

IGWEBUIKE AS A WHOLISTIC RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND HUMAN SUFFERING

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Abstract

A cursory glance at the historical evolution of philosophy reveals that right from the Ancient, through the Medieval and Modern periods to the Contemporary Era, questions about the problem of evil and human suffering have continued to arise in the minds of men and women of various classes. These questions border on the origin, cause, purpose, etc., of human suffering. While these questions continue to arise in the minds of scholars even in the contemporary epoch, this work is interested, not in the origin or purpose of human suffering, but on how to help those who are experiencing human suffering. Although several approaches have been taken to explain and help human suffering, this work, however, adopts an Igbo-African pragmatic and wholistic approach. It sees the different approaches to the problem of human suffering as dimensions of the whole, which, as individuals do not provide a wholistic solution to the problem of human suffering.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Wholistic Response, Problem Of Evil, Human Suffering, Evil.

Introduction

The problem of evil and human suffering is the great *enigma vitae*, the solution of which, forever attempted, may forever baffle the human mind (Strahan 1913). And as far back as the 6th century BC, the question of the problem of evil and human suffering had burdened the heart of man; answers to such questions were sought through mythology. Many centuries ago, the Igbo people have tried to understand the source or origin of human suffering. This is well explained in an Igbo myth narrated by Mbaegbu (2012). He writes that there was a time the sky lay just above the earth. Thus, human beings could reach *Chukwu* (God) through a rope which hung down from the sky. There was no death at the time God created the world and human beings. Human beings never lacked anything, as God was involved in their affairs: associated with them and provided for all their needs. In that world, the spirits and human beings were one. However, it

happened one day that a woman spat into the eyes of God. He picked offence and thus withdrew into the sky where he now dwells. The result is that human beings were punished and could now die. Since then suffering came into the world, and evil and sin spread throughout the world. No matter how imperfect this response might be to the problem of human suffering, it points to the fact that it has been a problem that dates back to the earliest periods of human history.

In Western philosophy, this burden can be noticed even in the 4th century BC in Epicurus, the founder of Epicureanism. Hume (1947) in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* puts the following words into the mouth of Philo, "Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered. Is he [Deity] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" (p. 243) More agitating, is the mystery of suffering, or more precisely, the mystery of unjust suffering (Gordis 1965). During the medieval epoch, the idea of an infinitely good God and the presence of evil in the universe disturbed Augustine (Omoregbe, 1991).

Whence then is evil? He asked, what is its origin? How did it steal into the world? What is the root or seed from which it grew? Can it be that there is simply no evil? Whence then does evil come if God made all things, and because he is good made them good too? (*Confessions*, p. 138).

In the *Confessions*, Book Seven, the energy and passion with which Augustine pursued an answer to this question is further revealed:

I anxiously sought the answer to the question, 'Where does evil come from?' How great were the pangs of my overflowing heart, what inward groans I had, my God! Yet even then Your ears were open to me, though I did not know it. When in silence I vehemently sought an answer, those silent sorrows of my soul were strong cries to Your mercy. (p. 164).

While these questions continue to arise in the minds of scholars, this work is interested, not in the origin of human suffering, but on how to help human suffering. Several approaches have been taken to explain and help human suffering, this work, however, adopts an Igbo-African wholistic approach. The first step in this research would be to study the different approaches to the problem of evil and human suffering.

Approaches to the Problem of Evil and Human Suffering

1. Dualistic Approach

The first and oldest approach to the problem of Evil and human suffering is dualism, which holds that there are two opposing forces at work in the world – light and darkness, good and evil. The good God, in this view, is responsible for every good thing in the world, while the evil god is responsible for evil and suffering. This view is abundant in the ancient myths of the Middle East, and also is expressed in Johannine Writings. But Christian theologians generally reject this view because it is opposed to monotheism that Christians profess.

In the works of Augustine, we find adequate reference to the Manichean dualistic approach. After reading the work of Cicero, *Hortensius*, Augustine's intellect was awakened, and he became inspired with the quest for knowledge, and truth. He became a restless mind seeking the truth (Omogegbe, 1991). In his search for a solution to the problem of evil, Augustine was first attracted to the dualistic explanation of the Manicheans, who claimed that they have the answer to the problem of evil which had long bogged the mind of Augustine. At first, their solution to the problem of evil attracted Augustine.

