AN EXAMINATION OF THE DUAL NATURE OF IGALA ETHICAL UNIVERSUM

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Abstract

The conception of Ojo among the Igala is deeply intertwined with their cosmology, which includes a rich pantheon of lesser deities and ancestral spirits that mediate between Ojo and humanity. In terms of ethical understanding, the Igala people's idea of "good" is closely linked to communal harmony, justice, and respect for both divine and societal laws. Ethical conduct among the Igala is assessed based on adherence to traditional norms and the well-being of the community. Activities and behaviors that promote unity, peace, and collective prosperity are regarded as morally good, while those that cause discord or harm are considered evil. In this regard, this research explored why there are prevalent evil in the society despite the existence of God. Methodologically, this research employed qualitative tools including in-depth interviews with local religious leaders, elders, and practitioners, as well as analysis of oral traditions and indigenous texts. This approach provided a comprehensive view of the religious and ethical systems of the Igala people, offering insights into how these systems have evolved over time and how they continue to influence contemporary Igala society. The study concludes that the Igala's concept of God and their moral philosophy are profoundly interwoven, reflecting a worldview where the sacred and the moral are inseparable. This integration serves as the foundation for their social order, governance, and interpersonal relationships. The findings contribute to broader discussions in African religious studies and ethics, offering a nuanced perspective on the dynamic interplay between belief, morality, and cultural identity. Overall, this work advances our understanding of Igala religious and ethical thought, illustrating the richness and complexity of indigenous African belief systems.

Introduction

The concept of God and the dichotomy of good and evil are integral themes in understanding the religious and ethical frameworks of any culture. Among the Igala people of Nigeria, these themes have been explored through various lenses, including mythology, philosophy, and daily practice. The Igala possess

a rich cultural heritage that encompasses a diverse range of beliefs and practices concerning the divine and moral principles. This paper aims at examining the concept of God and the understanding of good and evil among the Igala, drawing on existing literature and ethnographic research. In Igala cosmology, the concept of God is multifaceted. The supreme deity, often referred to as "Ojo," is viewed as the creator and sustainer of the universe. Igala writers, such as Akogu, discusses how Ojo is perceived as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent (45). This understanding shapes the Igala people's worldview and influences their behaviours and moral judgments. Ojo is not only a figure of worship but also a protector, who demands reverence and adherence to communal values (Okpanachi 33).

The Igala also recognize a pantheon of lesser deities and ancestral spirits that serve specific roles within the community. These entities mediate between the people and Ojo, reflecting the intricate relationship the Igala maintain with the divine, (Okpanachi 38). This polytheistic element adds a layer of complexity to the understanding of good and evil, as actions are often judged based on their alignment with the will of both the supreme deity and the intermediary spirits. The Igala people's understanding of good and evil is deeply rooted in their cultural norms and traditions. Good is often associated with actions that promote community welfare, harmony, and social cohesion, while evil is linked to selfishness, discord, and actions harming the community, (Okpanachi 47). The moral teachings are reinforced through proverbs, folklore, and religious narratives, which serve as ethical guidelines for members of the society (Abah 104).

The role of the community in defining good and evil cannot be overstated. In Igala society, the collective experience of the people influences moral standards, and transgressions are viewed through a communal lens rather than an individual one, (Ogbo 89). This implicates social repercussions for actions deemed evil, establishing a moral accountability that is group-centered rather than solely focused on personal conduct. As the Igala navigate modernity, the interplay between traditional beliefs and new influences poses questions about the evolution of their understanding of God and moral concepts. The introduction of Christianity and Islam has led to a complex intermingling of beliefs, where traditional practices coexist with new religious ideologies, (Idris 201). Contemporary Igala often find themselves negotiating their identity between traditional customs and modern religious practices, resulting in a dynamic landscape of belief and morality that warrants examination.

Thus, the concept of God in relation to the existence of good and evil among the Igala people are intricate and deeply woven into the complexity of their culture. This background lays the groundwork for a comprehensive analysis of how these concepts are understood, practiced, and communicated within the Igala community. By engaging with Igala writers and relevant literature, this study aims to illuminate the rich system of beliefs that shape the moral and spiritual lives of the Igala people.

The Idea of Good and Evil among Igala People

Igala philosophy is essential not just to this paper but to the general moral framework in African philosophy. The Igala philosophy of good is deeply rooted in communal well-being and ethical behaviour, reflecting a comprehensive worldview that includes respect for elders and ancestral wisdom. One significant aspect of the Igala concept of good is its relational nature. In Igala culture, good is not an individualistic pursuit but a communal endeavor. As noted by Adebanwi, the Igala philosophy places great emphasis on social harmony and the collective welfare of the community. This perspective aligns closely with broader African philosophies like Ubuntu that prioritizes communal values over individualism (17). Moreover, the idea of good in Igala philosophy encompasses ethical conduct, which is demonstrated through traditional proverbs and wisdom. According to Onah, these proverbs serve as

moral guides, instilling virtues such as honesty, integrity, and respect for others in the younger generations (45). The embodiment of these virtues within the community is seen as essential for achieving a good life. Furthermore, the Igala worldview incorporates the ancestral legacy, where the opinions and teachings of ancestors shape contemporary understandings of the good life and the presence of Ibegwu who serves as the moral agent. As Ojo argues, ancestral wisdom is a crucial element in defining moral standards and behaviours expected from members of the community, as they reflect the collective history and values of the people (102).

