

A Critical Analysis of Eti-Owo in Ibibio Ethics

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Abstract—This paper critically analyses the concept of Eti-owo (good person) in Ibibio communitarian ethics. Rooted within the afro-communitarian ideology, Ibibio communities determine who is considered Eti-owo (a good person) by adjudging a person's adherence to community standards, norms, traditions and values as well as significant contributions towards the development of the community. The bestowment of this status is usually done by the community through a chief or an elder, who is revered as a wise person. Most often than not, this status is conferred upon wealthy individuals who have contributed significantly in community development. The Eti-owo status cannot be self-assigned or subjectively determined. This promotes absolutism in supremacy of communitarian collective identity over individuality in conferring this status. Nonetheless, the over reliance on antiquated doctrines as sine qua non in determining and bestowing the Eti-owo status on a person raises concerns. Within the trajectory of contemporary views, reliance on these doctrines may not align in totality to what makes one Eti-owo (a good person). This concern necessitated this study to raise the philosophical question: how can the Eti-owo ideology be modified to reflect contemporary realities where absolutism does not have a space to situate its existence; where individualism plays a role in determining who Eti-owo is? This paper used the critical and analytic methods of philosophical investigation in its attempt to address this concern. The paper introduced the idea of a subjective-communal good which will reduce the extremism or absolutism of the communal judgment in assessing Eti-owo within the contemporary Ibibio communitarian purview.

Keywords: Ethics; Eti-owo; Ibibio; Afro-communicatarian; absolutism.

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INTRODUCTION

The ideas of “goodness” and “personhood” proliferates studies and practices of African Ethics. Since the Ibibio culture and its ethical valuations sits within the circumference of African ethics, these ideas are intrinsic within its communitarian ethics (Okon, 2003; Okon & Noah, 2004). As asserted by Umotong's (2015), that the idea of Good, ‘Eti’ in Ibibio parlance, is indeed deeply rooted in the norms, tradition and culture of the people of Ibibio communities. As a matter of fact, Ibibios from time immemorial have juxtaposed these two concepts to form a highly sort after ethical cum society status, the *Eti-owo* (good person) status.

The notion “good” is one that has attracted a lot of definitions. The definition of the concept is mostly dependent on what the scholar is trying to get at. This is why Subjectivists hold that the meaning of “good” is relative depending on situations and person, while the absolutists are of the opinion that the concept has a statics connotation or meaning regardless of person and situations. Given these controversies, one cannot truly point to which school correct or not. Since the concept of good (*Eti*) has received many connotations (as aforementioned), it is herculean if not impossible to give a suitable meaning to the concept in a vacuum without recourse to ethics. According to Moses Udoh (2014), ethics deals with concepts such as norm, standard, pattern of behaviour considered normal in the society. This provides the required parameters through which good can be defined. With this view, Udoh (2014) has shown how ethics, in this context what is good, becomes a standard of the society. The society becomes a yardstick through which goodness is determined, a good person without aligning to the rule and norms of the society cannot be called good (*eti*). This way, the majority of the people would certainly agree that some activities are evil and others are good (Umotong, 2015).

While many believe that “good” (*Eti*) is subjective and not communal nor objective, this is not the case for the Ibibio people with regards to the idea of good person. The idea of good (*Eti*) when it involves the Ibibio people is an objective or universal thing, a good person is expected to be seen by all and appreciated by the community. The Ibibio adage which says “*eti owo ke nyin inie ami*” meaning “this is a good person that WE have” has shown how important and relevant the communal judgment is to the Ibibio people.

On the other hand, in this paper, a “person” (*Owo*, in the Ibibio language) is conceived from an Afro-communitarian point of view. Personhood in Ibibio ethics or Ibibio culture is not merely an ontological status conferred at birth but is deeply rooted in the individual’s active role within the community. The Afro-communitarian understanding of personhood emphasises the interconnectedness between the individual and the community, whereby one becomes a person through meaningful relationships and contributions to collective well-being. As Mbiti famously stated, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti, 108), illustrating that personhood is relational and social rather than individualistic. Similarly, Kwasi Wiredu (1980) emphasises that personhood is an achievement, not an inherent state, shaped by

one's moral responsibilities and communal engagement. However, scholars like Eyo (59), criticise this normative understanding of personhood as being selective and exclusionary.