According to Saulytis (2011), Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, was born in Babylonia, then under Persian control, on 14 April 216. His family belonged to the Elchasaites, a branch of Jewish Christianity through which Mani may have become acquainted with some of the Gnostic ideas that we find in his system. At the age of twelve he received a "divine" revelation, and another at twenty-four. These left him convinced that the revelations of previous religious founders, notably Buddha, Zoroaster, and Jesus, though authentic, were incomplete, and that it was Mani's task to bring to the world the fullness of revelation through what he called the "Religion of Light." It is for this reason that Mani's followers referred to him as the one in whom the Paraclete resides. Mani habitually styled himself "apostle of Jesus Christ."

The Manicheans claimed that in the world that there are two ultimate principles and sources of reality: *Ormuzd* the principle of good and *Ahriman* the principle of evil. The first is the source of all good, while the second is the source of all that is evil. These principles they claim are eternal and in perpetual conflict with each other, and this conflict is reflected in the things that come from them. Hence light and darkness, spirit and matter, good and evil (Omogegbe, 1991). Augustine held

on to this view until he read the work of Plotinus the *Enneads*; he thus rejected the Manichaean solution to the problem of evil in favour of that of Plotinus.

2. Classical Approach

The second approach is commonly called the *Classical, Free-will* or *Augustinian* theodicy, because it was Augustine that systematized it. According to this view, evil and suffering came as a result of the free choice of human beings, beginning with Adam and Eve (Original Sin). However, it has been argued that not all suffering is caused by human choice. Hence, this theory does not really hold water.

In the classical approach, Augustine divided the human nature into three states: the state of original blessedness, fallenness and restored nature (Kankai, 2008). As regards man's state of original blessedness, Augustine believed that God originally endowed human beings with his image, which is a rational and moral nature. In this prelapsarian state, man was endowed with immortality, integrity and knowledge. Thus, they are unlike God when they are immoral and irrational. This nature with which God has endowed man is purposed on the knowledge and love of God, and not finite things. In this state, man has the ability not to sin or to choose what was good. Thus man has a free choice, to choose between God the ultimate good or evil. With the sin of Adam and Eve, man lost the gifts with which God had endowed him, especially that of immortality, death emerged, ignorance and loss of knowledge and intimacy with God and the difficulty to accomplish the good one wills. The sin of man, for Augustine, was the sin of pride expressed in disobedience. He wanted to be like God (Kankai, 2008). With the fall, man lost the dominance of reason over passion, which has created a balance between the body and the soul until hitherto. Now the passions dominate rational thought. And this accounts for moral evil.

In Augustine's theodicy, he develops arguments that clear the creator of any responsibility for sin in the world by transferring that responsibility on creatures. A very serious question that arises from this approach is, "Is every human suffering caused by the free choice of human beings?" Certainly not! This mirrors the incompleteness of this approach. Those who have criticized this theodicy have also argued that God should not have created human beings who would sin. He would have created human beings who will be free, but at the same time, whose freedom is directed towards the good. However, if by free action we mean

that which flows from the nature of a being and not conditioned externally, the idea of having a freedom conditioned only on doing what is good, then human freedom is no longer freedom. In this case, as Hick (1994) wrote, we wouldn't be more than God's puppets or patients acting out of a series of posthypnotic suggestions: they appear to themselves to be free, but their volitions have actually been predetermined by the will of the hypnotist. Moreover, the very idea of a universe that was perfectly created, to go bad, for Friedrich (cited by Hick, 1994) is self-contradiction. A flawless creation would never go wrong, and if it does go wrong, the responsibility should go to its creators and not the created.

3. Expiatory Approach

The third approach sees evil and suffering as God's punishment. In other words, in response to human sin, God punishes humans by evil and suffering. The Old Testament accounts of the flood and the plagues in Egypt reflect this view, which was later taken up by John Calvin, Karl Barth and others of the Reformed tradition. In any case, this view distorts our understanding of God (as loving and merciful) too much to be acceptable.

4. Redemptive Approach

According to the fourth approach, suffering is redemptive. This view draws on the Suffering Servant Songs in Isaiah (40-45) and on the experience of Jesus in His passion and death. For those that hold this view, some human suffering are but an expiatory payment on a debt, whether one's own or that of others. Jesus Christ is the arch type of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah - the one who accepts abuse unto death, is really guiltless, but accepts punishment nobly on behalf of others (*pro nos*, i.e., for us). But this view is criticized on the grounds that it explains only some suffering, not all, and it is not clear what this redemptiveness means (Richard 1993).