Moreso, the Igala understanding of good is intrinsically linked to the spiritual dimension of life. The Igala people believe that the moral fiber of an individual influences their relationship with the divine and the community. Abubakar emphasizes that spiritual beliefs and practices play a significant role in shaping the community's moral fabric, reinforcing the idea that good deeds foster divine favour and social cohesion (78). Thus, the Igala philosophy regarding the idea of good highlights the importance of community, ethical behaviour, ancestral wisdom, and spiritual beliefs. This holistic approach resonates with broader African philosophical principles, reinforcing the profound interconnectedness of individuals within their communities. Overall, the idea of good in African philosophy encompasses community, harmony, adaptation, and spirituality. These elements create a rich nexus of thought that continues to evolve in modern discourse.

The Concept of Evil

In this discussion, one should take note that every indigenous language or society has actions that are referred to as evil based on the people's belief system and also the different ways of life. As Azibili noted, African worldview is an important aspect of their life as it reveals the totality of the thought systems (50). This makes the possibility of a whole African Society to conceive a thing, and idea, or action as evil as the opposite is considered as good. Igala people see anything evil, if it is bad, questionable, harsh and malevolent behaviour that must be avoided and should not be compromised with in any form. These acts include killing, stealing, telling lies, engaging in immorality, and anything that has capacity of setting one person against another in violence, quarrel and enmity of all sorts (Okpanachi 35). The Igala definition of evil extends to all acts that undermine acts of love, pure conscience, and communal efforts in making peace to reign in the community. This underscores why the people have a number of taboos and totems with many traditional norms, morals and codes of conducts which varies from place to place. These are in force within every locality so that man should not kill man or human, there should be no stealing and there should be peace and harmony. The people believe that violation of these taboos, totems, norms and code of conducts have some severe consequences on not only the violator, but the whole society. And as such, abominable acts are not to be treated with levity, as they believe that its repercussion can kill people as well as can kill a land (Ya Kpane) (Edegbo 32-33).

Defining Good: Indigenous Perspectives

The concept of "good" among the Igala people is deeply embedded in their cultural, religious, and moral framework. Unlike Western philosophical traditions that often define goodness in abstract, rational terms, the Igala perspective is rooted in communal values, spiritual beliefs, and lived experiences. To understand how the Igala define good, one must explore their oral traditions, ethical teachings, and social norms, which collectively shape their perception of morality.

Goodness as Communal Harmony and Responsibility

For the Igala people, goodness is far more than an abstract quality or individual virtue—it is a way of life fundamentally tied to the well-being of the entire community. In Igala thought, every act, no matter how small, contributes to a larger history of communal harmony and collective prosperity. As Idachaba explains, "The Igala perceive goodness as actions that promote harmony, peace, and the prosperity of the community" (42). This definition reveals an ethic where the measure of a good person lies in the positive impact they have on their neighbours and the broader social fabric. Central to this understanding is the principle of Ubuntu, an African ethical concept that encapsulates the idea that one's humanity is bound up with the well-being of others. Ubuntu, often summarized as "I am because we are," underscores the importance of interconnectedness and mutual care. In Igala society, personal success is never seen in isolation but is always linked to the welfare of the community. Goodness is expressed through acts of kindness, the sharing of resources, and a steadfast commitment to ensuring that no member of the community is left behind.

Numerous personal interviews with local elders provided vivid examples of this communal ethos. One elder noted that the Igala way of living requires every individual to look beyond personal gain and to actively participate in the collective welfare. This sentiment was strongly echoed by Elder Adejo Okpanachi, a respected community leader in Abocho, who stated:

"A good person in Igala culture is someone who does not think only of himself but considers the needs of others. If you share what you have and ensure no one suffers alone, then you are good". Elder Okpanachi's words highlight that for the Igala, the true essence of goodness lies in selflessness and communal engagement. Such perspectives contrast sharply with Western models of individualism, where moral virtue is frequently associated with personal achievements or individual rights. In many Western contexts, ethical behaviour is often measured by the success or integrity of the individual alone, rather than by their contributions to the social good.

The Igala approach reminds us that ethical living is inherently relational. Every act of kindness or support not only uplifts an individual but also strengthens the community's bond and resilience. This collective mindset is evident in everyday practices, from community gatherings and festivals to the routine acts of neighbourly help that define daily life. Even in times of hardship, the expectation that one will look out for others serves as a critical pillar of social stability and continuity. Moreover, the Igala conception of goodness challenges modern societal norms that prioritize individualism over community solidarity. In an era when globalization and technological advancement can sometimes erode traditional communal structures, the Igala perspective offers an alternative model—one that values interconnectedness and shared responsibility. By fostering an environment where every member is committed to the common good, the Igala create a resilient community that thrives on cooperation and mutual support.

In essence, the Igala view of goodness is a holistic, living practice—a call to action for individuals to engage in behaviours that promote collective well-being. It is a reminder that ethical conduct is not just about personal integrity, but about nurturing a community where everyone has the opportunity to flourish.

Spiritual Dimensions of Goodness

In Igala religious thought, the concept of goodness transcends everyday social interactions and is deeply intertwined with divine approval and spiritual integrity. At the heart of this perspective is the belief that true goodness is achieved by aligning one's actions with the will of Ojo, the Supreme God. Ojo is not

viewed as a distant, abstract deity but as a central, active force in everyday life, providing the ultimate standard by which actions are judged. As Okeme explains, "the Igala people view goodness as obedience to divine laws and traditions passed down from their ancestors" (88). This obedience is not a passive submission but an active, living commitment to maintaining a harmonious relationship with the divine.

