

## **IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY AS THE FOUNDATIONAL BASIS OF HUMAN INTERSUBJECTIVITY**

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### **Abstract**

*While it might be arguably asserted that the issue of intersubjectivity in the western world has attained a recently famed status, arising from the domination of the subjective, in the Igbo-African worldview, intersubjectivity has always had and will always have a pride of place in the existence and thriving of the Igbo people and culture. Intersubjectivity, is basic to all social life, especially the complex behavior of humans from childrearing to science. The term has come into recent use among psychoanalytically oriented clinicians influenced by the efforts of Continental philosophers to solve what Anglo-American philosophers call the “problem of other minds” or of “solipsism. Before the expanse in the thought reawakening of this term, western thought had much pondered upon the subjective/objective dichotomy, this reached its climax in the solipsistic doctrine embellished and defended by Rene Descartes. The Igwebuiké philosophy captures in depth the reality of the intersubjectiveness that defines the human person. Igwebuiké is at the heart of African philosophy, and in fact, the inner or underlying principle of African philosophy. It is the manner of being in African ontology. Its nearest equivalents in English include complementarity, harmony, communality, etc., however, the preferred concept is complementarity. The richness of the term Igwebuiké is totally acknowledged but in relation to the intersubjective term, it would best be conceived in the light of harmony and complementarity. This is because the term communality, as much as subjectivity does, also reduces the concept of intersubjectivity, for the latter pays tribute to the subjective and the communal, but is neither one nor the other. This paper would be focused on the elaboration of the validity of the igwebuiké philosophy as foundational to the human person, who fundamentally is a being-for-others. It would also be earmarked that the intersubjectivity that this philosophy portrays does not negate the individuality of the human person, but enriches it evenly.*

**Keywords:** Igwebuiké, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, Igbo-African cultural worldview (the Igbo-verse), Intersubjectivity, Solipsism, Other-ness, Human person.

### **Introduction: Making Clear the Terms *Intersubjectivity* and *Igwebuiké***

Intersubjectivity is the hallmark of the human person. More to this, the element of intersubjectivity in the human person has always occupied the mind of thinkers from

every epoch; thus man has been properly defined as a social animal.<sup>1</sup> Such intersubjective rapport, which according to Aristotle has been heightened by his power of speech,<sup>2</sup> between human individuals is very much occasioned by the awareness of the self and the significant awareness of the other. According to Dan Zahavi and Søren Overgaard, “The notion of intersubjectivity is a relatively new concept.”<sup>3</sup> That which dominated the thought of ancient, medieval and early modern philosophy was marked by the subjective/objective dichotomy. It was not until the late modern era that the German term, *Intersubjektivität* made its first appearance, this was in 1885, in a work by Johannes Volkelt. It was picked up by James Ward and first used in English in 1896. It was initially used to describe something with universal validity, something that was valid for everybody, something that was valid independently of every subject.<sup>4</sup> Intersubjectivity concerns how one is mentally connected with and distinguished from others.<sup>5</sup> It refers in the most basic sense to the interaction between two subjects: myself and another person, or self and other. The intersubjective field is an area of common engagement in which my individual subjectivity is articulated and communicated.<sup>6</sup> It is also referred to as the sharing of experiential content (e.g., feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and linguistic meanings) among a plurality of subjects.<sup>7</sup>

According to Christian de Quincey, Intersubjectivity can be construed in three senses that is cut across two different meanings, the standard and the experiential. They include:

1. Intersubjectivity 1 (standard meaning): consensual validation between independent subjects via exchange of signals, Standard intersubjectivity relies on exchange of physical signals.

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation is derived from Aristotle’s *Politics*, I, 1253a. In which he enumerates the fact that man is by nature a politically inclined animal (that is to say social), more than other animals like the bees. Aristotle goes further to note that this social nature in man has been very much aided by his power of speech.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1253a

<sup>3</sup> D Zahavi-S Overgaard, *Intersubjectivity* in the International Encyclopedia of Ethics, First Edition, Hugh LaFollette H (Ed), Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2013, 1-11.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. The first systematic and extensive philosophical discussion and treatment of the notion of intersubjectivity can, however, be found in the work of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl.

<sup>5</sup> J. May, *Empathy and Intersubjectivity* in The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy, H. Maibom (ed), Taylor and Francis, UK, 2017, 169.

<sup>6</sup> R. Frie and B. Reis, *Understanding Intersubjectivity. Psychoanalytic formulations and their philosophical underpinings* in Contemporary Psychoanalysis, 37:2, 2001, 297-327.

<sup>7</sup> J. Zlatev et al, *The Shared Mind. Perspective on Intersubjectivity*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 2008, 1.

