

***Egbe belu ugo belu: The Igbo-African Approach to the Principle of Letting-be in Martin Heidegger's Philosophy***

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**Abstract**

The treatment of the principle of *letting-be* by Martin Heidegger, reveals an attempt to articulate an actionable attitude to guide human behaviour and conduct. Heidegger believes that man is often caught in the web of prejudices and the urge to dominate while relating with his object of experience. As such, this desire to always have our object of interaction produce a specific outcome often defines our relationship with phenomenon including fellow human beings; which in turn engenders conflict and crisis. In view of this, Heidegger makes a case for man to adopt a phenomenological attitude of letting-be of reality as it is, so that nature can yield freely without necessarily creating the kind of tension that is destructive to human civilization. While this paper agrees with the notion of letting-be as attitudinal disposition which allows reality to negotiate for meaning based on the attitude of openness, respect and recognition in a non-compelling manner, it however critiques its susceptibility to misconstruction and misapplication in human relations. Consequent upon this, the objective of the paper is to reinforce this principle with the Igbo-African construct *egbe belu ugo belu, nke si ibe ya ebelu ka nku kwa ya* (literarily translated as; let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too, if one says no to the other, let its wing break). It ethically implies "live and let live". The paper adopts the method of phenomenological investigation which insists on the rule of patience, respect and openness of mind towards the object of experience.

**Keywords:** letting-be, egbe belu ugo belu, phenomenology, complementarity

**Introduction**

The concept, *letting-be*, is a phenomenological construct which emphasizes the need for human beings to allow things (reality) to come into the open on their own accord without forcing them to do so. As such, it advocates respect for phenomenon or object of experience. It holds that we should approach our object of experience with a free and open mind and allow it show itself in the very way it is, not in the way we want or wish it show itself by imposing our individual biases on the object. As a phenomenological method of philosophy,

it advocates bracketing, reframing, suspension and abstention from judgment (epoche) in order to get the truth of our object of investigation. These technical terms as used here simply represent phenomenological methods of investigation or research, by which the inquirer is expected to avoid hasty judgment and conclusion until the essences become distinct and clear without our personal opinion inferring in the interpretation. In this way, phenomenological philosophy as it is fondly called, enables us to suspend and dispel a ‘general’ or preconceived knowledge of phenomena and to bracket our idiosyncratic nuances in order for us to “focus solely on what is given as it is given ‘immanently’, and are not seduced by our naïve belief in its exactness or ‘on-hand-ness’” (Dermot Moran, 2005., p.8) .Understood in this light, it becomes a meticulous science of philosophy which exhibits the general structure of entities in their most lucid manner and promotes the study of the essential traits of objects. In this way, phenomenology translates to what Martin Heidegger calls a letting-be approach to experience, a letting-be that allows the truth of entities to manifest itself in its full light without prejudices and imposition of human categories.

As a disposition of patience, Unah (2010, p.33) states that it is “the orientational habit of letting things come into light as they are without forcing them into our ready-made, artificial, conceptual straight-jackets. For object of experience to truly show itself in its true light, we have to detach ourselves (let-be) and allow it manifest the way it is. This is why it was not a coincidence when Heidegger declared that only as phenomenology is ontology possible (Heidegger, 1962, p. 60). In other words, what Heidegger means here is that; since ontology is the study of Being or essences, for Being to truly render itself as it is, it must be approached phenomenologically. Therefore, for the proponents of the principle of *letting-be*, the objective includes among other things; to overcome such metaphysical heritage or history of philosophy which extols a tradition of vengeance and the culture of conflict all over the world, by emphasizing the attitude of patience, tolerance and mutual respect for others to hold contrary opinion if they so wish. It canvasses for attitudinal change and wants to return man to his original nature which confers on him the shepherd of his fellow humans and preserver of the earth. The problem with this doctrine as espoused by Heidegger is that it is not founded on the principle of the imperativeness of the Other as its limiting condition, hence, it is susceptible to abuse. The principle of the imperativeness of the Other is an existential doctrine which stipulates that man is not only an existing being but a being that exists with other human beings which confer legitimacy on our own existence, without the other, our own existence becomes meaningless. Simply put, the principle of imperativeness of the Other asserts the mutuality of human existence. It is for this reason that the paper contends that, although the principle (letting-be) can guarantee the attainment of truth when adopted as an investigative methodology, it cannot

be used to organize a peaceful and well ordered society because first, it is not founded on the mutuality of human existence as its basis; second, because it is open-ended. In view of this, the objective of this paper is to strengthen this loophole with the Igbo-African notion of - *egbe belu ugo belu, nke si ibe ya ebelu, ka nku kwa ya* “let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too, if one says no to the other, let its wing break”.

