources of causes of appearances on the ground that causation of categories and categories cannot be applied to **things-in-themselves**. Insofar as the existence of actual things in the world presupposes that there must be a cause and effect of those things, it implies that Kant's notion of the **thing-in-itself** is paradoxical in this sense that it is only appearances of objects that can be apprehended.

The main problem with Kant's thing-in-itself is that, though it is the ground of appearance, categories of understanding have no application in it. Unlike Aristotle who held that categories of understanding are derived from sensible intuition, Kant maintains that categories are *a priori*. However, Kant realizes that knowledge is impossible without sensible intuition and categories of understanding. He proposed transcendental schema, which serves as a mediator, to unite these two ideas. Transcendental schema and categories of understanding are combined in the unity of apperception. All things and events are perceived by the unity of apperception as being in space and time, and they are understood in terms of unity, reality, substantiality, causation, etc. Kant believes that the unity of apperception is the greatest in the whole sphere of human cognition.<sup>20</sup> We can infer from this that the thing-in-itself, represents the materialistic aspect of the Kant's ontology even though he misconstrues it as unknown and unknowable. In later years, Karl Marx in his materialistic philosophy argued that all that can be known are phenomena that comprise the known and the yet to be known. Thus, granted that some things may be unknown to us for a variety of reasons, this does not mean that they are unknowable.<sup>21</sup> Based on the foregoing, V. I. Lenin states that:

<sup>20</sup> R. P. Singh, *Methodology, Ontology, Epistemology, Dialectics and Ought*, (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> Subhankari, op. cit., pp. 2277-7881.

In the theory of knowledge, as in every other sphere of science, we must think dialectically, that is, we must not regard our knowledge as readymade and unalterable, but must determine how knowledge emerges from ignorance, how incomplete, inexact knowledge becomes more complete and more exact.<sup>22</sup>

Knowledge is dynamic and never static. We cannot assume that things will always be the same and never change. We can only have knowledge when we commit errors and attempt to correct such errors. Usually, ignorance is the starting point. Characteristically, knowledge is the overcoming of ignorance and is susceptible either to further confirmation or refutation. Hence, a fundamental problem in Kant's analysis of knowledge is that despite his acknowledgement of the existence of thing-in-itself, he still maintained that the human mind can only apprehend appearances.

Fichte who is a successor to Kant disagrees with the Kantian conception of thing in itself because for him, it created a dualism between the phenomena and noumena. Fichte argues that the fundamental principle is the "postulation of its own existence by the ego, in postulating his own existence, necessarily assumes the existence of non-ego".<sup>23</sup> By implication, individual existence comes before objects of knowledge, meaning that the cognition of the objects of knowledge is dependent on the ego. In contrast, Kant demonstrated that objects are possible when there is a thing-in-itself that exists apart from a subject. However, Subhankari Pati believes that in order to obtain sufficient knowledge, both the object and the subject are required. He does not dispute that the existence of the objects precedes the individual, but it is also true that the individual is the one who identifies the objects through cognition.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lenin, 1978, op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Subhankari, op. cit., pp. 2277-7881.

Another philosopher who has reacted to Kant's noumena and phenomena distinction is Hegel. Hegel argues that nothing can remain unknown forever. For Hegel, understanding makes knowledge possible. He argues that reason unifies the contradictions (e.g universal and particular) created by understanding. But for Hegel, it is the unity of apperception that serves as a mediator between senses and categories of understanding. Hegel believes that all reality is at least potentially and in principle accessible to cognition. He opines that, one can claim that some forms of knowledge are unknown to us due to our ignorance and limitations that prevent us from understanding reality.

If our knowledge of reality is restricted to the phenomena, what then is the use of the discourse about the noumena realm since it is unknowable?<sup>25</sup> Kant's response is that beyond phenomena, there is the noumenal world not assessable by the categories except by faith. But without knowledge we cannot affirm whether God exists or not, or that souls are real or not. Hegel contends that we cannot argue that anything exists beyond knowledge because the mind (i.e. the German Geist) is identical with the whole of reality. Our knowledge ultimately turns into the Geist's self-knowledge. The world which is said to be beyond thought is really posited by thought, making it a manifestation of rational necessity.

## Conclusion

Rationalism and Empiricism are approaches to the issue of knowledge in the modern era of Western philosophy.<sup>26</sup> Rationalism holds that human reason is the source of truth and knowledge while empiricism holds that experience is the foundation for truth and certainty of knowledge. The central thesis for empiricism is that all knowledge is ultimately based on experience.<sup>27</sup> Immanuel Kant, on his part, proposed a thought-provoking distinction between two realms that shape our understanding of reality.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Timoteus Ata Leuehaq, "Basic Ideas of Rationalism and Empiricism and Some Epistemological Implications", *Media Jurnal Filsafat dan Teologi*, Vol.2, (2021), p. 150.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

This distinction hinges on the limitations of human perception. The phenomenal realm, is the world of appearances. It encompasses everything we experience through our five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. This is the world that science investigates, the empirical world governed by cause and effect, space, and time. It's the realm of the familiar, the concrete, the physical and the things we can directly measure and observe.

Furthermore, Kant argued that our senses aren't perfect mirrors reflecting reality, they are capable of deceiving us.<sup>28</sup> Instead, they act as filters, shaping and coloring the information we receive. This leads us to the second realm, the noumena realm which is non-physical. The noumena realm represents the world as it truly is, the **thing-in-itself** that exists independent of our perception. It's the essence of reality, the hidden core that is beneath the surface of appearances. Here, concepts like space, time, and causality might not be necessary.

The key point is that the noumena realm remains fundamentally unknowable and directly inaccessible to us. And that we can never directly access its true nature. We only have glimpses, filtered through the lens of our senses and mental categories. In spite of this inaccessibility, the phenomena realm gives us a hint of the existence of the noumena realm. The order and coherence of our experiences, along with our innate moral compass, suggest a deeper reality that structures our world. While we may never fully grasp the noumena realm, its influence shapes everything we perceive and interact with. Kant's distinction creates a fascinating tension. We live in a world of appearances, yet there's a nagging suspicion of a deeper truth that lies beneath. This tension continues to spark philosophical debate in our continued quest to understand the nature of reality.

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<sup>28</sup> P. Guyer and A.W. Wood, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 8.

Understanding Kant's distinction helps us to appreciate the complexity of knowledge. We can strive for objective understanding, but we must also acknowledge the limitations that are inherent in our perspective. Kant's constructivism revolutionized our understanding of human experience and knowledge. By recognizing the dichotomy of the phenomena and noumena realms, he demonstrated that our knowledge is not a simple reflection of reality, but rather an interpretation shaped by our minds. This insight has important implications for various fields, including epistemology, philosophy of science, and even psychology. It serves as a humble reminder about the limits of our knowledge and to be mindful of the ways in which our own thoughts shape the way we perceive the external world.

# HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE LIGHT OF ASOUZU'S COMPLEMENTARY PHILOSOPHY

Uchenna A. Ezeogu and Gregory Emeka Chinweuba

## Abstract

*The idea of homosexuality connotes erotic attraction between people of the same sex. This same sex erotic attraction has generated a lot of multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary controversy. Considering the importance of human erotic relationship to the survival of the human race, the paper adopted Asouzu's philosophy of complementarity to address the hitherto perennial controversy. Asouzu's argument anchored on the principle that every reality serves as a missing link and that reality is interconnected. The interconnectedness of reality helps individuals to overcome individual limitations and ensure the continuity of existence. Hence, the negligence or abandonment of any part of reality triggers off crisis in the entire chain of interconnected relationship. Using the philosophical method of analysis, the paper argued that the acceptance or rejection of homosexuality should be anchored on what it termed anthropocentric complementary position. It is therefore not enough, to argue for or against homosexuality; rather one should ask; what becomes of the human race if homosexuality is sustained and possibly enforced on the entire human race.*

**Keywords:** Anthropocentric complementarity, Homosexuality, Erotic relationship, Human race.

## Introduction

There are series of arguments on the legality and morality of homosexuality in this era of globalization and intercultural relationship. While most Africa countries have legally rejected homosexuality, the practice seems rampant and acceptable in Europe and America. In fact, the rights of lesbians, gay, bisexual, transsexual and queer (LGBTQ) people

are more pronounced in liberal democracies. Despite the supposedly inflow of democracy in Africa, most African countries have remained rigid in their stance against homosexuality. In recent times, the United States of America (USA) had threatened to impose financial sanctions on African countries that do not extend human rights to the LGBTQ community.<sup>1</sup> The complexity of this challenge is that the more sanctions are threatened against African nations, the more stringent laws are made against LGBTQ community in Africa. When we consider the economic strength of the United States of America and their capacity to impoverish African nations through economic sanctions, one is forced to wonder why most African nations are bent on going through economic sanctions rather than letting go their stance on LGBTQ? This gives a clue to the fact that the stance of these African nations on LGBTQ must be based on their ontological nature as Africans.

It is in the light of this understanding that this study adopts Asouzu's philosophical principle of complementarity in addressing the challenge of homosexuality in Africa. The reason why African countries wholeheartedly reject homosexuality is best understood when one considers African ontological basis for erotic relationship, which is premised on procreation and the sustainability of human existence. Kyalo captures this ontological basis by stating that in Africa "marriage was geared towards the procreation and promotion of life".<sup>2</sup> This understanding of erotic relationship calls to mind the Igbo African cultural practice where a woman is allowed to marry another woman. One may associate this practice with lesbianism, but both are fundamentally different. The Igbo cultural practice is always expressed in a family where

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<sup>1</sup> Ryan J. McElhose, "Are Threats to Impose Financial Sanctions an Effective Approach for the United States to Protect LGBTQ Rights in Africa"? *EILR Recent Development*, Vol. 37, No.1, (2023), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Kyalo. "A Reflection on the African Traditional Values of Marriage and Sexuality", *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, Vol. 1, No 2, (2012), p. 85.

there is no male child. More so, the woman who is married does not have erotic relationship with the one who married her. Rather, she (the married) is allowed to choose any member of her husband's (the woman that married her) kinsmen for erotic relationship. The sole purpose of this marriage is for her (the married) to produce what the Igbo African call *onochie*, which refers to a male heir for the family.

Traditional Africans classified homosexuality a most deviant act. Going by the principle of duality, they considered erotic relationship a complementary affair strictly consummated between male and female. It is against this background that Innocent Asouzu's view of complementarity is adopted as the framework that anchors the argument concerning the elucidation of erotic relationship. One may consider this complementarity to be a dialectical process in the pattern of Hegelian understanding, in which thesis coming in contact with antithesis to produces a synthesis. This stands in contrast to homosexuality in which a thesis coming in contact with another thesis stands no chance of progression.