Within this framework, acts of worship and ritual are pivotal. Sacrifices, offerings, and other religious ceremonies are more than symbolic gestures; they are practical expressions of an individual's devotion to Ojo. These practices serve both as a means of seeking divine favour and as a demonstration of one's commitment to upholding sacred traditions. The performance of these rituals is believed to secure Ojo's blessings, ensuring that the individual's life remains in balance with the cosmic order. Moreover, the concept of purity—both spiritual and physical—is central. Maintaining purity is seen as essential because it preserves the integrity of one's relationship with the divine, thereby reinforcing the moral order within the community. Elder Onuche, a traditional priest from Ejule, provided personal insight into how these spiritual dimensions are woven into the fabric of Igala life. He remarked: "When a person follows the right path—respecting the gods, the ancestors, and the elders—that person is considered good. A good heart is one that fears Ojo and does not deceive others."

This testimony underscores that, for the Igala, moral goodness is not an abstract ideal but is vividly expressed through both ritual practice and everyday behaviour. Respect for the divine and adherence to ancestral teachings are seen as essential characteristics of a good person. In this light, goodness is an ongoing pursuit—a dynamic process that requires continuous self-discipline, ritual observance, and ethical behaviour.

Furthermore, the Igala conception of goodness also mirrors broader African theological perspectives. Mbiti, in *African Religions and Philosophy*, argues that moral behaviour in many African societies is intrinsically linked to the divine, suggesting that ethical conduct is a form of spiritual alignment (203). This connection implies that morality is not solely defined by interpersonal relationships but is also a matter of living in accordance with the higher, cosmic order. For the Igala, as for many African cultures, the divine serves as both a moral compass and a source of communal unity. Thus, the spiritual dimensions of goodness among the Igala illustrate a holistic approach where ethical behaviour and religious observance are inseparable. Through rituals, sacrifices, and a lifelong commitment to purity and obedience, individuals not only seek to earn the favour of Ojo but also reinforce the moral and social cohesion of their community.

Ethical Conduct and Character

Beyond community and spirituality, the Igala people place significant emphasis on personal character as a fundamental indicator of goodness. In the Igala worldview, ethical conduct is not an isolated personal trait but a reflection of one's commitment to upholding communal values. Central to this perspective are virtues such as **Ogecha** (honesty), **Ejumomi** (compassion), and **Uhiolawane** (humility), which serve as guiding principles in everyday interactions. For the Igala, these virtues are lived experiences rather than abstract ideals. **Ogecha** is seen as the foundation for trust and reliability, ensuring that personal integrity is maintained in every action. **Ejumomi** encourages empathy and responsiveness to the needs of others, reinforcing the belief that one's actions should contribute positively to the collective welfare. **Uhiolawane**, or humility, keeps individuals grounded, reminding them that no person exists in isolation and that every action impacts the broader community.

Personal interviews conducted in various Igala communities have revealed a strong societal consensus on these values. Deceit, arrogance, and selfishness are consistently condemned as traits that not only harm interpersonal relationships but also disrupt the delicate balance of communal life. In contrast, patience and generosity are celebrated as essential qualities that foster social harmony and mutual support.

A particularly illustrative example comes from an interview with Madam Ene Abutu, a respected member of the Dekina community. She explained: "A good woman is one who respects her husband, raises her children well, and helps those in need. A good man is one who provides for his family, speaks truthfully, and does not oppress others." (Abutu, Personal Interview)

Madam Abutu's insights highlight how gender roles are intricately woven into the Igala conception of ethical behaviour. For women, goodness is often associated with nurturing roles and community support, while for men, it is linked to leadership, provision, and fairness. This gendered delineation underscores a broader cultural expectation that personal morality is intrinsically tied to one's social responsibilities. Both men and women are expected to embody virtues that enhance not only their character but also the overall well-being of their community. The Igala perspective on ethical conduct thus bridges personal virtue with collective responsibility. Every act of honesty, compassion, and humility contributes to a larger ethical framework that sustains community cohesion. In this light, personal character is both a personal achievement and a public good—a dynamic interplay that reinforces the social fabric of Igala society.

In other words, for the Igala, goodness is not a philosophical abstraction but a lived reality shaped by community, spirituality, and character. Acts of generosity, honesty, and adherence to tradition define what is good. These indigenous perspectives provide valuable insights into African moral thought, reminding us that the idea of good is deeply relational and rooted in shared human values.

Moral Values and Social Norms among the Igala

Moral values and social norms are fundamental to the ethical structure of the Igala people, shaping their understanding of good and evil. These values are deeply embedded in their cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and communal way of life. Moral values in Igala society revolve around virtues such as truthfulness, respect, justice, hospitality, and communal living. These values are passed down through oral traditions, religious teachings, and customary laws. Igala elders and traditional leaders play a vital role in enforcing these values, often using proverbs, folktales, and public sanctions to instill moral discipline. One of the core moral values in Igala culture is **Okpakpa** (righteousness or upright living). A person who exhibits **Okpakpa** is considered trustworthy and is respected in the community. As Ejima observes, "the concept of righteousness among the Igala is closely linked to their belief in divine justice, where good deeds are rewarded and evil actions attract consequences" (87). Another essential value is **Ochochi** (truthfulness). Among the Igala, speaking the truth is not only a personal virtue but a communal responsibility. Lies and deceit are strongly condemned, as they disrupt social harmony. A popular Igala proverb states: *"Ochochi akun, ila adeju togbegbele"*, meaning "Truth does not die but remains forever," reinforcing the belief that truth always prevails.

The moral code of the Igala people also places a strong emphasis on **Ubumo** (respect). This applies to elders, traditional institutions, and even sacred places. Disrespect towards elders is considered an offense with social and spiritual repercussions. As Oguche notes, "the Igala people see respect as a moral duty that upholds the orderliness of society" (45).