### **The Igbo-African Cosmology in Brief**

As made known by Uzodinma Nwala (2010), the Igbo people belong to one of the big three ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Speaking further, he says: “like their neighbours, they belong to the Negro race in Africa, and speak a language that belongs to the *Kwa group* of languages found in West and Central Africa. Their language is Igbo, with many local dialects” (Nwala, 2010, p.22). Aptly corroborated by Iroegbe (1995), what makes the Igbo nation distinct from other nationalities include: “common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, race, colour and habits, common historical experience, common destiny” (p.344). Beyond the bounds of the Nigeria enclave, the Igbo ethnic group are found in all nooks and crannies of the world; to the extent that it is fondly said in nigerian local parlance that ‘wherever one goes and does not find an Igbo speaking person there, one had better run away from that place’. They are very dynamic, industrious and hardworking people with strong drive to survive against all odds, and this explains why they are spread all around the world. It also needs to be added that the Igbo ethnic group are majorly Christians by faith.

The cosmological dimension of the Igbo community shows a well ordered, and the best form of conducting a healthy and meaningful existence. The community prior to the accidental contact it had with the Western culture, had and still has a functioning and well-balanced world view.

The term cosmology talks about the origin and general structure of the universe, its parts and laws. In view of this, the Igbo people have their view of the origin and general structure of the world. It could be recalled that right from the ancient Greek period, different attempts have been made to unravel the fundamental substance out of which everything came into existence. Whereas for Thales, the basic substance out of which everything originated is water, for Heraclitus, it is fire, and so the different views progressed. But for the Igbo, everything came into existence through spiritual substance. This spiritual substance is called *Chi*. It is through it that the principle of unity among diversity in the universe is established. Rightly captured by Onuoha (2000, p.308),

*Chi* is the source of all being. Iwugwu calls it “the essence of being”. All things were made through *Chi*, and without *Chi* was made nothing that was made. But at the heart and nerve-centre of this *Chi*

is *Chukwu* God, the centre and nuclear of this fundamental, universal substance.

So for the Igbo, everything has its root in *Chukwu*. To this end, He is referred to as *Chukwu –Okike or Chineke*, which shows His creative powers. The Igbo have two conceptions of the universe: *Elu-igwe* “sky or Heaven” and *Elu-uwa* “Earth”. These two spheres of existence also correspond to another two ontological realms of existence; *Ala Nmuo* “the spirit realm” and *Ala mmadu* “the world of man” (Nwala, 2010). The earth (*ala mmadu*), also belongs to *Chukwu* even though He dwells somewhere else above or *elu-Igwe*. He constantly meddles in the affairs of man. As the creator, He has both the powers to bring to life and to make dead. In Igbo worldview, there is a form of interplay of forces. That is, although there is a kind of division between the physical and spiritual, they are symbiotically interpenetrated in their activities. At the center of the Igbo world view is man, above him is *Chukwu* and below him are other spiritual elements (forces). In the scheme of this hierarchy, it is man’s duty to continuously maintain a harmonious relationship among other forces.

Although the Igbo world view recognizes the existence of the material or physical world, the diversities and conflict of the opposite in the universe, God (*Chukwu*) remains the unifying principle. In essence, the Igbo people are not materialists. They do not explain matter by matter, rather, they try to explain matter with spirit, that is, matter depends on spirit. Unlike the West who often draw a line between evil and good, in the views of Onuoha (2000, p.315), the Igbo “do not think it fit to assign a separate ultimate cause to evil since they realise that evil is imperfection, nonentity, the absence of good or being”.