### **The Concept of Homosexuality**

One of the commonest definitions of homosexuality is the view that, it is the sexual relationship between people of the same sex. The concept of homosexuality to a large extent encompasses lesbianism, gay relationship, bisexual, and queer. There are lots of controversies surrounding these kinds of relationships. The question of its acceptability has become a serious subject of philosophical debate. Bullough, writing on the definition of homosexuality posits that the definition has taken various forms, ranging from sin, to an illness, to a way of life, to a normal variant of sexual behavior, to a behavior disturbance and a crime.<sup>1</sup> Bullough's view on homosexuality is centered on how the concept has progressed

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<sup>1</sup> Vern L. Bullough, *Homosexuality: A History*, (London & New York Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2019), p. 1.

historically. At some point, it was regarded as a sin (mostly by those who considered the concept from a religious perspective).<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Adejuwon, Daniel Arap Moi, the former President of Kenya asserted that homosexuality is against African norms; tradition and religion. It is considered a menace which is counter to Christian teaching in Africa and therefore, a great sin.<sup>3</sup> Previously, homosexuality was medically considered as an illness. McColl making reference to a survey conducted in 1989 stated that about one third of general practitioners felt uncomfortable with male homosexuals. Gays were usually not employed in schools because they were considered a danger to children.<sup>4</sup>

In recent times, homosexuality has gained acceptance in the Western world and in South Africa both as a concept and a practice. However, homosexuality remains unaccepted in most countries of Africa. In fact, there are laws in most African countries that do not just prohibit homosexual behavior but stipulates severe punishment against homosexuals. This does not mean that homosexuality is completely alien to Africa. Barlet, in the interview with Wanuri Kahiu, posits that homosexual is not un-African; rather what is un-African is homophobia.<sup>5</sup> Barlet agrees that homosexuality is considered as anti-cultural and anti-social in most African countries. He nevertheless thinks that the strong prohibition of homosexuality is senseless. But if he agrees that a thing is

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<sup>2</sup> Denny Burk, "Is Homosexual Orientation Sinful"? *Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society JETS*, Vol. 58, Issue 1, (2015), pp. 95-115. See also Ezekiel A. Adejuwon, "Homosexuality: An African Christian Ethical Perspective", *International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences & Humanities Research*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (2020), p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel A. Adejuwon, "Homosexuality: An African Christian Ethical Perspective", *International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences & Humanities Research*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (2020), p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> Peter McColl, "Homosexuality and Mental Health Services" Vol. 308, (1994), 26;308(6928):550-1.doi: 10.1136/bmj.308.6928.550, p. 551.

<sup>5</sup> Olivier Barlet, "Homosexuality is not un-African: What is Un-African is Homophobia", *An interview with Wanuri Kahiu on Jambula Tree Black Camera*, Vol. 5, No 2, (2019), pp. 187-188.

culturally and socially derived from a people and then argues that it does not represent the identity of the people, what then should represent the identity of the people? Barlet's argument is anchored on the view that the African spirit is built on the principle of Ubuntu, which makes homophobia anti-communitarian on the ground that it ostracizes a group of people from the community.<sup>6</sup> For him, it is against African ethos to ostracize people. This line of argument is open to a lot questioning. What is really African ethos? What are the parameters in determining African ethos?

There are three perspectives to the issue of homosexuality. In the first perspective is the group referred to as homosexual progressives also known as homosexual enthusiasts, which is prominent in the global North. This group see homosexuality as a positive act that should be accommodated. Followers of this group promote homosexuality by advocating for rights for homosexuals. To the second group belong those who hold a rigid or anti-homosexual position against homosexuals. Followers of this group see homosexuality as a demonic act that should be prohibited. This group not only vilify homosexuality; they support the view that stringent measures be taken against homosexuals. The third and final perspective is the moderate group who maintain a neutral position about homosexuality. They neither extremely condemn nor overtly support homosexuality. In essence, while the moderate group accept that homosexuals should be accommodated in the society and accorded rights, they nonetheless, kick against the promotion of homosexuality in the society. These global conceptions of homosexuality are quite divergent to African conception of human sexuality, which synchronizes with Asouzu's complementary philosophy.

### **Asouzu's Complementary Philosophy**

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp.167-188.

Asouzu in his principle of complementary reflection established what constitutes the basis of human actions. For him human actions are guided by a basic need, and this basic need subsists in humanity's natural inclination for self-preservation.<sup>7</sup> This inclination for self-preservation guides human action either individually or collectively. In Asouzu's view, it is this law (natural inclination for self-preservation) that gives meaning to all things that human beings seek to achieve and have achieved.<sup>8</sup> It also forms the basis for human social relationships. Thus, in the event where an individual all by himself or herself cannot guarantee self-preservation, the need to form coalition arises. The implication of this assertion is that, the driving force of human social relation to a large extent is the need for self-preservation. We can interpret this further to mean that individuals enter into social relationship for complementary purposes. What an individual cannot offer to himself or herself, will be obtained from another with a complementary propensity and vice versa. It is this complementary reciprocity that results into sustainable social interaction. Asouzu puts it thus: "it is this instinct of self-preservation that leads to coalition of interest."<sup>9</sup>

The basis for the proper functioning of any human society adduced from Asouzu's view is this principle of complementary relation, which forms the inclusive basis for the survival of aggregates of individuals. By coming together in a complementary relation, they form alliance or coalition capable of helping them overcome their individual limitations. For Asouzu, the principle of complementarity is trans-cultural. It is not just an idea emanating from the African universe. This, he deduced from the operations of the human mind. Asouzu argued that the principle of complementarity is derived from the general and fundamental human

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<sup>7</sup> Innocent I. Asouzu, *The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and Beyond African Philosophy*, (Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 2004), p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

feeling of insufficiency and experience of relativity and fragmentation of historical process.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the deep experience of man's (in generic sense) finitude as a creature comes with the realization of man's insufficiency and dependency; and from there comes the need to solicit for others. Basically, Asouzu's argument is that each man all by himself or herself cannot survive. Hence, humanity needs complementary relationship in other to survive and make progress. The uniqueness of this complementary relationship is that the varieties associated with it serve as missing links. What one does not have the other person has it and can provide it in complementarity. This form of complementarity has been the basis of man's survival in the universe and Africa's consideration of the homosexual phenomenon.

### **Homosexuality in the light of Asouzu's Complementary Philosophy**

There is a whole lot of difference between promoting homosexuality and according fundamental human rights to those who are involved in homosexual behavior. The major challenge posed by the homosexual enthusiasts is that they have gone beyond advocacy for the protection of the rights of homosexuals to indirectly forcing everybody to be homosexual. Thus, the advocacy of homosexual enthusiasts is no longer a question of accommodating homosexuals and according them rights due to them as human persons. It is now a question of promoting homosexuality and encouraging our children to become one. This trajectory is now evident in the ideas inserted by homosexual enthusiasts into the curricula of primary and secondary levels of education in the Western world.

Another challenge in this context emanates from anti-homosexuals, who seem to be rigid with their position on the morality of homosexual behavior. This group, not only reject homosexuality as a deviant behavior, they also enforce proper punishments on the homosexual culprits. The

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

position of the anti-homosexuals contradicts the twin principles of democracy, which are liberty and equality. A country cannot be said to be democratic in its strict sense without observing these twin principles. It therefore amounts to a contradiction for a country to claim that it is democratic when yet it cannot guarantee the liberty and equality of its citizens irrespective of their sexual orientations.

The moderates' view on homosexuality rejects both extreme positions of homosexual enthusiasts and anti-homosexuals. This view is in line with Asouzu's principle of complementarity as it tries to create a harmony or balance between the two extreme positions. Its major question is; what happens to humanity if we all become homosexuals? One may see this view as a resemblance of one of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative where he talked about the universal law. To the extent that the question is viewed in the light of making it a universal law the answer is in affirmative. But the question goes beyond addressing the issue of universalizing homosexuality to questioning the existential risk associated with it if universalized. Asouzu's principle of complementarity becomes apparent, because for him the very essence of human relationship is to complement and the logic behind the complementary relationship is to ensure survival. Based on this reality, it is glaring that homosexual relationship does not satisfy the principle of complementarity. Unlike in heterosexual relationship where male and female come together in mutual agreement to complement each other (basically because what one lacks the other has and vice versa), homosexual relationship lack this required complementarity. Again, the need for survival which forms the basis of complementary relationship is also lacking in homosexual relationship. This is in the sense that homosexual relationship (gay or lesbianism) does not lead to any human progress (procreation), rather it puts human species in the danger of going into extinction.

In the light of Asouzu's principle of complementarity therefore, there is no room for homosexual relationship on two basic grounds. First, it cannot

complement in the true sense of complementing. For what one has in homosexual relationship is also available to his or her partner, and what one lacks, his or her partner also lacks, thereby making allowance for the use of sex toys in most homosexual relationships. Second, the need for survival which is fundamental in complementary relationship is lacking in homosexual relationship.

Going by Asouzu's view that every reality serves a missing link, it suffices to argue for a moderate view to homosexual controversy. Thus, homosexuals can be accommodated in our societies but not promoted. Here also lies the difference between the homosexual enthusiasts, anti-homosexuals and the moderates.

The functionalists may argue that there is complementarity in homosexual relationships, as many homosexual couples actually demonstrate this principle in their relationships. This seems visible in their situations where one often assumes the role of male, while the other assumes the role of a female. Yet, this argument draws a critical mind to the gender question thus: Is gender a social construct or biological creation? Gender could be said to be both a biological and a social creation. In logical terms, both are mutually inclusive; for someone cannot do with one without the other. As such, if gender is a social construct alone, without recourse to biological features, the argument of homosexual functionalists will be valid. But what happens to the biological features associated with human sexuality? For every male or female, there are corresponding physiological natural features that help in identification. The presence of penis in male and vagina in female; these are classified traditionally as male and female organs. The question accruing here will then be; if one assumes the social dimension of a particular sex, what happens to the biological features associated with that sex? In the case of gay relationship, can the partner who assumes the female role achieve pregnancy and child birth? At every point, the person who assumes the sexual role that is not in conformity with his or her natural features will even continue to explain his or her

sexuality. This naturally creates identity confusion. In as much as some homosexuals tend to assume these roles in their relationships, such roles adoption ends only at the social level.

Besides, one may argue that with the aid of technology, homosexuals can resolve the problem of procreation. These days, lesbian women can give birth to their own children by a sperm donation bank, and gays can have their own children through helps of the surrogate mothers. The fact that the problem of procreation is associated with every homosexual relationship validates the claim that homosexual relationship is not complementary enough. For in gay relationship, you have a presupposed female who remains a surrogate mother and in lesbian relationship, the sperm at the sperm bank are donated by a male. One may argue that such help is also sought for even in heterosexual relationship. Yet, the fact remains that sperm donations and surrogate motherhood are sole options in homosexual relationships, unlike in heterosexual relationships.

### **Conclusion**

The central debate on homosexuality is on its morality. Basically, the positions have always been in binary form; those who are for and those who are against. But it is not enough to argue for or against; as such arguments will only lead to an unending parallel. The basis of what should constitute what is right or wrong should amidst these arguments concern the question of human existence. This is not in the sense of the Protagoras' argument that – man is the measure of all things. Rather, the fundamental issue bothers on the survival of the human species. Hence, the concern of anthropocentric complementarity centres on the holistic consequences of homosexuality to the sustainability of humanity.

The argument in this essay is that homosexuals should be allowed to practice their sexual preference so long as heterosexuals are also allowed to practice their sexual preference without coercing them to support or promote homosexual relationship. Although there is need to accommodate

those with homosexual orientation and accord them the rights due to them as humans, it is against the principle of complementarity to promote such behavior. It is even an avoidable social crisis attempting to force such sexual orientation on Africa. The stage the world is in homosexual debate has indeed gone beyond according fundamental rights to homosexuals to normalizing and promoting homosexuality. This has become evident in how primary and secondary schools' curricula in Europe and America encourage minors to become homosexuals. It has as well become visible in the persuasion of African countries by the US and European nations to embrace LGBTQ rights.

