

THE IDEALITY OF MORALITY AND INDIVIDUAL MORAL RIGHT IN AFRICAN/IGBO COMMUNAL BASED MORAL SYSTEM- A PSYCHO- ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Igbo people and Africans at large practice community controlled moral system. They believe that life of an individual has implications in the community hence the need for individuals to be subjected to some degree of compulsion such that they cannot always do exactly as they like. This brings about non-cohesive relationship between community demands and individual right hence the fear that the individual right and freedom may be jeopardized. For some scholars, such fear is unfounded. It is but improper interpretation and understanding, of the said individual right. Different scholars have approached this problem differently; some see it as the problem of Individuality and Social cohesion while others prefer individualism and communalism; individuality understood as metaphysical freedom. This paper sets to approach it Psycho-anthropologically. It situates the problem within the socio- psychological feelings and wishes of human beings base on human nature. Findings show that every individual belongs to the human species, such that what is true of individual A is true of every other individual, such that when individual "A" wishes that his/her subjective desires be made a universal maxim; or that every other law give way to his/her individual wishes; or wishes for alone existence, such wishes are true of every other individual. If this is the case, then, it implies that within an individual, there is cohesion and conflict simultaneously between his/her wishes and the human nature. It is therefore against the self-realization of human species both as an individual and as a community to make individual right, wishes and an absolute.

Keywords: Igbo People, Morality, Communal Moral System, Individual Right, Psycho-Anthropological Analysis.

1. Introduction

The ideality of morality generally is a household concept. What is true about morality as a concept is that it is suffused with varieties and variants of meanings in both views and theories. In common opinion morality is concerned with good conduct of the members of a particular group of people. To some, it portrays and suggests an infringement on human freedom or a control system that dictates for and regulates members of the human society.

Morality anchored on religion for instance is seen simply as a brain washing invented by few to put the rest under check making them slaves hence diminishing the human dignity especially among societies with high sense of religious values like African/Igbo society. However, for such society with community-based morality, it is rather a prerequisite for mutual co-existence of people in the society.

At first, there was fear if Africans/Igbo as a people are moral beings. The Western scholars and intellectuals justify the inhuman and evil of colonialism based on the fact that it is a Western civilizing mission meant to rescue the barbaric African savages whose religion and magical sanctions were the only moral environment. The concerned African scholars on the other hand accuse the colonial masters of distorting and destroying the traditional African moral thinking built around human dignity realized in communal set up with the western individualistic and subjective morality. (Okoro, 2004).

It is in an attempt to clear this doubt, rescue and revive the traditional thinking of African society from the influence of colonialism, that a new moral horizon was opened. The now dominated debate among major political, moral and social philosophers as well as theologians is centered on the nature of moral thinking in African (Igbo) traditional societies prior to the event of colonialism. Having discovered a community based and controlled morality, what tends to engulf the non-African/Igbo people, is the fear that in community based moral system, the individual freedom is likely to be jeopardized and threatened. (Iwe, 1987) These two concepts of 'individual' and 'community' is seen by some as being 'dichotomous because individuality sometimes tends towards enhancement of the freedom that entails pursuit of egoistic or selfish interests, that is, negative individualism. On the other hand the social good tends to submerge such freedom' (Kigongo, 1992)

Therefore, while the first fundamental task is to justify the African/Igbo moral thinking, it is the core task and basic subject matter of this paper to show the place and nature of individual moral right in Igbo communal moral system. There is no doubt that at-a-glance and visual appearance of individual moral right within African/Igbo society is a restricted, cased, imprisoned and limited right that needs liberation. It portrays an individual as one without opportunities for true self-realization. However, it is an emphasized opinion in this paper that there is no conflict among the two concepts of individual right and communal demands; provided that the individual demands for freedom of conscience and thought is motivated by the sense of sound reasoning to conceive valid ideals of what ought to be done and what can be realized in one's action (Bidney, 1963) To achieve this objective, this topic is discussed within the context of the basic subjective desires of human being as a member of society when his interest conflicts with the social demands. Individual in the face of conflict of interests desires and wishes three basic interests: that other conflicting interest should give way to his/her subjective interest or wishes that his/her interest be made a universal maxim. (Casmir, Ome, & Nwankwo, 2014). The implication of these wishes is that the full human self-realization is possible only when a subjective right or wish is made a universal norm and truly it is difficult to speak profoundly of having rights where such right cannot objectively exist. So the subjective individual wish of having her/his ways in the society is nothing but the proof that a subjective right does not in the real sense exist (Kwesi, 2000) and where it exist, cannot be fully actualized in the human society. Therefore, the African/Igbo communal moral system