In Ibibio culture, the recognition of one's personhood is thus contingent on the individual's integration into the social fabric, where the community validates their moral worth and social identity. In Ibibio ontology, "Owo" refers to person, the "Owoism" (person hood) in Ibibio is not given by the virtue of ontology but by man's upright and meaningfulness in the community, this is achieved when one is in line with the culture and traditions of the people (Etuk, 2023). Therefore, personhood is a dynamic, evolving concept that is nurtured through the individual's alignment with communal values and expectations, highlighting the Afro-communitarian belief that a person's identity is intrinsically tied to their contribution to the community. As a result of this, the Ibibio people perceive a good person, or *Eti-owo*, from a perspective of communal and cultural acceptance.

Eti-owo (good Person) is achieved through a total compliance to the culture, norms, traditions and myth of the Ibibio people (Etuk, 2023). *Eti-owo* is also judged based on one's functionality and role within the community. An individual's status and contributions can further solidify their recognition as a good person. Additionally, goodness is a key criterion for aesthetic appreciation in Ibibio culture. An *Eti-owo* is someone whose life is meaningful and impactful within the Ibibio cultural context (Peter 14). A good person can be recognised by the elders, who are regarded as the wise ones in Ibibio society, and whose judgment is believed to be good and right. In contrast, a bad person (*Idiok owo*) is someone who goes against communal values, beliefs, traditions, and standards of morality (John, 1993).

Therefore, this paper critically examines the concept of *Eti-owo* (a good person) within Ibibio communitarian ethics, rooted in Afro-communitarian ideology. It explores how Ibibio communities determine *Eti-owo* status based on adherence to communal norms, values, and significant contributions to community development. Traditionally, this status is conferred by respected elders or chiefs, often on wealthy individuals who have positively impacted the community. However, the reliance on antiquated doctrines in bestowing this status raises concerns in light of contemporary views that emphasise individualism. This study seeks to address the philosophical question of how the *Eti-owo* concept can be re-evaluated to accommodate modern realities, where individualism and communal values coexist in determining moral worth.

THE IBIBIO PEOPLE

The Ibibio is a tribe in the south-south region of Nigeria, specifically in Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. They are peculiar in their culture, traditions, and myth of which ethics is a prominent factor (Etim et al., 2018). Ibibio is both a tribe and a language, we can rightly say that *eti-owo* is an Ibibio language and we can say that Ibibio being a language is also a tribe. The Ibibio language is probably one of the mother languages of the ancient Proto-Banta nation. (Okon & Akpan, 2001). The Ibibiodum comes from an Ibibio

culture, it is a coming together of the Ibibios which is majorly from the culture, traditions, folklore, beliefs and might of the people which is believed to be in existence from antiquity. According to Etuk (2023), Ibiodum or Ibibioism is a coming together of the Ibibio people for a common purpose.

Ibibio is both an ethnic and linguistic term. All the Ibibio people speak and understand the Ibibio language with same culture. They are related to the Annang, Eket, Oron, Igbo, Efik and cluster of some notable ethnic functions. During the colonial era in Nigeria, the Ibibio union envisaged the need to unite as one nation thus request for recognition by British as a sovereign nation. Indeed without the knowledge of the past history, origin and culture are like tree without roots. Ibibio arrived the present home at about 7000BC. They were also rich in culture and keep to some mystical belief in (Eset-ancient belief), Ekpo culture, *Ntak* (cause), *Mbiam* (Oath), *Mme Mbio Owo* (elders). And to the Ibibio's *Eti-owo ado uyai owo* (a good person is a beautiful person).

