

# **IGWEBUIKE HERMENEUTIC OF THE DYNAMICS OF UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR**

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## **Abstract**

A cursory glance at the historical evolution of metaphysics reveals that thinkers have had to grapple with major problems bordering on conceptualization, which has turned out to be perennial problems which cannot be solved once and for all, as in, in a dogmatic manner. It is, therefore, not surprising that various thinkers at the different stages of the development of metaphysics have had to deal with same old issues, however, with new perspectives of approaches. Such problems include the problem of substance and accidents, being, evil, unity and diversity, change and permanence, causality, mind and body interaction, universal and particular, etc. The present work has studied the problem of universal and particular from an Igbo-African perspective. And the concept of universal was discussed within the context of what particular things have in common, which means that universals are sometimes abstract and substantiated by particular things as in the case of three tables in a room that share the quality of ‘tableness’. This also implies that while universals are abstract, that particulars are concrete realities, however, not in all cases. Using the binoculars of *Igwebuike* philosophical (holistic) approach to interpret the dynamics of universal and particular, which represents the framework within which the African interprets and understands his universe, this work discovered that between the universal and the particular in Igbo-African universe, there is not duality in the sense of two poles set apart. Unlike Plato’s world of forms that understands the universal as the superior of the particular, the African perspective understands the two as complementary, that is, as each expressing the other.

**Keywords:** *Igwebuike*, Hermeneutic, Universal, Particular, Igbo, African, Philosophy, Metaphysics

## **Introduction**

Igbo-African metaphysics has been an area of interest and study since the time the Igbo-African intellectual history became more systematic and scientific (Nwala 1985; Edeh 1985; Ezekwugo 1987; Iroegbu 1995; Njoku 2018; Abanuka 2003; Asouzu 2004 & 2007). By ‘Igbo’, it is meant both a language and the name of an ethnic group or tribe in Nigeria. They are a single people even though fragmented and scattered, inhabiting a geographical area stretching from Benin to Igala and Cross River to Niger Delta. They speak the same language which gradually developed various dialects but understood among all the groups. Their cultural patterns are closely related, based on similar cults and social institutions. It is considered Igbo-African, first because the Igbo are part of the African people, and second, because of the interrelatedness of thoughts and ideas in African ontology.

As regards the concept metaphysics, Andronicus of Rhodes who was the editor of the works of Aristotle around 70 BC was the first to use the word metaphysics. At the time, there were some works of Aristotle which had the title *physics*, he used the word metaphysics to describe other works that do not belong to the realm of physics and which had no name. Metaphysics is a combination of two Greek words: *meta* which means that which is after, and *physika* which means physics or nature. Brought together, metaphysics would, therefore, mean that which is after the physical. From this etymology, metaphysics was understood as the science which deals with realities that are beyond the physical world. This understanding is only literal, as metaphysics deals with realities that belong to both the physical and non-physical realms. This notwithstanding, metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that deals with the study of the nature and structure of the totality of being. It is from the background of Igbo-African metaphysics that *Igwebuiké* hermeneutic of the dynamics of the universal and particular is discussed in this paper.

Thus, the problem of universal and particular would be studied from the perspective of Igbo-African philosophy. It is an African contribution to the ongoing discourse in this direction. Therefore, the question looming at the horizon of this paper is: what is the Igbo-African perspective or contribution to the ongoing discourse on the dynamics of the universal and particular? This work would begin with a study of selected universal philosophical analysis of the problem of universal and particular by different philosopher from which it would narrow down to the Igbo-African perspective of the problem.

### **The Problem of Universal and Particular**

The problem of universals and the particular can be traced to the time of Plato, even though Parmenides had distinguished between the way of truth and the way of opinion, as the way of reason and senses respectively. At the time when Socrates, through his dialectical method of enquiry, led his students from the knowledge of particular things like justice, man etc., to the universal concept of justice, man etc., he had made allusion to the problem of universals and the particular. Plato's pattern of thought is referred to as *realism*; it is also referred to as *exaggerated realism* or *ultra-realism*. In his epistemology, he spoke of the world of forms. He distinguished between particular things and their universal ideas or essences, between the knowledge gained through experience and the knowledge gained through reason. In the world of forms, he locates the object of true knowledge, which are the essences of things, the ideal things or the perfect nature of things. These essences of things cannot be known through sense experience since they are not perceptible to the senses. These forms or ideal things are known through dialectical reasoning, only by philosophers. Known through the senses are particular, individual things of this world. These he refers to as mere shadows, reflections and imitations of the things in the ideal world. While this may exist in varying degrees: beautiful, more beautiful, most beautiful etc, in the world of forms, there are no varying degrees of beauty, only the essence of beauty. This can be distinguished with examples. For instance, this would imply that the object of true knowledge are not particular beautiful things, particular cases of justice,