5. Process Approach

The fifth approach was first seen in Iranaeus' writings and later in the writings of Charles Hartshorne, John Hick and Teilhard de Chardin. Suffering and evil, in this view, are seen as realities that are inevitable in an unfinished world that is evolving towards its fulfilment and so is in the process of growth. In other words, they are the natural spin-off, the inevitable growing pains of matter and spirit evolving from foetal immaturity into fullness of being (cf. Rom. 8:22-23).

Thus, this view is referred to as the *Process, Developmental and Evolutionary* approach. This view is criticized as painting God as being harsh and as one who denies or is ignorant of the fact that suffering is largely destructive and not a necessary condition of life at all (Kanu, 2014)..

6. Remedial Approach

The sixth response to the problem of suffering is that which sees suffering and evil as being remedial, that is, God uses them as tests. In other words, in this view, God allows suffering and evil to test our moral and spiritual strength and stamina, and to purify us as we go through life. So, suffering and evil are a kind of moral and spiritual medicines for us humans. But this view too has been criticized for referring only to some suffering, overlooking the destructiveness of a lot of suffering, and also for portraying God as a harsh taskmaster and disciplinarian (Kanu, 2014).

7. Futurological Approach

This futuristic approach, rather than create an immediate solution or clarify the puzzle of evil and human suffering, often very attractive to those in pain, the futurology of the resurrection faith animates and strengthens the human person the struggle against evil and its attendant effects of pain with the eschatological assurance of what is yet to come. It shows evil as that which, in spite of its weight and thickness, cannot manage to, ultimately triumph over the human person (Ebuogu, 2006). With the resurrection faith goes the belief that, though the situation of suffering and pain cannot be rationally entirely explained, it can have an eventual solution at the *eschaton*. As has already been mentioned, our constitutive temporality inserts us into an occurrence that does not end up in emptiness, nor move us only towards possibilities latent in intra-mundane structure of reality but towards a consummation which offers us *un plus de ser* (Being plus). This dimension of human existence offers the future its fascinating charm and saves mankind from remaining absorbed by nature and remaining in a cyclic course that lacks both beginning and end.

At the *eschaton*, all the puzzles that defines human suffering would be unraveled, St Paul puts it succinctly, "the last enemy will be conquered" (1 Cor 15:26). It would offer a response to our restlessness, anxiety, fear, wandering and quest for meaning. It would offer healing to both the living and the dead. As such, offering a universal justice. The researcher believes that any promise of

justice to the suffering without reference to the eschatological hope, is not just insufficient but a fallacious deceptive promise. No amount of rehabilitation, posthumous apologies or floral wreaths can redress the injustice done to a violated woman, even though all these does make sense and can go a long way. It is only the resurrection that guarantees that there will be justice for all, freedom for all from all forms of alienation. Death levels the destiny of the martyr and the executioner, while at the resurrection the relationship of each person with God would be laid bare. God's justice would triumph over all the injustices committed against His children. And the kingdom of God would come in its fullness, for the definitive realization of God's plan to bring all things under Christ would be unveiled. In this new universe, God will have his dwelling among us (Rev 21:5). He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death, suffering shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away (Rev 21:4).

