

# ***Ibuanyidanda* Philosophy or Complementary Reflection**

## **Introduction**

*Ibuanyidanda* or complementary reflection is a philosophical movement in Africa founded at the University of Calabar, Nigeria. As the founder of the movement, I have outlined, in a systematic methodological mode, its basic presuppositions in my major writings. Not only the number of scientific projects anchored around its basic presuppositions attest to its transforming influence in the way philosophy is conducted in Africa today, but more so, the emerging philosophical variants drawing inspirations from its tenets. Besides myself, one can even be talking of core members of a budding philosophical movement in this regard.

Other notable core members, with their variants and accentuations, include Godfrey Ozumba and Joachim Chimakonam (University of Calabar, Nigeria), – Integrative Humanism or *Njikọka* philosophy;

Chris Ijiomah (University of Calabar, Nigeria), – Harmonious Monism; Chris Akpan (University of Calabar, Nigeria) – *Ibuanyidanda* and Basic Problems of Science;

Ephraim Essien (University of Cape Coast, Ghana) - Compatibility Theory; Edor John Edor (University of Calabar, Nigeria) – *Ibuanyidanda* and Basic questions of International Jurisprudence;

Mesembe Edet (University of Calabar, Nigeria) - *Ibuanyidanda* and Afroxiology (Values and African Experience of the World).

These approaches endeavour to work out what some call the stand points of “**The Calabar School of Philosophy**”. Notwithstanding the subtle differences between these approaches, we are united in exploring some basic integrative ideas that direct human consciousness as is captured in my “integrative principle of *ibuanyidanda* philosophy”, the metaphysical variant of the principles of *ibuanyidanda* philosophy, which claims that *ihe di, nwere isi na odu* (anything that exists serves a missing link of reality). With this I affirm an inherent necessary mutual relationship in complementary service between existent realities.

The theme for the 1991 **Ahijoku Lecture**, organised yearly by

the whole Igbo intelligentsia for the promotion of Igbo culture, was on “IBU ANYI NDANDA”. The lecturer, Prof. Romanus Ohuche, endeavoured to show how what Igbo understand as the principle of *Ibu anyi ndanda* or *Ibu anyi danda* (Complementarity), which he used interchangeably, due to variations in Igbo dialects, plays a vital role in Igbo educational experience. Generally “*Ibu anyi danda*” is one of the most important observational statements in the language of *Igbos* of Nigeria and is constituted of the following words: *ibu* = *load*; *anyi* = *not insurmountable for*; *danda* = *a species of ant*. Hence, the expression translates to: “no task is insurmountable for *danda* the ant”. *Igbos* derive the statement by observing a colony of the ants “*danda*,” which have the capacity to carry successfully loads that appear bigger and heavier than them when they work in mutual unison. For most *Igbos*, therefore, this statement points, most especially, to a form of mutual dependence observable in nature by reason of which seemingly difficult challenges can very easily be surmounted. Hence, the concept *ibuanyidanda* has as its nearest English equivalent the word “complementarity” and is abstracted and derived from the descriptive statement “*ibu anyi danda*”.

When applied to human conduct, this statement claims that, just like *danda*, human beings and communities have the capacity to surmount difficult challenges and attain extraordinary heights when they persevere in mutual complementary dependence. *Ibuanyidanda philosophy*, the new integrative philosophy of mutual complementation in African, is a reaction to what this statement seeks to claim. It seeks to probe into its scope and conditions of applicability as to determine its truth worth. By so doing, it weighs its implications for the assessment of those human conducts that are geared towards mutual complementation. The very exercise that results from such an investigation is what I call “*ibuanyidanda* philosophy” or “complementary reflection”.

