

# **'IGWEBUIKE' AS A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF IGBO-AFRICAN WORLDVIEW**

**Ikechukwu Anthony KANU**

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Tansian University Umunya, Anambra State

[ikee\\_mario@yahoo.com](mailto:ikee_mario@yahoo.com)

## **Executive Summary**

*The relationships in the African universe point to the fact of the dynamics of a personal and universal world, and the reality that the human person is a composition of lived embodiment with the world while at the same time experiencing his/her own body. This interaction between the personal world of the human person and the universal world is possible because, just as the heart of the human person is in the body, so is the body of the human person in the world. As a being in the world, the human person nourishes the world through creativity, while the world nourishes and sustains the human person. This interaction between the personal and universal worlds is a very important element in the understanding of the dynamics in the African worldview. It is in this regard that the African worldview can be described as an inter-subjective and complementary universe. It is a universe that remains in being by maintaining a balance in the relationships between complementary realities. This complementary and relational nature of the universe affects the way the African understands and interprets reality around him/her. This notwithstanding, with the recent studies in the area of Igwebuike philosophy and theology, the present researcher makes a co-relation between Igwebuike and the African worldview. This work discovered that Igwebuike is a conceptualization of the African worldview. It, therefore, understands Igwebuike as the African*

*worldview, and the African worldview as Igwebuiké. For the purpose of this research, the Igwebuiké complementary approach would be employed.*

**Keywords:** *Igwebuiké, Complementarity, Inter-subjectivity, Worldview, Universe, African*

## **Introduction**

The concept, ‘worldview’ (*Weltanschauung*), was popularized by German philosophers. Heidegger considers worldview within the context of distinguishing *Weltanschauung* from philosophy, to be a fixed interpretation of the universe of beings, as opposed to philosophy as the study of being. He further suggests that fundamental ontology could demonstrate the condition of possibility for something like worldview (Heidegger, 1975). In this sense, he distinguishes philosophy from worldview, while making it clear that philosophy as wisdom of the world and life is a provider of worldview. In this, he was quite unlike Hegel, Dilthey, Nietzsche, and Jaspers, who more or less equated philosophy with worldview.

The concept, worldview, had a very specific meaning for Freud. He defines it as “an intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis, which, accordingly, leaves no question unanswered and in which everything that interests us finds its fixed place” (1933, p. 158). This definition was to aid his distinction between rational or scientific worldview from religious or philosophical worldview. He argues that the age of modernity marks the emergence of the rational or scientific worldview and the bowing out of religious or philosophical worldview. While the religious and philosophical worldviews place realities beyond the reach of human understanding, the rational or scientific worldview sees reality as ultimately transparent to the power of human cognition.

Dilthey analyses worldview within the context of hermeneutics. Dilthey (1954) understands worldview as hermeneutical constructs, conveying the meaning of the world, thus, the interpretation of worldviews helps us to get at the meaning of reality, just as the interpretation of language helps to understand a text. According to Rickman (1988), Dilthey presents worldviews as:

A special case of methodological *Verstehen* (interpretative examination of phenomena) in the human sciences, involving description, abstraction, analysis, typification, comparison, and generalization. It [a worldview] attempts to reproduce or re-evoke at the conceptual level the original content of what is “there for us” in lived experience (p. 327).

Schleiermacher understands worldview as an element that makes our knowledge of God complete. For Emmanuel Kant, worldview is a world-intuition ‘*mundus sensibilis*’, which determines contemplation, apprehension and interpretation of being in the world of man. In the contention of Schelling, worldview is the summation-scheme for the understanding of the real world (Okonkwo, 2002a&b).

While these perspectives of worldview from German philosophers introduce us to the discourse on worldview, this paper focuses on the African worldview, that is, how the African interprets the universe around him and how he relates the individual elements of his world to each other. With the recent studies in the area of *Igwebuike* philosophy and theology, the present researcher makes a co-relation between *Igwebuike* and the African worldview. As a result of the content of *Igwebuike* and the place it occupies in African ontology in relation to the concept of African worldview, it would be argued in this piece that *Igwebuike* is a conceptualization of the African worldview. *Igwebuike* is, therefore, understood as the African worldview, and the African worldview as *Igwebuike*.