ETI-OWO FROM THE COMMUNAL PERSPECTIVE

The concept of *Eti-owo* in Ibibio ethics is shaded from the communal perspective. Just like Menkiti (1984) noted that it is the community that gives the true meaning of a person, the Ibibio idea of *Eti-owo* is not farfetched. *Eti-owo* in Ibibio ethics has a communal yardstick, and hence one cannot say that, he/she is an *eti-owo* without the communal approval in Ibibio. There is no room for a subjective approval of who a good person is, hence there is a total superiority of the community to that of an individual. For instance, there is a village in Ibibio land called "Ndiya-Ikot Ukap" in Nsit Ubium, this village is in the land of where the community decides everything including the aspect of the citizen's life. For a man to even weed the frontage his house or his roadside and leave the other places untouched, the person has not met the requirements of an *Eti-owo*, as *Eti-owo* must follow from a general or communal satisfaction. In this case, it is the community first before the person. Whenever one weeds or clears the road side of only his household, it is believed that such person is egoistic or self-centered, and the community may ask why the person did not leave the place the way it was rather than create a division. Okon (2003) believes that "such an act of self-centeredness brings about division in the Ndiya land".

The community tries to put up a standard that everyone must fall under, it is believed that this standard is a norm that ensures the safety and well-being of everyone in the community. Therefore, there is a view that the community is prior to the individual thereby supporting the idea and thought of Ifaenyi Menkiti (1984). Obioha (2014, p. 115) sees a person as "inherently and intrinsically a communal being, a being that is not isolated, a being that realizes himself amidst other beings, a group linked by interpersonal bonds". Obioha (2014) in this definition buttresses the point that the individual is a being with others. As such, there is always recognition of the 'other'. Man is a being with others as Heidegger would say (Ignatius and Dennis, 2024). Therefore, like other traditional communitarian conception of person, the Ibibio's see themselves through the lens of the 'other'. That is, they establish their existence through

the acknowledgement of community members. Hence, there's little or no room for individuality as that can be seen to bring about division.

An Ibibio traditional person has a healthy sense of human relationship anchored on integrated concern and concomitant living permeated with love and accommodation. There is a proper recognition of the worth of human being. The Ibibio proverbs aptly put it thus “Owo odo Inyene” (fellow humans wealth) in the spirit of live and let live, people help one another without demanding for immediate or an exact equivalent remuneration (Udo, 1997). Here, everyone is mindful of each other, everyone believes that each person has something to contribute to his welfare, sometime, somehow, people freely discuss their problems with one another and seek counsels and solutions. According to Oliver Onwubiko, not to behave in this way was taken as a bad manner or sign of enmity (14). This shows the superiority of communalism to individualism in giving who a good person is. A good person is not what is self-given but what is communally given. The Ibibio community accommodates and endures one another even in hard times. This accommodating spirit explains why the weak, aged, the helpless, the sick, the widows and the widowers in Ibibio are taken care of in a confronting family atmosphere.

An *Eti-owo* in Ibibio mainly maintains the principle of hospitality. The community establishes a standard that whosoever is hospitable and treats everyone nicely including strangers. The fact that Ibibios were and are still very hospitable people cannot be over emphasized (Udo, 1997). The Ibibios easily accept and accommodate strangers, even to their own detriment. This is based on their conviction that every man can be a stranger anytime, anywhere hence “se edu maha owo unam fien ku unam owo” (do not do to others what you will not like others to do you) (Udo, 1997). This view shows a communal yardstick through which human or individual should live.

The community sees a selfless person as a good person, and this act of selflessness needs an atomistic approval. Hence in Ibibio, it is unethical for one to praise oneself “ku usu utoro idem, yak owo utoro fien” (do not praise yourself, allow others to praise you). Africans, traditionally, were very meticulous in attending to strangers. They symbolically expressed this by presentation of “Ukord Nsung” (Palm wine), “Ibong” (colanut), Isip Eyop” (coconut) “Ufobob” (dry gin) etc. as a sign of welcome and acceptability. This show of hospitality was also extended to the actual meal such that everyone present is invited to participate even if the food was prepared for far less number of people without anticipation of any visitor (unlike practiced in the West). In fact, it is deemed incredibly bad for one to eat anything however small without sharing it with anyone else present or at least expressing intention to do so. Among the Ibibio for instance, it is tantamount not only to neglect but also a curse to despise a stranger. It is believed that you too will travel someday and you may not predict where you will land, because, “Isang aben owo nte afum” (travelling takes one freely like an air and you may not predict where you will land). Hence, being hospitable in Ibibio is a big criterion to say one is an *eti-owo*.