Taken on the surface value, the observational statement “*ibu anyi danda*”, for many, does actually recount true positive human experience with regard to addressing those difficult challenges where unified mutual complementary efforts are required. This is why, for many, this statement would, without much equivocation, be under-

stood to mean that such acts of mutual complementation, where they do occur, would invariably result in surmounting such difficult challenges and inducing those extraordinary achievements associated with them. Interestingly, many of us, without much hesitation, do accept aphorisms of this kind as true and valid. We do so because they evoke positive sentiments in us concerning those things we are likely to believe regarding acts of this kind; things we desire and expect. This is why we are compelled to accede to what statements of this kind claim – if only intuitively. When we act in this manner, we submit ourselves also, quite unknowingly, to an implicit moment of categorical command inherent in the nature of such statements. This is when they start to dictate the tune of our knowing, judging, willing and acting. Therefore, without our knowing it, approaching reality in this manner, can very easily become an unbearable burden; because statements of this kind have also an implicit hypothetical character that is not always obvious - one that is easily eclipsed by the overbearing categorical nature they exude. Hence, their truth claim and categorical character are not as self-evident as they impress themselves upon our consciousness. Adhering to them as pure categorical commands always is very likely to lead to false assumptions when it matters most.

By following statements of this kind uncritically in given concrete cases, we are made to believe, for example, that we can really address such difficult challenges successfully like building a just, peaceful and egalitarian society, if only such matters can be addressed in an attitude of mutual complementary unity of all stakeholders. This being the case, the very act of mutual complementation is immediately projected into our consciousness as the very cause of the state of equity, harmony and egalitarianism among human beings. Since stakeholders are enraptured by impressions of this kind, due to their apparent true and apodictic character, they actually go ahead co-joining, in a necessary causal mode, such values as justice, equity, fair play, compassion etc. with the type of attitudes they assume generate them. They thereby believe that adhering to injunctions arousing such attitudes are, not only the necessary, but also the sufficient conditions for bringing about the ideal states of justice, egalitarianism and harmony among human beings. However, by affirming the injunction *ibu anyi danda*

(no task is insurmountable for *danda* the ant) for example, what is thereby implied can vary, without our being very conscious of this. They can vary, because statements of this kind have an inherent moment of ambivalence that is often overlooked. Such ambivalence enters into what I call the **"the inconspicuous accessory conditions"** that compelled us into accepting statements of the kind *ibu anyi danda* as having a definite meaning that is in consonance only with our positive expectations and desires. They are inconspicuous accessory conditions because they have the character of accidentality. As such they are the types of things that are often neglected or forgotten. Being conditioned by factors of this kind, we, for example, associate statements like *ibu anyi danda* only with acts of mutual complementary harmony among human beings. This must not always be the case, because by affirm *ibu anyi danda*, believing that they are practicing genuine complementarity, actors may also, without being conscious of this, be pursuing objective that contradict ideals associated with this statement.

Indeed, innumerable cases abound, where commitment to the injunctions *ibu anyi danda* has often led to negative experiences. They have often contributed in complicating human interpersonal relationship without stakeholders being fully aware of this fact. At such moments, stakeholders, quite unwittingly, misuse what they think such statements proclaim to pursue privately motivated interests; even to the point of transgressing gravely against ideals they passionately believe in. This is when they act in unison to execute tasks they deem appropriate, noble and worthy, which however, quite unknown to them, are driven by vile motives of ruthlessness, injustice, tyranny, systematic exploitation and repression. At such moments, and bound in complementary unison, they go about persecuting and exploiting those they perceive as threatening their interests. Interestingly, they do this in the name of practicing genuine complementarity. Here, the feeling of strength in unity, characteristic of all such acts, heightens also the sentiment of genuine mutual complementation. This is one of the major reasons they easily forget or underestimate the excesses attached to their vile cravings and actions. They perceive such vile and unjust measures as wise, rational and prudent. Hence, they regard

these also as the very ideal of complementarity since these help them secure privately motivated interests against an outside they equally perceive as threatening and not good enough. In other words, they are misled into believing that they are pursuing the ideal of complementarity, their self-serving, unjust and exclusivist acts notwithstanding. The only valid reason behind such excesses, that is unfortunately concealed from them, is adherence to the feeling of intimacy holding them together. The same is applicable to what they sense as uniting to ward off the threat posed by an outside they perceive as alien and not good enough.