could be seen as a humanistic approach towards solving the alleged tension that exists between the individual moral right and community demands. It is obvious then that to live in accordance to the detects of communal moral system is not restricting but expanding the individual's sociological as well as the Psycho-anthropological horizons towards proper social integration to achieve true self-realization.

2. Concept of morality

Etymologically moral is from Latin word 'moralis' meaning "proper behavior of a person in society," or "pertaining to character or temperament" (good or bad), or literally meaning, "pertaining to manners". (Gert, 2012; Bloomfeild, 2008). Moral due to the human nature is also concerned with the creation of a humane social environment, without which the self-fulfillment of the individual members of a given society would hardly be realized. It was coined by Cicero ("De Fato," II.i) in his attempt to translate Greek word *ethikos*. It could also be defined as the very quality of being in accord with standards of right or good conduct or simply a virtuous conduct. (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020). Among some philosophers and theologians, the terms 'moral' and 'ethical' are often used synonymously and in most cases represented with 'morality' as their cognate word. However morality and ethics amount to the same thing for many, yet there are some who like Kant restrict the use of morality to systems based on notions such as duty obligation, and principles of conduct while ethics is reserved for the more Aristotelian approach to practical reasoning, based on the notion of a virtue ethics. (Oxford Dictionary of philosophy, 2008). Still for others, morality presupposes that human conduct is morally good or morally evil while Ethics, is a normative science of human conduct that studies the fundamental principles underlying moral judgments. Ingo Proft (2010) sees similarity in the roots of ethics and morality yet he made some distinctive clarification of the two concepts hence "Ethics stands to mean 'the form of moral reflection or theoretical concern with moral issues, whereas morality refers to the ethos practiced by individuals or social groups." For him Ethics can further be characterized as the critical reflection on the foundations of moral action that deals with the personal attitudes and values critically reflective, simply put - Ethics questioned again as what determines the common morality of everyday life. Starting point for any ethical reflection is the human. Human life itself is designed as a continuous sequence of decisions. These in turn are influenced by a variety of possible actions and behaviors.

So for Ingo, every human being is ethical insofar that he determines standards of value in his life orientation, weighs for itself and makes decisions; therefore an ethical human agent is also a moral human agent. Morals, for Kwasi Wiredu, (1992) "cover ethical rules proper as well as customs and taboos'. The above descriptions of morality by implication suggest its objective nature, when it is said to be concern about creation of a humane social environment. Morality is seen therefore as a community property more than as a subjective property. However, every human being to the extent that he/she makes daily a moral decision right and wrong, is said to be moral being and this nullifies the exclusion of any conscious being from moral judgment, penalty, and reward.

3. African/Igbo Moral Thinking

Despite the fact that every conscious human being as stated above is said to be a moral agent, the issue of moral thinking among Africans has being a problem both to African indigenous

scholars and foreigners alike. People like Thomas Hobbes and other imperial scholars argued that Africa had “no art, letters or social organization, but instead, only fear and violent death” (Agulanna, 2008)

Rudyard Kipling (1899; in Literature Network, 2005) states that an African (Igbo) person is “half devil and half child,” and needs...brutality or physical violence to make him truly human’ (Eliot, 1962). Most interestingly among these scholars was the German philosopher-Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. According to Hegel, Africans have no ‘... Knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting.”

