



4. Origin and Principles of “IGWEBUIKE”

Questions that have emerged from the various papers written on *Igwebuike* is: What is the origin of *Igwebuike*? How did it begin as a pattern of thought in African ontology? Is it a thought or philosophy that is exclusive to the Igbo or Africa? My response has always been that although *Igwebuike* is an Igbo word (Kanu 2019), it is not a philosophy that is limited to the Igbo world; rather, it is a local expression of a universal experience of the relevance of solidarity and complementarity (Kanu 2017j).

i. Wonder, the Origin of *Igwebuike* Philosophy

Igwebuike began with wonder as African traditional thinkers began to reflect on the nature of their immediate universe. This wonder shaped their thoughts, thus, establishing a connection between philosophy and the cosmos. Aristotle (1941) writes that “It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize” (p. 10). This wonder was the first step, which was followed by questions as a second step, and then the third, being proffering answers to these questions. They raised questions about the nature of reality: its beauties and the negative vicissitudes the human person must face in life. Realities such as the nature of life, its brevity, human suffering, successes, failures, sorrows, joys, death, the after-life, the nature of the human person, disease, decay, etc. They asked if there is a particular way in which a person ought to behave and a way he ought not to behave. They wondered at the origin and age of the universe, was it created or is it eternal? If it was created, who created the universe? They wondered at the order in the universe, why the rainy season is succeeded by the dry season, the day, the night, the seasons, the birds of the air, the fish that make their way through the waters, the animals in the fields; they wondered at how they are sustained. They wondered at the system of the universe which is a conflict of opposites: good and evil, life and death, light and darkness, hot and cold, wet and dry, love and hate, fortune and misfortune, male and female, etc.

These wanderings by African traditional thinkers led to the discovery that the universe persists because of a healthy inter-subjective relation. This discovery was conceptualized as: *Igwebuike*.

ii. The Principles of *Igwebuiké*

The principles of *Igwebuiké* refer to the framework that shapes *Igwebuiké*. These principles are the values on which *Igwebuiké* stands. While these principles guide *Igwebuiké*, they also justify *Igwebuiké*. In each of these principles, the *Chi* of whatever is plays a very significant role. *Chi* is used within the context of the imprint of the part of *Chukwu* (the Supreme Being) on all that He has made. These principles include:

a. *The Principle of Identity*

The principle of identity is the first principle of *Igwebuiké*. It states that every being is determined in itself, is one with itself and is consistent in itself. Thus, every being is one with itself and divided from others. If reality does not have an identity, then everything would be everything, giving birth to one thing since nothing can be differentiated from the other. In this case, there would be no subject and object relationship (Kanu 2012). This would create a causal traffic in the order of being and knowledge. The principle of identity is very important in *Igwebuiké* because, before we can talk about inter-subjectivity, interconnectedness, complementarity, the other must have an identity of its own (Kanu 2013). This identity is determined by the *Chi* of the being (*anatará Chi*- received from *Chi*), which individuates it in relation to the other. This is important as *Chi* is individual to every person, no wonder, it is called 'personal god' or 'personal guardian spirit'. It is also within this context that we understand why the symbol of a person's *Chi* is destroyed as soon as the person is dead.

b. *The Principle of Hierarchy*

Every reality in the universe has a force; however, not all realities have the same force. The variety of the degree of forces is at the base of the categorization of being. In the hierarchy of forces, those with a greater force come first, with God at the apex as the source of all force. It is the *Chi* of a being that determines the force and, therefore, its place in the hierarchy of beings. It is also the hierarchy that determines the relationships.

c. *The Principle of Contrariety*

Contrariety is from the word contrary. Aristotle defines contrariety as: “a kind of difference, and difference is a kind of otherness” (p.681-926). He writes further:

The term contrary is applied to those attributes differing in genus, which cannot belong at the same time to the same subject, to the most different of the things in the same genus, to the most different of the attributes in the same recipient subject, to the most different of things that fall under the same faculty, to the things whose difference is greatest either absolutely or in genus or in species (p. 763).

Within the context of *Igwebuike*, contrariety is part of the natural universe. For instance, in the same universe, we find both good and evil, life and death, light and darkness, hot and cold, wet and dry, love and hate, unity and diversity, short and long, substance and accidents, act and potency, fortune and misfortune, male and female. These are contraries to each other, and are indispensable realities of the universe (Kanu 2018). It is the *Chi* of a being that individuates it and thus makes it contrary to the other.

d. *The Principle of Unity*

In spite of the contrariety of reality, there is something common to everything. *Igwebuike* understands every individual reality as part of and the completion of the whole, and thus, there is a unity in the midst of diversity (Kanu 2019). Although *Chi* provides for the individuation, identity and contrariety of being, it is also the basis for the unity of being. *Chi* being a 'thumb print' of *Chukwu* in all that He has made, provides for the unity of being, and, a basis for interaction and collaboration. From the foregoing, the strong individualistic strain which *Chi* provides in the theory of personality, does not contradict the emphasis on the overriding value of unity in diverse human situations. Thus, *Chi* is not only a basis for identity in Igbo ontology, it is also a basis for unity- a common gift or platform for communal relations.