particular man, particular animal, particular house, but the essences of beauty, justice, man, animal, house etc., that are independent of the particular things of this world. Contrary to the particular things of this world, Plato argues that they are universal, eternal, immutable, fixed and stable essences of things.

Moving away from the realism of Plato, we encounter another form of universalism, which is *conceptualism* or *moderate realism*. Although this pattern of thinking is associated with the empiricists, thinkers like Boethius, John Salisbury, Albelad, St Thomas Aquinas and Gilbert de la Porree fall under the moderate realists. They avoid the view that universal ideas about particular things are in the world of forms as Plato had postulated and argue that these ideas are gotten from human experience, the perception of reality. The predecessors of Hume, Locke and Berkeley, had claimed that all human knowledge derives from sense perception from which ideas are generated, but none of them was really consistent with his claim. Hume, the thorough going empiricist, makes the same claim and takes it seriously. All human knowledge according to Hume derives from the impressions made on us by physical objects during sense perception. From these impressions ideas are formed, which he says are copies, images or representations of our impressions. Different from Berkeley and Locke, Hume as a thorough going empiricist, rejected the idea of substance as taught by Locke and Berkeley, on the ground that all our knowledge derives from perception and we do not perceive substance. This Hume extends to the idea of self and God. He rejects them on the ground that there are no impressions to account for them. He goes further to reject ideas that are abstract and general. This is because ideas are always those of things and things are always particular individual things. If ideas are always those of things that exist and since everything that exists is a particular individual thing, every idea therefore must be particular and not general. In Hume's philosophy, we see empiricism reaching its ultimate consequence and become skepticism.

In another form of universalism called *nominalism*, William of Ockham argues in the Medieval Ages that universals have no existence outside the mind. Before him, Boethius had asked the question whether universals were entities inside the mind or outside the mind. Thus, there are only general words like 'man' in the mind without any universal entity existing as 'humanity' anywhere. In terms of existence, therefore, only individual things do exist, and when universal ideas are employed, it is only a way of conceiving individual things that do exist. He, therefore, sees Plato's realism as a multiplication of entities, which is not necessary. From the foregoing, when we talk about things such as humanity, human nature, beauty, justice, goodness, wisdom etc, what is meant by these terms is not that such a thing actually exists apart from the individual thing which they refer, rather, for the nominalist, they are simply names and nothing more. They are *flatus voci*, that is sounds or mere words.

### ***Igwebuike Perspective of Universal and Particular***

An *Igwebuiké* perspective is based on the *Igwebuiké* principle of complementarity and solidarity. Literally, *Igwe* is a noun which means ‘number’ or ‘multitude’, usually a large number or population. The number or population in perspective are entities with ontological identities and significances, however, part of an existential order in which every entity is in relation to the other. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is a noun, which means *strength* or *power* (Kanu 2016a&b). *Igwe, bu* and *Ike* put together, means ‘number is strength’ or ‘number is power’ (Kanu 2017a&b). However, beyond the literal sense of *Igwebuiké*, it means *otu obi* (one heart and one soul) – *cor unum et anima una*. It is used within the Igbo linguistic setting to refer to relational engagement in the world, accomplished in solidarity and complementarity, and the powerful and insurmountable force therein (Kanu 2017c&d). The closest words to it in English are complementarity, solidarity and harmony.