In other words, the Igbo people have no separate place for Satan like the Christian view. For the Igbo, there is no place for a being whose duty is solely to do evil. All spirits in Igbo world view are good. “They know the art of turning evil to good account, using it to punish wrong-doing and restore the balance of justice” (ibid, p.315). As earlier stated, the concept of *Chukwu* in Igbo cosmology is so revered that man cannot relate to Him directly, rather, he relates with the lesser forces who in turn relate directly to the supreme God. This fact was demonstrated by Achebe (1958) in his book *Things Fall Apart*. In a conversation between the white missionary Mr. Brown, (the first head of the church in Unuofia) and Akunna when he (Mr. Brown) paid him (Akunna) a visit, it reads:

...we make sacrifices to the little gods, but when they fail and there is no one to turn to we go to *Chukwu*. It is right to do so. We approach a great man through his servants. But when his servant fail to help us, then we go to the last source of hope. We appear to

pay greater attention to the little gods but that is not so. We worry them more because we are afraid to worry their master. Our fathers knew that Chukwu was the Overlord and that is why many of them gave their children the name Chukwuka-“Chukwu is Supreme”.(Achebe, 1958, p.127)

As it is for the Igbo, so it is generally in all African worldviews. In other words, in the African circle, it is believed that spirits permeate everything and they are as real as any physical object you can think of. Whatever exists out there is believed to be a function of a spiritual cause (Azenabor, 2002, p.85). In a similar explanation, the Yoruba ethnic group’s cosmology for instance, contains *Olodumare* or *Olorun*, the supreme deity as the ultimate cause of all things. *Olodumare* just like *Chukwu* in Igbo view, is the creator. “*Olodumare* is the most important state of existence” ( Idowu, 1982, p.25).

During creation, it is believed that *Olodumare* gave *emi* (the breath of life) to human kind. The Yoruba divided the world between *Orun* (heaven) on one hand and *Aiye* (earth) on the other hand. The *Orun* contains the Supreme God and other lesser deities, spirits and ancestors, while *Aiye* contains man and other animate, and spiritual entities like the sorcerer and witches. Again, between *Orun* and *Aiye* are *Orunmila* the *Orisa* of divination, and *Esu*, the Yoruba Mischief maker. *Ifa* divination on the other hand, provides man with the knowledge of the supernatural. *Esu* on his part is a messenger among other divinities. According to Dopamu (2000, p.117), “*Esu* was given the office of the Inspector General of rituals. He was appointed to inspect the details of every act of worship and to make due report regularly to *Olodumare*”. Such origin and general structure of the world also pervade the nature of African philosophy which the Igbo is part of. In Igbo philosophy, spiritual essence takes the place of material importance although not in a confrontational outlook as we find in the Western versus matter dichotomy. “It is more of co-existence with nature, rather than conquest, more of collectivism, rather than individualism, more of holism, rather than atomism, more of synthesis, rather than analysis”(Azenabor, 2002, p.71). Therefore, it is in the light of the foregoing that the paper seeks to approach the concept of letting-be as explicated by Heidegger.

### **An Analysis of the Principle of Letting-be as a way to Disclosure (Aletheia)**

Letting-be is a manner of freeing ourselves from willing, in a situation where willing is understood as an attempt to impose human desire, wish and biases on the object of investigation. By habitually letting that which is separate from us (object) disclose itself to us on its own accord, we gradually acquire the character of non-objectification. Letting-be in this case, becomes a leap backward from man’s primacy position of relating to the external world. By

primacy position here, we mean man's habit of approaching object of experience from the position of superiority or from an overlord position. On the contrary, our emphasis on letting-be It becomes an adoption of the attitude of openness. In this manner, "rather than the typical "master controller" mentality, the human is listening for a new way to be and respond in its environment"(Harvey, 2008, p.50). And as further expressed in (Loscerbo (1981, p.124), "... that which is Open itself must have turned itself toward us in such a way that we are able to turn the being-without protection to it ...". Thus, to let be in this sense, means to engage being in its Beingness (essence). This of course does not imply subjective imposition or controlling engagement with being. Instead, it means an engagement that is dictated by openness and manifold senses of Being. This is what is understood in Western scholarship as aletheia. Aletheia, though understood in Ancient Greek as truth or correctness, wore a radical toga in Heidegger's interpretation. Truth, we could recall, was understood by the Greeks (most especially in the Fragments of Parmenides) as appearance or presencing. For him, everything is in continuous for Being, in which case, non-being or becoming is impossibility. Being, 'is' he contends. As such, it does not perish. And since it dwells in presence, it does not come into being. For if it was becoming, it is not being, and if it will come-to-be at some time, it is not being (More, 2015; Parmenides, Frag. 8).What constitutes truth later changed meaning in Plato as "correctness of apprehension" (Unah, 1997, p.195). In Plato, Aletheia became the being of forms as illuminated to the mind; hence, it became identical with idea or forms. It is in Heidegger's interpretation that aletheia as truth became known as unhiddenness, disclosure or unconcealment. Unconcealment for Heidegger, does not just mean the nature of Being but equally shows Dasein's mode of being (Heidegger, 1962, p.264). This view is further explained by Koskela (2012, p. 119) thus:

Unconcealment is therefore Dasein's state of being, but again, at the same time the event of unconcealment is a translucent part of the world in which Dasein uncovers things. This shows how Heidegger wishes to dismiss a subject-object duality: it is impossible to talk of truth as unconcealment merely as uncovering things or just as an aspect of human being. Unconcealment is a worldly thing, so to speak, and human being is a necessary constitutive part of that world, and vice versa.

