



## Research Article



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Section: Philosophy and Religion



Published in Nairobi, Kenya  
by Royallite Global.

Volume 2, Issue 3, 2021



## Article Information

Submitted: 28<sup>th</sup> October 2021Accepted: 15<sup>th</sup> November 2021Published: 10<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Additional information is  
available at the end of the  
article

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ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)

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## How to Cite:

Ansah, R., & Segbefia, M. (2022). Elements of philosophy in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 2(3). Retrieved from <https://www.royalliteglobal.com/advanced-humanities/article/view/716>



## Elements of philosophy in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958)

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### Abstract

An examination of the position of any school of thought on the nature of African philosophy will lead one to the realization that traditional African cultures are very relevant to the study of (indigenous) African philosophy – at least to the extent that both ethno-philosophy (philosophy based on cultural values and practices of a given society) and philosophic sagacity (philosophy as derived from sages in a given society) are still relevant. This gives a clear and imperative indication that discussions on what African philosophy is, or should be, cannot be devoid of culture. The mention of traditional cultures means that there are in Africa a variety of ethnic groups with cultures that vary or differ in several respects. Nevertheless, there are some underlying similarities that run through these cultures which justify speaking of an African traditional cultural heritage which has been preserved and passed down the generations. It is in respect of exhibiting this traditional culture that literalists have written insightful books. This paper concerned itself with one of the works of the renowned African writer, Chinua Achebe. His literary work, *Things Fall Apart*, just like the writings of other authors, presents philosophical elements in various forms, including; religion, proverbs, idioms, folk music, songs and folklores. Our aim, in this paper, was, primarily, to identify these indigenous African cultural traditions in *Things Fall Apart* and to draw out the elements of philosophy embedded in them.

**Keywords:** epistemology, ethics, ethno-philosophy, metaphysics, philosophic sagacity

### Public Interest Statement

Philosophical areas that have been emphasized in this study include metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics – the main branches of philosophy. Lots of African writers (literalists) have written books (novels) that have lots of elements of philosophy in them. Some of such writers include but not limited to Ama Atta Aidoo, Chinua Achebe, Kofi Awoonor, Ayi Kwei Armah, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ngugi wa Thiong'o among others. This article has proffered that these elements of philosophy in these literary works, especially as found in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, are too important to ignore.

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## Introduction

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* falls within the literary/artistic trend/current in African philosophy. This novel captures the traditional setting in a traditional Igbo community during the era of the British colonial rule in Africa. *Things Fall Apart* is an admixture of Western semantic forms and indigenous African literary and fictional traditions. It is also laced with Igbo folktales, fables, proverbs, words and phrases, folklore and other features of oral and indigenous African communal storytelling traditions. Achebe exploits these elements in his novel to provide us with information on Igbo metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. It could be said that African philosophy is better described by its cultural traditions and values and not by either racial dimensions or the content of methodology of the people's thought. It is in this context that Godwin Sogolo (1990) defines African philosophy as any philosophical thought which has been developed in the African tradition. To corroborate this view, C. B. Okolo (1990, p. 10) defines African philosophy as:

A path to a systematic coherent discovery and disclosure of the African as a being in the African world. Through this knowledge or disclosure of himself and his world by critical reflection, the African grasps reality that is to say attains the truth about man and the cosmos in its entirety.

To throw more light on this, C. S. Momoh (1988, p. 40) also opines that African philosophy consists of:

African doctrines or theories on reality (Being) and the universe which is made up of things like GOD, gods, life, life after death, reincarnation, spirits, society, man, ancestors, heaven, hell, things, institutions, beliefs, conceptions, practices etc.

In all, what one can infer from the above definitions and descriptions of African philosophy is that, it is basically a philosophical system that is distinctively African. It is a project that examines African experiences on the African continent. It is an activity that investigates the traditional African mode of reflection, conception and interpretation of reality, the world and the place of the African in the cosmos. The article brings out these elements as could be derived from *Things Fall Apart*.