2. Intersubjectivity 2a (weak-experiential meaning): mutual engagement and participation between independent subjects, which conditions their respective experience. It is psychological. Weak or psychological intersubjectivity relies on nonphysical presence and affects the contents of pre-existing subjects.
3. Intersubjectivity 2b (strong-experiential meaning): mutual co-arising and engagement of interdependent subjects, or intersubjects, which creates their respective experience. It is ontological. Strong or ontological intersubjectivity relies on cocreative nonphysical presence and brings distinct subjects into being out of a prior matrix of relationships.<sup>8</sup>

Of the three meaning offered here, that which rudimentarily drives home the point that is denoted by the word intersubjectivity is the third sense, that is to say the strong-experiential meaning of intersubjectivity. According to this meaning, intersubjectivity is a process of cocreativity, where *relationship* is ontologically primary.<sup>9</sup> The “subjectiveness” that is inherent in each individual arises necessarily from the conjoined rapport the individual engages in with others persons. In this strong experiential aspect of intersubjectivity, the subjective is a kind of late comer to the party that is to say that the subjective plays second fiddle to the intersubjective. This line of thought seems foreign, but it should be noted that the aforementioned does not mean that the subjective is totally immersed in the intersubjective, such that it is absent. We can say that before there is any rapport with the “I”, and the “other”, there must necessarily be an “I” to start up with. This is not negated here. What is being said here is that the “I” cannot be experienced for what it is without the “other”. Without the other, the “I” or the “self” is pure and is considered as an “indescribable, qualityless subject of experience.”<sup>10</sup> The “I”, which is the “self”, is actually the foundational basis of all that the individual experiences; the “I”, who is the subject of actual experiences<sup>11</sup> is not experienced in isolation. It is brought into reality by its relationship with an external object.<sup>12</sup> This implies that the individual in his subjectivity, only gets to know of himself as an individual in reference to others. This is what A. Damasio would call the core self. The core self is about action—specifically, about a relationship between the organism and the object. The core self unfolds in a sequence of images that describe an object

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<sup>8</sup> C. deQuincey, *Intersubjectivity. Exploring Consciousness From A Second Person Perspective*, in *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 2000, Vol. 32, No.2, 135-155.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> E. Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, W. Stein (Trans), ICS Publications, Washington-DC, 1989, 38.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> External object here is intentionally used to refer to another subject, other than the primary subject of the experience. That is to say that the external object is the “other” person.

engaging the protoself and modifying that protoself, including its primordial feelings.<sup>13</sup> According to Damasio, the protoself, is the neural networking and unconscious workings that go on within the self; the protoself is not experienced, but it exists. We could, linking the thought line of Stein and Damasio, indicate that the protoself, is the indescribable, qualityless hub of the self. The Protoself, gives way to the core self, when the protoself meets an object, an external object, which is a subject in its own right. The protoself with its primordial feelings, and the core self, constitute a "material me."<sup>14</sup> Aside from the proto and core self, there is also the autobiographical self. This self is defined in terms of biographical knowledge pertaining to the past as well as the anticipated future.<sup>15</sup> The point being emphasized here is that the individual as a subject arrives at a knowledge of his subject status, or subjectivity only in relation to another subject, to the *other*. Thus the "inter" in intersubjectivity refers to an interpenetrating co-creation of loci of subjectivity-a thoroughly holistic and organismic mutuality.<sup>16</sup>

*Intersubjectivity does not swallow up the concept of subjectivity, rendering it obsolete. It rather gives it a richer, more meaningful ontological basis. Intersubjectivity does not make nonsense of the individualism of the human person, it gives it a bridal colouring that is one at the same time attractive and alluring.*

Igwebuiké, which is anchored on the African worldview is a theory in African philosophy developed by KANU Ikechukwu Anthony that provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. As an ideology, it rests on the African principles of solidarity and complementarity. Igwebuiké holds that 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. 'To be' is 'to be with the other', in a community of beings. Thus, Igwebuiké is based on the African sense of community, which is the underlying principle and unity of the African philosophical experience.<sup>17</sup>

"Being" in Igbo philosophy translates to *idi*, that is, *to be*, Igwebuiké on its own part is the modality of being. It is an Igbo word, which is a combination of three words. Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence: as a word, it is written as Igwebuiké, and as a sentence, it is written as, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words

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<sup>13</sup> A. Damasio, *The Self come to Mind. Constructing the Conscious Brain*, Vintage Books, London, 2012, 22-23.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> C. deQuincey, *Intersubjectivity. Exploring Consciousness From A Second Person Perspective*.

<sup>17</sup> A.I. Kanu, Igwebuiké, Personal Identity and Alterity in Igwebuiképedia Internet Encyclopedia of African Philosophy, A Publication of Tansian University, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, ISSN: 2504-9038 URL: <http://igwebuiképedia.info/Alterity.asp>

enjoying some independence in terms of space. The three words involved: *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population. *Bu* is a verb, which means is. *Ike* is another verb, which means strength or power. Thus, put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power'.<sup>18</sup> It was employed by Igbo traditional philosophers as a theory based on an illustrative statement to teach that when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force, and more so, to express their world of relationship, harmony, continuity and complementarity. At this level, no task is beyond collective capability. This provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations.<sup>19</sup> As an ideology, *Igwebuiké* argues that 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. 'To be' is 'to be with the other', in a community of beings. This is based on the African sense of community, which is the underlying principle and unity of African philosophy.<sup>20</sup>

*Igwebuiké* is anchored on the African worldview, described as being characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. The communal-individuality of the African is expressed in the Igbo-African proverb: *Ngwere ghara ukwu osisi, aka akpara ya* (If a lizard stays off from the foot of a tree, it would be caught by man); *ntugwa bu uto ndu* (variety is the spice of life); *otu asisi anaghi eme ohia* (a tree does not make a forest); *gidigidi bu ugwu eze* (the dignity of a king is the number of his followers); *mmetuko ahu bu uto ndu* (the beauty of life is in mixing up with others).<sup>21</sup>

The *Igwebuiké* thesis is being explored here in line with the theory of intersubjectivity as the foundation of all human relations. The catch here is to indicate how much of this philosophically western-revived theory is engrained in the Igbo-African worldview, as seen in the *Igwebuiké* thesis.