This latter interpretation of aletheia by Heidegger, Unah (1997) says, is viewed by Paul Friedlander as fraudulent on the ground that it does not have any connection whatsoever with its Greek meaning. More so, that Heidegger's attempt at explicating aletheia as unhiddenness takes us back to subjectivity. Thus Friedlander according to Unah, insists that aletheia never at anytime meant unhiddenness, but rather correctness (Unah, 1997, pp.200-201).

Aletheia, Heidegger insists, is a way of being which frees Being from objectification and stultification. It is a way of letting-be which makes truth self-revealing, a disclosure of what keeps itself concealed. It is based on this reason that Nwodo, in the views of Unah (ibid, p.202), says that rather than arguing whether or not Heidegger's interpretation of aletheia agrees with its Greek meaning, what is more significant is the invaluable contribution it makes to the understanding of truth as openness which ushers Dasein (human beings) into Being.

In view of this understanding, aletheia as a letting, becomes a clearing through which we access our object of experience in order to grasp it as it is, not as we wish it be. In other words, letting-be as aletheia becomes a way of overcoming the subject/object contradictions, ambivalence and tensions that are prevalent in Western philosophical heritage. The ambivalence and tensions that we mean here are the dichotomous nature of the opposites, the rivalry between good and evil, Heaven and Hell, superior and inferior, Us and them, et cetera. Such was the nature of reality in western philosophical thought which Heidegger inherited. This nature of ambivalence although characteristics of the European cultural experience, seems not to have a place in the Igbo-African social order.

### **Dualistic-Complementarities in Igbo-African Social Order**

In European ethnocentric dogmatism which Heidegger inherited, a body of accepted belief is taken as sacrosanct and forever settled. To think differently under the pre-Heideggerian intervention was perceived as a deviation, heresy and obliviousness of the universal truth. Such mechanistic worldview created a single story about the world which everybody is expected to conform with in order to be accepted as civilized, developed, knowledgeable or logical. Subsequently, attempt was made to reinvent the notion of universal reality (single story) with the notion of relative reality (relativism). This in itself equally became problematic due to its tendency of assuming extreme relativism or what we may otherwise describe as "exclusive pluralism". This kind of relativity in our view, is self-defeating and a recipe for multiplied logocentrism (conflicting ideologies and systems) in place of interconnectedness of meaning and things. It is in this manner that the history of western thinking reveals a dualistic worldview where two opposite are made to confront each other (Heidegger, 1977, p.132). For instance, in Plato, there is a demarcation between appearance and essences. In Aristotle, there is distinction between matter and forms, and in Descartes, there is a split between body and mind (Descartes, 1968, pp.278-279). Thus, these thinkers portrayed reality as an irreconcilable confrontation between two elements; empirical and idealistic, matter and form, et cetera (Copleston, 1993; Kenny, 2004; Russell, 2000). In the western system, each of these opposing elements rivals against the other, sometimes, in a very destructive manner.

This is not the case in Igbo-African worldview where reality is explained and understood in its duality and complementarities. Donatus Nwoga in his 1984 *Ahiajoku Lectures* brings this phenomenon to the fore when he states that complementary view of reality by the Igbo is demonstrable right in their perception of social structure as *Oha na eze, Ikwu na ibe, Nwoke na nwanyi, mmadu na mmuo*. According to Asouzu (2013, p.30), it is through such synchronistic progression that the type of “complementary disposition needed to address reality as a missing link ensues”. This view is further buttressed by Nwala (1985, p.30) and Metuh (1992, p.51) when they both maintained that the entirety of Being in Igbo-African category of reality belongs to this bifurcated classification; Ala Mmadu na Ala Mmuo (the visible and the invisible world) respectively. In general, according to Nwoga (1984), it is in this pattern that reality forms and acts. The implication of the above categorization in the Igbo social structure is that both good and bad co-inhabit in the same reality in constantly changing form without seeable radical confrontation. Worthy to note according to Okafor (2000, p.147), is the fact that

the nature of the Igbo spirituality cherishes the need for the interaction of beings for efficacy. It is this understanding that helps the community of persons to develop and practice the culture of environmental preservation of existing realities which equally creates a balance in the natural world; trees, animals and other things in nature that today face extinction.