Social Norms and Their Role in Defining Good and Evil

Social norms among the Igala serve as practical guidelines for moral behaviour, defining what is acceptable and what is condemned. These norms are enforced through community expectations, religious practices, and traditional leadership structures. One of the most fundamental social norms is the **Communal lifestyle**. The Igala believe in the principle of '*one kate ane anen'* meaning "one person does not own the land alone." This philosophy promotes collective responsibility and mutual assistance. Acts of selfishness or neglect of communal welfare are seen as moral failures. Marriage customs also reflect Igala moral values. Fidelity in marriage is highly emphasized, and infidelity is considered a moral failing with spiritual and social consequences. Women and men are expected to remain faithful to their partners, and extramarital affairs are often met with community sanctions and in some cases a retribution from Ibegwu. According to Omale, "the Igala people's moral perception of marriage is rooted in the belief that a stable home leads to a stable society" (122). But one question that lingers in the mind of the researcher is, why is there much vices especially infidelity in homes among some Igala groups despite the strong emphasis on moral uprightness?

Religious practices further reinforce social norms by providing a spiritual framework for morality. Traditional deities and ancestral spirits are believed to reward good deeds and punish wrongdoing. The concept of **Ọjọ (God)** as the ultimate judge underscores the Igala understanding of divine justice. In a personal interview with Elder Akoh, a respected traditional leader in Dekina, *"Ojo atuji ubin,"* meaning "God does not support evil; God punishes evil." This belief reinforces the Igala commitment to moral uprightness.

Among the Igala, violating moral values and social norms often results in social and spiritual consequences. Wrongdoers may face public shame, ostracization, or ritual cleansing ceremonies to atone for their actions in time past. The fear of supernatural retribution also serves as a deterrent against moral transgressions. For example, stealing is heavily condemned. If someone is caught stealing, they may be required to confess publicly and make restitution. In some cases, traditional rituals are performed to cleanse the offender and restore social harmony. Ejima explains that "moral sanctions in Igala culture serve not only as punitive measures but also as corrective tools to uphold ethical values" (98). Similarly, acts of betrayal or falsehood in leadership positions are believed to bring about spiritual consequences. Leaders who act unjustly may experience misfortunes attributed to divine punishment. This belief sustains accountability within Igala traditional governance.

Therefore, Moral values and social norms among the Igala are deeply rooted in their cultural, religious, and communal life. These values define what is considered good and evil, guiding individual and collective behaviour. Through oral traditions, communal enforcement, and religious beliefs, the Igala people uphold a moral order that promotes social harmony and justice. Understanding these moral values provides insight into the broader framework of Igala ethics and their perception of good and evil.

The Role of Elders and Community in Defining Good

Among the Igala people, the concept of good *(Enyo)* is not just an abstract idea but a deeply communal reality shaped by the wisdom of elders and the collective consciousness of the community. Morality is not determined by individual reasoning alone but is passed down through generations, refined by communal experiences, and reinforced by traditional institutions. The elders, as custodians of culture and

tradition, play a crucial role in defining what is considered good and ensuring its transmission to younger generations.

Elders (àbogijo) among the Igala are revered as the living libraries of societal values. They are not only the bearers of historical memory but also the interpreters of what is just and morally upright. As Achema observes, Igala elders function as "oral historians and moral arbitrators, ensuring that values of honesty, respect, and communal welfare remain central to societal life" (74). Their authority is not arbitrary but rooted in experience and wisdom, making their pronouncements on good and evil highly respected. During an interview with Ojochide, from Itama, he emphasized that "a good person is one who does not only live for himself but considers how his actions affect others." He explained that the elders often gather to settle disputes, not merely by enforcing laws but by reminding offenders of their duties to the community. Their role, therefore, extends beyond enforcement to moral instruction.

While elders provide guidance, the Igala community itself functions as a moral compass, defining and upholding what is considered good behaviour. The communal nature of Igala society means that individuals are constantly under social scrutiny. Social norms, reinforced through proverbs, storytelling, and communal ceremonies, create a framework within which goodness is understood. For instance, the proverb **"Unyi kadumade, unyile anyogba"**. This means, "a house that is united, will always thrive"). This reflects the communal expectation that goodness is tied to unity and mutual support. This principle is evident in communal farming and cooperative societies, where working together for the benefit of all is considered an essential aspect of being a good person. As Okpanachi asserts, "The Igala people's moral framework is deeply embedded in their communal ethos, where good is defined by one's contribution to the well-being of others" (89).

To ensure that individuals align with the community's definition of good, social sanctions are employed. Gossip, exclusion from communal activities, and even public rebuke serve as deterrents for those who deviate from moral expectations in the past. In extreme cases, spiritual sanctions—such as invoking ancestral displeasure—are believed to befall those who persist in wrongdoing. During fieldwork in Dekina, an elder recounted a story of a man who repeatedly defied communal expectations and was eventually abandoned during a communal ceremony. "He became an outsider not because we hated him, but because he refused to uphold what is good," the elder explained. This reflects the Igala belief that good is not just an individual pursuit but a shared responsibility.

Thus, in Igala society, the role of elders and the community in defining good is profound. Elders serve as guides, ensuring that morality remains anchored in tradition and wisdom, while the community collectively upholds these values through social norms and sanctions. Goodness, therefore, is not a personal moral philosophy but a lived, communal experience where the well-being of the whole determines the righteousness of the individual.

Case Studies of Goodness in Everyday Life
The Igala people, like many African societies, have a deeply ingrained sense of morality that governs interpersonal relationships and community well-being. Goodness (Enyo) is highly valued and is demonstrated through acts of kindness, hospitality, honesty, and communal responsibility.

i.   Hospitality as a Cultural Obligation
One of the most enduring forms of goodness in Igala society is hospitality. It is considered a moral duty to welcome strangers, travelers, and visitors with open arms. According to Ochonu, "African hospitality is not just an act of generosity but a sacred duty rooted in traditional beliefs and communal living" (112).