(Omotade, 2015) For him chaos was the key word as they have no means by which they can experience an existence beyond their own sensuous will hence could not properly respect their fellow African. In Negro life, he said, the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial ,objective existence—as for example, God, or Law in which the interest of man’s volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being.”. Therefore, for Hegel, “the most reckless inhumanity and disgusting barbarism” is found in Africa. They have no true religion, African religion for him is, purely magic and fetishism. Hegel finally called for abrogation of African continent; “at this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit.” (Hegel, 1944, in Omotade, 2015)

The problem with Hegel is common with most western scholars; they placed African at a distance and at same time hope to offer true account of African cosmology. Is it possible for one to understand fully something that is outside of his or her historical and intellectual world? However, since it seems generally accepted that Africans are religious people;

(Greene, 2010), one may ask if it is possible for a people to be religious without having moral thinking? There are many views supporting the notion of morality without religion.

Accepting the fact that there are exceptions with regards to the general rule that those who truly believes in God, and who have some sense of the moral principles laid down for them are better people than those who have not; there are some people who have no belief and profess no religious and yet they live good moral lives. While on the other hand, there are those who profess to be quite religious and go to church every day and yet, they are as far from godliness, having nothing to show for their belief. However, several researches carried out show that there are strong link existing between religion and morality.

David G. Myers in his article ‘Godliness and Goodliness’ (Myers, 2010), states that ‘faith-rooted values give many people a reason to behave morally when no one is looking’. Quoting from the studies of people in all major contemporary religions by social psychologists Shalom Schwartz of Jerusalem and Sipke Huismans of Amsterdam, he states that religions encourage people to seek meaning beyond everyday existence”; exhort people to pursue causes greater than their personal desires. The opposed orientation, self-indulgent materialism, seeks happiness in the pursuit and consumption of material goods. Myers conclusively state

Let no one be smug. Cruelty and compassion, mischief and morality, are exhibited by people of all faiths and none. Many are good without God and many believers go to sleep each night behind bars. Yet the accumulating evidence indicates that faith often tethers self-interest and nurtures character. Godliness and goodliness are more than typographically linked. (Myers, 2010).

Other research works in the areas of giving most generously of one's time and money, involves in "volunteerism", disciplining human sex habit and others confirmed the faith-philanthropy correlation. The role of religion in moral issues can never be overstretched. Good behaviour towards the other being demanded from people is based on the fact that human person has dignity and is rational. All these stemmed from the fact that God creates man in His own image. Therefore, it is difficult to remove the religious and humanistic approach to life of the people and still talk about morality. Outside the religious nature of Africans/Igbo, there are other historical evidences. Before the coming of the colonial masters, the people of Africa generally were discovered to have advanced in their sense of God and morality. In the unfortunate speech accredited to King Leopold II of Belgium delivered in 1883, he gave the early missionaries another task rather than proving the existence of God and teaching how to live morally to the people of Congo for instance, since they already know that God exists and those things that are morally wrong.

Reverends, Father, and Dear Compatriots:

The task that is given to us to fulfill is very delicate and requires much tact. You will go certainly to evangelize, but your evangelization must inspire above all Belgium interests. Your principal objective in our mission in the Congo is never to teach the niggers to know God. Thus they know already. They speak and submit to a Mungu, one Nzambi, one Nzakomba, and what else I don't know. They know that to kill, to sleep with someone else's wife, to lie and to insult is bad. Have courage to admit it; you are not going to teach them what they know already. (BusinessDay, 2010)

Other evidences include language, sense of finitude, community life, and sacred value of human life, religion and from some historical accounts. Among these evidences, community life and language stand out more pronounced.