Okafor further states that it is within this recognition that the relationship in the community of persons among the society is sustained. This is what Nwoga (1984), describes as the mutation of reality in Igbo worldview. For Nwoga, the Igbo conception of reality is in its multi-dimensional chain of actions which makes allowance for the physical, the spiritual and psychical (abstract). According to him, both events and situations he says exist and function in dualities, thus, creating the room for the belief that what appears, may not be all there is, and that alteration is a possibility. It is this basic assumption that provides the framework for the peace between man and nature, self and the community (other). “In no way is the Igbo society known and identified with individualistic or self-centered way of life” (Okafor, 2000, p.153). In Igbo community, identifying the self with the other is the basis for conferring a full status of *ezigbo mmadu* or *onye obioma* “a good person” on an individual (Agulanna, 2011, p.142). To be sure, in Igbo community, there are levels of social action and solidarity, from the smallest clan unit down to the larger or higher unit of community socialization. In other words, you cannot adorn a full status of a responsible social being until you are indentified with a clan and then, with a certain community. This Igbo community-driven way of life

is further captured in Achebe (2008, p.132), with the Igbo social proverb which says: “an animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him”. This adage is used to reinforce the otherness of the other in social relation and to show why living in peace with your neighbour is a desirable virtue. To lend further credence to the belief in human solidarity and brotherly care, the Igbo people say that *anyi ka umu anu-manu nma n’ihi na anyi nwere umu-nne*. “we are better than animals because we have kinsmen”. Why is it so? It is because *oburu na ngwere ghara ukwu osisi, aka akpara ya* “when the lizard stays afar from the foot of a tree, it endangers itself to a prey”. Rightly observed by Iroegbu (1995, p.345), “this is a succinct proverbial expression of the indisputable and inevitable presence, not just of the family, but of the community to which the individual is born”. Thus, there is a chain of social relations and actions, beginning from the clanship or kinsmen to the larger society. The implication of this is that the basis for belonging to a larger society is one’s identification of membership with smaller units. In fact, “Without the community, there is no remaining in essence” (ibid). And when people of smaller unit assemble in the larger units to deliberate on an issue of collective importance, the ego of the smaller unit is deliberately made to take the back stage while the greater interest of the larger units is elevated, although each of the smaller units still retains its identities in the larger unit. But when an issue of conflicting interests among several units is at stake, each unit falls back to itself and maintains a common opinion without creating the kind of tension that is destructive to the social order. One remarkable thing about the Igbo social philosophy remains the fact that although the place of individual freedom to live and actualize his essence is guaranteed, it is however limited by the imperativeness of the other. Thus, there is a feeling that everybody belongs to somebody. This feeling is expressed in the following statements by the Igbo people: *oburu na ichoro iga ngwa-gwa, ga wa na nigi; ma oburu na gi choro iga te-a aka, soro ndi ozo ga wa* “if you want to go fast, go alone; but if you want to go far, go with others”. The reason for this belief is that *igwe bu ike* “there is formidable strength in collectivity”. It is in this spirit that Uchendu (1965, p.34) posits that:

Community spirit is very strong among the Igbos. Almost from the first, the individual is aware of his dependence on his kin group and his community. He also realizes the necessity of making his own contribution to the group to which he owes so much. He seldom, if ever, becomes really detached from the group wherever he may live.

In traditional Igbo Society, every child fully becomes human and adopted as such after the child had been officially presented and received into the community either through the process of ritual induction or official birth

ceremony in the presence of the members of the community. This is meant to formerly introduce the child into the self and the other way of existence of the Igbo-African people, and to teach the child that “existence is not only meaningful, it is possible only in community” (Iroegbu, 1995, p.347). *I am because we are. And because we are, therefore, I am* (ibid).