In Ibibio, a hard working person is qualified to have the qualification of an *eti-owo*. The community believes that “Ifu idiaha nnien” or “owo isi inoho ifu udia” meaning (a lazy person does not deserve a scrumptious delicacy). It portrays an Ibibio good person as a hard working person. Labour in the traditional African society was highly valued and Ibibio is not an exception (Udo, 1997). Labour included all forms and means of livelihood like farming, fishing, trading, blacksmithing, craft etc. Using Ibibio as a case study, there were plenty of evidences to show that they were highly productive. The huge yam barns, clay pots from thousand Kilns, raffia bags from weaving looms, intricate wood carvings from the Sculptors' shop bear witness to the Ibibios' love for creative labour.

The Ibibios respect hard work, an hard working man can be said to be *Eti-owo*. In a bid to appreciate hardwork, one can construct a statement in saying, “afo-ado-eti-owo” meaning (you are a good person). Ibibio communism or communal consideration of *eti-owo* is manifested in different dimensions; social, religious, traditional, political, economic etc. The individual could use land for productive purposes, but land is in principle collectively owned by the community. Socially, communalism is manifested in the spirit of oneness exhibited by the members of the community, such that they all share the failure and success of one another as if these were success or failures of the community. Achievements of individuals are attributed to the community and this creates a spirit in which even the poor widow contributes her mites in order to afford scholarship for a bright youth with the underlying understanding that his success is for the good of all the members of the clan. Commenting on the communal life of Africans, Aja writes:

African communalism is the existential life of the traditional African which is founded on the belief that all human beings are members of one family of mankind; it is the traditional concern for persons and their wellbeings. It presupposes that while the family is the unit of an African community, everyone in that community is his brothers or sisters keeper (p. 380).

This buttresses the point that communality was the strength of traditional African society and the Ibibios are not an exception to this. There is an Ibibio adage that says “Eto Isidaha Ikpong Ikaba akai” (a tree cannot make a forest). To be a good person is when this brotherhood is recognized.

ETI-OWO AS A CRITERION FOR BEAUTY

The Ibibios intertwine a good person (*Eti-owo*) with a beautiful person (*Uyai-owo*), an aesthetic appreciation cannot be adjudged outside ethics. Little wonder Dennis (2018) groups Aesthetics and Ethics as siblings conceived by one mother called Axiology. To say one is beautiful in Ibibio is as good as saying that one is good. Aesthetics deals with sublimity, grandeur, magnificence, splendour, brilliance, loveliness, charming appeal, perfection, gorgeousness in the real sense of these words. Any piece of art work that can produce any of these emotional feeling is adjudged to have aesthetic value.

Aesthetics as a philosophical concept connotes a corresponding reference to beauty, mostly as it relates to works of art, craft and all aspects of sensual comprehension. Aesthetic can also be seen as the feeling or enjoyment of beauty derived from sensation in different forms either viewing of an art work, appreciating natural environment or having the psychological satisfaction of something that evokes liking. Here one may ask; is aesthetics only concerned with perception of art works alone? The answer is an emphatic no. Aesthetic encompasses every aspect of literary and material arts. The untutored, erroneously associate aesthetics with the works of arts in all its various manifestations- sculpting, craft, painting, textiles, graphics etc. without due attention to its natural values and other non-visual appreciations like in music, poetry and other literary works. African aesthetics covers the idea or understanding of the thought process behind a concept, action or creation geared towards beautification in any given African concept and context. This involves the intellectual reasoning and belief pattern which influences the thought process of the African society with regards to their creative perception of artistic elements (Umotong, 2015).