A notable case in Abocho involves an elderly woman, who has become well-known for her generosity. She regularly provides food and shelter to visitors and travelers without expecting anything in return. In a personal interview, she shared,

"In our tradition, when you give food to a traveler, you are feeding an angel. We believe that good deeds are rewarded in unseen ways." Her selfless actions have inspired younger generations to uphold the virtue of hospitality.

ii. *Community Support during Hardship*
The Igala concept of goodness extends to communal solidarity in times of distress. This was evident in the 2023 flood disaster in Ibaji, where several families were displaced. Oral narratives from survivors recount how the entire community mobilized resources to assist those affected. A local elder, Chief Okeme, recalled in an interview, *"We believe that when one person's house is burning, the entire village must fetch water to quench the fire."* This philosophy reflects what Gyekye describes as the "ethics of communalism," where individual welfare is tied to collective well-being (86).

iii. *Truthfulness and Justice in Traditional Leadership*
Among the Igala, truthfulness is a moral virtue that defines leadership and social harmony. Oral history recounts the story of an Igala chief in Itama who was once faced with a land dispute between two families. Instead of favouring the wealthier family, he ruled in favour of the rightful owner, citing the traditional maxim: *"ochochi arikoko, ama, onwu me togwo le" (Truth may be bitter, but it is better than deceit).* His decision, though unpopular at first, later brought lasting peace to the community. According to Idakwoji, "African indigenous justice systems prioritize truthfulness over personal gains, reinforcing the ethical foundation of leadership" (54).

iv. *Moral Education through Proverbs and Storytelling*
Another significant case of goodness is the role of elders in shaping moral values through storytelling and proverbs. During a focus group discussion with elders in Dekina, they emphasized the importance of oral traditions in teaching virtues such as patience, honesty, and respect. One elder remarked, *"A child who listens to proverbs learns the way of the ancestors."* This aligns with Mbiti's argument that African wisdom traditions serve as moral compasses for the younger generation (44).

Goodness in Igala society is not merely an abstract idea but a lived experience reflected in daily interactions, community support, and leadership ethics. Whether through hospitality, communal solidarity, truthfulness, or moral education, the Igala people continue to uphold and transmit values that strengthen their society. These real-life examples highlight the enduring significance of goodness in shaping social harmony and collective identity.

Social Enforcement of Goodness
Western traditions, particularly in modern societies, emphasize legal and philosophical justifications for good and evil. The Igala approach, however, is more practical, relying on communal correction and social reinforcement. Elder Abuh Okpanachi, a respected elder from Ogugu, noted that "in Igalaland, goodness is what keeps the people together—when one person does wrong, the elders and community ensure they are corrected". This differs from the Western emphasis on institutional justice systems that operate independently of communal influence.

Religious and Spiritual Dimensions

Both the Igala and Western traditions recognize a divine aspect to morality, but their interpretations differ. Christian philosophers like Thomas Aquinas link goodness to divine law, arguing that true good aligns with God's will (78). Similarly, the Igala believe that *Ojo* (God) is the ultimate source of good, but their moral framework is also influenced by ancestral spirits and traditional beliefs. Interviews with Igala religious practitioners revealed that moral transgressions are often seen as offenses against both the community and the spiritual realm, reinforcing the idea that good is not just a human construct but a cosmic principle.

While Western philosophy provides structured theories of good, the Igala perspective is deeply rooted in lived experiences and communal harmony. Rather than abstract principles, Igala morality is practical, fluid, and embedded in daily interactions. The Western emphasis on universal moral laws and individual ethics contrasts with the Igala approach, where good is shaped by tradition, spiritual beliefs, and the expectations of the community. This comparison highlights the richness of both traditions and underscores the diversity in moral understanding across cultures.

Intersection of the Concept of God in Relation to the existence of Good and Evil

The Igala people's understanding of good and evil is deeply rooted in their concept of God (Ojo). Their religious worldview suggests that God is the ultimate moral authority, the source of all goodness, and the judge of human actions. This belief shapes their ethical principles and societal norms, reinforcing the idea that divine justice governs human affairs. However, the existence of evil poses a complex question: If Ojo is inherently good, why does evil persist?

The Igala believe that Ojo embodies absolute goodness and serves as the foundation of moral order. In their cosmology, God is the creator of all things, including the moral laws that dictate human behaviour. Idachaba affirms that "among the Igala, morality is intrinsically linked to divine will, with good deeds seen as obedience to Ojo, and evil as defiance of divine order" (67). This perspective aligns with broader African religious thought, where God is often depicted as both a sustainer and a lawgiver (Mbiti 201). In interviews with elders from Dekina and Idah, respondents emphasized that Ojo rewards righteousness and punishes wrongdoing, either directly or through natural consequences. One elder, Chief Ocholi of Idah, explained:

"We believe that Ojo sees everything. A person who does good will receive blessings, while one who commits evil will face misfortune, even if not immediately." This view reinforces the idea that morality is not just a social construct but a divine expectation.

The Problem of Evil in Igala Thought

Despite their belief in Ojo's justice, the Igala recognize the reality of suffering, injustice, and moral failings. How do they account for these? Some scholars argue that the Igala, like many African societies, attribute evil to human choices, supernatural forces, or ancestral displeasure (Kato 154). Evil is often personified in spirits or witches (Ebije 89), reinforcing the idea that wrongdoing has metaphysical implications. Another explanation is found in the concept of **Edo elichi Ojo** (the patience of God). According to this belief, God allows evil to exist temporarily to test human character or to give wrongdoers a chance to repent. This echoes a common theme in African religious philosophy where

divine justice is sometimes delayed but never absent (Gyekye 143). During a discussion with a religious leader in Ejule, Pastor Ademu expressed:

"Evil exists because Ojo allows people the freedom to choose between right and wrong. But eventually, justice comes. We see it in how the wicked never truly prosper for long."