# HEIDEGGER'S NOTION OF AUTHENTICITY: A POSSIBILITY OF OVERCOMING DRUG DEPENDENCE AMONG FRESH GRADUATES

Anthony Kwaku Boakye

## Abstract

*Unemployment in Ghana has turned out to become a canker that has made survival most difficult. In the process, many youths are rendered hopeless making them to develop the mentality of drug dependence or the abuse of hard substances. The youths we speak about include college students and graduates who inauthentically drift away in the they-world of hard drugs. Drug dependence is an existential issue that calls on the theme of authenticity. Authenticity is a central theme of existentialism explored by most existentialists, in particular Martine Heidegger. Heidegger's treatment of authenticity is further connected to themes of conscience and destiny, which makes it the framework that anchors this work. Hence, this paper argues that the inculcation of the tenets of Heidegger's principle of authenticity into fresh graduates as a correctional measure, would immensely ameliorate the problem of drug dependence amongst them. It would facilitate the healing process of empowering fresh graduates with the mental capacity to make authentic (right or correct) decisions and choices about their lives and their future.*

**Keywords:** Authenticity, Drug Dependence, Fresh Graduates, Possibility.

## Introduction

The abuse of hard drugs or the consumption of hard substances that wear down the body and eventually destroys the individual has become a world phenomenon. The situation has become so alarming that many fresh graduates in Ghana have developed the syndrome of drug dependence. The regular consumption of hard drugs amounts to developing a habit or syndrome of dependency, which is difficult to manage even after

rehabilitation. This very issue of habitual reliance on drugs considered injurious to the person, which we have christened drug dependency syndrome, amounts to a loss of self or a loss of individuality. Existentially speaking, the habitual loss of self or the inability to control self, constitutes an ontological foundation for the inauthentic life. It is on this basis that Heidegger's notion of authenticity, which is tied to the concepts of conscience and destiny, is regarded as instrument that could facilitate the process of the individual's process of self-retrieval from drug dependence. Hence, it is conjectured that absorbing the true nature of authenticity can serve as a possible basis for the prevention of one's relapse into drug dependence. In this case, the constitutive elements of authenticity would be clarified. This paper does not argue that the philosophy of Heidegger, specifically his notion of authenticity unavoidably prevents the relapse. What this paper underscores, is, that Heidegger's existential notion of authenticity focuses on a possible conceptual framework that prevents the Individual's relapse into drug dependence. This means that this paper is an attempt to meaningfully contribute to the potential prevention of an individual's return to drug addiction.

Consequently, two fundamental issues are examined in this work. First, is the exploration of the meaning of drug dependence or drug addiction, Second, situated within the Ghanaian context, it will also examine how Heidegger's notion of authenticity can assist individuals to develop the self-confidence required to prevent the problem of relapsing into drug dependence. Here Heidegger's existential notion of Dasein with its constitutive elements of authenticity, death, conscience, destiny and resoluteness would be deployed to evaluate how the individual can gather self-confidence and by so doing free self from dependency on drugs.

### **The Phenomenon of Drug Dependence: Its nature and effects on the Individual**

Drug dependence or drug addiction can be regarded as a "neurobiological and pharmacological" process that causes a psychological state of

‘substance use disorder’”.<sup>1</sup> The idea of drug in the paper refers to “addictive drugs that act by binding to specific proteins in the brain and disrupt their normal function”<sup>2</sup> Such disruption can be physical, physiological or psychological.<sup>3</sup> Addictive drugs are mostly used illegally without doctor’s recommendation. This is opposed to legal drugs that are consumed based on either doctor’s recommendation or the description of dosage to be taken per day.

Legal drugs are those substances that are officially permitted to be used by the Individual. This means that it is intended for a particular individual and the public. Since every type of drug is a medicine, the purpose of any drug is to cure people. But not all drugs are medicinal and so what constitutes a medicinal drug? For Barber, it is any stuff that can cure a sick person once it is taken into the body.<sup>4</sup> Legal drugs are understood to be curative due to their benefits, especially when taken with a physician’s prescription.<sup>5</sup> Usually, there shouldn’t be any problem within the society when it comes to legal drugs since the essence of its production is to heal people, however, the problem we face as Ghanaians is that of the illegal drugs. On the other hand, illegal drugs are those substances forbidden by the society. The reason for this is that it brings a lot of negative effects on the Individual. They are also illegal when it is taken without a prescription from a qualified medical practitioner. As it stands now, many people are using illicit drugs for self-pleasure and enjoyment. For instance, those who would like to stay longer hours have resorted to amphetamine for its capacity to counterbalance drowsiness and tiredness. This can lead to drug abuse where people take drugs without medical supervision.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Chavkin, “The Neurobiology and Pharmacology of Addiction”, Allan & Phyllis Treuer Chair of Pain Research & Professor, Dept of Pharmacology University of Washington School of Medicine Seattle, WA: [wacodtx.org](http://wacodtx.org); Assessed 05/06/2025, 5 pm.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> R. L. Akers, *Drugs, alcohol, and society: Social structure, process, and policy*, (California: Wadsworth, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Barber Bernard, *Drugs and Society*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1967), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 36.

Drug abuse can also lead to drug dependence. This is because as the Individual continues to use and abuse drugs the Individual gradually shifts to drug dependence. The continuous abuse of drug use will lead to a disastrous consequence for the user. In this case, the drug becomes one's source of living. The dependence can lead to an essential habit such that the Individual does not care so much about how much it may cost him or her. He or she will explore every avenue within one's means to take drugs for one's existence. In the end, the Individual becomes a drug dependent which could be psychological dependence. It could also be physical dependence. This occurs when the Individual relies on certain psychoactive drugs such as alcohol, and cocaine which can change the body's chemistry of the Individual when it is observed that the Individual takes a particular substance frequently making it habitual. Once the body becomes used to it, the Individual will find it difficult to stop and if one is persuaded to stop abruptly it can lead to withdrawal symptoms. It becomes psychological when the drug user is so convinced that he or she needs to use drugs. In that case, it becomes a psychological or emotional need. The user is convinced that it is only the drug that can satisfy one's hunger.

### **Application of Heidegger's Notion of Authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) for the Prevention of Individual's Relapse into Drug Dependence**

As earlier stated, the main focus of this essay is to explore how Heidegger's understanding of authenticity can serve as a possible means to prevent an Individual's relapse to drug dependency. The Individual in this context is a drug dependent who is undergoing rehabilitation treatment and is willing to recover. This will be done through the analysis of the three themes in Heidegger's existentialism which are: being-towards-death, conscience, and resoluteness.

#### ***Dasein and its authentic existence:***

Heidegger describes two fundamental ways in which *Dasein* exists, understands itself, and lives: authentic and inauthentic. These two modes of being are central to *Dasein's* way of being in the world. By authenticity,

he refers to a mode of existence whereby *Dasein* becomes aware of itself and owns its possibilities in the world. The point of Heidegger is how meaning is revealed to us or concealed from us. Heidegger tried to overcome the flaws of traditional philosophy by providing a conceptualization of the self. Traditional philosophy presented misconceptions of being, that it is self-evident, indefinable, and universal.<sup>6</sup> *Dasein* for Heidegger simply means being there or the being that is there, which suggests a relation with the world where *Dasein* exists. The nature of *Dasein* is such that it does not choose to be in the world but is thrown into it. The thrownness of *Dasein* for Heidegger refers to the state of a person where one is born. This thrownness does not suggest solitude or loneliness but portrays other beings in the world with *Dasein*. Thus, *Dasein* relates with other people, they live in a shared socio-cultural context that influences and affects everyday living. In as much as *Dasein* has no control of its thrownness,

*Dasein* has some traits that come with its being. Aside from these traits, *Dasein* possesses a structure of care and concern that affects how *Dasein* lives with others. This includes facticity, fallenness, and existentiality. For Heidegger, facticity is the awareness of the thrownness of being as being with, a being with others, as well as its existence as a *Dasein* with all his features. *Dasein* as an authentic being, also responds to the call of conscience, dread, and being resolute. So, authenticity is, how I become aware of myself and my possibilities, and decide to choose my way of life, to be myself.<sup>7</sup> The other form of existence is inauthentic. This occurs when *Dasein* is not aware of itself or its possibilities. In this case, instead of taking responsibility for myself, I live for others because *The They* have disburdened me with the responsibility that I owe to myself especially the way others expect me to live.

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (Trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson), (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 2008), pp. 22, 23.

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, op. cit., pp. 313-314.

Heidegger begins with the analysis of Being. He argues that philosophers before him had not well defined the concept of Being. This Being, called *Sein* in German, which means *to be*, is regarded as the ground or foundation of all things. Heidegger further stated that the only entity among all the entities within Being that has the vague average understanding of *what it is to be* is *Dasein*, which means being there or simply human being. Heidegger assumed that *Dasein* is thrown into the world with a feature of its facticity which is its past life, and its essence lies in its existence.<sup>8</sup> This facticity refers to existential givens which *Dasein* never chose. Given *Dasein*'s facticity as a thrown being, it has two possibilities either to live an authentic or inauthentic life. Heidegger's assertion of facticity as a feature of past experiences means that, he adopted what Husserl termed natural attitude, where natural attitude refers to presuppositions and assumptions we make about objects of existence. This is what makes Heidegger's phenomenology different from Husserl's. While Husserl adopted a phenomenological attitude or *epoche*, which implies suspending all presuppositions and assumptions to come to our subjective realization of reality, Heidegger employed a natural attitude whereby *Dasein* is thrown with its facticity that it never chose. Now, not only were we thrown into the world with preexisting culture and history, but we were thrown into relationships with other *Daseins*. We are being-with (*mitsein*) other *Daseins*. Nobody ever chose his or her society, we were simply born into society. *Dasein* is not a superman or super person. *Dasein* has finitude or mortality as one of its essences.

### ***Being-towards-Death (Sein-Zum-Tode): Its application in preventing the Individual's relapse into drug dependence***

*Dasein*'s **being-towards-death** (*Sein-zum-tode*) brings the understanding that man's life is finite. The life of *Dasein* ends with death. According to Heidegger, by accepting death we need to understand the authenticity of it, by going through the experience of death. The first experience of death

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

is its acceptance and living in anticipation of it. We do not experience our death. The first experience of death is characterized by anxiety. This anxiety makes life authentic to us. We come to know the value of life. In this anxiety, we understand the nothingness of life. This stage ignites a process where an individual loses the desire for the worldliness of life. Death limits the time of living as human beings. Thus, the phenomenon of death is inevitable. *Dasein's* being-towards-death is an undeniable reality. Hence, in aiming to prevent the Individual's relapse into drug dependence, the first thing that Heidegger's notion of authenticity could render in preventing the Individual's relapse into drug dependence is— the acceptance of the reality of death.

One of the characteristics of the authentic *Dasein* is that it is aware of its death. And having this awareness has its effect on *Dasein*. Death actualizes *Dasein*. It changes *Dasein's* attitude, behavior, values, and even life's disposition. With this, the Individual who is a drug dependent must also have an awareness of one's impending death. Besides, it is not enough to simply have the **acceptance of death**. The Individual must feel the so-called *angst*. This *Angst* will surely disturb the Individual. Although *Dasein* goes through *angst*, the daily concern in some way hinders the mood of dread that *Dasein* may enter into. But the phenomenon of death will be concealed from someone if the person continues to remain in the *they*, especially towards the realization of death which is one's ownmost possibility. It disturbs and invites a person to change one's way of life. The Individual must have an authentic response and attitude in confronting their death. For *Dasein* to live an authentic life, *Dasein* must overcome the limitation of fallenness while being aware of the inevitability of facticity in order to activate and actualize its possibilities bearing in mind the finitude of its existence.