## Designs and Methods

The articles used discourse analysis (as its method) in teasing out the elements of philosophy in Achebe's work aforesaid.

## Elements of metaphysics in *Things Fall Apart*

The study of being and the nature of reality are the preambles of metaphysics. Metaphysics can be defined generally as that branch of philosophy which deals with the investigation of ultimate reality (Omeregbe, 1996). According to Alfred North Whitehead, metaphysics is the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element

of our experience can be interpreted (Whitehead, 1929). A. J. Ayer (1975, p. 23) briefly defines metaphysics as that branch of philosophy which studies the fundamental questions about the structure of reality.

Whichever way we define metaphysics, the important thing is that it is a transcendental science that deals with transcendence of being in particular and reality in general. It is plausible, perhaps, to say that no rational human being(s) can exist without forming any view(s) about reality, existence and the physical world. Consequently, Africans, as they went (and continue to go) through life, observe(d) the world and then made (make) reflections on reality and existence. African metaphysics can be said to be the African way of perceiving, interpreting and making meaning out of interactions among beings, and reality in general. African metaphysics can also be seen as the African theory of being, doctrine on reality, or notion of transcendence which constitutes first principles for organizing experiences. It is the African method of “transcendental inquiry” (Iroegbu, 1995:26). Consequently, African metaphysics is the totality of the African’s perception of reality. The general trait or characteristic of any metaphysical system which is distinctively African is that it is basically integrative. By integrative metaphysics, we simply mean African metaphysics is a metaphysics of harmony, which in turn makes African philosophy as a whole a philosophy of harmony (Onyewuenyi, 1994:27).

In addition, referring to traditional African metaphysics as being integrative metaphysics is to say that African metaphysics is the metaphysical system which regards spirit, force, life-force, or vital-force as the primordial principle which permeates all things and is responsible for unity in diversity. It is a metaphysical system which sees spirit, which includes, mind, idea, subject and all things mental or spiritual and matter including body, object and all things physical, as being equi-primordial and complementary (Okoro, 2011:5). In C. S. Momoh (1989:8), African metaphysics is the “African doctrine on the spiritual”. Thus, for the African, “the concept of reality encompasses the totality of everything that exists: visible or invisible, real, actual or potential” (Momoh, 1989:8). The above definitions of African metaphysics and what it entails are very much reflected in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. In the first place, Achebe uses both proverbs and myths to exhibit the African, or specifically, the Igbo conception of the nature of the cosmos and the ultimate cosmic principle.

The traditional Igbo believes that the ultimate cosmic principle is ‘being’ which also denotes an existent force. ‘Being’ can be described or defined as “what is” or “whatever exists.” According to Ozumba (2004), ‘being’ is a generic term which represents all existing things. The appropriate Igbo word for ‘being’ would be *adu* or *adi* meaning ‘to be’. Here, *du* which is the short form of *ihe na du adu*, connoting that which endows entities with life and *di* which is a short form of *ihe di adi*, meaning that which is primordial; would refer to ‘being’ as the primeval source embodied in all reality, the ground in which reality is rooted and garners nourishment, or simply the fountain from which everything derives. From *adu/adi* (being) would then derive *mmadu/mmadi* (human being) and all that is endowed with life (i.e. *ndu*). ‘Being’ in the African context is multiple – positing plurality of being.

Cosmologically, the Igbo believe in the existence of a Supreme Being responsible for bringing the universe into existence. The Igbo, according to Edeh (2007:124) are more realistic than tentative in their conception and presentation of reality. The Supreme Being in question

is acknowledged under various names in the Igbo language; however, the most fundamental and most frequently used are *Chukwu*, *Osebuluwa*, *Obasi bi n'elu* and *Chineke*. They are the most fundamental because all other Igbo names for God seem to have developed from them. In addressing this notion Achebe writes:

I have not heard of a message that could not wait. Or have you brought us news that *Chukwu*, the high god, is about to remove the foot that holds the world? (Achebe, 1986:23).