### ***Other-Ness in the "Igwebuiké" Thesis***

The ontological foundation for otherness in African philosophy is based on the centrality of the human person in the African universe and the principle of complementarity.<sup>22</sup> The centrality of the human person in the African-universe<sup>23</sup>, is

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> A.I. Kanu, *African Philosophy, Globalization and the Priority of Otherness*, in *Igwebuiké*. An African Journal of Arts and Humanities Vol. 3 No 5, July 2017, 92-109.

<sup>23</sup> This refers to *African Universe*.

depicted by the likes of Mbiti, who notes that “Man is at the very center of existence and African people see everything else in its relation to this central position of man... it is as if God exists for the sake of man”.<sup>24</sup> And the likes of Metuh, who corroborates this stating, “Everything else in African worldview seems to get its bearing and significance from the position, meaning and end of man”.<sup>25</sup> The African philosophy arising from the “African-verse”, it should be emphasized, is anthropocentric. This puts the human person, as a point of convergence of all realities, be it spiritual or physical. The “Igbo-verse”<sup>26</sup> is divided into three categories namely, The *Eluigwe*-The Sky; The *Ala Mmuo*-The Spirit world; The *Ala mmadu* – The land of the living.<sup>27</sup> To this three categories, the human person, man, according to the “Igbo-verse”, hold a position of centrality. This is a distinguished position that calls on him to exert himself in responsible prudence, in order to maintain the balance around him.

According to Kanu,

The centrality of man in African cosmology places him in a matrix of spiritual relationships. There is the unbreakable tie to the Supreme Being, who created the earth and everything therein for man and his progeny. This tie is unbreakable because man's existence is ontologically dependent upon his Creator. Man also has to maintain correct relationship with the lesser entities within the spiritual realm. His day-to-day activities are not only designed to harmonize his relationship with the divinities and the departed ancestors, but they are also motivated by the fear that bad relations with these spiritual beings could certainly endanger the life and safety of his community. That peace may reign between man and the deities, it is also necessary that man lives in harmony with the members of the earthly community.<sup>28</sup>

The depiction of the human person's centrality in the “Igbo-verse” gradually aligns us to a consideration of the subjective “I”. This is because to fittingly occupy that position of centrality, the human person would need to have as an appendage a requisite knowledge of *his-self*.

### **The Self according to the Igbo-Verse**

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<sup>24</sup> J. Mbiti, *African religions and philosophy*, East African Educational, Nairobi, 1970, 92.

<sup>25</sup> E.I. Metuh, *African religions in Western conceptual schemes*, Imico Publishers, Jos, 1991, 109.

<sup>26</sup> *Igbo universe*.

<sup>27</sup> C.A. Okoye, ‘*Onwe*’. *An Inquiry into the Igbo Concept of the Self* in Ogirisi. a new journal of African studies Vol. 8, 2011, 51-66.

<sup>28</sup> A.I. Kanu, *African Philosophy, Globalization and the Priority of Otherness*.

According to C.A. Okoye,

The 'self' according to the Igbo understanding is categorized into three parts but not automatically in direct correlation with the three worlds discussed above but at the same time not estranged to them. The 'self' being an entity faced with destiny has everything about it centered on its nature and has its own environment explainable through it. We thus see the three categorizations of the self as follows: The Soul – *Mkpuruobi*; The Spirit- *Mmuo*; The *Body-Aru* The trio above constitutes what we call the 'onwe'-self in African (Igbo) thought.<sup>29</sup>

But this rendition by Okoye, seems to reflect more of the constitution of the human person than the concept of self according to the "Igbo-verse". According to the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist way of viewing the world, each person does exist as an individual, but the self, or personal identity, does not exist as an independent ego that is somehow in control of the body and mind. Rather, the individual is understood as a matrix of dependently related events, all of them in a state of flux.<sup>30</sup> This link that is seen in the Buddhist world view in reference to the self, is also how the Igbo worldview considers the self, for while the *Mkpuruobi*, *Mmuo* and the *Aru*, characterizes the human person, the "self", the "I", according to the Igbo worldview has a communitarian tone to it. This manner of being is characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny.<sup>31</sup> In his own words, Mbiti notes "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am".<sup>32</sup> For the Igbo African, we can thus assert that this communitarian-ness, this communality, this complementarity, is a mark of the self. According to Mbiti,

The anthropocentric ontology is a complete unity or solidarity which nothing can break up or destroy. To destroy or remove one of these categories is to destroy the whole existence including the destruction of the creator, which is impossible. One mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart from one another nor get too close to one another.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> C.A. Okoye, 'Onwe'. *An Inquiry into the Igbo Concept of the Self*.

<sup>30</sup> B.A. Wallace, *Intersubjectivity in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8, No. 5–7, 2001, 1–22.

<sup>31</sup> A.I. Kanu, *African Philosophy, Globalization and the Priority of Otherness*.