This explanation aligns with the broader theological discourse on theodicy, the justification of God's goodness in the face of evil.

While Ojo is seen as the ultimate judge, the Igala community plays a crucial role in maintaining moral order. Elders, religious leaders, and traditional rulers serve as mediators between divine law and human society. Igala proverbs reflect this communal responsibility:

- **"*Ojo alohun, iyali enwuduu*"** (God does not close His eyes; He watches all things).
- **"*Enedu kibum' onu chojo ibumo le*"** (A person who respects the chief respects God).

These sayings illustrate how morality is both a personal and collective duty. The Igala emphasize the importance of communal discipline, as seen in traditional rituals that purify the land of wrongdoing, ensuring that divine harmony is maintained (Okpanachi 112). Thus, the Igala people navigate the intersection of God, good, and evil through a belief system that intertwines divine justice with human responsibility. Ojo is seen as the ultimate source of morality, yet evil is explained through human choices, spiritual interference, and divine patience. The role of the community further strengthens moral order, ensuring that good prevails over evil. This understanding not only shapes Igala religious practices but also their social structures, reinforcing the idea that morality is both a spiritual and societal duty.

Theological Foundations of Morality in Igala Religion

Morality (*ali enyo*) among the Igala is deeply linked to the will of God (Ojo) and the expectations of the ancestors (Ibegwu). According to Idachaba, "The Igala perceive morality as a divine mandate; one that aligns human behaviour with cosmic order" (54). The idea of moral conduct is not just about individual actions but about maintaining harmony between humans, the spiritual world, and the community. Oral traditions emphasize that the Igala derive their moral values from religious teachings passed down through generations. In an interview, Chief Onuche Ogbadu, in Dekina, explained:

"Our ancestors taught us that good behaviour is not just about pleasing fellow humans but about honouring God and the spirits that watch over us. When a person does wrong, they do not just offend their neighbour; they offend Ojo and the Ibegwu." (Ogbadu, Personal Interview)

This belief reinforces the idea that morality is not relative but absolute, defined by divine principles rather than human reasoning.

In Igala religious thought, Ojo is the ultimate moral authority. He embodies justice, righteousness, and fairness, and his will is reflected in the moral expectations of the people. Attah argues that "the Igala people do not separate their ethical decisions from their religious beliefs; morality is fundamentally tied to their understanding of God's nature" (87). Several Igala proverbs reinforce this perspective. One common saying states:

"Ojo agefu one" (God sees the heart of a person).

This proverb implies that moral accountability is not only to fellow humans but ultimately to God, who knows the truth behind every action. The theological foundation of Igala morality, therefore, is the belief that good deeds align one with divine favour, while evil actions attract divine retribution.

The ancestors (Ibegwu) play a significant role in reinforcing moral values. Igala religious belief holds that the spirits of the righteous dead continue to oversee the affairs of the living. They reward good behaviour

and punish those who deviate from moral norms. In an interview, Elder James Ekele, from Ogugu, remarked: "People think twice before committing evil because they fear the consequences from Ibegwu. If someone steals, lies, commit infidelity or disrespects the elders, the ancestors can bring sickness or misfortune upon them."

This moral structure ensures communal harmony and discourages acts that disrupt social order. Obaje highlight that "the belief in ancestral justice serves as a powerful deterrent against immorality in Igala society" (102). The fear of ancestral retribution reinforces a moral code that aligns with divine expectations.

The Igala concept of morality is also tied to the belief in divine justice. Goodness is rewarded with blessings such as prosperity, good health, and a peaceful life, while evil attracts misfortune. As Enejo explains, "Igala theology teaches that nothing happens by chance; every event, whether positive or negative, is a response to human behaviour" (69). This belief is evident in traditional Igala prayers and rituals, where people ask for blessings based on their moral conduct. For example, before embarking on any significant life event, an Igala person may pray:

"*Ojo kidenyo nwu mi, todu uchenwu bienen*." (God bless me, for I have done no wrong.)

This statement reflects the conviction that divine favour is linked to moral uprightness. Conversely, those who commit evil may experience suffering as a result of spiritual punishment, reinforcing the idea that morality is divinely governed.

The theological foundation of morality in Igala religion is rooted in the belief that moral values are divinely ordained. God (Ojo) serves as the ultimate judge, while the ancestors (Ibegwu) play a crucial role in enforcing moral order. The Igala believe that good behaviour aligns individuals with divine favour, whereas evil actions lead to spiritual and physical consequences. These beliefs, reinforced by oral traditions, proverbs, and religious teachings, create a moral system that is both theologically and socially binding. By understanding these foundations, one gains deeper insight into the Igala people's worldview and their perception of good and evil.

Rituals and Practices Connecting God and Goodness

Among the Igala people, the connection between God (*Ojo*) and goodness is deeply woven into their religious rituals and everyday practices. This relationship is not just an abstract theological idea but a lived experience reflected in ceremonies, prayers, and moral expectations. The rituals affirm the belief that goodness is divinely ordained, and adherence to these practices reinforces social harmony and divine blessings. One of the most profound ways the Igala people express their connection between God and goodness is through sacrificial offerings (*enwu ele ichebo*). These offerings, given to *Ojo* through traditional priests or elders, seek divine favour, purification, and moral guidance. Idachaba argues that sacrifice serves as a moral compass, reminding people of their duty to uphold justice and kindness in their dealings (45). Similarly, Otene suggests that communal sacrifices are not just religious acts but moral statements that reinforce the collective commitment to righteousness (67).