Knowing that one is a **being-towards-death** would encourage one to live a meaningful life. This is because *Dasein* becomes aware of the vulnerability of his life, and that his life could end at any time. Thus, *Dasein* would not waste time living in conformity to the will of the **Das**

**Man** in which he never fully experiences himself and others. This leads to anxiety and mental disturbance because death as understood, must accordingly arrive from somewhere, but which is proximal *not yet present-at-hand*<sup>9</sup> for oneself, and is, therefore, no threat. On the other hand, Heidegger stresses that accepting the possibility of death means the readiness to confront one's authentic self. Besides, confronting one's death this paper suggests that the Individual must not commit suicide. Heidegger's notion of death is not an invitation for committing suicide, but rather, an invitation towards an authentic way of existence despite the absurdity of life. The Individual must have an authentic attitude and response to avoid the possibility of experiencing a relapse into drug dependence.

Additionally, the Individual should be made to be aware that the inevitability of death mandates one to follow the path of authenticity towards self-realization. Here, *Dasein's* attitude towards death can either be positive or negative. The **positive attitude** is about being responsible, that is, living meaningfully. The **negative attitude** involves toeing the path of authenticity or being fallen that could take the form of committing suicide, doing various immoralities or abuses, and other self-destructing activities. I strongly argue for a **positive attitude** towards death because it inspires the Individual to continue to be aware of his or her impending death and the need to alter adversities into advantages. This inspires the Individual to become optimistic about life, which in turn awakens the Individual towards a sense of freedom and responsibility, through which the Individual is able to instruct meaning into life. By this, death invites the Individual to give value to one's own life. The Individual must also not be afraid of death for it is something that needs to be confronted. In confronting one's death, the Individual transforms himself or herself into becoming a better person and may prevent his or her tendency to relapse into drug dependence.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

Moreover, the Individual should understand that confronting one's death brings clarity to one's life. Thus, by understanding the reality of death, the Individual also understands one's existence, because it reveals the hidden wisdom and the beauty in life. In addition, if the Individual has an awareness of death, it awakens the way one lives and treasures time. Thus, death is not something to be afraid of, but to be faced and accepted to by the Individual for it is inevitable and one of the truths in human existence. Therefore, the goal of the Individual is not simply **to live** or **to live forever**, but to live wholly, consciously, and meaningfully. Therefore, death gives Dasein a "freedom which has been released from the illusion of the *They*".<sup>10</sup>

### **The Voice of Conscience: Its application in preventing the Individual's relapse into drug dependence**

A key to Heidegger's claim is that conscience and guilt are important traits of human existence that reveal human authenticity towards freedom. By this, the voice of conscience calls us to focus directly on our authentic selves.<sup>11</sup> Conventionally, conscience belongs not only to religion but also to any moral perception. For Heidegger, conscience has nothing to do with religion, but rather something authentic.<sup>12</sup> Heidegger ignores the traditional religious view of conscience and offers an existential interpretation that throws more light on our way of being. He argues that not everybody has a **conscience** (i.e. lowercase **c**), that concerns our conventional understanding of the word, but everyone has a **Conscience** (i.e. capital **C**), in a more fundamental, existential sense.<sup>13</sup> He believes that the fundamental Conscience, unlike conscience in the traditional sense, does not have an inner voice that can judge, command, condemn and refuse action on moral grounds. He sees the moral judgments of traditional

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Watts, *The philosophy of Heidegger*, (UK: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2011), p. 81.

<sup>12</sup> Michael A. Gelven, *Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time*, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970), p. 167.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Watts, op. cit., p. 81.

conscience as superficial.<sup>14</sup> His existential notion of Conscience is exposed bare of all such ethical content. He claims that the only time we can have genuine conscience in the traditional sense is when we respond to the insights offered by our conscience in the existential sense. In a similar manner to traditional notion of conscience, Heidegger's notion of fundamental conscience, bifurcates *Dasein*'s ways of acting into the **caller** and the **called**, which is rooted in the understanding of how our conscience, existentially calls us either to the path of authenticity or the path of inauthenticity in our everydayness.<sup>15</sup>

The second division of *Dasein* is the **homeless** self, which has been stripped naked into a world that has no meaning.<sup>16</sup> "The call of conscience has the character of an *appeal* to *Dasein* by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-being-its-self, and this is done by way of *summoning* it to its ownmost Being-guilty",<sup>17</sup> because "The call reaches *Dasein* in this everyday-averagely concern always-already-understanding-itself".<sup>18</sup> What happens here is that it summons this **fallen** inauthentic self to turn away from the influence of the *They* to reflect on its potential possibilities and it is from these possibilities that it draws out its resoluteness with a firm choice of life, without forgetting its mortality. Notwithstanding, for *Dasein* to **make** a committed choice, it must first and foremost choose to do so, and it is from this initial choice that Conscience is calling *Dasein*. It is because of the *They-self's* upbringing alertness of its potentiality for authenticity that stimulates the primordial Conscience to call out, and which allows the *They-self* potentiality to respond. The basic requirement to hear the call of Conscience is that one must *want* to have a Conscience and *listen in silence*, since, if we are to perceive the call to authentic existence, we must be quiet enough to hear it.<sup>19</sup> The call of Conscience

<sup>14</sup> Martin Heidegger, op. cit., pp. 332, 334.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Watts, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger, op. cit., p. 314.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 318, 342-343.

appeals to fallen *Dasein* to become an authentic person by summoning *Dasein* to face their *primordial* guilt.<sup>20</sup> Heidegger believes that Conscience may call out to anybody, but the point is that not everyone responds to this call. Frequently, when our Conscience reminds us of our potential for authenticity, we prefer to turn away from this consciousness to escape the responsibility of authentic Being. In the end, Heidegger's Conscience can be understood as a kind of **call**. This **call** reminds *Dasein* of her responsibility for any choice she makes without the influence of the *they*. The absence of the **call** occurs when *Dasein* is absorbed in the *they* due to daily activities and so any blatant refusal to accept its finitude is a direct refusal to the **call** of Conscience.

Again, the voice of conscience is one of the important elements of *Dasein*'s authentic existence. It is *Dasein*'s conscience that reliably invites *Dasein* toward the mode of authentic existence. It restores and makes *Dasein* realize its ownmost possibility. Thus, it encounters the feeling of guilt that affects its decision and responsibility in its existence. It orders *Dasein* on **what to do** and **what to avoid**. It determines what is proper for itself and transforms its attitude to become a better person. Besides, how does Heidegger's perspective on conscience prevent the Individual's relapse into drug dependence? This paper argues that the Individual as a drug dependent must learn how to listen and obey that inner genteel but firm voice that urges us to follow the path of virtue, which is called **conscience**. One of the reasons why the Individual turned into experienced relapse is because of the influence of the other drug users, most especially the influence of peer groups. At this point, in preventing oneself from the tendency to relapse, the Individual should pay attention to self. She or he must listen to the voice within the self that calls one's attention to change one's way of living and quit using drugs. The Individual must have self-discipline and responsibility in his or her decisions and actions. However, does this mean that the Individual should not listen to others? This paper argues that the Individual should pay attention to others if it helps him or

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.314.

her to prevent himself or herself from relapsing into drug dependence. The Individual who really, and sincerely heeds to the call of conscience would never use drugs. This is because, in the case of drug use, the conscience calls the Individual to quit drug use, not letting himself or herself be absorbed by the influence of others. As an inner voice of the Individual's self, it calls the attention of the Individual **to act**.

Additionally, the Individual should not let herself be with drug users, addicts, or dependents. She or he must not listen or pay attention to the temptation or invitation of others to use drugs again. She or he must know how to refuse in times of temptation to use illegal drugs. Consequently, this paper believes that by paying attention to one's conscience, one should be able to listen to good and morally upright people, psychologists, and even religious leaders if possible since *Dasein* is always situated in a particular context.

### ***Resoluteness: Its application in preventing the Individual's relapse into drug dependence***

The third and last contribution of Heidegger's notion of authenticity in preventing the Individual's relapse into drug dependence is resoluteness. Resoluteness is one of the elements of Heidegger's notion of authenticity. In his *Being and Time*, the term is presented as making one's own decision and having resistance not following the prescriptions of the *they*. The authentic *Dasein* follows own's decision towards an authentic way of living. At this point, what would be its application and contribution in preventing the Individual's relapse into drug dependence? This paper has argued that the Individual as a drug dependent should make a consistent and firm decision in recovering and preventing oneself from relapsing into drug dependence.

The Individual should not simply decide for deciding sake of his or her life but more importantly, their decision should be moral. It is about making a decision that is good, moral, consistent, and firm not to use illegal drugs. It has been presented in this paper that one of the reasons

why the Individual is experiencing relapse into drug dependence is because of the influence of other people specifically drug users and drug dependents. With that, the Individual is being influenced by the *they* into the use of illegal drugs.

The Individual can choose with firmness to be resolute not to go back to using drugs. This activity is rooted in one's freedom in two ways. The first is deciding positively, and the second is deciding negatively. The former means choosing to do what is good, and the latter means choosing to do what is bad. One who decides to follow the positive path, must be firm or resolute and should avoid being fragile or easily broken in the face of adversities. That is why the Individual must also have strong willpower. This willpower could be psychologically superior which must be consistent in realizing and practicing one's goals in life. The Individual must also decide wisely because decisions that are made in the present can affect the future of one's existence. Decisions made in the present has the capacity dictating or influencing one's future positively or negatively. If the Individual just follows the decision of the other drug users, it is a manifestation of being a slave to others, it means conforming to what other people's influence, which will eventually lead to a problematic situation of drug dependence. Here, the Individual should be commander and master of himself or herself in aiming to prevent himself or herself from relapsing into drug dependence. By this, the resolute *Dasein* is an authentic Individual since it adheres to the call of Conscience. Authenticity also implies **ownness**. By being resolute, *Dasein* can be said to be aware of its existence, not under the influence of the *they* and has the anticipation of its death.

### Conclusion

There are three important things that the Individual could learn from Heidegger's notion of authenticity in preventing oneself from relapsing into drug dependence. The first one is that the Individual must always anticipate and be aware of one's death. By this, the phenomenon of death calls the attention of the Individual to have a constant awareness of one's

self. In realizing this, the Individual is drawn to have an authentic attitude. The phenomenon of death transforms and actualizes the Individual.

Another existential element that was considered was Conscience. Here, it was discussed that conscience is about the **calling** towards authenticity. The implication is that the individual must listen to his or her inner voice called conscience. This involves prioritising one's authentic self over the untoward influences of the *they*. It is not that the Individual should become egoistic, selfish, or self-centered. What is simply emphasized here is focusing on oneself and not disregarding others. The Individual should learn to stand on his or her own and know how to refuse when it comes to the bad invitations of others that might eventually lead one towards drug dependence.

The third and last essential element of *Dasein's* authenticity is resoluteness. As was discussed and elucidated in the previous section, resoluteness is about being firm with one's decision. The Individual must not easily give up in times of the negative influence of those who patronize the use of illegal drugs, nor should such individual easily succumb to his or her appetite to relapse into dependence on illegal drugs. Thus, resoluteness also calls the attention of the Individual to follow the decision one has made and not the negative and immoral decisions of others. Conscience becomes the way to self-esteem, just as self-esteem becomes the path to self-reflexivity, which in turn positively directs one to self-authenticity. Self-reflexivity becomes the authentic path towards freedom from drug abuse and the strong will not to relapse into drug dependence. Hence, the submission of this paper is that Heidegger's notion of authenticity serves as an instrument for boosting the psychological state of individuals not to take to drugs or relapse into drug dependence. This is the crux of this paper.