<sup>32</sup> J. Mbiti, *African religions and philosophy*, 108.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

In the Igbo of Nigeria, the self is netted within the world, *uwa*, which comprises of humans and the spirits. As earlier noted the human person is the center, thus the physical and spiritual world, are not divided or separated by a chasm. There is interconnectedness between the two enabling contact between the deities and spirits, and human beings. This unitary conception of reality pervades Igbo world view in a very remarkable way. One factor that makes for this unity is that the Igbo view of reality is anthropocentric.<sup>34</sup> The Igbo sense of self is not a closed frame, it is rather a closeness between the self and the other. There is a closeness in living because each person 'belongs to' others and in turn, 'is belonged to' by others. By adopting this life of 'closeness' or 'belongingness', an Igbo becomes immersed in the culture's spiritual substance, love; and by love, he acquires a fulfilment as a person beyond mere individuality.<sup>35</sup> The communitarian concept of self in the "Igbo-verse", is succinctly captured by Achebe, who notes

We do not ask for wealth because he that has health and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him.<sup>36</sup>

The idea drawn forth from Achebe's proverb indicates that the self is seen always outgoing, outreaching towards the other, who reciprocates in like manner. This idea earmarks the complementary role of the self, according to the "Igbo-verse". The individual self gets completed by the other, it gets in contact with, and there is always the desire to enter contact, because that is where the fullness of the self is found.

### **Other-ness Revisited**

According to Kanu,

Igwebuike as understands life as a shared reality. And it is only within the context of complementarity that life makes meaning. Life is a life of sharedness; one in which another is part thereof. A relationship, though of separate and separated entities or individuals but with a joining of the same whole.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> J.O. Oguejiofor, *Globalization and the resilience of traditional paradigms. The case of the Igbo of Nigeria*, The humanities and globalization in the third millennium, Fab Anieh, Awka, 2010, 15-26.

<sup>35</sup> E. Edeh, *Towards Igbo metaphysics*, Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1983, 105.

<sup>36</sup> C. Achebe, *The Things Fall Apart*, Heinemann, England, 1958, 132.

<sup>37</sup> A.I. Kanu, *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Philosophy of Education*, A paper presented at the International Conference on Law, Education and Humanities, 25th -26th November 2015 University of Paris, France.

In the “Igbo-verse”, the other is referred to as *ibe*, which means ‘a piece of’ or ‘a part of’, as in *ibe anu* (a piece of meat) or *ibe ede* (a piece of cocoyam). The Igbo would, therefore, refer to the ‘other person’ as *ibe m* which means ‘my piece’ or *mmadu ibe m* (my fellow human being).<sup>38</sup> This notion is very well employed when referring to relationships and shows forth the mark of reciprocity. The “Igbo-verse boasts of phrases like love one another (*hunu ibe unu n’anya*), help one another (*nyere nu ibe unu aka*), respect one another (*sopuru nu ibe unu*), etc<sup>39</sup> which depicts how much of the *ibe*, is contained in the “*onwe m*”.<sup>40</sup> According to Kanu,

Since the ‘other’ refers to my own piece, it would, therefore, mean that to love the other is to love oneself, to help the other is to help oneself and to respect the other is to respect oneself. Put the other way round, to hate the other is to hate oneself, to refuse help to the other is to refuse help to oneself and to disrespect the other is to disrespect oneself.<sup>41</sup>

In general, the use of *ibe* applies to all forms of relationship with the other. According to Ekwulu, these forms include:

- 1st Person singular: *ibe m* (my piece (s)/my part (s))
- 2nd Person singular: *ibe gi* (your piece (s)/your part (s))
- 3rd Person singular: *ibe ya* (his/her piece (s)/his/her part (s))
- 1st Person plural: *ibe anyi* (our piece (s)/our part (s))
- 2nd Person plural: *ibe unu* (your piece (s)/your part (s))
- 3rd Person plural: *ibe ha* (their piece (s)/their part (s)).<sup>42</sup>

Ekwulu goes further to assert conclusively that

The term *ibe* brings out the reciprocity tension between the self and the other. The self is always implicated in the other. The self’s reference to the other always points back to the self. I am, as it were, in the other and the other is in me. He is my piece as I am his piece. That which is different from me is ‘my piece’ or ‘my other’. That which is different from us is part of us.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A.I. Kanu, *African Philosophy, Globalization and the Priority of Otherness*.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> This refers to myself, and can be well construed as referring to the self.

<sup>41</sup> A.I. Kanu, *African Philosophy, Globalization and the Priority of Otherness*.

<sup>42</sup> B.I. Ekwulu, *Igbo concept of Ibe (the other) as a philosophical solution to the ethnic conflicts in African countries*, in B. I. Ekwulu (Ed.) *Philosophical Reflections On African Issues*, Delta Publishers, Enugu, 2010, pp. 183-192.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

These lines are reminiscent of the point heralded earlier by the intersubjectivity theses.

### **Solipsism and Igbo Communitarian Worldview**

The intersubjectivity thesis and reality became a necessity with the emphasis placed on subjectivity, leading to a philosophical thought known as solipsism. Solipsism is gotten from the Latin *Solus*, meaning "alone", and *Ipse* meaning "self". It is the philosophical idea that only one's mind is sure to exist. Solipsism is sometimes expressed as the view that "I am the only mind which exists," or "My mental states are the only mental states."<sup>44</sup> The history of solipsism began with the Sophist definition and has reached our time with certain confusing interpretations. New conceptions emerged in the Middle Age depending on their theological as well as philosophical approaches. Nevertheless, it got formulated, popularized and developed by D. Hume and G. Berkeley in their discussions of philosophical problems. Modern philosophers such as B. Russell, L. Von Wittgenstein and E. Husserl referred to solipsism, directly or indirectly, as part of their philosophical perspectives.<sup>45</sup> The concept of "solipsism" played a very central role in the philosophy of Berkeley and Hume merely because of their philosophical theses. According to the empiricist philosophers, sensations are the basic sources of our knowledge, but they are based on the existence of subjectivity, that is, on consciousness, which is not detectable by empirical observations or sensations. It is all the worse that consciousness is the provision of the existence of physical things, as well as of our sensations. This implies that the existence of a physical world depends on my consciousness, that is, all in all, on my existence.<sup>46</sup>