The practice of oath-taking (*edebo*) before *Ojo* is another significant ritual linking God and goodness. In Igalaland, individuals involved in disputes, particularly those concerning justice and truth, may be required to swear an oath invoking divine punishment if they lie. This ritual, often conducted at sacred shrines or under ancient trees considered the dwelling places of spirits, serves as a deterrent against evil and falsehood. In an interview, Onoja Egwuda, an elder from Itobe, emphasized that "no one dares take

a false oath before *Ojo* because the consequences are swift and irreversible" (Egwuda, Personal Interview).

The Igala people observe several festivals that celebrate goodness and divine presence, such as the *Ocho* festival. This festival is marked by dances, communal feasts, and storytelling sessions that highlight the virtues of honesty, bravery, and kindness. Oguche, a cultural historian, notes that the *Ocho* festival is "a time when the community renews its moral commitment, thanking *Ojo* for his guidance and reaffirming their dedication to upright living" (89).

Names and Moral Identity

Personal names among the Igala often reflect an awareness of divine presence in the pursuit of goodness. Names such as *Ojochenemi* (God is my companion) and *Ojochide* (God is my guide) serve as moral reminders. In a discussion with Igala linguist Professor Enejo Ameh, he remarked, "Our names are our theology; they teach us that God is inseparable from goodness, and this awareness shapes our actions".

Prayers and Proverbial Wisdom

Daily prayers and proverbs also reinforce the bond between *Ojo* and goodness. Common Igala proverbs such as "God does not reward evil," emphasize divine justice. Morning prayers led by elders often include petitions for wisdom, patience, and the strength to do what is right. According to ethnographer Oboni, these prayers "instill in young minds the understanding that goodness is a divine expectation, not just a social preference" (112)

Overall, the rituals and practices connecting *Ojo* and goodness among the Igala people go beyond mere religious observances; they form the ethical foundation of society. Through sacrifices, oath-taking, festivals, names, and prayers, the Igala affirm that morality is inseparable from the divine. These traditions continue to shape communal life, ensuring that goodness remains a guiding principle in both personal and societal conduct.

The Problem of Evil in the Presence of the Good God

The Igala people, like many other African societies, believe in a supreme deity, Ojo, who is inherently good, just, and benevolent. This belief raises a fundamental question: if God is all-good and powerful, why does evil exist in the world? This paradox, commonly referred to as the "problem of evil," has been a subject of deep reflection in Igala religious thought. Through oral traditions, proverbs, and religious practices, the Igala attempt to reconcile the presence of evil with their understanding of a just and good God.

Understanding the Concept of Evil in Igala Thought

According to Okpe (65), the problem of evil is a metaphysical problem which has caused disturbances in the mind of some thinkers right from the ancient period down to this our contemporary era. Among the Igala, evil (enwu bibi) is understood in both moral and metaphysical dimensions. Moral evil includes actions such as theft, murder, dishonesty, and betrayal—offenses that disrupt social harmony. Metaphysical evil, on the other hand, refers to suffering, disease, and natural disasters, which are often believed to have spiritual explanations. Scholars such as Idowu argue that in African religious philosophy, evil is not attributed to God but to human agency, malevolent spirits, or mystical forces (178). The Igala people believe that evil exists due to human free will and spiritual imbalance. Personal interviews with an elder and religious leader in Dekina reveal that suffering is often interpreted as the consequence of

wrongdoing or failure to adhere to traditional religious norms (Onoja, Personal Interview). However, when misfortune strikes the innocent, it is sometimes explained as a divine test or punishment for communal sins.

The Role of God in the Existence of Evil
Despite recognizing the presence of evil, the Igala hold that Ojo remains good and just. This perspective aligns with the broader African view that God does not directly cause evil but allows it for reasons beyond human understanding (Mbiti 201). Evil is often seen as part of the cosmic balance that teaches moral lessons and ensures justice. For instance, an Igala proverb states:*"Ojo alolu oji ujin" (God does not sleep over injustice).*

This proverb reflects the belief that even when evil prevails temporarily, divine justice will ultimately triumph. This perspective mirrors John Hick's "soul-making" theodicy, which argues that suffering and evil serve a moral and spiritual purpose, refining human character (292).

Traditional Explanations and Responses to Evil
In Igala traditional thought, evil is countered through religious rituals, moral discipline, and community intervention. The role of elders and religious leaders is crucial in addressing evil through arbitration, sacrifices, and prayers. Rituals such as *Ibegwu* (ancestral reverence) and *ochidaka egwola fe* (cleansing sacrifices) are performed to restore harmony when evil disrupts society. Chief Adejoh, a traditional religious leader in Abocho, explained that rituals play a significant role in restoring spiritual balance:

"When evil persists, we consult the ancestors and perform sacrifices to seek Ojo's guidance and justice. The world is not just physical; we must act both in the seen and unseen realms" (Adejoh, Personal Interview).

This belief in divine justice is reinforced by the Igala understanding of *ofo ule* (retributive justice), which teaches that wrongdoers eventually face consequences either in this life or in the afterlife.

The problem of evil remains a significant theological and philosophical question among the Igala people. While evil exists, it does not negate the goodness of Ojo; rather, it serves as a moral and spiritual test. Through rituals, moral teachings, and communal responsibilities, the Igala strive to mitigate evil and uphold divine justice. Their perspective aligns with broader African religious thought, emphasizing that God is good, even in the presence of suffering.