3.1. Community life

Community life, which is much pronounced among the people and that, which necessitated the work invariably stems from their worldview that centered on the concept of holism. They believe that there is synergy between all beings and such synergy demands ethical life and obligations. The people believe that everything in the universe was created by God, hence the universe is full of sacred life, full of life that transcends itself through fecundity, that in its abundant creativity continues to cross frontiers and break forth into new dimensions, always recreating itself and presenting people with ever new possibilities. (Sindima, 2010). Within these constant activities in the universe, there becomes the need to work out things in an orderly manner as was first initiated by the creator, as every living and non-living thing in the universe live in symbiosis. The life of every individual as a 'being with the order' and

being conscious of himself or herself in term of his or her relationship with the cosmic order well accommodated in the community set up, calls for a responsibility in an orderly manner. Therefore, For the Africans/Igbo, morality should be conceived as consisting in all life activities and deeds intended to maintain harmony among the various cosmic forces.

3.2. Language

The moral consciousness among the people can be observed also from their language beginning with the “given-names” or native names and the meaning of human being in Igbo native language. The concept “person” means ‘mmadu’ a compound word of ‘mma (goodness) and du (di) (exists). This shows that the idea of goodness is associated ontologically with man from time immemorial among the Igbos. The name mmadu is as old as the people showing how old is the moral thinking among the people. Other expressions in Igbo language suggest the same. Dr. Christopher Agulanna (2008), listed many of them, “for instance, the words, ‘aru’ (pollution) ...to commit ‘aru’ (ime aru, in the Igbo language) is to do that which is evil while to do ‘nma’ (ime nma, also in Igbo) is to conduct oneself in a morally worthy manner. A person is described as ‘onye aru-rala’, literally ‘one who pollutes or abominates the land’. Human being can directly be qualified as Ajo mmadu or ezigbo mmadu meaning to say a good or bad person if the ethical conduct of the person is a deviant attitude. They believe that the certainty of their existence and life continuity depend to a large extent on the degree of harmony between them and the other beings or forces that inhabit their world other worlds and rest of the community of beings. So it could be said that morality in Igbo ontology is objective and has an ontological dimension: ‘the objective ethics of the Africans is an ontological ethics, immanent and intrinsic. It is attached to the essence of things ontologically perceived.” (Temples 1959 in Aja, 2010)

It emerges clearly from the above notion about the universe that Igbo world is a religious universe. Nature, therefore, in the broadest sense of the word, for the Igbos is not an empty impersonal object or phenomenon but it is filled with religious significance hence to relate with the world is to be ethical.

4. Individual Right and communal moral system

Africans/Igbo people believe that human life achieves its fullness when it is richly connected to other people, to other creatures and to the universe itself. Therefore, the Continuity and security of life is said to depend on the extent an individual identifies with the community. Along with other negro-African society, the Igbo “puts more stress on the group than on the individual, more on solidarity than on the activity and needs of the individual, more on the communion of persons than on their autonomy. Ours is a community society” as against the western societies that still ask to know how much of their time and energy, how much of *them* are they supposed to devote to their community. Based on this high level of community consciousness as stated earlier, some scholars believe that in the contemporary African society in general, there is this communal deliberate coercive tendency against the individual in an attempt to build this needed harmonious community and moral order because of what they believe to be the interrelatedness of beings and likely effects of sin on the community. This, they said, brings about what they call authoritarianism understood in the ideas of Wiredu , as when the state or any human arrangement entails a compulsory hindrance of an individual freedom, thereby making him to suffer against his own will, hindering the development of

his own will. Simply put, the unjustified ridding of individual will. This raises the question of restricted human freedom on the side of individual. For them these two concepts of 'individual' and 'community' are 'dichotomous and irreconcilable because individuality sometimes tends towards enhancement of the freedom that entails pursuit of egoistic or selfish interests, that is, negative individualism. On the other hand the social good tends to submerge such freedom'

By implication therefore, the problem is how to create a synergy between community-controlled morality and the freedom of individual and how to balance the tensions that normally arise. However, many people do not see any tension except on the ground of pursuit of a destructive self-realization by an individual. Bidney for instance, sees no conflict existing between a well coordinated individual moral right and the demands of communal life provided that the individual demand for freedom of conscience and thought is motivated by the sense of sound reasoning to conceive valid ideals of what ought to be done and what can be realized in one's action.