By every indication, they are being deceived at such moments, without realising this, because their actions contradict the ideals they believe in and proclaim. At least, one can say that, at such moments, they suffer an existential illusion that leads to self-deceit; and one also that leads to the contradictions we sense in their actions. Their ruthless, exploitative exclusivist tendencies and self-serving disposition contradict the ideal of mutual complementary harmony which was what they intended when they proclaimed and affirmed *ibu anyi danda*. Unfortunately, this would not be because they suffer existential illusion. Therefore, even if they proclaim and believe in ideals of this kind, realisation of such would ever remain unattainable since there is a deep-seated divide in human consciousness itself. It is therefore a paradox that by adhering to an injunction that should ordinarily lead to mutual complementary harmony among human beings, stakeholders, quite unwittingly, strive towards negating the very values and ideals such injunctions should enshrine and proclaim.

Now, the question arises: Why are actors deceived in this way, and who or what deceives them? Why can following the injunction *ibu anyi danda* (something that urges stakeholders to rally in complementary harmony), lead to anti-complementary acts; and such that can even compel stakeholders to negate the very values and ideals injunctions of this kind enshrine? Furthermore, why are actors not immediately conscious of their mistakes; but would rather pursue blindly the negative connotations of injunctions of this kind; as to violate the very ideals they cherish? Why can following injunctions of this kind make actors self-serving, exclusivist and intolerant; and most especially in

their dealings with those they perceive as alien; and who do not share the same bond of mutual complementary intimacy with them? Why do they go ahead repressing, discriminating and even persecuting these others by following the injunction *ibu anyi danda*? Why do they, quite unwittingly, consider the questionable measures they take at such moments the wisest, most prudent and rational things to do?

Answering these questions would help us understand more clearly the nature of the injunction *ibu anyi danda* and what it seeks to claim. Generally, the difficulties injunctions of this kind present have much to do with the fact of our being human. Here, we are, by and large, partially products of our existential situations that are tension-laden and ambivalent. Besides the ambivalence to which our perception of reality is exposed, we are also subject to the constraints arising from what I call in *Igbo* language *ihe mkpuchi anyi*. This ambivalence and *ihe mkpuchi anya*, as the inconspicuous accessory conditions of knowing, willing, judging and acting, are the very mechanisms and phenomena responsible for such illusions and deceit. They achieve this by projecting only the categorical demands of our most cherished interests immediately into our consciousness while withholding the hypothetical character of the same. The moment this happens, an unavoidable error of judgement ensues which invariably leads to paradoxical acts and weird wishes. Since accidental and inconspicuous accessory conditions of this kind are easily overlooked, they can have devastating effects in the way we relate to the world. They can enormously becloud our thinking and power of judgment; so much so that we start misperceiving our needs and misconstruing our relationship with people who do not share bonds of intimacy with us. These are people we, instinctively, assume constitute some stumbling block to us just because they do not belong to us intimately. Elucidating the complex character of matters of this kind, and how to handle them, constitute some of the cardinal foci of *ibuanyidanda* investigation.

### **The inconspicuous Accessory Conditions of Knowing, Willing, Judging and Acting**

Now, an important question arises: What is the modus operandi of these inconspicuous accessory conditions of knowing, willing and