# METAPHYSICAL BIOLOGY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHICAL RENEWAL OF SOCIETY<sup>1</sup>

Jim I. Unah and Kizito I. Ochala

## Abstract

*The concepts of Being and Becoming characterize metaphysical and biological modes of existence. Often, being is conceived to depict essence while becoming depicts growth, change, and alteration. This conception is associated with Metaphysical Biology which interrogates the nature and development of beings or entities. Metaphysical Biology is explained by the theories of **substance ontology** and **process ontology**. These theories are in tandem with the thesis of Being and Becoming; the substantial and relative properties, the changeless and changing aspects, of a being. This study adopts these categories to examine the character formation of human beings. The choice of the human being is its phenomenal value embodied in the scheme of existence, and the concern with character formation is the need to retool the human person for peaceful coexistence in sustainable inclusive societies. Furthermore, the choice welcomes the adoption of Aristotle's conception of metaphysical biology to delineate implications for social reconstruction or ethical renewal of society. A synthesis of metaphysical biology and ethics is instrumental for the reordering of social systems; to enhance social order and human flourishing.*

**Keywords:** Metaphysical Biology, Contending Ontologies, Ethical Renewal.

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## Introduction

Metaphysical biology is alternatively described as the metaphysics of biology. Since metaphysics is a cognitive study of the nature, substance, and essence of a being and biology is an empirical study of matter, it would seem, superficially, that metaphysical biology is a synthesis of the transcendental and the empirical. However, this study concentrates on the choice of metaphysical principles for human entities in the realm of conduct. This is a different position from the thoughts of Heidegger<sup>1</sup> that a purely ontological analysis of human entity does not lead to any particular moral appeal and Metz<sup>2</sup> that nothing ethical straightforwardly issues from ontology. The primary concern of this study is about the nature and development of entities and the characteristics of human existence amenable to training. The ethical compass of the survey is particularly directed at human life whose mode of being is in question, entangled as it were, in a miasma of moral disaster. The aim is to improve the value of human coexistence through the habituation of admirable moral character since human beings are what they repeatedly do. The objective is to identify, for the most part, the mode of existence that guides human conduct. The characteristics of human life show that certain basic traits are natural to all humans which could, however, be adapted by environment, orientation, or nurture towards desirable conduct. Analysis of human beings within the framework of substance and process ontologies should disclose the dominant factor and the basis for moral rearmament. This is preceded by seeking clarity about the concept of metaphysical biology.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (Trans. by J. Macquarrie), (USA: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Thaddeus Metz, "Questioning African Attempts to Ground Ethics on Metaphysics", *Ontologized Ethics: New Essays in African Meta-Ethics*, (Eds. Elvis Imafidon and J. A. I. Bewaji), (U.S.A: Lexington Books, 2014).

## Conceptions of Metaphysical Biology

Metaphysical biology is an aspect of the philosophy of biology. It examines the substance and properties of existing material objects. It further interrogates the essence and material properties of objects.

To elaborate on this perspective, Dupré asks “Why should the *metaphysics* of biology be distinguished from the metaphysics of things or stuff more generally?”<sup>1</sup> Concerning this question, he proposes *naturalistic*, or *scientific metaphysics*.<sup>2</sup> He opines that “science and naturalistic metaphysics both draw essentially on experience”.<sup>3</sup> Notably, he observes that “the metaphysics of biology, then, consists of the most general, abstract truths about the living world”.<sup>4</sup>

Metaphysical biology describes the practice in which “philosophers explore and make precise the metaphysical commitments and implications for the different biological disciplines.”<sup>5</sup> Also, it refers to how philosophers “use metaphysics when addressing a conceptual biological problem”.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the point is made that “philosophers recur to the metaphysical framework they consider to be more accurate to determine the ontological status of the entity to which the biological concept refers (in this case, human conduct – *emphasis ours*). In doing so, the biological concept itself is clarified”.<sup>7</sup> Triviño, citing Mumford and Anjum, observes that the “dispositional theory of causation to clarify the biological concept of gene”.<sup>8</sup> Triviño avers that metaphysical concepts and theories such as

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<sup>1</sup>John Dupré, *The Metaphysics of Biology* [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/34942823\\_The\\_Metaphysics\\_of\\_Biology](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/34942823_The_Metaphysics_of_Biology), (2021), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Vanesa Triviño, Towards a characterization of metaphysics of biology: metaphysics *for* and metaphysics *in* biology. *Synthese*, 200, 428 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-022-03897-3> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11229-022-03897-3#citeas>, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.5

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Mumford and Anjum, 2011; cited by Vanesa Trivino, 2022, p. 5.

dispositional causation, emergence, and natural kinds are the reference framework for clarifying the nature of biological notions.

## **Characterizations of Metaphysics of Biology**

Triviño identifies two characterizations or modes of performing Metaphysics of Biology; metaphysics for biology and metaphysics in biology.

1. **Metaphysics for Biology:** In this kind of metaphysics, philosophers appeal to metaphysics to clarify a biological concept. In particular, they recur to the different metaphysical theories they might consider more accurate to explore and determine the ontological status of the entity to which the biological concept refers. By doing so, the biological concept is clarified.<sup>9</sup>
2. **Metaphysics in Biology:** In metaphysics in Biology, on the other hand, philosophers explore and make precise metaphysical commitments and implications that can be found in the different biological disciplines. In this case, philosophers of biology pay attention to biological theories, phenomena, and practices to disentangle the metaphysical commitments and assumptions that are given in them. In doing so, philosophers of biology can clarify and shed light on the biological theories, phenomena, and practices themselves.<sup>10</sup>

The author synthesizes these two modes. He observes that;

besides the question of the emphasis when doing Metaphysics of Biology cases of cross-fertilization can also take place. This occurs when the results obtained by philosophers of biology in metaphysically addressing

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<sup>9</sup> Trivino, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

conceptual problems in biology affect the metaphysical theories or concepts initially used by improving, modifying, or extending them.<sup>11</sup>

However, he equally makes the point that “cross-fertilization does not always need to occur”.<sup>12</sup> It implies that either of the characterizations is substantive of metaphysical biology.

## Theories on Metaphysical Biology

As stated above, two ontological theories on the front burner in the discourse of metaphysical biology are substance ontology and process ontology.

1. **Substance ontology:** this theory is about particular things and objects. ... We could substitute **particular** for **substance**. So, the idea is that **substances** AKA (also known as) particulars are things like trees, cats, planets, and people (Wetzel, T.). A **substance ontology** usually also has a claim to the effect that particulars have nature. Consider a molecule of water. Usually, it is said it has a chemical nature, given by the formula  $H_2O$ . If we consider a glass full of water, that's stuff, a **substance** in everyday language, but the molecules are distinct packets, with a chemical structure that imparts certain tendencies to it. Thus, the molecule satisfies the philosophical concept of a **substance**, that is, a particular with a nature.<sup>13</sup>
2. The idea of a substance ontology is that the particulars, the packetized bits of reality with natures, come into existence and undergo changes over time and continue to be one & the same particular thing through those changes. This means that the identity of a particular, in this sense, can't be explained in terms

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.,

of the principle that  $X = Y$  just in case  $X$  &  $Y$  have the same properties. This must be true of anything at any given instant but particulars are said to be identical through change over time. At the least, they would have to retain their same nature.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from substance, entities have properties. Two properties are basic. Wetzel observes that among the various kinds of properties that particulars can have are dispositional properties and event- and activity properties. A dispositional property is about the range of changes in properties that are feasible for that particular. The ability to learn, to perceive, to gain or lose weight are dispositional properties of people. The ability to freeze or to be vaporized are dispositional properties of water.<sup>15</sup>

1. **Process ontology:** this is also described as event ontology. Basically, it holds that the appearance of persisting particulars over time is an illusion.<sup>16</sup> This implies that process or event is real. In other words, on this view events or processes are basic, and what we call **things** are just particular series of processes that we humans find it convenient to regard as one thing.<sup>17</sup>
2. On the substance ontology view, however, events occur as a state of affairs in which a particular, or set of particulars, exhibit some activity or series of activities, which lie within the realm of possibility for them, given their natures. So, this means that events are analyzed as a compound entity in which a particular exhibits an event or dynamic property.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



## Ethical Implications

Generally, this study attempts to derive ethical implications from metaphysical biology on the presumption that “science and naturalistic metaphysics draw essentially on experience”.<sup>19</sup> Experience in this context is of human being. Furthermore, human experience entails human action. We reiterate that human action is a cardinal factor of morality which is the subject matter of ethics.

In particular, it derives ethical correlation from Descartes’ and Aristotle’s theses on metaphysical biology. Manning, G.<sup>20</sup> states that “Descartes does offer a philosophical justification for the existence of physical natures, albeit not by appeal to the categories of substance and mode, or matter as such, but by appeal to our **nature** as a union between mind and body”. Nature as the union of mind and body is critical to metaphysical biology.

Aristotle’s metaphysical biology is inherent in his argument that: “**Every** art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason, the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim”.<sup>21</sup> Evidently, this is a form of process ontology which makes the point that entities of the same nature can acquire different properties. In matters concerning human conduct, these different properties can be formed through habits into moral character by sustained and systematic teaching of identified virtues in the formative years of learners.

This position is advanced in consideration of the fact that “human beings, like the members of all other species, have a specific nature; and that nature is such that they have certain aims and goals, such that they move

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<sup>19</sup> Dupre, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Gideon Manning, “Descartes’s Metaphysical Biology”, *HOPOS: The Journal of the International Society for the History of Philosophy of Science*, 5(2), 2015, pp. 209–239. <https://doi.org/10.1086/682372>  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/682372>

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. (Trans. by W. D. Ross). Kitchena: Batoche Books. 2018, Bk. I:1

by nature towards a specific telos. The good is defined by its specific characteristics”.<sup>22</sup> The point is that “Aristotle's ethics ... presupposes his metaphysical biology”.<sup>23</sup> It suffices to state that Aristotle's metaphysics paves the way for his ethics which is the main point of reference.

The objective of the moral renewal of society is to guide human conduct. Put differently, ethics enhances social harmony since it promotes admirable moral character. According to Zaluski;

The first argument is the commonsensical observation that it is easier to harm than to help someone, to kill than to enliven (the latter being impossible), to destroy than to create, to make unhappy than to make happy. Thus, it seems that, in so far at least as great good and great evil is concerned, it is easier to do evil than to do good.

The second – more sophisticated – argument rests on the Aristotelian account of virtue and vice. This account implies that while it is difficult to be virtuous (in any given circumstances, a virtuous action can be done *only in one way*, called **the mean**), which is why virtuous actions are rare, beautiful, and morally glorious, it is easy to fall into vice: it can be realized in many different ways (e.g., according to Aristotle's account, in given circumstances, you can manifest fortitude only in one way, but you can cowardly or reckless – two vices opposed to fortitude – in many different ways).

It is difficult to be virtuous, not only because – being virtuous – one ought to choose a *unique* morally good action (**the mean**), but also because this choice must have some additional features: it must flow from a stable emotional disposition to make such choices, should be made deliberately

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<sup>22</sup> <https://philosophy.stackexchange.com/questions/90809/what-does-macintyre-mean->

<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, op. cit.

and disinterestedly – only for the sake of its moral beauty. Thus, the conditions imposed on a good act are very restrictive.<sup>24</sup>

The thrust of the ethical renewal of society implies that while it is easier to do evil than good, it is never better to do evil than good. In other words, easier is what happens but better is what we achieve by admirable, consistent social efforts and acquirements. In pursuit of these **fundamental options** that conduce to the greater good of human well-being, pragmatic strategies of socio-ethical applications of metaphysical biology are pertinent.