*Igwebuiké*, therefore, sees every component of reality as a complement of the other. As regards the problem of universals and particular, *Igwebuiké* understands both realities of our metaphysical universe as complementing each other rather than two poles of reality. Unlike the Platonic perspective that distinguishes between particular things and their universal ideas or essences, between the knowledge gained through experience and the knowledge gained through reason, locating the object of true knowledge in the World of Forms, which he considers the abode of the essences of things, the ideal things or the perfect nature of things. In this way, Plato presented universals as superior part of reality and the particular as the inferior dimension of reality. From the *Igwebuiké* perspective, none is superior and none is inferior; they are both significant dimensions of reality and necessary for the understanding of reality.

### **Particulars Projecting the Universal in Igbo Metaphysics**

In the Igbo-African world, the particular and universal are not seen as two poles apart but as projections of the other. The two are in constant relationship with each other and complementing each other. To buttress this fact, two Igbo-African elements central to the Igbo-African reality would be studied as they express the complementarity of universality and particularity- the first is *Chi* which is central to Igbo religion and social life, and *Madu* who is central in the African universe.

#### **a. *Chi*-A Portion of the Universal (God) in the Particular (Human Being)**

*Igwebuiké* is based on particular principles, and one among them is the principle of identity, which states that every being is determined in itself, is one with itself and consistent in itself (Kanu 2012). The principle of identity is very important in *Igwebuiké* because, before we can talk about interconnectedness or complementarity, the other must have an identity of its own (Kanu 2013). This identity is determined by the *Chi*, the divine aspect of the human or a spark of *Chukwu* in the human person. It is a spiritual being or force that every Igbo-African is believed to possess within or outside of himself or herself. This explains why it is spoken of in the possessive sense like: *Chi m* (my *Chi*), *Chi gi* (your *Chi*), *Chi ya* (his or her *Chi*), *Chi anyi* (our *Chi*), an Igbo interjection for surprise *Chim o*

(My God), etc. It is within this context that Ilogu (1974) avers that *Chukwu* has assigned to each human person at birth a portion of divinity referred to as *Chi*. This implies that each individual has a portion of the great God. It is also within this context that Nwodo (2004) argues that *Chi* is a divine person possessed of intellect and will.

The individuating power of *Chi* evident in Achebe (1975) who understands a person's *Chi* as his other identity in spirit-land - his spirit being complementing his terrestrial human being; this is based on the perspective that nothing can stand alone, there must be another thing standing beside it. In this case, the *Chi* shadows the physical aspect of our being on earth and in fact remains a more powerful aspect of us as its influence is high. This other part of us in the spirit-land is not in opposition with our identity here in the world but complements it. *Chi* as the source of identity could be understood better from the practice of the Igbo who plant a special tree in their compound like the *ogilisi* or *oha* or make a small clay pot, filled with sand with three sticks cut from a special plant thrust jointly into the sand, and preserved as the personal *Chi* of individuals which cannot be a symbol of the *Chi* of any other person. Thus, once the person dies, his or her *Chi* is destroyed. Achebe's concept of *Chi* as the other identity of the terrestrial human being in the spirit-land looks like Plato's analysis of the relationship between the world of forms and the world of individual realities, however, unlike Plato's world of forms where the later is having an independent existence from the other that it only a shadow of it, in the African world, both complement each other.

While *Chi* individuates reality, it is also a projection of our universality in *Chukwu*. And here we see the complementarity of universality and particularity. At the particular level of *Chi* it individuates every individual human entity who occupies a unique space which another cannot ontologically take or fill. This does not in any way imply that entities are independent of the universal, every entity has something in its own sphere, which uniquely contributes to the universal reality, and in collaboration with others with whom it collaboratively sustains the universal; hence, the fact of the identity of the particular within the universal.

#### **b. *Madu*- Expressing the Universal (God) in the Particular (Human Being)**

*Madu* is the Igbo-African word for human being, both male and female. Etymologically, it is an abbreviation of the words *Mma* (which means 'the good', 'a good' or 'good') and *di* that is the operative word in *Idi* (to be) and which comes from the word *odi* (it is), which is the third person of the singular *idi* ('to exist' or 'to be'). From this etymology, it means that you cannot be a human being without existing or being in existence. However, put together, *Mmadi* means 'the good that is'. The particular human person's expression of the Universal 'God' within the context of *Mmadi* begins with the understanding of the relationship between the human person and God.