acting; the very phenomena and mechanisms underlying sense experience and descriptive statements? How do they impact on our sub-conscious world as to becloud our reasoning, our judgement, our willing and the way we act? This can be explained in the following way: Even if the human person is fundamentally rational, the same human person is subject to challenges of our fundamental instinct of self-preservation. Thus caught between being rational and being subject to our most primitive instinct, a tension is generated within the subject and in the sub-conscious. This is the foundation of the ambivalent tension that characterises our consciousness itself and in its relationship to the world generally. This is mostly the case with most mental and emotional acts dealing with knowing, willing, judging and acting. Due to this ambivalence, the world presents itself to our consciousness fundamentally in its double capacity. This is the one we feel most concretely in the varied character of our perception of reality. We feel this double capacity most when our most cherished interests are at stake. This is when this ambivalence can compel us into being oversensitive in view of protecting our interests, even at the risk of becoming excessively selfish and exclusivist; and most especially with regard to perceived threats arising from the outside. For this reason, we may be inclined to choose only those things always that appeal to us most, and which, in our opinion, help us safeguard such interests and repeal such threats. Oversensitive about our gains and advantages, we tend towards losing measured circumspection and are easily forgetful concerning some of the most severe consequences of our negligence and forgetfulness. In this way, and quite unknown to us, we are exposed to some of the most grievous danger of error of judgement.

Experiences of this kind, as noted, are possible because our experience of the world in its ambivalence is further characterised by an inherent moment concealment or the very thing I call "*the mkpuchi anya*" in *Igbo language*. This "*the mkpuchi anya*" or *phenomenon of concealment* has the capacity to radicalise the precariousness of our already tension-laden ambivalence experience and complicate it. The expression "*the mkpuchi anya*" is taken from the *Igbo* language of Nigeria; and I have translated it to the English equivalent of "phe-

nomenon of concealment”. Within the context of *Igbo* existential experience, this expression means “something that impairs vision” or “something that beclouds the eyes”. Hence, “*ihe mkpuchi anya*” or “phenomenon of concealment” is an existential condition that militates against the capacity to reason soundly, judge correctly and imaginatively; most especially in matters dealing directly with our most cherished interests. Overwhelmed by *ihe mkpuchi anya*, and in the face of our most cherished interests, Igbos question: *o nwere ihe na eme gi na anya* (is anything wrong with your eyes)? They still ask more pointedly: *anya o di kwa gi mma* (are your eyes at all in order)? They conclude: “*anya adigi ya mma*” (something is definitely wrong with his or her eyes!). What is implied by statements of this kind is that a person is so blinded by his or her passion, that he or she is passionate to the point of madness. It is precisely due to this its character that *ihe mkpuchi anya* (phenomenon of concealment) conceal from us the ambivalent tension-laden character of our existential conditions. Furthermore, it makes us blind to some of the most severe consequences resulting from our capriciousness, excessive zeal, negligence and forgetfulness. Thus victimised, actors actually seek only those persons and things that fascinate them; things only in tune with their whims and caprices. They thereby believe that these are the only options open to them; the only things most likely to lead to their happiness and ensure their overall wellbeing. In the same way, they despise and may seek to avoid those peoples and things they assume bring them misfortune and misery. This is why, out of sheer fascination and enthusiasm, we may very easily tend to be drawn, instinctively, only towards such persons and object that, in our estimation, stand to enhance our chances of success. Likewise, out of fear, hatred and sheer disgust, we seek to avoid instinctively also those things and persons that diminish our chances of success and bring us misfortune. Since this emotional and mental state constrains actors into attending to important decisions in a one dimensional absolute mode; and only in ways that favour their interests, they easily overstep allowable boundaries and, paradoxically, consider such measures most prudent, wise and rational. In the process, they become unduly bold and daring, both in their negligence, capriciousness and excesses. Thus lack-