## **Pragmatic Strategies of Socio-Ethical Applications of Metaphysical Biology**

1. **Nurture of nature:** the nature of an entity is the substantial form of the being. It is the natural mode of the being. For instance, being human is the nature of human beings. From the biological perspective, human nature is characterized by life and death. From an ethical perspective, human nature consists of virtuous and vicious traits. We observe that virtuous activities are beneficial whereas vicious activities are harmful. Notably, it seems to be that most people want beneficial results, however, about the same people engage in dangerous activities. Manifestations of the vicious trait of human nature are dominant in society. This truism discloses the need for the nurture of nature; to enable people to develop their virtuous traits towards well-deliberated activities that enhance their sustainability and meaningfulness. Put differently, the nurture of nature enhances admirable, consistent social efforts and acquirements.

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<sup>24</sup> Wojciech Zaluski, “Why it’s easier to do evil than to do good”, *iai news*, 30th November 2022 <https://iai.tv/articles/why-its-easier-to-do-evil-than-good-auid-2322>.

The nurture of nature is fundamental. Hence, it is instructive to underscore and understand the basic theses of nature and nurture. Allen presents the theses in the form of a debate. In his account:

Although the nature-nurture debate technically refers to all traits (physical, physiological, and behavioral) in all organisms (plants, animals, and microorganisms). It is most often, and most heatedly debated, concerning human beings. Proponents of the ‘naturist’ argument claim that for many traits or characteristics of the organism, biological inheritance is the major determiner of how the adult appears or behaves. The naturist position implies that because a trait is biologically determined, it cannot be altered much, if at all, by environmental intervention. On the other hand, proponents of the **nurturist** position argue that many traits, especially human personality, mental, and social traits, are not determined in any specific way by biological inheritance but are developed (i.e., learned or conditioned) from interactions with the outside world. The implication of the nurturist position is that many human mental and personality traits can be modified through exposure to new environments. In the economic and social spheres, naturists maintain that people’s social position (job level, income, educational level, and degree of economic responsibility) is far more rigidly determined at the time of conception whereas nurturists maintain that social and economic positions, along with educational level, are developed through exposure to particular (favorable or unfavorable) environments.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> G. E. Allen, “Nature versus Nurture”, *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics*, (Second Edition), (2012), pp. 197-207. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780123739322001824>.

The evident point is that human decisions and behaviour are largely influenced by both nature and nurture. Allen opines that “nature and nurture refer to the two factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of form and function in organisms”.<sup>26</sup> More succinctly, the point is made that

Nature and nurture provide two different suggestions for what influences or causes a person’s behaviors and characteristics to develop. Nature suggests a biological or genetic cause behind how you act and who you are. Nurture proposes that the environment and how a person was raised majorly impact your behaviors and traits.<sup>27</sup>

This study is cognisant of nature and the traits it bestows; however, our point of departure is on the influence of nurture on natural traits, which is quite apodictic. Our position on nurture of nature is supported by the historical socio-ethical paradigm of child raising which prescribes *train up a child in the way that he should go; when he is old he will not depart from it*.<sup>28</sup>

In the context of this study **nurture of nature** entails the transformation of biological and metaphysical aspects of a person. We adopt it as a social and ethical paradigm that transforms the behavioural conditioning of a person for beneficial, virtuous, and desirable dispositions and conduct, especially, in a social context. This means that **nurture of nature** implies the training and formation of people; both in personal and social contexts, to improve their ethical consciousness in both decisions and actions.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> “Understanding how Nature and Nurture Influence Behavior”. *Medically reviewed, Akilah Reynolds, PhD* — Written by Jenna Fletcher on September 5, 2024. Available at: <https://psychcentral.com/health/nature-versus-nurture>

<sup>28</sup> Holy Bible, Proverbs 22:6.

Another critical point about **nurture of nature** in metaphysical biology is that possessing virtuous traits and moral character increases lifespan. The research observes that virtuous people engage less in crimes and consequently are less exposed to dangers and death. Suffices to state that nurture complements and improves nature, hence, nurture of nature is significant for improving human existence.

## Virtue Habituation

Habituation is a process or a practice that transforms a behaviour into a habit. It entails consistency of practice and commitment to goals. Habituation may be likened to addiction; an almost automated pattern of behaviour. It is a learned or an acquired ethical consciousness. Similarly, it is conceived that “moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; ... rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit”.<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that Aristotle emphasises virtue habituation as a necessary antecedent of moral character development. He avers that it takes place at the formative state of a child; for effective formation. He opines that;

but the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.<sup>30</sup>

This is true collectively and individually. This position explicitly indicates and buttresses the contextual analysis of the **nurture of nature**. It is

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<sup>29</sup> Aristotle, 2018, Bk. II:1

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

important to emphasize that nurture complements and improves the nature of a person. Nurturing human nature through value orientation and virtue habituation serves the interest of both the self and the other – and by extension, the society. A virtuous person is less exposed to danger, exercises her/his duties to others, and ultimately contributes to a well-ordered society.

## Value Orientation

Value is the quality of (that bestows) importance of an entity. Values are standards that inspire and guide moral decisions and actions; by individuals and groups. They inform judgments about goals, needs, and priorities. Values are relative or relational. This means that individuals and groups have different values, depending on their goals, needs, and priorities.

According to Okoro,<sup>31</sup> “Value orientation in life helps to determine focus, direction, goal, and purpose of an individual, project, organization or society”. Also, it is observed that,

value orientation’ is an action aimed at establishing the direction, identifying the effective ways to follow, under certain circumstances, in order to acquire facts, ideas, and phenomena to meet the social requirements and the ideals generated by them, forming the most appropriate, adequate attitude that gives price to an object/action expressed through behaviors.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Chiedozie Okoro, “Foreword”, *Philosophy of Value: Concepts and Issues*, (Eds. Anele, D. I. O., Onyeaghalaji, M. N. Osimiri P.), (Lagos: University of Lagos Press and Bookshop Ltd., 2021), p. v.

<sup>32</sup> D. Antoci, “The Modern Concept of Value Orientation”, *Advances in Education Sciences*, (1) 1 67-84(2019) ISSN 2668-5256. Available at” <https://core.ac.uk/reader/227002260>, (2019), p. 69.

Similarly, the author cites Kluckhohn who defines value orientation as an “organized and generalized concept, influencing behavior, nature, humanity, human relations with others and desirable and undesirable as they may be related to the environment and inter-human relations”.<sup>33</sup> More contextually, the author restates the position of Penikov that “personal value orientations of an individual are manifested in the ability to take responsibility for finding goals in life and realizing these goals, helping to adapt to constantly changing conditions, living life more meaningfully”.<sup>34</sup>

A synthesis of these points is the ability of value orientation to transform people from vicious lifestyle into virtuous lifestyle; from inauthenticity into authenticity. Truly, the significance of value orientation cannot be overemphasized. Quite eloquently, it is observed that

Values as the most important regulator of life of people and social groups determine decision-making in situations of choice and impose a strong imprint on behavior. Value orientations ensure the stability of the individual, certainty, and consistency of behavior, and constancy of the relationship of a person with the social world, and with other people. Values encourage action and determine the content, and focus of any activity.<sup>35</sup>

Based on these accounts, it is consistent to state that the **nurture of nature** is particularly integrated through virtue habituation and value orientation. They suffice for pragmatic strategies of socio-ethical applications of metaphysical biology. Also, they are critical components of moral character development. Ultimately, they complementarily contribute to human flourishing which Aristotle describes as the *good life* and the *end* of human existence and activities.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

## **Conclusion**

Being, in the form of perceptible entities is characterized by substance and matter. This is theorized in the metaphysics of biology and the substance and process ontological theories. Therein, the nature and properties of entities may seem opposing. Similarly, the ontological theories of substance and process seem divergent. However, a critical analysis indicates that substance and process are complementary in nature and properties. These categories resonate with human beings in the sense that human beings have nature and properties which are classified into substance and process. Human nature is the being while the properties constitute the process, becoming, or nurture. This study asserts that both nature and nurture complementarily influence human action. It is like human beings to be either good or bad. However, nurture through habituation of either virtues or vices determines either good or bad actions which, in turn, produces either beneficial or harmful consequences. Thus, while nature can be turned into good or bad, nurture through habituation of virtues tends humans towards the good to achieve inclusive sustainable peaceful societies.

# EDUCATION AND SOCIETY: UNLOCKING THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION POTENTIALS

Godwin Azenabor

## Abstract

*Education came with the formation of the society. Prior to this, the Hobbesian hypothetical state of nature where life was nasty, brutish and short obtained. By implication, any meaningful development in the society revolves around the pivot of education, which serves as a fundamental capacity building enterprise for sustainable development, making for an inseparable connection between education and society. Hence, this paper aims at a philosophical analysis of Nigeria's education potentials, which if properly harnessed would immensely facilitate national development. I argue that education is a right, meaning that education is a national project that requires the holistic mobilization and motivation of the entire citizenry. Besides, any sustainable education system must find anchor on a philosophical principle or system. In the light of the forgoing, I interrogate the main issues, problems, questions, and challenges in Nigerian education curriculum, as a leeway for recommending indigenous education system for national development.*

**Keywords:** Education, Nigerian Education, Philosophy, Philosophy of Education, Society.

## Introduction

As a philosopher, I am trained to critically examine concepts, questions, theories, languages, policies, problems, issues, contents, methods, claims, goals and pre-suppositions in other disciplines; meaning that this particular essay belongs in the realm of philosophy of education. Essentially, philosophy aims at the articulation, clarification, and critique of ideas with a view to attaining deeper knowledge of things, as well as decipher more innovative ways of improving the human condition. Philosophy of education, which comes under applied or practical philosophy, focuses on the application of philosophical methods to education. It is the theory of educational practice and a foundation of

education. This paper, will be taking a fresh look at conceptual clarifications of education, importance of education, relationship between education and society, and major issues and problems in Nigerian educational system. An attempt at a road map to unlocking the Nigerian educational potentials, will be made, in order to engender positive system-performance and adaptability, with a view to enhancing sustainability, in order to avert a total collapse. For systematic analysis and expositional simplicity, I begin with clarifications and articulation of concepts.

## Concept of Education

The term education derives from the Latin word *educare* which means to bring out or putting in. The concept of education can be viewed from both the broad and narrow perspectives. In its broad sense, education is at the disposal of everyone. Here, education refers to everything that is learnt from birth to death. It is a continuous process. This accounts for informal educational system, which is usually casual, unorganized and unsystematic. Education in its broad sense, is a process of intellectual development, in order to adjust individuals to the society or environment, through morals, physical, mental build-ups and learning processes.<sup>141</sup>

Informal education refers to the knowledge, skill, attitude, fashion, manner, etc, which we pick up without prolonged or sustained efforts on our part. In its narrow or technical sense, education is a schooling process, through colleges, universities and other tertiary institutions, aimed at transmitting cultural heritage, accumulated knowledge, values, skills to learners, in order to develop intellectual capacity, ability, character and mental power in a systematic and organized form. This is otherwise known

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<sup>141</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Education and Sociology*, (New York: The Free Press, 1986), p.16.

as formal education. Although formal education involves schooling, schooling alone does not capture the whole of education. In fact, education involves not just schooling but learning and unlearning; not so much of unlearning but of knowing; not so much of knowing but of questioning what one knows – it is going beyond the limited to the unlimited. It involves mental and intellectual awakening, not just teaching. Formal education refers to educational activities that have set patterns of work, curriculum, professional educators/teachers, set examinations, certification, as evidence of successful completion of work.