Therefore, with the forgoing process, a strong solidarity of purpose is equally demonstrated in how the Igbo conceive individual progress or failure. In other words, the community recognizes that the achievements of a single member of a community enhances the value and strengthens the existence of the community, on the other hand, when a socially despicable act is credited to a member of a community, it diminishes the value and weakens the protective force of the community. In such reciprocal chain of actions, the Igbo believe that *oburu na otu aka ruta mmanu, ozuo oha onu* “when a finger is deepened into oil, it spreads to other fingers”. It is for this reason that an Igbo person or family avoids, like plague, whatever action or inaction that is capable of bringing shame to one’s person or family name, *aha mu efula* (may my name never be tarnished or go into extinction). For this reason also, the Igbo-African view lack of shame or shamelessness as the highest immoral conduct. That is, when an individual has gotten to a level whereby he or she no longer feels the sense of shame and guilt on an immoral action or socially despicable acts, that person is said to have attained the state of deplorable moral condition. This is why Igbo communities celebrate any of their sons or daughters who may have excelled in his or her chosen field of endeavour. And accordingly, they are celebrated, hallowed titles of the land are conferred on them and certain community heritages named after them as the case may be. It is in this form that the reciprocity of relationship between the community and (although with the community being the greater partner) the individual is instilled and the individual made to see oneself as tied to the apron strings of his community in terms of social actions. When the actions of the individuals bring glory and honour to the community, the community celebrates him or her. When the reverse happens to be the case, the community wields its big stick either by imposing a stringent penalty on the defaulter or by out-rightly banishing the individual from the rest of the community as the case may be (Nwala, 2010, pp. 203-206). It should be noted however, that the modern mythical theory of “one’s enemy being the member of one’s own family or community” is indeed alien to the Igbo social order. The theory is colonial and a Judeo-Christian psychical assault on the Igbo-African person. The family, clan or community in the Igbo-African perception is not only one’s source of existence but also, the place of inspiration, succor, strength, protection, power and home. Thus, the realization of the complementary service that each individual owes to the other is the ontological foundation upon which self-interest driven actions are socially disapproved. In fact, to be sure, the Igbo-African complementary understanding of reality regards untrammelled pursuit of self interest as the root cause of conflicts, disenchantment and war in

human society. This of course is in reaction to Thomas Hobbes' (1651) claims that man is essentially selfish, that he would not move to action except driven by his appetites, desires and passions. Thus, to remedy this tendency for man to elevate his personal interest above that of the other, the Igbo introduce the notion of *egbe belu ugo belu* "live and let live".

***Egbe belu ugo belu: The Limit between the Right to Individuality and the Imperativeness of the Community***

Issuing from our discussion on the principle of letting-be as a phenomenological attitude towards instilling respect, tolerance and truth, Heidegger is persuaded beyond every reasonable doubt that the solution to the problem of our world, to the problem of alienation and instability, will be on hand should human beings learn how to let-be and by refusing to cling one-sidedly to a portion of reality (single story) as though it is all that is (Heidegger, 1966, p.61). This phenomenological attitude Heidegger says is in the very being of man as a being given the privilege by nature to care for other beings. Man, he says, needs to cultivate it and allow it to truly take root in him so that it could guide his behaviour and conduct. This view by Heidegger is further reinforced by the Igbo-African traditional sense of value and respect for the human other, anchored on the attitude of *egbe belu ugo belu; nke si ibe ya ebelu, ka nku kwa ya* (let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too, if one says no to the other, let its wing break) (Asouzu, 2007, p.394). Consequent upon Heidegger's treatment of the principle of *letting-be*, the way to depart from the habit of imposition and from "know it all" mindset is to always remain open before our object of investigation by purging ourselves of the urge to impose and dominate. It is in this way that we allow reality to express itself in the manner it deems fit. It is this principle that is at the core of the concept of liberalism, democracy and freedom.

However, there seems to be a serious problem orchestrated by the drive to actualize this principle (letting-be) in human society. While it may be the right methodology for arriving at truth and for attaining an investigative objective, it is susceptible to misconstruction and misapplication when taken to social relations. As a matter of fact, it sometimes has been mistaken for absolute freedom without bounds. For this reason, there are all forms of demand for one's social right, recognition or the other, even when granting such demand would result in trampling on another person's right. Let us take the gay right activism for instance; some persons crave freedom to express freely their sexuality in whatever form and to whoever they choose. To be sure, this phenomenon agrees with what Heidegger intended in his concept of letting-be, although cannot be sustained in this case without contradiction because it negates other people's belief and orientation about sexuality. It is on this ground that our intervention with the Igbo-African view on *egbe belu*

*ugo belu* (let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too) gains its strength. Thus, our stance is that for man to flourish and realize all his given potentials, he must not be limited by anything external to him but by his very self (his freedom). This conviction is complemented by *egbe belu ugo belu* (let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too), which has the caveat that *nke si ibe ya ebelu ka nku kwa ya* (whichever says the other should not perch, may it lose its own wing).