The concept of *Chukwu* denotes an indefinable supreme deity. The name *Chukwu* (Chi-Ukwu) derives from two words *Chi* and *Ukwu*. *Ukwu* means “biggest” “supreme,” or “highest” and *chi* means “God”. *Chukwu*, therefore, means *highest or biggest Chi* (God) (Ejikeme, 2011, p. 123). Since God is the highest in an absolute sense, He is the un-limited fullness of being, the Supreme Being. Taking *Chi* as -life (*ndu*), we see, therefore, that *Chi-ukwu* thus expresses recognition of God as the *fullness of life* – To be for Him is just to be, simply and absolutely (Edeh 2007, p. 126). From a philosophical perspective, Achebe portrays the idea that there is a *Chi* which is greater than all and it is this force that is responsible for all things and has jurisdiction both over the physical and the spiritual world (Achebe, p. 66).

In *Things Fall Apart*, one can recognize that Okonkwo, the main character, has a good *chi*. The Igbo have a saying that *when a man says yes, his chi also says yes, Okonkwo said yes very strongly so his chi agreed* (Achebe, 1958: 19). In Agbakoba's (2019:44) view, “Okonkwo, in full, is *Okolobiankwo* which means a ‘youthful man (*okolobian*) born on *Nkwo*.” Since he has a good *chi*, Agbakoba continues, “Okonkwo lives up to his name in terms of having a big family and wealth. Further, as is expected of him, he takes titles which require wealth...” (Agbakoba, 2019:44). In Chieke Ifemesia's view:

In the [Igbo] cosmology, nothing is absolute. Everything, everybody, however apparently independent, depends upon something else. Interdependence, exhibited now as duality or reciprocity, now as ambivalence or complementarities, has always been the fundamental principle of the [Igbo] philosophy of life (1969:67-8).

Consequently, to the Igbo in particular, reality is made up of the sacred and the profane or the spiritual and the material. Life exists only if these two dimensions are in union. The profane must unite permanently with the sacred and lose itself before life can become a reality. To place more emphasis on this, Mbiti (1969:74) avers that “both the physical and the spiritual are but two dimensions of one and the same universe”. Gyekye (1987) advances that the African ontology is not wholly pluralistic, neither is it wholly monistic as it comprises attributes of both. In much the same way, African ontology is neither idealistic nor materialistic as it includes both. The underlying implication here is that whatever happens in the spiritual domain is fairly represented in the physical realm. To buttress this point, Ibeh quoted in Okoye (2011:63) avers:



... The world of man and the world of the spiritual (ancestral) world are in constant causal relationship that the activity of one affects the other.

Another element of metaphysics in *Things Fall Apart* is the reality of spiritual forces. On this, Mbiti stipulates that, “myriads of spirits are reported from every African people and the class of the spirits is an essential and integral part of African ontology” (1969:105).

The reality of the supernatural powers possessed by the spirits is undeniable and indubitable in the traditional African setting. It is believed that when one gains their support one is feared among one’s peers and the entire society. This is the reason why Umuofia (Okonkwo’s village, in *Things Fall Apart*) is feared by its neighbouring communities. Umuofia was powerful in war and in magic and its ‘medicine’ men were feared in all the surrounding villages. It was even said that its most potent war ‘medicine’ known as *Agadi Nwayi* was as old as the community itself (Achebe, 1958:8). Vital forces and the influence of spiritual entities are central to the African conception of reality.

Metaphysically, Africans, as we can infer from the above, believe in the existence of the immaterial as much as they believe in the existence of the material but the two are not distinct independent substances as posited by Rene Descartes. The traditional African believes that the spirit world is not far from our physical world. The traditional African believes that souls are reincarnated. Mbiti (1977) holds the notion that when a person dies that person is not totally banished from the family but rather the person can come back in other forms. Traditional Africans through divination or other esoteric means claim to be capable of detecting when and which spirit has returned. For Africans, both good and bad souls are reincarnated (Ozumba, 2004).