The African society has been thought of as being peculiar, especially, when referring to the traditional African society in its unadulterated state of antiquity, not the contemporary African with much diluted values owing to exposure to diverse cultures of the world. This is that society that is perceived to have evolved independently of much external influence or which most of her creations were original in content and context. Though much of the African arts are said to be functional art meant to fulfil certain purposes, especially, religious rituals, yet, there are rooms for other not too prominent purposes for art such as aesthetic values which encompasses the work or arts in all its various manifestations sculpting, craftsmanship, painting, textiles, graphics, poetry, play or drama, dance etc. without due attention to its natural values and other non-visual appreciations. In the African context, aesthetics is not only concerned with beauty and standards of beauty, but also tries to answer fundamental questions concerning arts and artifacts, for instance; what is an art object or when does an object qualify as an art work? Here the answer may be in part any aesthetic piece of man-made creation with a purpose, idea or message behind it with the view of making pleasant appeal to any one acquainted with it (Umotong, 2007).

It is common to associate most of the African art works to ritualistic purpose, especially sculpture and painting, yet we still find some of the African artists expressing themselves through the work of arts. Aesthetics is overly expressed all over Africa. The aesthetic consciousness among us, in religion, culture, and social life of an African, beauty is displayed without reservation. This can be seen in all ethnic nationalities in Nigeria for instance the *Efik* speaking people of Cross River State are known to use aesthetically designed chewing stick, with carvings of various cultural designs, not only as ornamental instrument but as a sanitary ware, despite the fact that these are consumables. The Benin kingdom of Nigeria is not left out in their sense of aesthetics, their houses are arrayed with bronze sculptural pieces and decorations of various arts and craft even the uneducated do not toil with issues of environmental decoration and

personal adornment with decorative globules and other accessories such as elephant tusk, carved staff etc.

The Hausas of Nigeria are well known for their leather works and calabash among other aesthetic attachments. The walls of palaces are not left without mural drawings speaking volumes of the people, culture and their ancestry. Generally, Africans are aesthetically aware and spare nothing in making their environment beautiful. The beauty driven culture are also exhibited in ceremonies; from the food served and the preparation before and after such ceremonies like marriages, child naming, coronation age grade days, agricultural festivals like new yam, boat regatta, fish festivals and others, most of such events are lavishly displayed with aesthetics such that so many of these cultural festivals are celebrated as carnivals for numerous tourist purposes

MANIFESTATION OF AFRICAN AESTHETICS

African aesthetics is manifested in three distinct dimension; psychological, educational and cultural. African aesthetics, deeply rooted in the lived experiences and philosophies of the African people, is multifaceted, finding expression in psychological, educational, and cultural dimensions. These dimensions interconnect to form a holistic understanding of African art, beauty, and cultural expression, each contributing to the broader notion of aesthetics. The psychological aspect of African aesthetics centres on the connection between the individual and the community, emphasising the role of art in shaping collective consciousness and individual identity. In African societies, beauty is not solely about physical appearance but is also linked to virtues such as harmony, balance, and moral goodness. This idea aligns with the traditional African belief that art is functional, serving to enhance both communal cohesion and personal development. Thus, the aesthetic experience is tied to mental and emotional wellbeing, where appreciation of beauty and artistic forms fosters a sense of belonging and psychological stability. For instance, African masks and sculptures are not just artistic objects but are imbued with spiritual significance, offering psychological grounding in rituals and rites of passage (Okpewho, 1992). This is why the masquerade (ekpo) has aesthetics appeal.