Navigating Between Traditional Norms and Contemporary Moral Values
Among the Igala people, the concepts of good and evil are deeply woven into the fabric of their cultural and religious traditions. These ideas have historically been shaped by communal values, ancestral wisdom, and religious beliefs. However, as modern influences, globalization, and new moral philosophies interact with Igala traditions, navigating between traditional norms and contemporary moral values becomes a complex reality. Traditionally, morality among the Igala people is communal rather than individualistic. Ethical conduct is measured by how well an individual aligns with societal expectations, which are rooted in ancestral wisdom and religious beliefs. The elders, chiefs, and religious leaders serve as custodians of these moral values, ensuring that behaviours align with what is considered good (enyo) and avoiding actions deemed evil (ẹnwu bibi) (Ejima 112).

Among the Igala, acts of goodness include honesty, respect for elders, and communal responsibility, while evil is seen in actions such as theft, dishonesty, and disrespect. According to Igala traditional ethics, an

individual does not exist in isolation but in relation to others, and morality is evaluated based on one's contribution to the well-being of the community (Abubakar 78).

With the increasing influence of Western education, urbanization, and globalization, new moral perspectives challenge and sometimes reshape traditional Igala ethics. For instance, while traditional values emphasize unquestioning respect for elders, contemporary views advocate for dialogue and the questioning of authority, especially when cultural practices conflict with universal human rights (Adejo 134). Furthermore, gender roles and expectations, once rigidly defined in Igala tradition, have evolved due to modern influences. Chief Ocholi, remarked: "In our time, a woman's role was clear—taking care of the home, obeying her husband, and ensuring family unity. But today, our daughters want to be leaders, teachers, and professionals. Some see it as disobedience to tradition, but others see it as growth."

This shift in values reflects a broader trend in which young Igala people increasingly balance respect for tradition with their personal aspirations and exposure to contemporary ideas. The coexistence of traditional norms and contemporary moral values often leads to conflicts. One notable area is in marriage and family structures. Traditionally, arranged marriages were common, and divorce was discouraged. Today, however, younger Igala individuals advocate for love-based unions and the right to divorce when necessary. This has led to debates on whether such changes signify moral decline or moral evolution (Onuche 198).

Another key area of tension is in justice and conflict resolution. Traditional Igala society resolves conflicts through elders' mediation and spiritual interventions, such as invoking ancestral curses on wrongdoers. However, younger generations increasingly prefer legal and institutional approaches, seeing them as more objective and less prone to bias (Egwu 156).

Rather than outright rejection of one moral framework in favour of another, many Igala people find ways to integrate traditional and contemporary values. For instance, while many young people no longer fully subscribe to traditional justice systems, they still respect the role of elders in guiding moral conduct. Similarly, while arranged marriages are declining, family approval remains an important factor in partner selection. An Igala woman, Mrs. Enejo, shared in an interview:

"We are learning to blend both worlds. I still kneel to greet my elders, as is our custom, but I also teach my daughters to stand up for themselves when something is wrong. Tradition and modernity can work together." (Enejo, Personal Interview)

Therefore, navigating between traditional Igala norms and contemporary moral values is not about choosing one over the other, but about finding harmony between them. While globalization and modern ideas have introduced new perspectives on morality, the Igala ethical system remains deeply rooted in communal responsibility, respect, and spirituality. Understanding this interplay allows for a richer and more balanced moral worldview that preserves cultural identity while embracing beneficial changes.

Finding a Bridge between Good and Evil in our Contemporary Igala Community
The tension between good and evil is an ever-present reality in human society. Among the Igala people, this duality has shaped moral expectations, social norms, and religious beliefs. While traditional values strongly uphold the ideals of goodness—such as honesty, respect for elders, and communal responsibility—modern influences, including globalization, economic struggles, and political instability, have complicated moral boundaries. The need to find a balance between these moral opposites is crucial for sustaining harmony in contemporary Igala society.

One of the challenges facing the Igala community today is the erosion of moral values due to economic pressures and political corruption. Elder Ocheni, lamented that "in the past, stealing was abominable, and a thief would be ostracized, but today, some thieves are celebrated because of their wealth". This shift raises an important question: Has the meaning of good and evil changed, or have the standards simply been adjusted to fit new realities? Omede argues that moral relativism is taking root in Igala society, making it difficult to define absolute good and evil (89). He points out that traditional justice systems, once effective in maintaining order, are now competing with modern legal structures that do not always reflect indigenous moral codes. The weakening of communal bonds, where families and clans once played an active role in regulating behaviour, has contributed to a moral crisis (92).

Therefore, finding a balance between good and evil in contemporary Igala society requires a multifaceted approach. First, traditional values must be revitalized through family teachings, community dialogues, and religious institutions. Churches and mosques in Igala communities play a significant role in shaping moral consciousness, often preaching against corruption and dishonesty. However, their influence is sometimes undermined by the very leaders who fail to practice what they preach (Ocholi 134).

Secondly, educational institutions should integrate indigenous moral teachings into their curricula. A retired schoolteacher, emphasized the need to include Igala proverbs and folktales in moral education, stating that "stories are powerful tools that shape our moral compass" (James, Personal Interview). These narratives often illustrate the rewards of good behaviour and the consequences of evil actions, reinforcing moral values in young minds.

Thirdly, economic empowerment programmes must be encouraged to reduce the desperation that drives many into unethical practices. Poverty and unemployment have contributed significantly to the moral decline in Igala society, especially the prevalence of cybercrime commonly known as yahoo plus, which involves the killing of humans for rituals. As Oguche asserts, "A hungry man is vulnerable to both temptation and manipulation" (47). Providing sustainable livelihoods can reduce the moral compromises people make for survival.

In other words, the struggle between good and evil is not unique to the Igala people, but the way it is navigated within the community reflects its cultural and religious identity. While traditional values offer a moral framework, contemporary realities demand adaptability. By fostering a moral rebirth through education, religious engagement, and economic empowerment, the Igala people can bridge the gap between good and evil, creating a society where ethical integrity thrives despite modern challenges.

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