Another metaphysical element expressed in *Things Fall Apart* is the use of myth. A myth can be described as “a traditional story concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary). C. S. Momoh describes African myth as myth par excellence, a myth about the unity of things, the existence of God and spirits which gives meaning to our experiences and life and also gives direction and purpose to our human activities (Momoh, 1989: 144). Achebe used mythology (myth) to typify African philosophy when he wrote about great heroes and wrestlers whose fame rested on solid personal achievements (Achebe, 1958:1). The reality of such heroes shows, among other things, the metaphysical component of philosophy in *Things Fall Apart*. Umuofia was revered and held in high esteem through the deeds of the heroes who showed bravery on the battle field and on the wrestle ground. For instance, Okonkwo, the famous hero, had brought honour to his village by throwing down Amalinze, ‘the cat’ (Achebe, 1958:1).

Thus, we can clearly see the metaphysical elements present in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. This goes a long way to suggest that philosophy is present in African literary works. These indigenous African cultural traditions with rich elements of metaphysics are beneficial to the study of African philosophy.

### **Elements of ethics in *Things Fall Apart***

The word ethics derives from the Greek *ethos* which translates as habit, custom or character. Ethics is used interchangeably with moral philosophy. Ethics/moral philosophy is that branch

of philosophy that deals with morality (Ozumba, 2001:4). In this context, ethics is the study of universal values like human or natural rights, the essential equality of all men and women, concern for health and respect and obedience for the rule of law. In discussing African ethics, it is, perhaps, significant to differentiate between taboos, customary behaviour and morality as each comes with its peculiar accompanied elements. Wiredu (1983) opines that among the Akan, there are certain acts which are regarded as customary. To these people, these acts are considered customary because it is a tradition that was performed generations ago. And have been passed on from the fore-fathers and for that reason such practices must continue to exist and be performed.

Etymologically, the word 'taboo' derives from the Polynesian term *tabu* which is literally translated as 'forbidden' or 'prohibited' (Sarpong, 1974:51). The term *tabu* is, in some sense, equivalent to the Greek *sacer*, the Hebrew *kadesh*, the Igbo *nso* and the Akan *mmusuo*. (Odejebi, 2013:221-2). For instance, in nearly all African societies including the Akan (Osei 2006:47) and the Igbo (Aguwa, 1993:541) it is a taboo to engage in sexual intercourse in the bush, farmland or on the bare floor.

Morality, which is universal and relevant to all human cultures and societies, can be described as the adherence to rules for the peaceful co-existence and general welfare of all people in a community. In a wider scope, it involves conforming to those requirements motivated by an ingenious understanding of the wellbeing and concerns of other people even at the detriment of one's own welfare (Wiredu, 1983). Tempels (1959) observed that among the Bantu, morality is regarded as something significant to the harmonious or continuous existence of the society and not as something created by the gods, any person or societal leader. Consequently, any contravention of the laid down moral arrangement affects the whole society and therefore draws grave societal consequences.

The indigenous African way of living is essentially communal and this explains why Africans see "themselves as their brother's keeper" (Izibili, 2009:13). Individualism (subjectivism) and selfishness (egoism) are seriously frowned upon and are not encouraged at all since they appear alien and repugnant to traditional African norms and moral values. In elaborating on the communal living of the African, J. V. Taylor opines that:

Man is a family. The living chain of humanity, in which the tides of world-energy ebb and flow most strongly, stands at the heart of the great totality of being. The underlying conviction remains that an individual who is cut off from the communal organism is nothing. As the glow of a coal depends upon its remaining in the fire, so the vitality, the psychic security, the very humanity of man, depends upon his integration into the family. There are many who feel that the spiritual sickness of the West, which reveals itself in the divorce of the sacred from the secular and in the loneliness and homelessness of individualism, may be healed through a recovery of the wisdom which Africa has not yet thrown away (Taylor 1963:99).

