

IGWEBUIKE AND THE QUESTION OF SUPERIORITY IN THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY OF KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract

A cursory glance at the different developments in the different epochs in the history of philosophy reveals the continuous resurfacing of the problem of superiority in the scientific community of knowledge. In Plato we see an exaltation of the discipline of philosophy and philosophers far above others. In Aristotle, we further encounter an exaltation of metaphysics far and above other fields of human inquiry. During the Medieval period, philosophy becomes a handmaid of theology- a mere tool for communicating theological truths. During the era of Karl Marx and the Logical Positivists, pure science is exalted far above metaphysics and religion. During the 1960s, when discussions began on Nigeria's national development, privileged place was given to science and technology, while the arts was referred to as 'watery arts'. In the face of this superiority in the scientific community of knowledge, the question that arises is, how should it be handled? Is there any field of human inquiry that is more superior to the other? In responding to the questions raised by this piece, the Indigenous wholistic theory has been employed, which advances IGWEBUIKE, an African complementary philosophy which understands every field of human inquiry as contributing a piece, and not the complete whole of the truth.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Superiority, Scientific, Community, Knowledge, Aristotle, Plato.

Introduction

Every field of human inquiry is limited and fragmented. And as fragments, no field of knowledge adequately satisfies the human hunger for truth. As fragments, they only provide answers that are fragmentary and limited. A cursory glance at the historical development of philosophy reveals these fragments and perspectival perspectives. In an attempt to know the world, Thales argued that its underlying principle was water-water is just a dimension not the whole; Anaximander argued that the original element of which all things were made was an indeterminate element. Anaximenes argued that it was air. Parmenides avers that change is an illusion, as reality is one and unchanging. Heraclitus on the contrary argued that reality is in a state of perpetual flux, as reality is in constant change. Plato limited reality to the world of forms, being more concrete Aristotle dismissed the world of forms and focused on motion. The medieval philosophers placed God at the centre of their thinking, their perspective was theocentric. However, with the emergence of practical philosophies like pragmatism, positivism, the reign of science emerged and pushed to the background other forms of knowledge. During the modern period, the empiricists emphasized sense knowledge and dismissed other sources of knowledge as unreasonable; however, the rationalists emphasized rational knowledge as the most superior knowledge. In the face of these varying perspectives about reality, this work calls for a more wholistic and complementary approach in the scientific community of knowledge. Igwebuike, as an Igbo-African philosophical approach to the interpretation and understanding of reality has been adopted and argues that academic pride or fragmentation cannot produce a knowledge that is wholistic. For knowledge to be wholistic, it must be open to other forms of inquiry to add to its narrow perspective might not have been able to know. In knowledge, there are diverse units that make up an entity within the framework of the whole.

Plato and the Exaltation of Philosophy

In Plato's allegory of the cave, he makes a distinction between philosophers and non-philosophers. In a cave, he says, some prisoners are chained in such a way that they are not able to look in any other direction, except straight where they have before them a wall that looks like a screen in the cinema. Behind them is a fire and between them and the fire is a raised platform stretching across the cave. On this platform are men,

animals and all kinds of things passing by, and since there is a fire behind, it casts the shadows of the fire on the screen. Since these men cannot turn back or look at other directions to see the real things, they see only the shadows and imagine that these shadows are the real things. However, Plato said that one succeeds in freeing himself from the cave and happens to find himself outside and sees things the way they are: the sun, the moon, the stars, fellow human beings, etc., different from the reflections and shadows which prisoners see in the cave. When he goes back to free them from their chains, they refuse to follow him and even want to kill him. In explaining this, Plato says that the cave is the world, the shadows of the cave are the particular things of this world, the fire is the sun, outside the cave is the world of ideas, the world of forms or intelligible world. The prisoner who escapes from the prison is the philosopher, and those in the cave who see only shadows are the non-philosophers. He equally exalted the knowledge of the world of forms over the knowledge of particular things in the world (Omoregbe, 1991). This affected virtually every dimension of his philosophy. In his political philosophy, in his famous work, *Republic*, Plato made a class distinction between the guardians, auxiliaries and common people. The guardians are rulers, the auxiliaries are defenders and the common people provide for the needs of the state. The guardians, the ruling class he calls the philosophers who correspond to the rational part of the soul (Omoregbe, 1991). The auxiliaries and common people correspond to the higher emotions and lower emotions respectively. This places philosophers and philosophy at a superior pedestal and other forms of knowledge at a lower pedestal of knowledge.

Aristotle and the Exaltation of Philosophy

Aristotle was of a different temperament from his master Plato. While his master concerned himself with the world of forms, Aristotle rejected the idea of the world of forms, veered a more practical path by focusing on motion. His rejection of the world of forms is simply because it cannot explain motion in the world. Aristotle posits that the theory of forms itself does not change and as such, cannot account for the phenomenon of change in the world. Aristotle criticized Plato for not being precise, noting that, the method of postulating another world to explain the common features between things of the same species in this world and the other world would certainly require the postulation of a third world and this process will go on *ad infinitum*.