8. Faith Solution Approach

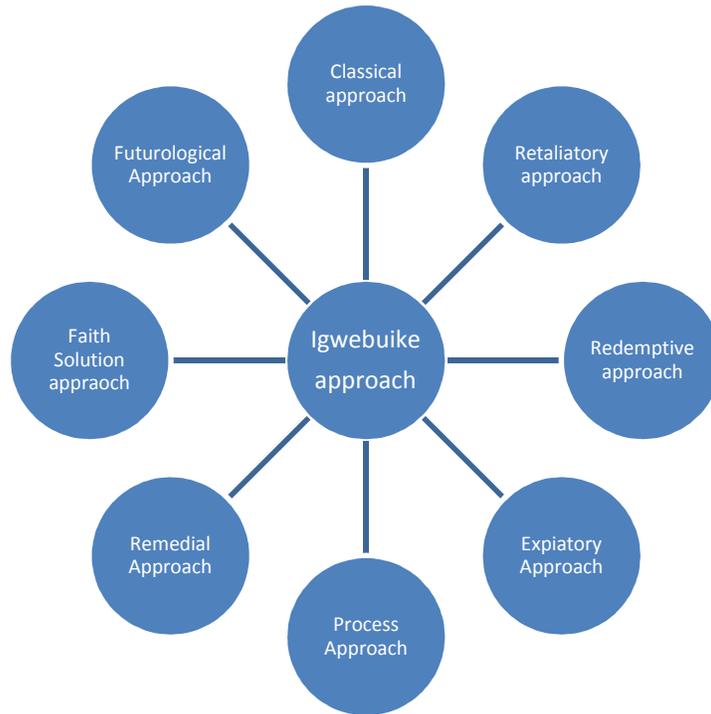
The last approach is commonly called the *Faith Solution* – the one adopted by Job in the Scripture. According to this view, since suffering and evil are mysteries just as God is, all one can do in the face of suffering is to follow the examples of Job and Jesus. And this entails facing and accepting suffering in faith without understanding it, while seeing it as somewhat part of God's plan and will for one's life. The likes of Karl Rahner, John Cobb and Simone Weil upheld this view. And as a matter of fact, this is the approach that is adopted in this work, with focus on the example of Jesus. Although this is the most accepted Christian approach to suffering today, still Dorothy Soelle challenges it in her book, "Suffering", for its tendency to promote 'Christian masochism' as she calls it, that is, the passivity or false other worldly asceticism that has plagued the 'acceptance' response to suffering.

Igwebuike as a Wholistic Approach to the problem of Human Suffering

Igwebuike is from an 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 (Kanu 2016 a & b). Igwebuiké 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 (Kanu 2015 a & b).

Igwebuiké as a complementary thought posits that no individual approach to the problem of evil and human suffering adequately satisfies the question of the problem of evil. It calls for a complementary approach or an eclectic method of responding to the problem at hand. And to respond to the problem of human suffering, there is the need for a wholistic approach, no one single approach is comprehensive enough.



The different approaches taken by different scholars and schools of thought are perspectival to the whole. It is like the proverbial elephant approached from different angles by different blind men. 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. An Igwebuiké approach, therefore, calls for an eclectic or integrative or complementary approach (Kanu 2015c & d).

For instance, the dualistic approach quite alright attempts at explaining the problem of human suffering but does not provide a solution to it. The classical approach explains the problem of moral evil, but we know that not all suffering is caused by the abuse of human freedom. Alone, it does not comprehensively respond to the question of evil and human suffering. The expiatory approach is also inadequate. For instance, in the case of Job, he did nothing to deserve the evil that came upon him and so there was nothing to expiate. The process approach, remedial approach and faith solution approach seem to advance a form of passivity in the face of human suffering. However, one must respond actively to situations of suffering—fighting to alleviate it and only when one has no control over the situation can one accept it in fate. It does not seem to advance solidarity among people in the face of evil and human suffering, that is, a feeling-with the other, in the face of suffering. Igwebuiké as a response to the problem of human suffering calls for a complementary approach for a wholistic attendance to the problem of human suffering.

Igwebuiké as a Pragmatic and Complementary Approach to the problem of Human Suffering

The pragmatic approach adopted by Igwebuiké as a solution to evil and human suffering is anchored on the perspective that it is indifference that makes evil to persist. In relation to the Holocaust, Wiesel (2005) writes that: "I have always thought that the opposite of culture is not ignorance, but indifference. That the opposite of morality is not immorality, but again indifference." (p. 101). There is a saying that "The sleep of reason produces monsters". There is the need for an ethic of responsibility in the face of evil and human suffering, a responsibility towards the other. Rather than just sit and look towards the future that no one knows when it would come for the resolution of evil and human suffering, rather than see evil merely as a part of the elements of nature as in the case of the dualists; rather than see evil merely as expiatory, and so part of payment for one's sins as in the expiatory approach; rather than see evil merely as redemptive, a process and remedial, the Igwebuiké approach thinks that there is need for a pragmatic response.