From the quotation above, we can deduce that man in traditional African thought, is never to be perceived as a self-existing entity (Tempels 1959:71). This takes one to Mbiti's (1969:14) dictum; "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am," which means that the African person exists

because of the existence of his or her community, the absence of which the person ceases to exist. Society is not in the first instance structured in terms of rights but rather in terms of duties. In the African understanding, priority is given to the duties which individuals owe to collectivity, and their rights are seen as secondary to the exercise of their duties. According to African receptiveness, people should be valued for what they are and not for what they could achieve (Wethmar, 2006:255). In *Things Fall Apart*, Umuofia is presented as a communal community made up of nine villages. Okonkwo's killing of Ikemefuna has been described as the knottiest dilemma in the novel. The notion that the traditional African sees himself as his 'brother's keeper' becomes evident here. Okonkwo was cautioned by Ogbuefi Ezeudu not to bear a hand in Ikemefuna's killing.

That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death. Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it. They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom, and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father (Achebe, 1958:40).

Okonkwo committed a grave sin by killing Ikemefuna, his adopted son because he was afraid of being thought weak. His killing of Ikemefuna marked the start of his tragic end. In killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo disturbed the cosmic balance and societal harmony since killing a clansman is a crime against the earth goddess. The result was he being out of place and in discord with the hierarchy of vital forces and, in the end, he lost his vital force by committing an abomination (suicide).

African morality and moral laws are filled with beliefs and unshakable principles held from time immemorial. In *Things Fall Apart*, the people of Umuofia adhered strictly to their belief of not allowing a person with a bad *chi* to die at home. Rather such persons are sent to the evil forest. This practice presents an ethical element as it shows the idea of punishment on wrong doing. Another ethical element is presented in the novel when Okonkwo disrupted the week of peace (known as Peace of Ani) set aside by the Umuofia community by severely beating one of his wives when she angered him. Such an act is unheard of and was considered a crime against the earth goddess, Ani. We should note here that there are established laws, customs, rules of conduct, regulations, taboos, observances etc. in all African societies which constitute the code of conduct and moral laws and that regulate the life of the community. Most of these laws, customs, rules of conduct etc. are not written legal codes showing what is legal or illegal; however, they are supposed to be known by all members of the society. Even so, some of these codes are believed to have been formulated either by the Supreme Being (making them absolute) or the leaders of the community. These codes of conduct constrain individuals to live in conformity with the general welfare of the society. Confirming this, Omosade Awolalu was quoted by Kasomo (2012:149) as saying:

In African communities, there are sanctions recognized as the approved standard of social and religious conduct on the part of individuals in the society and the community as a whole. A breach of, or failure to adhere to the sanctions is sin... It includes any immoral behaviour, ritual mistakes, any offences against God or man, breach of covenant, breaking of taboos and doing anything regarded as abominable

and polluting ... To disregard the norms and taboos of the society is to commit sin.

These moral codes may not be documented but are supposed to be known, *prima facie* and *be sui generis* to all in the society as every child born into the society is taught these norms through practices. Consequently, all moral customs, codes and laws require strict adherence (Kasomo, 2012:153). In this case, for violating the sacred holiday Okonkwo was asked to pay a penalty. He was told to bring to the shrine of *Ani* one she-goat, one hen, a piece of cloth and hundred cowries the next day. Although he regretted his acts against the gods and paid the fine, he did not show his regret to the villagers because he did not want to appear weak. His pride made his neighbours believe that he no longer revered the gods and communal living and that his success had 'gone to his head'. Another instance of moral law at work is shown when Okonkwo's gun exploded accidentally killing the son of Ezeudu. This happened at Ezeudu's funeral. "It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent. He could return to the clan after seven years" (Achebe, 1958). Okonkwo had polluted the land with the blood of a clansman. To cleanse the land, he had to go into exile for seven years. This way, the earth goddess was pacified and justice was served.