According to Aristotle, reality consists of two elements. These elements he termed substance and accident. He says that the substance of a thing is the very nature or essence of that thing, meanwhile, the accident is a quality which a thing has but which is not essential to the nature of that thing. In other words, it is the substance of a thing that constitutes its nature and essence, which distinguishes it from other things. For example, the substance of a man according to Aristotle is his “rationality”. It is this which distinguishes him from other beings. Therefore, his complexion (i.e. his colour whether black or white), his height (whether tall or short) his size (whether fat or small) are all accidents, for they are all not part of his essential nature as a human being (Obeten 2016). For a human being remains a human being notwithstanding his colour, size and height.

Furthermore, Aristotle distinguishes two types of change, namely accidental and substantial change, according to which the former is a change that does not affect the nature of a thing, for a thing remains what it is regardless of the changes taking place in it; for instance, a drop of blue ink on a piece of paper does not change the paper from being a paper, though, the paper may undergo a change in colour. Meanwhile, on the part of the latter, a substantial change is the change that affects the very nature or essence of a thing, example, a burnt paper undergoes a substantial change in that, it changes from being a paper to becoming ashes (Obeten 2016). Consequently, he postulated that, metaphysics is the study of substance, but, the attributes or accidents, he considered them to be of subsidiary importance. With this, Aristotle places Metaphysics as the most superior of the sciences.

The Patristic and Medieval Philosophers and the Exaltation of Theology

From the second to the sixth century, the Patristic period, philosophy passed from the hands of Greek philosophers to those of Christian thinkers who were primarily theologians, and who hardly made any distinction between theology and philosophy. Philo of Alexandria, a devout Jew, attempted a synthesis of the Jewish religion and Greek philosophy (Wolfson 1948). These Patristic and Medieval thinkers include Justine Matyr, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Pseudo Dionysius, Anselm, John Scotus, etc. They strongly believed that philosophy was the handmaid of theology; philosophy was used in the service of theology, basically for clarifying and developing theological truths. Thus, faith comes before reason, theology before philosophy. There was never a time in the history of

philosophy when philosophy was humbled to the capacity of a maid like the Medieval period. And for several centuries, even beyond a thousand years, philosophy served theology as a maid.

Some of these Patristic and Medieval theologians were Neo-Platonists and some others Aristotelian. The Neo-Platonists Christianized Neo-Platonism by giving Christian interpretations to themes and concepts in Neo-Platonic philosophy. These concepts include: logos, creation, soul, evil, universals and particular, freedom, etc. The reasons for this movement of accommodating Greek philosophy in Christian theology was very necessary for obvious reasons: first, there was need to defend the Christian doctrine from the Gnostics and other critics (Grant 1966); secondly, although the early Christians were mostly unlettered people, there were a college of learned men and women among them who drank more conveniently from the bowl of philosophy (Charlesworth 2006). Whatever the interaction between philosophy and theology, the Patristic and Medieval thinkers placed theology at the top of the ladder: theology was superior to philosophy and other human disciplines. In fact, theology was the queen and mother of other disciplines.

Logical Positivism and the Exaltation of Science

The twentieth century logical positivism is a contemporary school of philosophy that dates back to the 19th century classical positivism. Her ideas as a school developed from the thoughts of philosophers like Auguste Comte (1798-1857). It was Auguste Comte that once remarked that the human mind develops through three stages, namely, the religious stage, the metaphysical stage and the scientific stage. The religious stage he speaks of as the first or the primitive stage in the development of the human mind. At the religious stage, the human person develops a religious worldview and interprets reality from the religious perspective (Kanu 2015a&b). Here, the human person develops the idea of the gods and divinities. As the mind develops, it moves from the religious stage to the metaphysical stage where he tends to offer metaphysical explanations of reality. The final stage in the development of the human mind is the stage of science, when scientific explanation of reality takes over the religious and metaphysical. Human beings, thus, moves from preoccupation in the search for the ultimate causes of things to that which is empirically observable, therefore, abandoning the attempt to explain phenomena in terms of the unseen (Omogegbe 1991). Comte (cited by

Copleston 1975), writes:

We believe that there are no substances, but only systems of facts. We regard the idea of substances as an ideological illusion. We consider substances, forces and all metaphysical beings of the moderns as a relic of scholastic realities. We think that there is nothing in the world but facts and laws, that is to say events and their relations... we recognize that all knowledge consists in the first instance in linking or in adding facts. (p. 114).

At the base of the thinking of the Logical Positivist is that science as a discipline is superior to other disciplines. Metaphysics, ethics, religion are considered unreasonable since they cannot be empirically verified.