Solipsism, holds that the existence of anything outside one's own mind is uncertain; the external world and other minds could not be known and could not exist outside my mind. As a metaphysical thesis, solipsism takes it further to say that the world and other minds cannot exist as independent of my mind because my consciousness gives existence to itself and to anything noticed by my sensations. This has been a well-known classical thesis since the Sophist philosophers.<sup>47</sup> As an epistemological position, this theory holds that knowledge of anything outside one's own mind is unsure; the external world and other minds cannot be known and might not exist outside the mind.

Thus stating it clearly we say that there are three categories of solipsism. They are:

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<sup>44</sup> S.P. Thornton, *Solipsism and the Problem of Other Mind*, in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ISSN 2161-0002, URL: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/solipsis/>, 5/8/2019.

<sup>45</sup> S. Ural, *Solipsism Physical Things And Personal Perceptual Space. Solipsist Ontology, Epistemology and Communication*, Vernon Press, Delaware-USA, 2019, xi.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, xiii.

1. Egoistic solipsism, which defines reality as the disposition or behavior of the subject;
2. Epistemological solipsism, which states that one's immediate experience is primary while attempting to explore the possibility that knowledge itself does not owe its entire organization to a constituting consciousness; and
3. Metaphysical solipsism, which is more radical, claiming that not only is one's immediate experience primary, but also that one cannot penetrate or go beyond such experience.<sup>48</sup>

Of the three categories outlined above, the one of interest here is the metaphysical. This is because it pertains to experience arising from the depths of the human consciousness. Metaphysical solipsism, underscores the difficulties which solipsism presents in human expression. One of the reasons solipsism has been a recurring issue is because our means of expression, thought and speech are viewed as a unique or private possession of consciousness. According to the doctrine espoused by a metaphysical solipsism, communication between consciousnesses is possible because they each participate in a shared construct, language. Language is a vocal and written mirror of consciousness' operations; it serves as a pre-established pathway linking these islets of expression. Once again we confront the problem found in epistemological solipsism; consciousness is the dominant partner in the relationship of thought to world. As a result, the world is reduced to an abstract domain where past and future stand on equal footing with the present. We find no conception in metaphysical solipsism of the world as an immediate presence participating in consciousness.<sup>49</sup>

The empiricist dogma holds that sensations are the bedrock, the foundational basis of our knowledge of the physical world. It moves on to endorse the plausibility of the consciousness in making this possible. That is to say that all the data obtained about physical things by sensations (including existence) can only be meaningful to us as conscious individuals.<sup>50</sup> This is the case, because not only do we have sensations, but we are aware of the fact that we have sensations, and this gives our sensing a different outlook. When we accept that the data we obtain from physical things comes from sensations, we might interpret that empirical data as the evidence of the existence of my consciousness as in solipsism. Thus since sensations depend on consciousness, the

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<sup>48</sup> D.E. Smith, *Solipsism. A Perceptual Study*, in *Auslegung, A Journal Of Philosophy*, Volume 8, Number 2 Summer, 1981, 143-156.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> S. Ural, *Solipsism Physical Things And Personal Perceptual Space. Solipsist Ontology, Epistemology and Communication*, 1.

existence of physical things has to depend on the existence of a consciousness. A statement as “the physical world exists as I perceive it” can easily be transformed into the statement “the physical world exists in relation to me/self” and into “the physical world exists if I exist”. So, everything is constructed on the axis of “self” (*ipse*). Therefore, an empiricist approach accepting the existence of physical things and sensations as a starting point instantly finds itself reaching a solipsist finding. Empiricism reaches a solipsist finding by making sensations and objective existence of physical things its foundation.<sup>51</sup>

The rationalistic view on solipsism came to a head with the intuitions of Descartes, as contained in his *cogito ergo sum*, For the *ego* that is revealed by the *cogito* is a solitary consciousness, a *res cogitans* that is not spatially extended, is not necessarily located in any body, and can be assured of its own existence exclusively as a conscious mind.<sup>52</sup> This view of the self is intrinsically solipsistic and Descartes evades the solipsistic consequences of his method of doubt by the desperate expedient of appealing to the benevolence of God. Since God is no deceiver, he argues, and since He has created man with an innate disposition to assume the existence of an external, public world corresponding to the private world of the "ideas" that are the only immediate objects of consciousness, it follows that such a public world actually exists.<sup>53</sup> Descartes' thesis implies that the individual acquires the psychological concepts that he possesses "from his own case," that is, and which is true, that each individual has a unique and privileged access to his own mind, which is denied to everyone else. This view was fundamentally conducive to the historical development of solipsism. On this view, what I know immediately and with greatest certainty are the events that occur in my own mind - my thoughts, my emotions, my perceptions, my desires, and so forth. These are not known in this way by anyone else. By the same token, it follows that I do not know other minds in the way that I know my own; indeed, if I am to be said to know other minds at all - that they exist and have a particular nature - it can only be on the basis of certain inferences that I have made from what is directly accessible to me, the behavior of other human beings.<sup>54</sup> This solipsism of Descartes paved way for a series of doubt aligned existence of the other. Beginning from him, Descartes claimed one can doubt the truth of one's perception of an external world, including one's body, by supposing one is dreaming or deceived.<sup>55</sup> Mill extended doubt to others: “I must either believe

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> S.P. Thornton, *Solipsism and the Problem of Other Mind*.