Furthermore, it was immoral and a crime against *Ani* to give birth to twins. So, when Obierika's wife begot twins, they had to throw them away (Achebe, 1958). Amadi's wife, Nneka's case was even worse as she gave birth to twins each of the four times she got pregnant; forcing her to eventually flee to the missionaries when she got pregnant the fifth time for fear of giving birth to twins once more.

Finally, in taking his own life, Okonkwo committed an abomination. This act also constituted a crime against *Ani*. "It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. For breaking such a serious taboo, Okonkwo was not given a befitting funeral and burial ceremony and, in addition, he will be denied entry to the spiritual world and reunion with his ancestors and his clan and will be forever alienated from the community. To further strengthen this view, Agbakoba (2019:44-5) remarks:

... Okonkwo did not really find a way to hold his passions in check, including the darker one of the fear of public perception of any weakness in him... This irrationality drove him to participate in the killing of Ikemefuna (against the advice of the most elderly sage, distinguished *Nze* and warrior in his clan, Ezeudu, and for which his wise, brave, successful friend, Obierika, blamed him); to striking out tactlessly and beheading an agent of colonization and ultimately suicide; in a society where suicide was an abomination. The suicide gets no mourning or funeral; such a person is buried as abomination by strangers.

It could be inferred from the above that, for the traditional African, good and evil are objective and of universal cogency. This is to say, moral truth or falsity is neither relative nor subjective. There is also a connection between morality and the ontological order. To this end, objective morality is ontological, inherent and basic morality.



### Elements of epistemology in *Things Fall Apart*

The term epistemology derives from the two Greek words *episteme* meaning *knowledge* and *logos* which translates as *theory*. Etymologically, epistemology is defined as the theory of knowledge – the branch of philosophy which studies the nature, scope, extent, limit and validity of human knowledge. According to Nkulu-N’Sengha (2005:2)

African epistemology is the African theory of knowledge, which includes the African conception of the nature of knowledge, the means used to gain knowledge, the criteria for the assessment of the validity of knowledge, the purpose of the pursuit of knowledge, and the role that knowledge plays in human existence.

African epistemology, just like the other branches of African philosophy, heavily relies on indigenous African cultural traditions. Knowledge or wisdom (as the two words are mostly used interchangeably in traditional African thought) for the African comprises how deeply he comprehends the nature of forces and their relations or interactions. Philosophy in the traditional African sense relates more with the immaterial forces and elements in nature and this provides sensitive and artistic fulfillment to the traditional African. To buttress this notion Tempels (1959:73) asserts that, “true wisdom lies in ontological knowledge; it is the intelligence of forces, of their hierarchy, their cohesion and their interaction”. The African believes that, God, the Supreme Being, possesses all knowledge and wisdom in the sense that He has knowledge of all forces, their arrangement, their dependency, and their relations.

The African believes that when an old person dies, an entire library goes down or is burnt with him/her. This is just to say that the African believes that old age comes with wisdom – A case of philosophic sagacity (wisdom and or knowledge is in the bosom of sages in the society). Divine wisdom is attained when one’s flesh becomes less fleshy. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe portrayed this conception. Ezeudu, the oldest man in Umuofia as at that time cautioned Okonkwo not to take part in the killing of Ikemefuna: “That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death,” (Achebe, 1958:40). Ezeudu foresaw the consequences that would follow should Okonkwo play a part in the death of Ikemefuna but Okonkwo was blind to this. Okonkwo thought that no harm could possibly befall him since the gods had ordained it. In the end, Okonkwo suffered the wrath of the very gods he sought to appease. Ezeudu’s words have epistemic justification which materialized after Okonkwo’s predicament. Many elders understand and have knowledge of the hierarchy of beings, their nature and their interaction such that they (the elders) can, sometimes, predict the future.

Okonkwo’s friend and an elder, Obierika, also condemned Okonkwo’s action. Obierika had, also, foreseen the sinister that characterized this action, but Okonkwo would not understand. “If I were you, I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families” (Achebe, 1958:46); Obierika condemned his friend.