In the educational dimension, African aesthetics plays a critical role in transmitting knowledge, values, and cultural heritage. Artistic expressions – whether in the form of oral literature, music, or visual arts – serve as pedagogical tools, teaching societal norms, history, and morality. Storytelling, for example, is an essential medium for passing down wisdom and life lessons, often encapsulating aesthetic principles that are central to African thought. This educational function of art is crucial in a society where learning is predominantly oral and experiential. The proverb “A man who uses force is afraid of reasoning” symbolises how African aesthetics promotes critical thinking, reflection, and dialogue (Achebe, 2008, p. 12). Through aesthetic expressions, knowledge is preserved and disseminated, ensuring the continuity of cultural traditions. In Ibibioland, for instance, the aspect called “Mbobo” is a preparatory class for maidens. In this class, beauty is woven with character, adornment and proper nutrition. Any maiden undergoing this preparatory class waiting for suitor is expected

to feed well, adorn self with colours in clay and precious metals. The class is ought to teach good manners especially of the marital home, a well-trained maiden is judged beautiful from the looks, adornment, gracious steps when walking, manner of greetings as well as good culinary skills. At the expiration of the training period usually between one to three months, such is adjudged “uyai mbobo” meaning “beautiful maiden”. Mbobo in its entirety connotes beauty; it is a display of comprehensive beauty of African woman in food, culture, adornment, design, and etiquettes.

Furthermore, In Ibibio culture, a maiden's physical beauty, such as a fine height, pointed nose, and fair shape, is not enough to define her worth. If she lacks good character, her physical attributes become secondary, and her moral shortcomings render her a bad person. Hence to say that a maiden is beautiful is the same like saying the maiden is good. The idea of good in Ibibio is like saying that one is beautiful. Beauty hence is not in the eyes of the beholder in this context, rather, the community values, so one can have all the fine features that could make one beautiful but yet does not meet up the requirement of being an *eti-owo* due to the fact that the character of the maiden does not align with the values of the people. This shows the uniqueness of how the Ibibios conceive a good-person. What is good automatically is a beautiful thing in Ibibio, beauty hence follows from the perspective of being able to meet the demands of communal, traditional, and cultural values of the Ibibio people.

Culturally, African aesthetics reflects the values, beliefs, and practices unique to African communities. It manifests in the use of colours, forms, and materials that carry symbolic meanings. For instance, in many African cultures, the use of specific colours in textiles or body art can denote status, spirituality, or community belonging. The cultural dimension of aesthetics also extends to music, dance, and performance, which are integral to various ceremonies and celebrations. These artistic practices are not merely for entertainment; they serve as a means of communicating cultural identity and reinforcing social structures. The collective experience of art, therefore, strengthens cultural bonds and affirms communal values (Wiredu, 1996). African aesthetics in this context becomes a means of cultural preservation and resilience against external influences. For instance, A person in Ibibio, who is into sculpture or any work of arts has some requirement to be called a good sculptor. In a case where one carves a snake or the face of (Osama bin Ladin) who was a terrorist, irrespective of the colours adorned in that work of art, or how beautiful it appears in the eyes of the sculptor, It remains bad communally, as it is the community that gives the *eti-owoism* in Ibibio. Hence, for one to say that a work of art is beautiful, the artist or sculptor, must be able to sculpt what is meaningful and pragmatic to the community. Every community has value, norms and beliefs; this is the principal tenets of what makes a good person in Ibibio ethics. However, a good person must ensure that whatever work of art is presented should and must have a communal relevance.

In conclusion, the psychological, educational, and cultural dimensions of African aesthetics are deeply intertwined. All these form the complete, holistic and total beauty of an African woman. In other words, Aesthetics in African culture is beauty expressed

in both tangible and intangible mediums spread in all ramifications of human understanding. Together, they shape not only the artistic practices of African societies but also the broader understanding of beauty, identity, and knowledge within the African context.

OBJECTIONS OF *ETI-OWO* FROM A MODERATE AND INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

Eti-owo in *Ibibio* depicts total and extreme approval by the community. The community is holistically superior and prior to the individual. Hence, it is not permissible for one to self-proclaim being a good person (John, 1993). A moderate communitarian like Gyekye (1995) would see this as an exploitation of the individual, where the individual is merely a tool for the community. To say that *eti-owo* is a title given by the community to an individual person is equivalent to saying that personhood is defined by communal functionality. Is it possible for the community to conceive a universally accepted good without considering individual rights? For instance, consider a community norm that dictates all roads to be blocked by 10 pm, regardless of circumstances. Suppose an emergency childbirth requires urgent hospital attention at 11:05 pm, must the community standard take precedence over individual needs? What if the pregnant woman and unborn child die? Would we consider the man who followed the rule a good person for allowing his wife to die, or should he break the rule to save their lives? This scenario highlights the extremism and absolutism of the community.