It boils down possibly to misunderstanding and improper applications of human freedom as different from freedom of choice. A proper understanding of the concepts of human freedom and freedom of choice seems to solve the problem. Some scholars would like to approach it as the problem of Individuality and Social cohesion (community consciousness). There are others who prefer individualism and communalism; individuality understood as metaphysical freedom. In the opinion of David Bidney, individual right as an autonomous power of choice and decision of will, will not constitute a problem for the individual, if properly channeled towards Social cohesion. He/she can achieve such synergy if he/she being conscious of his/her existence in the community of beings, consistently strives towards acquiring certain fundamental virtues and morals for the common good.

Writing on the concepts of human freedom and freedom of choice, Cornelius Van Der Poel described the human freedom as the 'specific human character or ability through which a person can determine one's self in such a way that one's life expression becomes either meaningful or destructive for oneself and one's fellow human being. He states that this ability of self determination includes not only the ability for constructive self development but also the ability of expressing oneself contrary to a constructive self realization which too is a human self determination even though it leads to distortion of one's human ability. This means that freedom should not be taken as unlimited human power, which is curtailed by corporeal and psychological conditions but must be viewed as the very modest aspect of the human totality.

For Van der Poel, it could also mean the development of one's own 'inner life' borrowing from Michael Novak; human being becoming conscious of his/her own decisions and excising the same with greater consciousness. A human development, he said is achieved by an integrating power which coordinates human experiences and insights into one unit of operation. So as we are all caught up in an inseparable, symbiotic and network of mutuality, the human life is tired down as it flows from and into an eco- system of dependency; whatever affects an individual affects the whole group directly or indirectly.

5. Psycho-anthropological analysis

After due considerations of the very different views towards reconciling the alleged tension between individual moral right and communal demands, this paper sets to discuss this individual right within the context of individual basic wishes as a member of human society to see if there is any conflict and true infringement of individual right within Igbo communal moral order. True to human nature, there is this fundamental moral yearning in every human being both as an individual and as a member of the society. This moral yearning propels the individual to live towards self-fulfillment in response to the social demands and in accordance with the conflicting demands of both his rational and irrational relational selves, which call him always to duty and obligation. In an effort to express this moral yearnings, he/she see him/herself being confronted with the powerlessness of his/her finitude and self insufficiency and incapacitation as a result of his/her throw-ness into the symbiosis of relations. Therefore, there is no doubt that from experience that human being sometimes feels that he or she makes an autonomous decision. This means that the decision come forth from one own inner resources and at the same time one notices that his decision is influenced by outside circumstances which is either totally or partly beyond one's control and is experienced as a law imposed from outside. This in turn creates a feeling of resistance in the agent. In most cases, the agent may not like to be involved in such activities.

However, this outside influence is so intimately interwoven with one's personal self-realization such that the individual cannot avoid it; so human situation is such that one both likes and dislikes a certain action hence feels autonomy and heteronomy concurrently. He/she may like an action as an individual and at the same time dislike the same action as a member of the society. In this situation, he/she yearns to be free by expressing three basic wishes: (1) the wish, which, tends towards changing those intrinsic and unchangeable human values or simply called the moral constants, which impedes the absolute exercise of his subjective and egoistic desires. Moral constants or *omenala* in the Igbo are the social laws and customs, traditions, etiquette, religion and morality. They were not created by conscious efforts of any individual and is not traceable to any "law-making-body" but by virtue of the human nature. They are constant and unchangeable. The objects of this first wish therefore are categorical moral norms guiding the moral behavior of every human family. The only way to do away with it is either to become irrational human being, a nature that works against true self-fulfillment.

2. The second wish sees others as obstacles and wishes that they do not exist or wishes that the wishes of other beings be sacrificed for the sake of his egoistic desires. This is also self-defeating for it is part of human nature to be social. The objects of this wish are those hypothetical or flexible moral norms and the wishes of other beings that can be forgone for the sake of granting an extended freedom to another being(s).

Finally (3) He/she wishes that his/her subjective norms and desires, i.e. the way he/she always want things to be done, like in Kant's categorical imperative, be made a universal maxim.