<sup>53</sup> R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 6<sup>th</sup> Meditation, Cress D (trans), Hackett Publishers, Indianapolis, 1979, 28-30.

<sup>54</sup> S.P. Thornton, *Solipsism and the Problem of Other Mind*.

<sup>55</sup> R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Meditation, 14.

them to be alive, or to be automatons.<sup>56</sup> Hume doubted the evidence of any self or mind, outer or inner: “For my part, I have a notion of neither”.<sup>57</sup>

### **The Igwebuiké Philosophy is totally against Solipsism**

Western philosophical thought as outlined above, maintained the idea, and which is valid, that consciousness is in the hub of the personal and cannot be shared. This gave force to the solipsistic pattern of thought. The Igwebuiké philosophy does not negate the fact that consciousness is personal and private, that it cannot be accessed by a third party, nonetheless, it refutes the idea that *what I know immediately and with greatest certainty are the events that occur in my own mind - my thoughts, my emotions, my perceptions, my desires*. Igwebuiké depicts commonality and complementarity; thus it is not “my”, it is “our”<sup>58</sup> thoughts, emotions, perceptions, desires. The communal-individuality of the African is expressed in the Igbo-African proverb: *Ngwere ghara ukwu osisi, aka akpara ya* (If a lizard stays off from the foot of a tree, it would be caught by man); *ntugwa bu uto ndu* (variety is the spice of life); *otu asisi anaghi eme ohia* (a tree does not make a forest); *gidigidi bu ugwu eze* (the dignity of a king is the number of his followers); *mmetuko ahu bu uto ndu* (the beauty of life is in mixing up with others).<sup>59</sup> According to the “Igbo-verse”, what is first encountered is “you in reference to me”, and “I in reference to you”. That is to say that I have a notion of you, not that you and I have a shared consciousness, but that you and I have our existence entwined, in such a way that I cannot be without you, you cannot be without me.<sup>60</sup> The Igwebuiké thesis for intersubjectivity does not mean that the individual identity is usurped. It rather provides a fine silver lining for self, and other identity. According to Kanu,

One can argue that the differences among human beings is absolved in identity, for that which is different from me is part of me *ibe m*, and, in turn, the identity is absolved in the otherness, because I am part of the

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<sup>56</sup> J.S. Mill, *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, 1872, 244.

<sup>57</sup> D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1951, 233.

<sup>58</sup> The term “our” here does not do justice to what is being said here. This is because it could lead to the confusion of taking the Igwebuiké philosophy to be a subset of the communist trend and philosophy of the east. But this is not the case. I use “our” here for lack of a better English word. However the intended meaning here is “our” not as a negation of “I-you” or “me-you” existential relationship, but as an emphatic tone to the “I-you” existential relations, not as “our”, but as “you-I”.

<sup>59</sup> A.I. Kanu, *Igwebuiké and the Unity of the African Philosophy*, in Igwebuiképedia. Internet Encyclopedia of African Philosophy, A Publication of Tansian University, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, URL: <http://igwebuiképedia.info/Intricate.asp>.

<sup>60</sup> J. Mbiti, *African religions and philosophy*, 108.

other who is different from me. Identity and otherness are in a sense two related concepts, for the one implies the other.<sup>61</sup>

The “other” is not foreign to the “I”, rather the “other” is the “I” viewed from the flip side of the spectrum. This allows me to relate with the “other” as a part of me and not as someone foreign to me, that is *onwe m* relates to the other as *ibe m*, and not as *onye mba ozo*

### **I am Conscious of the Other: *Aka nri kwo aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwo aka nri***

We have considered the Igbo term of the other that is *Ibe m*. We have also seen how much the *Onwe m* is totally dependent on the *ibe m*, as the former is dependent on the latter. We know that between these two existential realities, there is the consciousness of other, as much as there is the consciousness of the self. But the question that arises here is that, how is *onwe m* conscious of the *ibe m*?

The Igbo maxim: *Aka nri kwo aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwo aka nri*, lends credence to what is about to be espoused here. It can be translated to mean *If the right hand washes the left hand, the left hand would wash the right hand.*<sup>62</sup> While this, *prima facie*, might denote complementarity and communality, a closer look at this maxim also denotes consciousness of other. The consciousness of the other has doubted in the scientific circles of the western world because consciousness is on the first person perspective and is entirely personal. A cursory look at all that has been mentioned so far, in particular with reference to solipsism indicates how much havoc this non-understanding of a consciousness of the other, has wrecked in the western world. Let it be noted here that it is the consciousness of the other that gives force to the element of intersubjectivity. This is because of the latter was lacking then the former would not be a subject for debate. *Aka nri kwo aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwo aka nri*, indicates that the right hand, which is conscious of itself, also acknowledges the left hand, not just in terms of its function, but most importantly in terms of its being-there, as much as the right hand is also a being-there. It is noteworthy to state here that intersubjectivity is at the root of all human-centered relationships that exists; that is to say that it is because of intersubjectivity that any meaningful rapport amongst and between persons can thrive, I mean family relationships, friendly relationships, peer relationships, nation interrelationship, and the relations of all human beings in the world. Dare I input here that intersubjectivity is also there when enemies confront each other. That is to say that there is recognition, which is

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<sup>61</sup> A.I. Kanu, *African Philosophy, Globalization and the Priority of Otherness*.