ing in circumspection and insight, their selfishness and carelessness are enhanced. Worst still is that they may thereby easily lose every sense of decorum, become insensitive to the boundaries between right and wrong, good and evil. For these reasons, actors easily become absorbed by irrational wishes, vile fantasies, fears and desires; and so much so that they start to act only in a one-dimensional absolute mode lacking in wisdom. This is the very root of paradoxical and contradictory behaviour. This is why under such tense conditions, we may be affirming *ibu anyi danda*, believing that we are actually practicing the ideal of complementarity; in actual fact and quite unwittingly, however, we may be pursuing vilest forms of privately motivated interests; and to the point of negating the very ideals we believe in. This is all the more the case when we are acting in unison with our closest allies and against those we perceive as threatening our interests; and who do not share same bond of intimacy with us. Here, what we sense as the ideal of complementarity is nothing other than the shared bond of intimacy that sustains such vile wishes and privately motivated interests. In this case, what we perceive as the ideal of complementarity is what it takes to defend our egoism against an outside that is perceived as threatening, alien and not good enough. Quite interestingly; in the whole process we may even have that inner feeling of satisfaction that we are acting wisely and intelligently. This is because we are being deceived due to the constraints to which we are subjected. At such moments and in their semi-conscious state, and out of irrational fears, stakeholders would very probably proceed to resolve conflicts in their favour only; and through questionable means, and contrary to equity and fair play. This is what we mean when we say that all human existential situations are inherently ambivalent, in their double capacity; and are beclouded with the *mkpuchi anya* (the phenomenon of concealment).

This stressed emotional and mental state follows us in all we do, and determines our being no matter our levels of achievement; and no matter our status; no matter what we profess, and no matter how highly we rate ourselves. Even, the impact of this ambivalence and the *mkpuchi anya* can grow and be amplified by achievements, responsibility and self-perception; and so much so that the more we are over-

whelmed by our achievements and self-perception, the more these existential constraints gathers momentum and tighten their grips. This is why the moment these constraining mechanisms hold sway, actors are very easily thrown off balance; and tend to compromise and mismanage their positions, self-understanding and responsibilities in ways that can be very baffling and incomprehensible. This is that stressed existential experience by reason of which precisely those things actors cherish and praise very highly are the very things they may be most willing to compromise. Here, one easily acts against those ideals and norms one cherishes highly and believes in. Ironically also, one imagines, at such moments, that by so doing one is smart, acting in the most wise and intelligent manner. It is as if one is acting against ones will and convictions and considers this the wisest thing to do.

Here, actors respond, more or less, in a state of subdued insight with regard to their social and universal moral obligations; but may be willing to act with much more positive responsiveness towards their own personal needs and interests. They may also be most willing to extend the same positive consideration to those they imagine share some bond of intimacy with them; and who, in their estimation, would very probably contribute towards securing their most cherished interests and help them succeed. This is why in proclaiming *ibu anyi danda*, in the vile sense of complementarity, they may be most willing to persecute those who, in their estimation do not form a bond of intimacy with them, because these for them are mere nuisances and threats. With this, they believe that they are practicing the ideal of complementarity in its fullest; but they are merely being deceived and are deceiving themselves without realising this. Since actors, at these moments are prone to seeing the world from a stressed and compromised type of disposition, their actions and their intentions are bound to be at variance.

This is the foundation of all types of ambivalent behaviour and something that can distort the meaning we assign to things; and to the point of actors contradicting themselves without knowing that they are actually doing so. It is also one of the foundations of irreconcilable differences, where each party in a dispute is so absorbed by the correctness of its position that it hardly finds it necessary to listen to

other parties. This is why such a compromised type of mind-set can make people unbearably stubborn and capricious. Here, stakeholders are more inclined to stick to their opinions without realising that such are founded on deep rooted mistake or existential deceit. They are thus subjected to avoidable errors of judgement. Such difficulties are bound to persist because what is presented to our consciousness and what we intend or believe in, may be diametrically opposed to each other – and often without our being fully aware of this fact. In such cases, we are bound to err; but errors of this kind are not always intentional, because actors suffer an existential illusion which impacts on the way they think, judge, will and act. What this shows is that in most situations of life our actions may not always match with what we intend, even if we think otherwise. This is why under such conditions actors are more likely to choose only those things that enhance their most cherished interests, without caring much about all the implications. They only believe that these are the best possible options open to them, even if this is not always the case. Where the stakes are high, such dispositions can easily lead to our doing harm to others, our becoming unduly irrational and repressive, without our being fully aware of the full implications of our actions. On the contrary, we consider the measures we take quite appropriate, wise and smart.