### **What is African Worldview?**

African worldview refers to the African theory of the universe, which includes the manner of conceiving the world and the place of humanity in this world in relation to other realities. The African worldview forms a ‘life system’ that the African holds on to consciously or unconsciously which serves as an interpretative framework for the interpretation and conception of reality. Writing on the philosophy of the Igbo-speaking people, Nwala (1985) defines worldview as:

The complex of beliefs, habits, laws, customs and traditions of a people. It includes the overall picture they have about reality, the universe, life and existence; their attitude to life and things in general; what they do and think of; what life is; what things are worth striving to attain; what man’s place is in the scheme of things; whether or not man has an immortal soul; whether or not life has a meaning and purpose, etc... worldview is enmeshed in the practical life of the people; in particular in the economic, political, social, artistic and religious life (p. 26).

Worldview is, therefore, at the centre of our thoughts and expressions through actions and the institutions of society, like education, politics, fender, sense of family, religion, arts, social interactions, health care, etc.

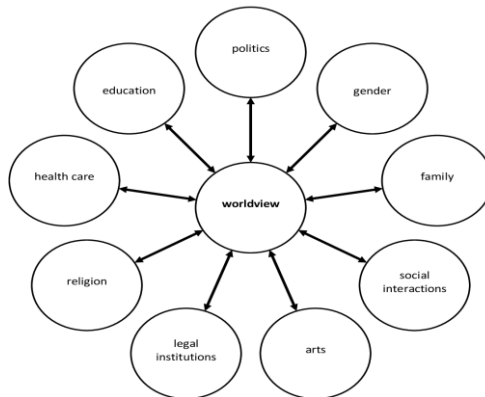


Figure 1: Walsh and Middleton (cited in Kara 2011)

Just like any other worldview, the African worldview has the following characteristics: It is mutually exclusive, which also gives it its unique identity; it is assumption-based; it has a strong sense of assurance and provides Africans with techniques to manipulate their world.

It is like the lens (glasses, sunglasses) through which the African looks at the world around him. In this sense, the African worldview colours everything that the African sees. Although we have one universe, one world, one existence, but how the African understands it, interacts with it, and lives it depends on his lens, that is, his worldview. The African worldview, therefore, affects everything the African sees, notices, etc., and, therefore, affects the way he/she relates to it. It is the worldview that guides, directs, orients the African; it takes him to where he is, where he is going to and shapes how he intends to get there. It is the same worldview that shapes the African personality and culture and serves as a filter and framework. It sifts and sorts, accepts and rejects, and gives context to the life of the African; it interprets, explains and imparts meaning to realities, such as God, universe, the self, etc.

The African worldview gives answers to the following questions: What is the origin of the universe? What is the ultimate and prime reality? What sustains the universe? What is the basic nature of the environmental universe? What is the place of the human person in the world? What is death and what happens after death? Is there any need for morality? Etc. The answers it gives to these questions shapes the life of the African. In providing answers to these questions, the African worldview provides an intellectual construct that provides unified solutions or answers to these fundamental questions in a way that blends the multiplicity of beings, values and duties. This intellectual construct may be expressed in African mythical narratives, songs, proverbs, parables, drama, prayers, etc. It is essentially the underlying thought link that holds together the African value system, philosophy of life, social conduct, morality, folklores, myths, rites, rituals, norms, rules, ideas, cognitive mappings and theologies.

### **The Religious and Relational Character of African Worldview**

There are different types of worldviews: there is the religious worldview that is based on the belief in a universal spirit: God, deity or divine entity. This divine entity has established a moral order which is known to human beings, and human beings have a moral duty to obey it as it has future consequences in relation to life after death. The religious worldview has a comprehensive perception of the world, putting into consideration the seen and unseen realities. Contrary to the religious worldview, there are non-religious worldviews. These include the mythological worldview, especially when it uses myths, folklore or legends believed to be supernatural and true for the interpretation of nature, universe, events and humanity. The distinction between religious and mythological worldviews, notwithstanding, a mythological worldview can also be a religious worldview. Non-religious worldviews also include the philosophical worldview, which uses logical reasoning, mathematics and speculation to interpret and provide answers to fundamental questions about reality. The third is the scientific worldview, which uses the premises and findings of science in explaining the meaning of life, morality, creation, etc. Although it is more exact and authentic, it does not provide meaning to existence as it is limited to the material realm.