Edeh (1985) connects the idea of *Mma* with the creation of the world by *Chukwu* from whom the human person draws his or her goodness. He writes:

For the Igbos the notion of ‘good’ is derived from divine creation to say that man is the ‘good that is’ is not to say that man is ‘good *in se*’ for no one is ‘good *in se*’ except God. This is made manifest in such expressions as: (a) ‘So *chukwu dim ma ezie*’ that is, ‘Only God is good in the true sense’. (b) ‘*Onye dim ma belu so Chukwu?*’ a question which translated literally means: ‘Who is good but only God?’ (p. 100)

The goodness of the human person is, therefore, because of the goodness of God in whose goodness he or she shares and without whom there cannot be any good in humanity. From this understanding, it means that the goodness of the human person is a participation in the goodness of God. In other words, the human person is good because he or she was created by a God who is goodness itself and the Highest Good that there is. To express and appreciate this divine goodness in the human person, the Igbo-African bears names like *Chidimma* (God is good), *Chidiogo* (God is generous), *Chiugo* (God is generous), *Chiamaka* (God is beautiful) *Chibumma* (God is good). In this case, the human person who bears the name does not only point to a good God but becomes a reflection of the good God, such that within the particularity of his or her being, he or she becomes a reflection of the Universal Being: God.

To enrich this discourse on the participation of the human particular in the divine universal, Edeh argues that there is a need to understand better how the Igbo use the word ‘participate’. While considering the several ways which the Igbo understand the word ‘participate’, he paid attention of the two most widely used understands of the word by the Igbo. The first translation of the word that he considers is *Iketa n’ife* which points to individuals or an individual sharing in something which belongs to the group. According to Edeh (1985):

It belongs to each of those who share in it only insofar as one is a member of the group. This kind of sharing is evidenced in a traditional Igbo funeral ceremony. Usually the family of the bereaved slaughters one or more fattened cows as part of the ceremony. The meat from the cows is shared freely by all. According to custom, even though all can partake of the cow meat, no one can say that the meat belongs to him *per se*, that is, as distinct from his being part of the community. (p. 101).

The second translation of the word ‘participate’ in Igbo according to Edeh is *Isolu n’ife*, which literally means ‘to follow others in something’. This would mean that the human person, although as an individual, with others that make up the human community follow in participating in the goodness of God. It is, therefore, within this context that we say that:

- a. Kanu is good
- b. Emeka is good

- c. Ijeoma is good
- d. Amaka is good

Outside of human beings, the concept of good is also applicable. For instance it can be said of animate and inanimate things:

- a. Nkita (dog) is good
- b. Okwute (stone) is good
- c. Osisi (tree) is good
- d. Uno (house) is good

All that is made by God is said to be good because they reflect the goodness of God who created them. Thus, in the word *mmadu*, we find an individual human being reflecting all the transcendent attributes of being realized in the highest order. *Mmadu* is a microcosm of the macrocosm. The human person is therefore not a dualism but a synthesis.

### Conclusion

During the course of the development of metaphysics, thinkers have had to grapple with major problems bordering on conceptualization, which has turned out to be perennial problems which cannot be solved once and for all, as in, in a dogmatic manner. It is, therefore, not surprising that various thinkers at the different stages of the development of metaphysics had to deal with same old issues. Such problems include the problem of substance and accidents, being, evil, unity and diversity, change and permanence, causality, mind and body interaction, universal and particular, etc. Of particular interest to this work is the problem of universal and particular.

The present work has studied the problem of universal and particular from an Igbo-African perspective. And the concept of universal was discussed within the context of what particular things have in common, which means that universals are sometimes abstract and substantiated by particular things as in the case of three tables in a room that share the quality of 'tableness'. This also implies that while universals are abstract that particulars are concrete realities as in the case of the personhood (universal) of Kanu (particular) or doghood (universal) and dog (particular). Using the binoculars of Igwebuiké philosophy to interpret the dynamics of universal and particular, which represents the framework within which the African interprets and understands his universe this work strongly holds that between the universal and the particular in Igbo-African universe, there is not duality in the sense of two poles set apart. Unlike Plato's world of forms that understands the universal as the superior of the particular, the African perspective understands the two are complementary, each expresses the other. And it is within the context of this complementation that both find their meanings.

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