A critical analysis of these basic subjective wishes in the faces of conflict of interests the human self-given- subjective right of desire is not only detrimental to uniformed conscience but it is irrational, considering the selfish tendencies of human nature. If moral relativism as is in the

first above case is allowed, it implies that human desires become the human source of right and wrong hence nothing will be wrong or right. Again, if every individual wishes should be considered in the same way, they become moral constant. It will follow therefore that every individual wishes be done away with. Secondly the individual wishes for 'alone existence' which implies that he/she cease to exist since it is in human nature to be social or he wishes that the others sacrifice their wishes and forfeit their right so that he/she can have his/her way, that right he/she too value. This means that he/she forfeit his/her own right too. It becomes compulsorily that all either forfeit such wishes or right or compulsorily have them. Finally he/she wishes that his/her subjective 'maxim' in the word of Kant, be made a universal norm; From the moment a subjective wish is absorbed and synthesized into a new harmony, it ceases to be subjective. As it waits to be absorbed, the irrational aspect of the individual tends sometimes to outweigh the rational aspect. In such situation, the individual is left with an option either to pull out from the community or to remain and if he pulls out of the community website, a new era of individual identity and freedom begins which brings about a disfigured identity and existence. The above two conflicting natures, being within the same individual, creates a synthesis as the egoistic wish. When such wish reaches its maximum possible degree of separateness or individuality, then comes the wish for what is constant, this is when the wish to exist alone, the wish that others might not be, the loneliness, isolation and lack of social companionship of the individual give way to a desire for freedom in communion. In this sense, one can conclude that all the activities of human being, viewed from the modest aspect of human nature, comprising his individuality, social nature, experiences and insights bring in limitation to quest for human freedom. This limitation comes in as one evaluates his or her potentials not only according to its inner meanings, values and possibilities, but also insofar as this potential reaches beyond its own inner structure and enters into relationship with other beings. Hence freedom in the first place demands knowledge and ability to conceive and accept valid ideals of what ought to be done and what can be realized in such choice. It is within this line of thought that the Igbo 'community-controlled moral-order' can be properly situated and understood. Human right as understood among the westerners is foreign to Igbo society. It is only when the individual, lives and is guided by humanistic tendencies by living under the influences of the three basic moral wishes that one can observe, that rational wishes of an individual, do not in any way contradict the wishes of his social nature; for human being could have exist with two basic natures that can create destructive tensions within one person.

5. Summary and Conclusion

The issues of subjective and individuality of right as we have seen, seems to be in conflict with the moral demands of the community moral system hence there is fear that the right of individual in such moral system might be jeopardized. However, from every indication, the whole issue boils down possibly to misunderstanding and improper applications of human freedom. It is obvious that a proper understanding of the concepts of human freedom especially as it patterns to individual in a society might offer a better option for its application and expression in such moral system. Some scholars would like to approach it as the problem of Individuality and Social cohesion (community consciousness), while others prefer individualism and communalism; individuality understood as metaphysical freedom but this paper considered it from the psycho-anthropological perspective. With this approach, the problem is situated within the socio- psychological feelings and wishes of human being base

on his/her human nature. It is discovered that every individual belongs to the human species such that what is true of individual A is true of individual B. It is such that when he/she wishes that his/her subjective norms and desires be made a universal maxim or be accepted as part of universal norms, or that every other law should give way to his/her individual wishes or when she/he wishes for alone existence, such wishes are true of every other individual. If this is the case, then, it implies that even within an individual, there is cohesion and conflict at the same time between his/her wishes and his/her human nature. It is therefore against the self-realization of human species both as an individual and as a community to make individual right an absolute.

Conclusively therefore, it is proper to say that the good values of Africa/Igbo communal moral system preserves moral order for the sake of the individual members that make up the community. The individuals therefore must be schooled into the humanistic approach that will enable him/her to see that living according to the detects of communal moral system is to expand his/her sociological as well as the Psycho-anthropological horizons towards proper social integration to achieve true self-realization.

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