The main difference between informal and formal education can be found in their various objectives. The main objective of informal education is to prepare the learner with skills to grow into a functional member of the family, group and society. It aims at imparting immutable truths and values. The objective of formal education is determined by the challenges of a particular epoch or culture. For example, the missionaries in Nigeria had their challenge as the propagation of the gospel and the sustenance of colonial administration. This made them to tailor colonial missionary education towards the promotion of religion, evangelism and the sustainability of colonial administration through white-collar job schemes. This in turn, facilitated trade and commerce in raw materials for the colonial masters. Unfortunately, colonial missionary education and its agenda of Eurocentrism forms the anchor of contemporary Nigerian education system.

The differences in informal and formal education can be better understood when highlighted along their contexts, pupils, teachers, curricula, medium of instructions, method of impacting knowledge, preservations and transmissions of knowledge and mode of discipline. Whereas in its broad sense, education is what is already here with us, it is something we already have; in its narrow or technical sense, education is what we look for and go for. However, to be truly educated is to be in possession of some body of knowledge and understanding of some principles which transform one in terms of what one does or does not to do. Therefore, the highpoint of

this essay, is the contextualization of education to be relevant to the culture and needs of the people. Precisely, no system of education can be analysed or criticized except this is done within the societal milieu, which it is designed to serve. Education is part and parcel of the society. Whether in its formal or informal sense, education is simply the acquisition and utilization of knowledge<sup>142</sup> for social adjustment and control.

### **The of Concept of Society**

Society is an outcome of established joint human activity. It is an aggregate of individuals and group in relationship to one another with a common territory, interest and mode of life,<sup>143</sup> with common historical development, social intercourse and relation backed by law, custom and tradition. Society can also be conceived as a form of grouping of people. Unlike the community which is constructed on natural grouping, society involves artificial lines grouping. However, the common line between society and community is that both find anchor on the notion of *will*; the former being reflective, while the latter is spontaneous. This makes society to be artificial, while community is based on bloodline, communal and spiritual life.

The emergence of society meant the continuous erosion of the fundamental bonds that existed in the community. However, both society and community refer to the basic structure of human togetherness and also to different periods of social development – one being modern, while the other is ancient. One is based on legal order, the other is based on organic harmony.<sup>144</sup> Also, community can easily dissolve into society, where fidelity to law and reason takes the place of love and empathy. Society is

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<sup>142</sup> Alfred North Whitehead. *The Aims of Education*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1907), preface.

<sup>143</sup> Chinay was cited in Phenix H. Philip, (Ed.), *Philosophies of Education*, (USA., John Wiley and Sons. Inc. 1961), p. 46.

<sup>144</sup> Ezikiel Kolawole Ogundowole, *Philosophy and Society*, (Lagos: Correct Counsels Ltd., 2004), p. 32.

composed of diverse groups that could be social, political, religious, ethnic, racial, etc. It is regulated by the force of power, law, state or government, classes and legal sanctions. Community on the other hand, is accentuated by habit, custom, tradition, religion, morality and ancestral sanctions.

### **Education and Society: Relationship and Importance**

Education is essentially a social system and a major factor of social development. It must be emphasized that it is what the society believes about life and living that it attempts to transmit to its future generation through education.

The relationship between education and society is a symmetrical one; they both influence each other. Every system of education has a mark of a societal system and every societal system has a mark of its system of education. Whether or not a society is civilized or developed, depends on its type and level of its system of education. Society is transformed through good education, making education and society to be intertwined. The centre of education is the human being and the human being lives in the society. This is precisely why any sustainable educational system must be relevant to the society. It is along this line of thought that education is seen as an effort by an individual to adjust to a societal order.

Since the centre of education is man and man lives in a social milieu the ontological question; **What is man?** becomes fundamental to the idea of education and society. Because, the nature and method of education, including the curriculum will depend on what we take man to be. Is man spiritual or material, moral or amoral? Is knowledge innate to man or is it acquired through experience? Arising from this are the questions of the method for imparting knowledge, whether man is a product of society and education or is it man that makes society and education? Educational, philosophical, sociological, psychological and anthropological theories abound to address these questions.

The relationship between education and society is better captured by Babs Aliu Fafunwa, when he wrote that education is;

the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives, that is to say, it is a process of disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both.<sup>145</sup>

With respect to the importance of education to the society, education is said to be like a double-edged sword; it is an instrument used to either facilitate *conformity* into the systems or bring about *freedom* and the discovery of how to transform the world critically and creatively.

Education is an indispensable tool for societal development and for empowering the citizens through impartation of knowledge. The state of development in a society is analogous to the standard of education in that society. In fact, it has been said, and correctly too, that a society is only as developed as the standard of its system of education. One of the importance of education is that it serves as an instrument of adaptation of the individual's life to societal norms through the continuous process of reconstruction. Education is designed to serve the society; it is the society which set the goal that education follows or aim.<sup>146</sup> So, education must find meaning within a society for it to be sustainable.

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<sup>145</sup> Aliu Babs Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria*, (London George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1974).

<sup>146</sup> S. J. Cookey, "The Nigeria National Curriculum Conference of 1969 at the University of Lagos", *Philosophy for Nigeria Education*, (Lagos: Nigeria Educational Research Council, 1972), p. XXXII.

In fact, the fate of a society depends on education of its citizens. “Just as the fate of plants is shaped by cultivation, so is that of man, by education”.<sup>147</sup> Education is for the advancement of the human race. It is a major instrument of effecting meaningful change and ensuring social reconstruction<sup>148</sup> through the transmission of culture, morality and knowledge.

Education plays such a vital role in the society that we cannot even imagine a life without it. It is the element or symbol of civilization and humanity. It is along this line of thought that Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1970) informs us that “we are born weak and education strengthens us, we are born unprovided for, education gives us aid, we are born stupid, we need refinement – in fact everything we do not have at birth is given to us by education”.<sup>149</sup>

The function of society in terms of education is that of socialization, social integration, cultural and moral values, provision of schools, teachers, management and administration. Education prepares us for future life, it enables us to be aware of our rights, duties and obligations in the society, through its agents, like; schools, family, religions and moral institutions, and economic and political organs. Education is power – power to have knowledge, to harness material and human resources for the development of the society.

### **The Nigerian Educational System**

Nigeria is a country in Africa, West Africa to be precise. Nigeria has a population of over 200 million<sup>150</sup> occupying a surface area of 923,764 sq.

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<sup>147</sup> Aristotle, *Extracts from Ethics and Politics*, (Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> B. O. Ukeje, *Education for Social Reconstruction*, (Lagos: MacMillian and Co. Nig. Ltd., 1996), p. 18.

<sup>149</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on Economy*, (London: Penguin Press, 1970), p. 42.

<sup>150</sup> National Population Commission (NPC), 2020, <http://www.nationalpopulation.gov.ng/publications>.

km; with about 350 Languages, spreading over 36 states and a Federal capital Territory (FCT). There are three tiers of government in Nigeria – Federal, States and Local, designed to handle the education system. Formal (Western) education was started in Nigeria by the colonial government in 1882, which was meant to support the colonial administration. The basic subjects taught were reading, writing, religion and arithmetic. The first contact of Nigeria with formal or Western education was through the Christian Missions. In fact, by 1842, its first mission School was established in Badagry by the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

A framework for Nigerian education was provided by different commissions and later there was the National Policy on Education in 1977, with revised editions in 1981, 1998, 2004 and 2014. Currently, Nigeria operates the 6-3-3-4 system of education (i.e. 6yrs in Primary School, 3 years in Junior Secondary School, 3years in Senior Secondary School and 4 years at the tertiary level).

The Nigerian educational system is foreign in conception, methodology, world-view and value orientation. Apart from its foreign outlook, there is the attendant problems of irrelevant curriculum, poor and inadequate funding, infrastructural neglect, over-emphasis on paper qualification, leading to forgery of certificates, examination malpractices, moral decadence, sexual harassment, sorting, Brain drain, incessant strikes and unemployment, all dwarfing sustainable growth.

### **Problems and Issues: Unlocking Nigeria's Education Potentials**

Our enthusiasm and high expectations for education in Nigeria are displaced by major crises confronting policy makers and educational researchers.

Some of the major problems are as underlisted;

#### **A. Inadequate funding of Education**

This is the greatest developmental problem in Nigeria today. Education is chronically under-funded in Nigeria. The system suffered neglect under military rule. Even democratic governance has not helped matters. A paltry sum of 5% - 11% of Nigeria's total national budget is allocated to education, since the democratic dispensation, as against the expected 27% recommended by the United Nations. The level of commitment and application of resources do not match the desire for education in Nigeria. The neglect of education in terms of funding, may not be too surprising in the light of the fact that the ruling elite in the Nigerian society, is one that accords education a second fiddle role to politics and power. The astronomical expansion in Nigerian education coupled with the dwindling resources have led to the deterioration in institutional facilities and services.

### ***Unlocking Funding Potentials and the Question of Institutional Autonomy:***

There is the need for a drastic reform that will institute a policy that will make for free education in primary and secondary schools, but allows for the payment of fees at the tertiary level. To this end, education shall no longer depend solely on the insecure and dwindling resources from the government. Other avenues to boost government sub ventures need to be explored. To this end, fund-raising and private sector participation in education is rather imperative. The point is that there is need to establish connection between higher education, the industry, commerce, agriculture, and other entrepreneurial services in order to fully realize the potentials of the system.<sup>151</sup> The education policy should include a scheme for corporate social

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<sup>151</sup> I. A. Adelelo, "Higher Education in Nigeria: Institutional Inadequacies System Performance and Sustainability", *News Letter of the Social Science Academy of Nigeria*, Vol. 4., (2001), p. 11.

responsibility and partnership education that ensures that companies give back to the society.

The 1981 and 1998 National Policies on Education are specific on how education should be funded in Nigeria. These policy statements on education maintain that education, as a social service, should be adequately funded by all tiers of government for a successful implementation of educational programme. To this end, the educational ministry should match minimum standards and requirements with minimum standards of funding along the line recommended by the United Nations. Funds should be tied to research and there should be a correlation between research and the society's problems. Companies and private sectors should fund projects in tertiary institutions, through investments. School fees, in terms of service charges should be introduced as it is being presently done, but with reasonable progression, rather than the present arbitrary increase, without recourse to reasonable percentage increases.

To solve the problem of inadequate funding, once and for all, the Nigerian government should grant institutional (not financial) autonomy to its tertiary institutions in order to diversify their economic base and become more entrepreneurial in management, design, content, curriculum as well as the mode of delivery of their programmes. Therefore, it is instructive to note that government cannot completely abandon financing of tertiary institutions. Rather, government has to work out the percentage of its financial involvement in the funding of education in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The point is that, there is need to put in better perspective the idea of autonomy. This will require a major overhauling, reconstruction and reform, beginning with the reconstitution of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), National Universities Commission (NUC) and the University, Polytechnic and

Colleges of Education, Governing Councils, with a view to radically address the issue of autonomy.

Autonomy, desirable as it may be, should be contextualized and specified. In this context, autonomy means self-governance, absence of external interference or control. It means academic freedom to conduct research, advance the frontiers of knowledge, and to hold and express opinions freely. Autonomy is opposed to centralization. It confers on the educational institutions the right to admit students, set curriculum, determine areas of research, teaching, funding and even staff salaries. In Nigeria today, institutional autonomy has been eroded by the establishment of centralizing bodies. Consequently, there should be a revocation of all centralizing legislation and undue interference in the affairs of tertiary institutions. Autonomy, in a developing country like Nigeria, is limited by the realities of social imperatives and needs, like pure academic, economic inequality, consensus, group conflicts and legal/enabling laws imperatives.<sup>152</sup>

The point to underscore at this juncture, is that in Nigeria, certain realities exert and erode autonomy considerably. Autonomy, does not mean that educational institutions will be self-funding. Afterall, other institutions of government, like the legislature and judiciary, are autonomous bodies, but are still being funded by government.