One can say that human subjects are not completely to blame for lapses of this kind because at such moments they are not fully in control of their situation. Indeed, they are caught in a mental and emotional state of restricted self-consciousness. This is when we say of a person in Igbo language: *o magi onwe ya* (he does not know himself i.e. he is not self-conscious). Therefore, it is due to these inconspicuous accessory conditions, that we unconditionally assume that the statement *ibu anyi danda* can only be understood only in a positive sense that proclaims the ideal of complementarity. This is why we misuse the expression in this way; and go ahead submitting ourselves only to the ideal of mutual complementary harmony as the only true meaning that can ever be assigned to this statement. This must not be the case because the expression can also be misused in a way that contradicts the ideals they seek to proclaim. Ibuanidanda philosophy seeks to disclose the reasons for difficulties of this kind, that are often

forgotten or overlooked. Furthermore, it strives to offer viable tools towards their containment; and in the form of constructing a method and higher principles of legitimisation of human conduct at all levels of determination.

Innocent I. Asouzu

## Sources:

- Akpan, Chris. "Ambivalence of Human Existential Situation: A Veritable Index of Rational Explanation". In: American Journal of Social and management Sciences, Vol.2 No.1, March 2011, pp.1-10.
- Aristotle. *Metaphysica*, Translated into English under the editorship of W. D. Ross, M.A., Hon. LL.D (Edin.) Oxford. Vol. VIII, Second Edition, OXFORD at the Clarendon Press 1926. Online Edition.
- Asouzu, Innocent.
- The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and beyond African Philosophy, Lit Verlag, Münster, 2005. Cf. Asouzu I. Innocent. The Method and Principles of Complementary, Calabar University Press, 2004.
  - Ibuanyidanda. New Complementary Ontology. Beyond World-*Immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction and Impositions*. Litverlag, Münster, Zurich, New Brunswick, London, 2007.
  - Ibuaru: The Heavy Burden of Philosophy beyond African *Philosophy*. Litverlag, Münster, Zürich, New Brunswick, London, 2007.
  - Ikwa Ogwe. Essential Readings in Complementary Reflection. A Systematic Methodological Approach. Saesprint Publishers, Calabar 2007.
  - "Ibuanyidanda" and the Philosophy of Essence (Philosophy the *Science of Missing Links of Reality*). 50<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture. Calabar University Press, 2011.
  - "Ibuanyidanda (Complementary Reflection), Communalism and Theory Formulation in African Philosophy" in: Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK) New Series, Vol.3 No.2, December 2011, pp.9-34.
  - Ibuanyidanda (Complementary Reflection) and Some Basic Philosophical Problems in Africa Today. Sense Experience, "ihe mkpuchi anya" and the Super-maxim. Litverlag, Münster, Zürich, New Brunswick, London, 2013.
- Kant, Immanuel. "The Metaphysical Foundation of Morals".  
In: *The Enduring Questions . Main Problems of Philosophy*, arranged by Melvin Rader, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1976.
- Kimmerle, Heinz. "Die schwere Last der Komplementarität. Antwort auf Innocent I. Asouzus Kritik an der interkulturellen Philosophie" in: Polylog. Zeitschrift

für Interkulturelles Philosophieren. 19, 2008.  
Ohuche, O. Romanus. „Ibu Anyi Ndanda. The Centrality of Education in Igbo Culture. 1991Ahiajoku Lecture. Published by Culture Division Ministry of Information and Culture and printed by Government Printer, Owerri, 1991.  
Solomon, Roberts. Introducing Philosophy. A Text with integrated Readings. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, New York, 1989).

Read the continuation of this article by going to “Links and Resources” <link>