The question of the meaning and nature of responsibility has continued to arise in the discussions, analysis, and debates of philosophers, right from the ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary historical developments of philosophy. There is hardly any major philosopher who did not discuss it in one way or the other. This has continued to reoccur and even more as more interesting circumstances continue to emerge. More recently, with the emergence of cataclysmic happenings during the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazi, world wars, moral ineptitude of Vietnam and Indochina, genocide against aboriginal peoples in North America, the Armenian genocide, the Japanese massacre in Nanjing, questions have arisen, not just of responsibility but of collective responsibility. While this might pose a problem in the western world which is individualistic in nature, in African ontology, it fits into the structure of the African worldview. Questions such as, what can be done collectively to attend to the problem of evil in the society? Igwebuike is anchored on the thinking that the community has a moral responsibility in the face of human suffering. Everyone must do something to alleviate the suffering of the other.

According to Jean (1982), "...the Christian's participation in Christ's painful destiny must be accompanied by an eagerness to alleviate the sufferings of others and to reduce the anguish in the world" (p. 308). John Paul II (1984), in this regard says, "... One (the Christian) must cultivate this sensitivity of heart, which bears witness to compassion towards the suffering person. Sometimes this compassion remains the only or principal expression of our love for and in solidarity with the sufferer" (p. 72).

Every member of the community is responsible for the other. When a member of the community is hungry, rather than resort to abstract theories, someone can feed the person. If someone is sick, someone can come to his aid by taking him to the hospital and paying his bill. Even if the disease is incurable, he can have a better death through modern medical facilities. If someone is bereaved, the community can come together to console him. If someone suffers a loss, the community or friends can come to him in solidarity to alleviate his suffering. If someone is in prison, visitation can alleviate his suffering. If someone or a people are suffering because of injustice, someone can stand up for them to overcome injustice. This approach points to the fact that something practical can always be done for the alleviation of human suffering.

However, Igwebuiké philosophy also understands that the pragmatic approach cannot on its own, without integration, bring a holistic solution to the problem of human suffering. It is in this regard that Igwebuiké, at this point, introduces the idea of mystery to the discourse on human suffering. Thus, it understands suffering as a mystery - a hidden reality that goes beyond human comprehension. The mystery of suffering has been identified by many scholars to be intimately connected to the mystery of God. Rahner (1983), made a connection between the mystery of suffering and the mystery of God, when he writes:

The incomprehensibility of suffering is part of the incomprehensibility of God. Not in the sense that we could deduce it as necessary and thus inevitably as clarified from something else that we already know of God. If this were so it would not be at all incomprehensible. But the very fact that it is really and eternally incomprehensible means that suffering is truly a manifestation of God's incomprehensibility in his nature and in his freedom. In his nature because, despite what might be described as the terrible amorality of suffering (at least on the part of children and innocent people), we have to acknowledge the pure goodness of God, which needs no acquittal before our tribunal. In his freedom, because this, too, if it wills the suffering of the creature, is incomprehensible, since it could achieve without suffering the sacred aims of the freedom that wills suffering. Suffering then is the form ... in which the incomprehensibility of God himself appears. (p. 206).

Thus, to accept that God is the intractable mystery is to accept too the inexplicability and unanswerability of suffering, since they are one and the same event.

Still more, Rahner (1983) argues that when in our present state we accept suffering in view of the incomprehensibility of God and His freedom, we in a concrete form accept God in Himself and allow Him to be God. Anything short of this acceptance would amount to the affirmation of our own idea of God rather than the affirmation of God in Himself. Hence, he concludes: "There is no blessed light to illumine the dark abyss of suffering other than God himself. And we find him only when we lovingly assent to the incomprehensibility of God himself, without which he would not be God." (p. 208).

Conclusion

In the past, a retinue of attempts have been made by mankind to change, improve and ameliorate situations of evil and human suffering in the society. We have the socio-religious attempts, as in the great deal of charity offered by religious groups and philanthropists. We have the socio-political revolutions as in Marxism, the Politico-religio approach evident in Political, Liberation, Black and Feminist theologies. Other attempts include the scientific-technological optimism (neo-positivism) and the Philosophic-practical approach evident in pessimism, nihilism, existentialism, etc. Generally, they are well intended, but they all result to not being enough. Many of them are sectional and segmental, often at the great expense of others. This piece argues for a wholistic approach to the problem of human suffering. It sees the different approaches to the problem of human suffering as dimensions of the whole, which, as individuals do not provide a wholistic solution to the problem of human suffering.

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