<sup>62</sup> A.I Kanu, *Sources Of Igwebuikwe Philosophy. Towards A Socio-Cultural Foundation* in International Journal of Religion & Human Relations Vol. 9 No 1 June 2017, 1-23.

conscious, that the other is an enemy. Thus while it might be that enemies, might not enjoy the same kind of rapport friends enjoy, it does not water down the importance of intersubjectivity as the bedrock of all human relations. Again the question posed is, how am I conscious of the other?

Present day scientific research have pegged Mirror Neurons as an answer to the above question. Mirror neurons are premotor neurons that fire both when an action is executed and when it is observed being performed by someone else. Neurons with similar properties were also discovered in a sector of the posterior parietal cortex. The same motor neuron that fires when the monkey grasps a peanut is also activated when the monkey observes another individual performing the same action.<sup>63</sup> The discovery of mirror neurons and of other mirroring mechanisms in the human brain shows that the very same neural substrates are activated when these expressive acts are both executed and perceived. Thus, we have a neurally instantiated we-centric space.<sup>64</sup> That is to say that our complementarity and communality is neutrally orchestrated. Mirror neurons seem to bridge the gap between one agent and another; to represent 'my action' and 'your action' in the same way. Therefore, it has been suggested that mirror neurons are the key to explaining many aspects of social cognition, including the ability to understand the actions of others, to 'read minds', to imitate and to communicate using gestures and speech.<sup>65</sup> Via the input of the findings made by the MN research, we are beginning to find out more and more that *we are not so different after all*.

While the Mirror Neuron System (MNS) is the closest that science has come in explaining how the human person is conscious of the other, and explaining the fact of his intersubjectivity, it was heralded by two theories namely, the theory theory (TT), and the simulation theory (ST). According to 'theory theory', mental states are represented as inferred posits of a naive theory. According to 'simulation theory', other people's mental states are represented by adopting their perspective: by tracking or matching their states with resonant states of one's own.<sup>66</sup> While both TT and ST are involved in mind reading for the sake of understanding the mental state of the other, the major difference between the TT and ST is that TT depicts mindreading as a thoroughly 'detached' theoretical activity, whereas ST depicts mindreading as incorporating an attempt to replicate, mimic, or impersonate the mental life of the target

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<sup>63</sup> V. Gallese, *Mirror Neurons, Embodied Simulation and the Neural Basis of Social Identification*, in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* Vol 19, 2009, 519-536.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> C. Heyes, *Where do Mirror Neurons Come From*, in *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 34, 2010, 575–583.

<sup>66</sup> V. Gallese-A. Goldman, *Mirror Neurons and the Simulation theory of Mind Reading*, in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, Vol 2, No. 12, 1998, 493-501.

agent. ST hypothesizes that a significant portion of mind-reading episodes involves the process of mimicking (or trying to mimic) the mental activity of the target agent. TT predicts no such mimicking as part of the mind-reading process. This contrast presents a potential basis for empirically discriminating between ST and TT. If there is evidence of mental mimicry in the mindreading process, that would comport nicely with ST and would not be predicted by TT.<sup>67</sup> In spite of the strengths that either TT or ST has, it lacks the scientific rigour that the MNS possesses.

MNs were first observed in the Macaque monkey, in ventral premotor cortex, area F5 of the monkey's cortex. These neurons, respond both when the monkey performs certain actions and when the monkey observes someone else (monkey or human) performing those actions. Mirror neurons' activity reveals the existence of a mechanism through which perceived events as different as sounds, or images, are nevertheless coded as similar to the extent that they represent the assorted sensory aspects of the motor act's goal. It has been proposed that mirror neurons by mapping observed, implied, or heard goal-directed motor acts on their motor neural substrate in the observer's motor system allow a direct form of action understanding, through a mechanism of embodied simulation.<sup>68</sup> Mirror neurons require, in order to be activated by visual stimuli, an interaction between the action's agent (human being or a monkey) and its object. Control experiments showed that neither the sight of the agent alone nor of the object alone were effective in evoking the neuron's response. Similarly, much less effective were mimicking the action without a target object or performing the action by using tools.<sup>69</sup> The likely human homologue of the monkey areas in which mirror neurons were originally described are the premotor and posterior parietal areas. All that is being said here is that the western world and its scientific knowledge is just coming to the recognition of the fact that *Igwebuike*, has always defined man, assisted his thriving, evolution and survival.

The *Igwebuike* thesis, does not have the mathematical rigour of western science, but it is deeply entrenched in the existential structure of the human person. It is an analysis of the human person's existential structure that has given birth to theories seeking to understand how the human person is conscious of the other (of which the MNs theory is one). *Aka nri kwo aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwo aka nri*, makes emphatic this point; for the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> V. Gallese, *Mirror Neurons, Embodied Simulation, and the Neural Basis of Social Identification* in the *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, No 19, 2009, 519–536.

<sup>69</sup> V. Gallese, *The 'Shared Manifold Hypothesis'. From Mirror Neurons to Empathy*, in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8, No. 5–7, 2001, 33–50.

Igbo-verse, does not negate or oppose the findings of science, it rather posits to science the fact that its findings have already been operational in its worldview. Thus according to the Igwebuike thesis, how am I conscious of the other?