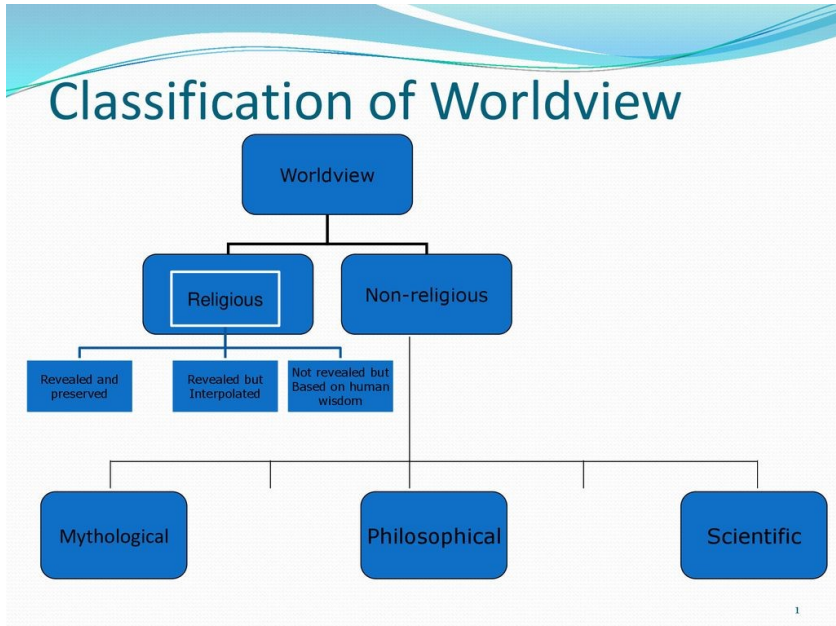


Figure 2: Carmel M. (<https://slideplayer.com/user/15613762>)

These classifications notwithstanding, the basic question looming at the horizon is: what is the nature of the African worldview? There is copious font of literature available on the African worldview. One needs to glance at the works of eminent scholars like Wambutda (1986), Ejizu (1986), Achebe (1958), Onuoha (1987), Metuh (1987), Quarcoopome (1987), Arinze (1970), Madu (2004) and Kanu (2012). Very significant to their analysis is an underlying principle that speaks of the African worldview as basically religious, which gives a sense of purpose and direction to the lives of people and enables them to act purposefully and exercise a measure of control over their environment. Thus, Okonkwo (2002b) argues that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the African person as ‘homo religiosus’ from his ‘mundus sensibilis’.

One cannot talk about the African worldview without making reference to the place of the God, deities, ancestors, etc., in it, and the place of the human person in relation to the other elements of the

African universe. The presence of and relationship between the human person and God, the deities, the ancestors, etc., and the strong influence that these divinities have in the day-to-day life experience of the African introduce a wide sense of the sacred and mystery in the African universe. It is such that it is difficult to separate other dimensions of the life of the African from his personal inclinations to the divine. Mbiti (1970) puts this succinctly:

Wherever the African is, there is his religion. He carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting new crop, he takes it with him to a beer parlour or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician, he takes it to the house of parliament. (p. 2).

In the contention of Njoku (2004), this is such that:

The African man had many taboos to observe, and many daily rituals to perform, either to appease the community or the divinities. If he was not an indirect or unconscious slave of the dominant conscious, he held perpetual allegiance to one divinity or another. If he was 'free' with men, he was not free with nature or his environment. Suppose community and environment allow him to live his life with fewer burdens, he would still have to pay the debts owed by his past ancestors. (p. 57).

What makes the African worldview religious is not just because of the presence of God, the deities and ancestors, etc., but the relationship that is operative between the human person and these divine realities. More so, this religious dimension has great influence on the African worldview, as it shapes the worldview of individual persons or people. This perspective has great implications for the Latin origin of religion as *religare*, which means 'to bind together'. It is around this process and degree of binding or relationship between the African and the divine elements of his universe that religion takes its place. In this relation within the context of the religious universe, the *Igwebuike* character of the African universe begins to emerge. Through this



relationship, the divine does for man what he cannot do for himself and man does for the divine what they cannot do for themselves. It is a relationship of not only of survival but a display of the beauty of being with the other. It is this ideology of being in relation to the other that *Igwebuike* captures.

### ***Igwebuike* Character of the African Worldview**

*Igwe bu ike* is an Igbo proverb and also a typical Igbo name. Igbo proverbs and names are among the major traditional vessels in which African philosophy, religion and culture have continued to be preserved. Mbiti (1970) writes that: "It is in proverbs that we find the remains of the oldest forms of African religious and philosophical wisdom" (p.89). They contain the wisdom and experience of the African people, usually of several ages gathered and summed up in one expression. Proverbs spring from the people and represent the voice of the people and express the interpretation of their beliefs, principles of life and conduct. It expresses the moral attitudes of a given culture, and reflects the hopes, achievements and failings of a people (Kanu, 2018). This is to say that beyond the linguistic expression lies a deeper meaning, that is, the spirit of the letter. Beyond the literal sense, *Igwebuike* is understood as providing an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations (Kanu, 2016c).