### **B. The Brain Drain Syndrome**

This is one of the consequences of decaying and deplorable educational system in Nigeria. Brain Drain is a situation where teachers or lecturers are compelled to relocate abroad and or

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<sup>152</sup> See Godwin Azenabor, *Sustainability of University Education in Nigeria*, (Lagos O.O.P. Ltd. and SORAC Publishers, 2005).

pursue careers elsewhere, especially in European and American countries, where the pastures are greener, remunerations are better and obstacles to scholarship and research are obliterated. The quest for job satisfaction, the pressure of prevalent economic hardship, poor facilities and salaries, and other socio-economic conditions, including maladministration, are causes of brain drain or migration to other developed countries. The effect of this outflow of talents is counterproductive and a contributory factor to Nigeria's educational under-development.

Brain drain gives room for mediocrity and incompetence become the order of the day, which result into poor leadership, corruption, and the continuous erosion of standards. Brain drain results into lack of professionalism, which soon begin to manifest in the forms of institutional decay and eventual collapse. So, the effect of brain drain is economic. It makes a country under-developed because the skilled man power that should have helped to develop the country have migrated to foreign countries in search of greener pastures. With this sort of situation, we cannot achieve the necessary long term economic growth in Nigeria.

### ***Unlocking the problem of Brain drain:***

There is need to avert the mass exodus of lecturers. To this end, government needs to change its policies and working conditions to make the academic sector more attractive. Examples of policies that would attract skilled manpower back to our tertiary institutions are:

- regular and improved salary and allowances,
- prompt payment of entitlements after retirement,

- making loan facilities readily available for cars, housing and furniture,
- creating enabling environment for and providing necessary research grants and sponsorship of conferences and researches, and
- radically addressing Infrastructural deficiency and decay.

Other policy implementation that would aggressively address brain drain problem include;

- ensuring that facilities in the educational institutions are rehabilitated and expanded to cope with increased students' enrolment and population, and
- updating tertiary institutions in Nigeria to world class standard, to make for global competitiveness, to prevent incessant strikes by the different unions, which in turn result into unstable and unharmonised academic calendar.

### **C. The Problem of Unharmonised Academic Calendar**

The disruptive impact of strikes on the educational system is not conducive to the attainment of harmonized academic calendar. Today, while some universities are in 2021/2022 academic session, others are in 2022/2023, while some have even cancelled a whole session by merging two academic sessions (i.e. 2022/2023 and 2023/2024). The effect of this is that an academic programme that ought to run for 4 years now drags for 6 to 7 years or more!

***Unlocking the Problem of Academic Calendar:***

Consequent upon the above, there is the need for an integrated system. Government should do enough to guarantee a strike-free system that makes for industrial harmony. There was a time in this country when the educational institution's calendar started in January and ran to December, leaving the planting and harvesting season for holidays, thereby conforming with our season as an agrarian nation.

But the calendar was later changed to run from October to July to conform with foreign model and summer holidays abroad! We advocate a return to an academic session in which programmes run from January to September, leaving October to December for long vacation.

### **D. Quota System and Unequal Educational Opportunities**

The educational programme implementation in Nigeria has been defective. Even where the Nigerian National Policy (NPE)<sup>153</sup> and the Constitution stipulates “equal, universal, free and compulsory education”, today, after over sixty-five years of independence, there is no evidence or effort toward attaining this goal. The problem has been the lack of commitment to the spirit and provision of NPE and the Nigerian Constitution with regards to education. Education, according to NPE and the Nigerian constitution, is to serve as instrument of integration.

On the contrary, we have the introduction of quota system, catchment areas, educationally disadvantaged states and federal character as admission and employment criteria, taking little cognizance of talent and merit, thereby encouraging mediocrity. This very act amounts to social injustice which fuels acrimony amongst individuals, thereby leading to social disequilibrium. The point is that the Federal character principle and quota

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<sup>153</sup> National Policy on Education 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Lagos: NERDC Press, 1998.

system run counter to the Nigerian Constitution, which stipulates that no Nigerian shall be discriminated against on the basis of his or her state of origin, religion or ethnic group. But the federal character principle and quota system have continued to encourage ethnic diversity instead of ethnic balancing. This has led to different demands and agitations, like resource control, rotational presidency and secessionist moves; all threatening the principle of peaceful co-existence and development. This situation has further encouraged the culture of corruption and dishonesty; people now supply false information in order to get admission or employment.

So, the objective of the quota system, legitimate as it might seem, is dubious in its method. This is because we cannot eliminate intelligence, parental and home rearing influences, economic and social conditions, innate ability, social and genetic make-up of the child and inherited tendencies that could make a difference in educational achievement.<sup>154</sup> So, what is needed are commitment to learning, innate ability, recognition of social conditions, and the initiation of a global standard that ensures acceptable measure of *equity*, not *equality*, in educational opportunities.

### ***Unlocking the problem of Quota System and Unequal Educational Opportunities:***

There is need to remove restrictions or discriminations in the access to education: minimum standard of educational facilities should be made available to all educational institutions, to enable students realize their learning potentials. We should stop adopting foreign education models that do not fit to our system. Education must relate to society for it to find meaning.

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<sup>154</sup> J. A. Akinpelu, *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*, (London Macmillan Publishers, Ltd., 1984), p. 220

Education must connect with the societal system. “It has to adapt to the challenging needs, aspirations and circumstances of its social milieu”.<sup>155</sup>

The curriculum, which is the most important object in the process of learning and teaching, needs to be reviewed to connect with the kinds of values in the society.<sup>156</sup> There is need to re-examine and re-arrange our curriculum. NUC is presently trying to do this through its Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standard (CCMAS). The only problem is that, it is like an imposition – its introduction should have evolved from the Universities and not the other way round.

### **E. Moral Decadence**

This has to do with bad attitude or character. Moral decadence is one of the greatest problems facing our educational institutions. Morality, is the area of knowledge that deals with human values, behaviour, or conduct. It regulates human relationship and character. Education without morality, is like a tea without sugar – tasteless! Today, the educational institutions are faced with the problem of moral decadence, resorting in examination malpractices, sorting, sex for marks, sexual harassment, cultism, cybercrime, drug trafficking, financial fraud (419), kidnapping, etc; all of which are as a result of the disconnect between morality, education, and society.

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<sup>155</sup> Aliu Babs Fafunwa, “Crises and Challenges in Higher Education: An overview”, *Crises and Challenges in Higher Education in Developing Countries: A Book of Reading*, (Eds. A. U Akuba and Dan Enyi), (Nsukka. Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, 2001), foreword.

<sup>156</sup> Godwin Azenabor, “The Nigerian Education System: Problem and Prospects”, *The Nigerian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 17. (1999), pp. 68 – 79.

It must be emphasized that educational institutions are established to impart learning and character. Unfortunately, only the former is being pursued; the latter is virtually neglected. We have to determine the right education for Nigerians. Education must be geared towards reforming character and determining right values, so that the dignity of the Nigerian person is not threatened and dehumanized. In a dehumanized state, guile is method, ruse is means, treachery is strategy, politics is a game, sex is allurements, murder is the road to success, suicide is fun, abortion is right and betrayal is cleverness. The result is that man is wolf to man.

***Unlocking the problem of Moral Decadence:***

To tackle the menace of moral decadence in the education sector, there is need for a radical reform tailored towards moral discipline and ethical orientation. To this end, education summit or conference of all stakeholders – government, parents, students, teachers, school administrators, etc; needs to be convened to address the problem of moral decadence in the education sector aimed at “building of strong moral character, and instilling in our youths the imperative of discipline, hard work, and creativity”.<sup>157</sup>

Religious and traditional values should be recognised as important agents in re-shaping and remoulding the educational system, beginning from primary schools. There should be a re-introduction of moral instruction or moral education, as it was in days of old. In fact, we should re-introduce the “Black-Book”, found in our schools in those good old days, where unruly students’ names were written and uncomplimentary testimonials issued to them.

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<sup>157</sup> J. F. Ade-Ajayi, “Paths to the sustainability of Higher Education in Nigeria”, *News Letter of the Social Science Academy of Nigeria*, Vol. 1. 2001, p. 8.

It may be instructive to note that educational systems all over the world have three important components: Instruction, Administration, Guideline and Counseling. Of these, the most neglected is Guidance and Counselling. There is need for effective guidance and counselling coupled with vigorous orientation programmes for fresh students. Seminars and workshops on human relationship and moral character development education should be held regularly. Along this line, the inclusion of African moral, religious and cultural values into the school curriculum is imperative. In fact, this should be made part of the General African studies syllabus to enable the grounding of students on indigenous traditions and cultural heritage. This would immensely encourage the project of retrieving students from alien values and mentality otherwise known as *colo mentality*.

To rejuvenate our moral sensibility, we need a dynamic philosophy of education for Nigeria, that is to say, a philosophy that will reflect our past, present and future as a society in a developmental process. Consequently, the Nigerian educational system must be tailored to both local and global needs to make it relevant to contemporary challenges. It is in this light that Babs Fafunwa states as follows:

Nigeria, like other African countries, had reached a stage in development when it must wrestle with the problem of defining its educational goals, in terms of its own concepts, needs and temperament.<sup>158</sup>

There is therefore the need to emphasise functional education and to effectively implement the aspect of the Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE), which stipulates that course contents should reflect our national requirements and needs. For all round improvement, there should be a general course programme in all our educational institution, which should offer courses in history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge, cultural

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<sup>158</sup> Fafunwa, 1974, op. Cit., p. 3.

and moral development, entrepreneurship and National orientation as stipulated in the National Policy on Education.

### Conclusion

What is needed is a complete overhaul of the system in order to give Nigerian educational system the necessary perception, depth and better scale of values. Emphasis should be on cooperative endeavor rather than competitive individual advancement. Our educational orientation should be centred on moral development, building of moral character, sense of value, right attitude of mind, self-reliance, discipline, commitment, liberation, critical thinking, and integration of the individual to the society, for common good, environmental relevance and development.

Since the main problem with the Nigerian educational system is that of foreign models in conceptions, contents, methods, worldviews and values, we need to stop adopting foreign models that do not fit or apply to our own system. Education will not have any definite or useful meaning until it relates to a society. Education has to be pragmatic. Foreign education alienates the recipients from indigenous societal values. So, we should stop introducing foreign causes that are irrelevant and unproductive, just because they are being offered in Europe and America. There is the need for Nigeria to move towards an indigenous system of education in order to put education in better perspective. It is advisable that Nigeria should adopt a model of education that is both multi-culturalist and reconstructionist in orientation. In essence, we have to re-examine the intellectual foundation of our culture in order to renew our education system to have a blend of tradition and modernity.<sup>159</sup> To this end, we have to deconstruct some aspect of our traditions and western ideal in order to reconstruct them to fall in line with social and cultural realities,

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<sup>159</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, *Person and Community*, (Washington, DC: Council for Research in values and Philosophy, 1992), p. 36.

differences, variations, diversity, pluralism, multiplicity and heterogeneity in the Nigerian society. This is because education does not take place in isolation, but geared towards social needs, changes and challenges.

Courses in the curriculum should be applied not just theoretical, but should be made functional and relevant to the Nigerian society, world of work, in order to make the graduates more flexible for the labour market, development needs and societal aspirations. With this, we will be moving towards a problem-solving education in Nigeria.