Karl Marx and the Exaltation of Science

Karl Marx has followed the same path with the Classical and Logical Positivists when he maintained that civilization has moved from the theological stage through the philosophical to the scientific stage. He regarded religion as a bourgeois attempt to feed the masses with opium, which numbs the senses from a correct perception of reality. Feuer (1959) quoting Karl Marx says:

As soon as Jew and Christian come to see in their respective religions more than stages in the development of the human mind-snake skins which has been cast off by history, and man as the snake who clothed himself in them - they will no longer find themselves in religious opposition. (p. 200).

Karl Marx's glorification of the scientific people is depicted in a painting which portrayed a man as coming out of darkness into light. Science thus brought light in the midst of the darkness of mystification created by religion. The new economics of Marx presupposed that when St Peter meets us during the day of judgment, his only question would be: what did you do on earth to increase the gross national product.

The Nigeria and the Exaltation of Science

In the 1960s, there was a mentality that gave the impression that the pure sciences were superior to arts. Kalu (1980) observes that the Ashby Commission on Higher Education had, among other opinions recommended an increased pace of training in the sciences. The new nation would embark on massive industrialization and, thus, would need

technologists. To boost this pursuit, science teachers were imported from India. Among the students, they made a distinction between those in the sciences and those in arts. Those in the science were regarded as future leaders while those in the arts were regarded as talkatives and their discipline as 'watery arts'. In the universities, those for arts were regarded as the bourgeoisie conservatives and those in the sciences as the bourgeoisie progressives (Kanu 2015b). In the face of all these, can African philosophy make any contribution to development?

Igwebuike as a Complementary Approach to the Problem of Superiority in the Scientific Community of Knowledge

Igwebuike is the modality of being in African philosophy. It is from the Igbo composite word and metaphor *Igwebuike*, 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 *Igwebuike*, and as a sentence, it is written as, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words 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', that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force or strength, and at this level, no task is beyond their collective capability. *Igwebuike* is, therefore, a philosophy of harmonization, and complementation. It understands the world immanent realities to be related to one another in the most natural, mutual, harmonious and compatible ways possible.

Igwebuike provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. As an ideology, Kanu (2016a&b) opines that *Igwebuike* rests on the African principles of solidarity and complementarity. It 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. It is anchored on the African worldview, which, according to Iroegbu (1995) 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. Mbiti (1970) classically proverbializes the community determining role of the individual when he writes, "I am because we are

and since we are, therefore I am” (p. 108).

From the perspective of Igwebuike, knowledge is too wide to be captured by just a person or a school of thought or just an age or epoch; knowledge is wholistic and not perspectival. Knowledge is like a big elephant; different persons, schools of thought and ages or epochs approach it from different dimensions. Those who approach the ‘elephant’ from the ear would say it is a big fan, others who approach the ‘elephant’ from the legs would say it is a big stick, yet others who approach the ‘elephant’ from the tail would say it is made up of strands. When an argument ensues as to the real nature of the ‘elephant’ each of these groups of people will express itself from the angle or direction it approached the ‘elephant’, and because of their limitation to comprehend the totality of the elephant misunderstanding and self-destruction begins as each group thinks its own description is the real picture of the elephant. The problem of relegating other fields of inquiry to the background would be solved if we understand our incompleteness and the need for the other to achieve what we intend to achieve. That which we relegate to the background is always the missing link in the search for knowledge.

Igwebuike emphasizes that every field of human inquiry is complementary, and to complement means an ability to add something to another in order to improve it or make that which is being added to, more attractive. In this case, no field of knowledge works without the other; to arrive at truth, it must cease to be non-monopolistic within the complementary whole. No field of human inquiry has the monopoly of knowledge but, as a unit, must complement the ideas of the other in a whole universal system of inquiry.

Conclusion

The search for knowledge is a burden in the hearts of the seekers for the truth. It becomes easy to bear when we work together from different perspectives. When we complement each other, that which is a burden becomes a joy, and truth becomes easier to find. Life is not an individual journey. Everything in life serves a purpose and so does the other. Life is a journey with the other, and so is knowledge a search for the truth with the other. *Igwebuike* means that openness to the other enriches knowledge, and thus, generates a more wholistic knowledge. The consequences of relegating the other and their findings to the background could be

explained with the proverbial story of the man who rubbed powder on his face and had no one to tell him what he looked like. He had the powder lumped on one side of his face like one who has just come from a native doctor. While he smiled priding himself that he was well made-up, on the contrary others laughed at him and some others looked at him with pity. If he trusted the judgment of others, they would have added value to his make-up and made him better; when thorough going empiricists said that only the sense gave knowledge, and the rationalists that only the rational constituted knowledge, they made a mess and caricature of their various positions or findings. A more wholistic philosophy would have been born if they came together and shared their knowledge about reality. Their knowledge would have been balanced. The claim to superiority in the scientific community of knowledge is itself a hindrance to knowledge.

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