*Igwebuike* is a combination of three Igbo words. It can be understood as a word or 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. 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, which are, 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, 2017f). However, beyond the literal sense of *Igwebuike*, it means *otu obi* (one heart and one soul) – *cor unum et anima una*.

The need for *otu obi* or solidarity in the African universe is anchored on the fact that the universe in which the African lives is a world of probabilities. An Igbo proverb says: “If a thing remains one, then nothing remains”. This is because the power or strength generated by a person is not strong enough to withstand the existential gamble of life, as the chances of being overcome are on the high side, thus the need for an existential backing. There is also an African proverb that says: “while going to the toilet in the morning ensure that you carry two sticks”. The sticks were used for cleaning oneself after using the convenience. But because there is always the high probability of the stick falling into the pit, it is always advisable to take a second stick, just in case. With two sticks one has a greater assurance of cleaning oneself up after using the toilet; the higher the number, the greater the preparedness towards minimizing the casualty of life. The second stick is also necessary in case of a second coming or remainder of the output. In a metaphoric sense, 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, 2017g). The closest words to it in English are complementarity, solidarity and harmony.

The main principles of the African worldview that makes it *Igwebuiké* and *Igwebuiké* the African worldview include: the interconnectedness of reality; the spiritual nature of the human person that creates a basis for connection to other spiritual beings in the African universe; the collective or inclusive nature of the family structure; the ones of mind, body and spirit; and the value of interpersonal relations.

### **The Structure of the African Universe**

The African universe has physical and spiritual dimensions (Unah, 2009). At the spirit realm, God is the Chief Being, and sits at the apex of power. In the physical world, human beings dominate, occupying the central position (Onunwa, 1994). The human beings form a “microcosm” on which converge the innumerable forces and influences from the beings that inhabit the other arms of the universe.

## THE AFRICAN COSMOS

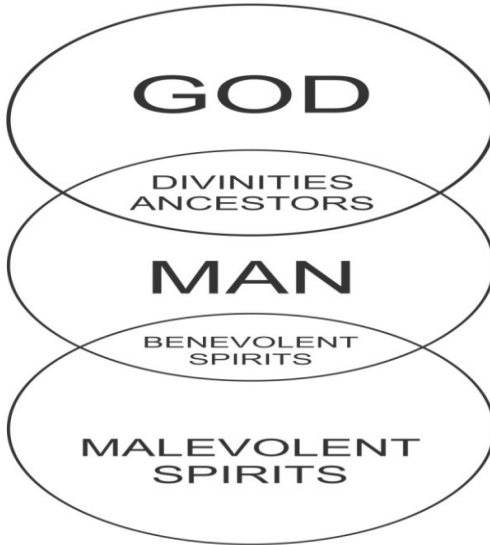


Figure 1: Kanu (2013 & 2015)

The diagram above, with three circles, represents the spiritual worlds of God (*Chukwu*) and the spirits and the physical world of human beings that overlap and, thus, interact. Thus, Ekwealor (1990) stresses that “It is important to note that although the Igbo universe is divided into these three broad structures, there is the possibility of certain elements to move from one structure to another to commune with other elements” (p. 30). In the African universe, there is really no distinction between the physical and spiritual worlds, between the visible and invisible, the sacred and profane. There is a corporate existence of reality in the African universe and this corporate existence is not brought to an end by the death of the human person but extends into the hereafter. It is in this regard that the African speaks of his death as a return to the world of the ancestors. In this interaction, human beings commune with God, the angels, the ancestors, and vice versa. The African world is, therefore, an interactive universe.

Taking the foregoing into consideration, it can be concluded that the African universe has basic characteristic features which include: unified view of reality: the profane and the sacred cannot be separated, as they interact through divination, sacrifices, libations, etc; and a strong sense of community: there is an intricate web of relationship between the living, the dead and the yet to be born.