With this locution, the Igbo-African decrees and declares the unfettered freedom of free beings to exist, associate and actualize their essence and God given potentials. However, the only limiting condition to this privilege is a refusal to align to its dictates. Again, due to the fact that there is an unseen cord binding the individuals, their community and their gods, “the Igbo spirituality is no doubt a spirituality of peace-making” (Okafor, 2000, p.159). Since the individual freedom is only limited through the imperativeness of a well ordered society, the communal force (in terms of *ala* or the gods) becomes activated in any attempt to stretch the individual freedom and self-interestedness beyond the rights and freedom of the other to actualize his or her own aspiration and essence.

It is in this way that the expression *egbe belu ugo belu nke si ibe ya ebelu ka nku kwa ya* is made socially potent in Igbo social philosophy. Igbo spirituality strives for peace and does everything possible to bridge the gap between individual freedom and community’s sustenance. We observed earlier that there is high premium placed on personal, family or community name in Igbo society. Thus, in the quest to preserve each of the names from being dragged to the mud through an unholy action or through the drive to assert one’s individuality, the Igbo warn that one must at the same time factor in the right of other fellow humans to preserve theirs too. This is captured by Iroegbu (1995, p.348) thus:

Aham efula (let my  
name not be lost)

To which a counter-  
saying is often added:

Onye si aha ya efula,  
osi nke onye fuo?

(He who says that his  
name should not be lost,  
whose name does he  
want to get lost?)

By this, Iroegbu asserts; a balance between individual autonomy and the imperativeness of the human other is maintained. Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let its wing break.

In the Igbo social philosophy, it is believed that competition does not necessarily mean rivalry or confrontation: for if the hawk and the owl could fly without collision, why can there not be competition yet without rivalry? The philosophy of *egbe belu ugo belu*, runs contrary to predator versus prey understanding of the animal world which has characterized human relations of the contemporary world, be it at individual versus individual level or at nations versus nations level. But even within the animal world, we do observe both the hawk and owl fly without collision, how much more man who is endowed with reason to organize himself and his society? “Why cannot man live in peace and plenty without conflicts?” (Ademiluyi, 2003, p.167). In the notion of *egbe belu ugo belu*, the Igbo believe that contradictions can co-inhabit in the same system without creating unhealthy rivalry that will lead to systemic unrest and disquiet. Both *egbe* and *ugo* are contradictions which symbolize commonness and royalty respectively for the Igbo. In other words, the haves and the have-nots conveniently co-inhabit in a mutually benefiting manner in Igbo society. This then means that in Igbo worldview, social stratification does not constitute impediments to peaceful coexistence because it is viewed as the natural order of things. It is for this reason that the colonial Igbo society was able to welcome alien religious and cultural institutions even though they were antithetical to the indigenous institutions. And that is why also, the colonial Igbo society did everything possible to resist attempts made by the colonial agents to obliterate and designate the Igbo traditional institutions as fetish and barbaric. Thus, for the Igbo-African, the phenomenological attitude of letting-be of reality as it is, is an existential imperative in so far that one’s right to be is not trampled on by other’s inordinate quest to extend his beyond the naturally allotted rightful space. It must be noted that the Igbo recognize the deep rootedness of the urge for self-preservation as being the first instinct in man’s quest for self-affirmation. However, being that every human has this same instinct, the Igbo reason that to regulate these free-floating instincts and interests, socio-ethical code is very imperative. That is why in the expression *egbe belu ugo belu* (live and let live), there is a caveat *nke si ibe ya ebelu* (which ever attempts to deny the other the space to live) in between it and the next clause *ka nku kwa ya* (let its own right to live be destroyed). That is to say that in Igbo-African thought, the only condition to deprive, strip and disallow contradictions is if one’s right to exist and pursue one’s aspiration is threatened by another’s ambition to do same. This position is corroborated by the proverb *obiara igbu m gbukwaa onwe ya* (let every action targeted to negate my own existence boomerang). This condition is palpably absent in Heidegger’s treatment of *letting-be* of things as they are which his phenomenological orientation seeks to achieve. This of course reveals its weakness when trying to use it to build a peaceful social philosophy. The point is that, man has conflict domiciled in his very being. That is, there is always that tendency for him to want to stretch his freedom beyond bounds

and thereby impinging on other's interest. That is why we today have all kinds of agitations all over the world struggling for recognition. Thus, the consciousness that the Igbo try to instill in their notion of *egbe belu ugo belu nke si ibe ya ebelu nku kwa ya* is that "one's right to lift his arm stops where another's right to protect his nose begins".