Achebe also demonstrated this element of old age and its relationship with wisdom when he features Uchendu, the oldest surviving member of Okonkwo’s maternal family. This man displayed a high sense of wisdom in his interactions with Okonkwo while he (Okonkwo) was

in exile. Uchendu asked Okonkwo two questions which made him (Okonkwo) feel like a child. Finally, the advice he gave to Okonkwo is “there is no one for whom it is well” (Achebe, 1958:95). This short statement is packed with wisdom. In fact, it is a knowledge claim that is practical, in that it speaks to all age groups.

Furthermore, proverbs are extensively used in Achebe’s novel to represent one of the elements of African epistemology. According to Achebe, “among the Igbo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten” (Achebe, 1958:5). Like the words of Socrates from which many philosophers tap, the words of these ‘sages’ are still in use for the wisdom they encapsulate. Proverbs fall under the type of knowledge called oral tradition. Oral tradition is simply the oral transmission (from one generation to another) of information, opinion, customs, traditional beliefs and cultural norms and values.

One of the proverbs Achebe uses is “if a child washed his hands well, he could eat with kings” (Achebe, 1958:6). This proverb reveals the honour and dignity that is associated with cleanliness and responsibility. It also depicts hands washing, a good and hygienic way of living and eating, as indispensable to honour. The truth of the proverb lies in its practicality – A case of pragmatism: The idea that truth (knowledge) is that which works (or that which gives result). The magnanimity of epistemic justification is embedded in this proverb.

Another proverb says “when the moon is shining, the cripple becomes hungry for a walk” (Achebe, 1958:7). This means people who were one time physically strong, lament their physical weakness when there is the opportunity to show activeness. In terms of strength, the aged regret what old age has brought to or taken from them.

Again, Achebe relates that “a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his greatness” (Achebe, 1958:14). This simply means good gestures pay and it is almost a replication of the English proverb “one good turn deserves another”. If you show respect to those ahead of you, those below you will, also, show respect to you. Again, the proverb “a toad does not run in the daytime for nothing” (Achebe, 1958:9) is almost a duplication of the saying “there is no smoke without fire.” A toad is a nocturnal animal and it does not run, rather it hops. Thus, a nocturnal animal seen in broad daylight, not hoping but running means that something is inappropriate. Inferring from the above, we note that there are elements of African epistemology in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Again, the core content of African epistemology includes proverbs, myth, short wise sayings of sages among others and these are what Achebe uses to depict the existence of knowledge in indigenous African oral and communal storytelling tradition.

## Conclusion

Elements of (African) philosophy as expressed in the values, customs, and traditions of the indigenous African people, are very much hallowed in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. This book, *Things Fall Apart*, explicates these elements of philosophy from the traditional African perspective. This goes a long way to suggest that indigenous Africans were demonstrating a high sense of philosophy before they came into contact with Western or Eastern philosophy. Again, we note that, to the traditional African, metaphysics, ethics and epistemology are all interconnected. This is specifically to say that, ethics and epistemology, in the African perspective, both have metaphysical background. This in turn makes African philosophy a philosophy of harmony. The

main aim of these indigenous African philosophies is to maintain the cosmic balance and societal harmony. With this balance and harmony in place, man can co-exist peacefully and in unity with the material and immaterial components of the universe. Stated differently, this would enable man to better understand the nature of forces and their interactions, and also to be able to make universal utterances that can withstand the test of time. The novel, to a very significant extent, has shown that the elements of (African) philosophy lie in the cultural domain of Africans.

**Funding:** This article did not receive funding from any source, whatsoever

**Acknowledgement:** We are grateful to colleague lecturers who assisted in reviewing this work

### **Authors' Bionotes**

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Richard Ansah: Conceived the research idea and contributed to the design of the study, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data. The two authors played a major role in the manuscript preparation and revision prior to submission and publication respectively. Michael Segbefia: He did most of the analysis of the data.

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