### **The Human Person in the African Interactive Universe**

African religion and thought is anthropocentric. Man is at the centre of the universe. Mbiti (1970), therefore, asserts that “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” (p. 92). Corroborating Mbiti’s position, Metuh (1991), avers that “Everything else in African worldview seems to get its bearing and significance from the position, meaning and end of man” (p. 109). The idea of God, divinities, ancestors, rituals, sacrifices etc., are only useful to the extent that they serve the needs of the human person. However, the human person is a being that has its origin and finality in the Supreme Being. This implies that the human person in the African universe is best understood in his relationship with God his creator, with whom, from the Igbo perspective, he is ontologically linked through his *chi*, the spark or emanation of God in each person. He comes into the world as a force amidst forces and interacting with forces. Good status, good health and prosperity are signs of the well-being of a person’s life-force, and man struggles to preserve it through an appropriate relationship with the spiritual forces around him.

This relationship is maintained through a community of channels:

#### **a. Libation**

Libation is prayer usually said in the morning time. However, libation can also be offered during ceremonies, meetings and gatherings using *oji* (kola nut) and *mmanya-oku* (hot drink), the food and drink of the gods. It is through libation that the African tries to normalize or balance the relationship between the three worlds. This libation is made to God through the

agency of the ancestors and other deities. The Igbo believe that it is through gifts that they can gain God's favour. There is an aphorism that says, *enyepu dibia ego, obuo mkpologwu n'ajo-ofia* (when a medicine man is well paid, he seeks the vital roots even in the evil forest).

**b. Divination**

Divination involves a process of inquiry. People who wish to know why certain things happen, how to solve certain problems, and so on, go to diviners. This is usually done through the agency of a particular deity. The Igbo would say *Onye amaghi ebe mmiri bidoro maba ya, anaghi ama ebe okwusiri* (He who does not know where rain started beating him cannot know where it stopped).

**c. Religious Festivals, Rituals and Ceremonies**

Religious festivals and rituals such as New Yam festivals, harvest seasons, hunting seasons and planting season festivals are activities that demonstrate and express belief and faith in God and the spirit world. During these ceremonies, what God or the spirits have done for human beings are commemorated; rituals are done and powers obtained from the spirit world. Describing the function of rituals, Steyne (1992) writes that "Rituals sustain and generate the myth underlying the belief system, while it also binds people together socially" (p. 95). For instance, the Igbo's celebration of the New Yam festival is connected to the month of *Ahiajoku*. It is a time when they give thanks to *Chukwu* and his deans and the ancestors for granting them a bountiful harvest for the year. Igbo traditional marriage ceremonies also provide an opportunity for communion with the ancestors, as the Igbo invoke their blessings upon the newly married couples.

**d. Professional communicators with the spirit world**

In the African world, as Egbeke (2001) observes, when the African speaks of an accident or the unexpected event, he does

not speak in terms of chance, but in terms of an event whose cause is not yet known. Because of the need to trace the causes of these events and conditions, counteract them and appease or punish those behind them, the African employs the help of sacred specialists like the priests, rain makers, medicine men, etc., as professional communicators with the spirit world to go into the spirit world and find out what is wrong.

These four channels are not the only channels through which the human person relates with the other elements in his universe; we can also speak of dreams, visions, etc.

### **Conclusion**

The relationships in the African universe point to the fact of the dynamics of a personal and universal world, and the reality that the human person is a composition of lived embodiment with the world, while at the same time experiencing his/her own body. This interaction between the personal world of the human person and the universal world is possible because, just as the heart of the human person is in the body, so is the body of the human person in the world. Being in the world, the human person nourishes the world through creativity, while the world nourishes and sustains his being in diverse ways.

Every interaction between the human person and the world begins from the personal trading scheme of ‘my world,’ which creates consciousness and understanding of both the personal and universal worlds. It also triggers the consciousness of abstraction that affects a relational understanding of consciousness and a universal world - ‘our world’. The concept of ‘my world’ which leads to ‘our world’ through sense abstraction expresses what Okonkwo (2020) calls the “personal and objective living communicative fieldwork of a world” (p. 71) that is made present to ‘me’ and to ‘us’ and also the familiar place of life experiment. At the level of logic, it seems more appropriate to speak of the discovery of ‘my world’ before the discovery of ‘our world’. But in reality, once you are conscious of

'my world,' it implies that you are already in 'our world,' as you can only discover 'your world' in relation to 'our world'.

This relationship made possible as a result of the presence of both personal and universal worlds within the African context is conceptualized by *Igwebuike*. It captures the inter-subjectivity of the African universe in terms of complementarity. Thus, *Igwebuike* becomes like a 'control box' that determines thinking, action or doing and values. It exerts a strong influence in shaping the life of individuals and the community as a whole, thereby, unifying the African thought and life. It is within this context that *Igwebuike* is understood as the African worldview, and the African worldview as *Igwebuike*.

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