Furthermore, for the purpose of clarification, the notion of *nku* as used in the expression above, symbolizes right, power and life-force. For instance, for eagles and kites to be able to fly and perch, they require power in terms of their wings. Thus, if there is an attempt to corrode one's right and power to fly and perch (one's freedom) just like the other does, the Igbo spirituality which is anchored on force insists that such aggressor must lose the right to its own power and source of vitality. In the light of this, Asouzu (2007, p. 393) avers that "all beings are therefore destined to uphold their existence only in the act of positive mutual co-affirmation, failing which they risk forfeiting their rights to exist". This form of principle in the Igbo-African thought reinforces the question of duty of care which human beings owe to each other for harmonious existence. It is this kind of principle that instills discipline, caution and enforces order in a society. The audacity of this spirituality is highlighted in Achebe's work "No Longer at Ease" with the rendering of the prayer which says: "We do not seek to hurt any man, but if any man seeks to hurt us may he break his neck" (Achebe, 1960, p.7).

This is the remarkable difference between what Heidegger's letting-be aims to achieve and what the Igbo-African *egbe belu ugo belu* (let kite perch and let the eagle perch too) phenomenological orientation has achieved. That was why individual or communal strife was at its minimal state prior to western interruption of the Igbo-culture. Therefore, in Igbo's treatment of the principle of letting-be, such open-endedness as observed in Heidegger's interpretation is closed. The implication or lessons in this is that "consistent or consequent pursuance of one's interests only, in total disregard of the interest of others, is tantamount to anti-self interest" (Asouzu, 2007, pp.393-394). This again buttresses Hobbes' (1651) conviction that covenants (laws) without sword are but mere words. The significance of the principle of letting-be (*egbe belu ugo belu*) in Igbo social philosophy is that for social order and peaceful cohesion to be achieved (in as much as it is desirable to let be of things as they are), not everything should be allowed to be, most especially if the right of one to be threatens the imperativeness of a peaceful social order.

### **Conclusion**

The discourse in this paper centered on how to redirect human action towards the path of patience, respect and tolerance for others. The paper approached this objective by appraising Heidegger's conception of the principle of *letting-be*. Our investigation into this principle revealed that it is an attitude of

refusing to impose one's will and prejudices on object of experience. The paper argued that the era of ordering, manipulation and objectification calls for patience towards things because ordering tends to dictate and determine how we respond to everything in our daily life (Holfstadter, 2001, p.xvii). But, the very moment we begin to see things as not having absolute consequence, instead, being subject to something higher; creates an atmosphere of tolerance and gives us open-ended arrays of perspectives to experience. The paper agreed with the aim of this principle as articulated by Heidegger. However, it argued that although it could work perfectly when applied to the quest for arriving at truth; it could be counter-productive if the objective is to attain a well-organized society. In lieu of this, the study injected into the principle (letting-be) the Igbo-African concept *egbe belu ugo belu* (live and let live) which is an existential imperative anchored on duty of care towards others as the only limiting condition to freedom.

Therefore, having recapitulated the thrust of the paper, it is pertinent to state here that for humanity to truly evolve a certain kind of value that can reinforce human freedom, mutual respect, inclusiveness and reciprocal solidarity against all divisive tendencies that characterize human relations today, the fastest route is by allowing an ethical principle that is anchored on 'self' and 'Other' to take root in man. This is because it is only a doctrine that takes root in man that can trigger a permanent change in his conduct. The self and other ethical principle as evident from our analysis of the concept of letting-be in this paper, is one founded on tolerance and accommodativeness of the Other as the standard for measuring man's humanity. This is exactly what the Igbo *egbe belu ugo belu* doctrine reinforces. As a call for attitudinal reformation, the concept further warns humanity in general and people of Igbo descent in particular, to continue to shun all practices and utterances that tend to alienate, marginalize and demean human dignity thereby depriving humanity the commitment and solidarity necessary to make the world a better place of abode. Against all forms of divisiveness and aggressiveness in the world today, the paper restates that man as a being-with-Others, must continue to play the role of a shepherd in order to preserve human civilization from total decimation. This is because, alone, one can achieve little; together, our limit knows no bound.

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