Kanu captures this as he notes:

The self as metaphysical unity forms a thesis that is negated by the diversity of the other, which stands to the self as an antithesis, however, with dialogue and relationship emerges a synthesis, a complementary whole, a situation where the self sees itself as part of the whole, and sees the other as part of the self.<sup>70</sup>

The self, from its rudimentary beginnings is never considered to be opposed to the other, as the Igbo-verse delineates it. The human person, is not just the body- *Aru*, but is also The Soul - *Mkpuruobi* and The Spirit- *Mmuo*. Thus the entirety of the human person is more than the *Aru*, it is a compendium of the three. The self, is never cut away from the other, *other-selves*. The self knows of its existence to be tied to a whole, not submerged and usurped by the whole, but tied to a whole, a greater reality that defines its particular and peculiar existential bearings. I am thus conscious of the other, because the other is a part of me, and I am a part of him. In my own existential circle, you have a functional presence and a part to play, and I have this in your own existential circle and we are both bound up together in a greater circle of reality of worlds, *The Eluigwe-The Sky*; *The Ala Mmuo- The Spirit world*; *The Ala mmadu - The land of the living*.<sup>71</sup> According to Mbiti, "Man is at the very centre of existence and African people see everything else in its relation to this central position of man... it is as if God exists for the sake of man".<sup>72</sup> This centrality puts man in relationship with other realities that surround him. Kanu notes:

The centrality of man in African cosmology places him in a matrix of spiritual relationships. There is the unbreakable tie to the Supreme Being, who created the earth and everything therein for man and his progeny. This tie is unbreakable because man's existence is ontologically dependent upon his Creator. Man also has to maintain correct relationship with the lesser entities within the spiritual realm. His day-to-day activities are not only designed to harmonize his relationship with the divinities and the departed ancestors, but they are also motivated by the fear that bad relations with these spiritual beings could certainly

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<sup>70</sup> A.I. Kanu, *African Philosophy, Globalization and the Priority of Otherness*.

<sup>71</sup> C.A. Okoye, 'Onwe'. *An Inquiry into the Igbo Concept of the Self*.

<sup>72</sup> J. Mbiti, *African religions and philosophy*, 92.

endanger the life and safety of his community. That peace may reign between man and the deities, it is also necessary that man lives in harmony with the members of the earthly community.<sup>73</sup>

This centrality of man does not just pertain to worlds that surround him that is the spiritual realities that encircle him, it also pertains to his own particular reality as an individual, for as his reality is entwined to that of God, the Divine Ancestors, the Benevolent and Malevolent Spirits, his own particular human individualistic reality is entwined with that of other humans around him. There is an overlapping that defines this nexus between him and the other, the same overlapping that defines the nexus of the man with the other realities that are circumambient to his. Ekwulu assertively articulates this as he says:

I realize myself in the other because it is in the 'Thou-ness' of the Thou that my 'Is-ness' is realized. I am 'I' because you are 'You'. Without Thou there is no I. We are 'We' because they are 'They', and without 'They', there is no 'We'.<sup>74</sup>

*Our realization, of the other, is not scientific, it is existential.*

## **Conclusion**

The debate about the human tendency to relate, understand, tolerate, and communicate with one another is being traced to the reality of intersubjectivity. This reality of intersubjectivity is presently being given a neural explanation, basing it on the working of the neurons that are embedded in the central nervous system (CNS). Even though this has for some time had mostly phenomenological traits to it, it is now traced to the neurons. Aside from the above functions that are traced to intersubjectivity, the ability to empathize is also founded on this intersubjective reality of man. Through the reality of intersubjectivity, we have come to the realization that even though we are all individual subjects, yet there is a line that warps us all together, one that is neural, phenomenological, psychological, emotional, showing itself in our physical interactions. The Igwebuiké thesis, captures this reality, the intersubjective reality. Intersubjectivity speaks of a recognition of the other, it notes that the other is as conscious as the "I" is. Intersubjectivity speaks against the doctrine of solipsism. It says that no human person can exist without another, because we are made to be for the other; we are being-for-others. Emmanuel Levinas holds that the "I am", is found residing in the other, and the

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<sup>73</sup> A.I. Kanu, *African Philosophy, Globalization and the Priority of Otherness*.

<sup>74</sup> B.I. Ekwulu, *Igbo concept of Ibe (the other) as a philosophical solution to the ethnic conflicts in African countries*.

psyche is the other in the same without alienating the same.<sup>75</sup> His use of the same here refers to the subject, and the implication of this statement is that there is a shared manifold that pervades the same and the other. While this is existent, the subjectivity of each remains intact. This was the same conclusion arrived at by M. Heidegger, who notes that as much as Dasein is being-in, it is yet being-with-others, and being-in-the-world.<sup>76</sup> The existential reality of the 'I' cannot be construed and constructed without reference to the other. These points are reechoed in the Igwebuiké thesis as captured in the Igbo terminology *IBE M*, which indicates a link between the "me" and the "other", such that I cannot be with YOU, as the *ONWE M* cannot be without the *IBE M*. As earlier asserted, while we might say that the underpinings of the intersubjective thesis is neural and scientific, that of the Igwebuiké is existentially lived out. Thus I dare say that what the western school of thought refers to as intersubjectivity, is what is construed in the Igbo world view as Igwebuiké.

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<sup>75</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Lingis A (Trans), Kluwer Academic Publishers, Netherlands, 1991, 112.

<sup>76</sup> M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Macquarrie J-Robinson E (Trans), Basil Blackwell Publishers, Oxford-UK, 1962, (118)155.

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