The principle of the Golden Mean, which states that every virtue of character lies between two correlative faults or vices, presented in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (1924), is a contentious concept among philosophers. Some appreciate it as a substantive theory on virtue, while others criticize it. Bernard Williams (1991) calls the doctrine of the Golden Mean one of the most celebrated yet least useful parts of Aristotle's system. Williams implies that even without the Golden Mean concept, other parts of Aristotle's virtue system can still stand. Take courage, for example. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (1924) defines courage as the mean between cowardice and rashness using the Golden Mean. However, before that, he articulates the context in which courage applies, such as war and vigor, and later explains five kinds of courage improperly so-called, defining courage using genus and differentia. Thus, even without the doctrine of the Golden Mean, Aristotle (1924) can still define the concept of courage properly with reference to the category it belongs to and the difference between it and other components within the same category. Applying this view of the mean to the *Ibibio* idea of a good person would employ a moderate approval in appreciating a good person, eliminating extremism in considering who a good person is.

The doctrine of the Golden Mean, due to its vagueness, can be misleading. For example, it can lead to the logical fallacy of Justification. A bully can assure the victim they deserve less and justify their misconduct by placing their action in the mean of two more severe actions. Another misuse is when politicians manipulate the Golden Mean Principle for their benefit. For instance, Winston Churchill justified his extreme policies

before WWI in the name of moderation to convince the public. This demonstrates that proving something is moderate does not necessarily prove it virtuous. Some community standards may not be pleasing or good for the people, as they are forced to conform, leading to feelings of dehumanization. However moderate communitarians argue for a balance between individual and community, where the individual is not dehumanized for the sake of the community. The concept of good as a meta-ethical idea is dynamic and should not be solely subsumed under community standards. Taking a critical look at Ibibio radical communitarian conception of good, it is pertinent to note that the Aristotle's doctrine of mean is not totally in support of the extremes in the community's right over the individuals. To link Aristotle's moderate of medium virtue down to the Ibibios' idea of a good person, it is not withstanding an objection to Ibibio communal approval of who is an *eti-owo*.

Moreover, from the standpoint of Joseph Fletcher's situation ethics, there is a contrast of good against the Ibibios' idea of who is an *eti-owo*. Fletcher's new morality or what is popularly known to be situation ethics holds that a good act is not intrinsic nor vested rigidly by the community as stipulated by the Ibibios' traditions but is based on the situation. An *eti-owo* can therefore be given based on the situation one finds themselves. This idea will see a bad or a good person based on the situation or condition one may find themselves. Thus, a single action one performs on different situations can either be good or bad depending on the specific situation. The guide to moral praise-worthiness is the situation. (Therefore, there is no objectivity or absoluteness in who is a good or a bad person). This very concept is contrary to the Ibibios' idea of good-person.

Also, the Ibibio concept of *eti-owo* deeply involves approval from elders, who are believed to be always right. Their words are considered wise (Peter 13). Adhering to these words can earn one the *eti-owo* title. However, this extremism in elderly approval or judgment is culturally conceived from antiquity, believing that an elderly person's gray hair signifies wisdom. This raises questions about the validity of such a system, where age is equated with wisdom, and individual thinking is neglected. Objecting to this view, we consider the technological and scientific era, where youth have made significant inventions and advancements. An elderly person in Ibibio land may lack basic knowledge, such as subscribing to a recharge voucher, and must seek help from children or youth. This negates the idea that elders are always right and highlights the importance of individual innovation and progress. Buttressing this point, Dennis (2018) argues that individuals, confronted with realities like past family economic depression, now plan and use science and technology to moderate family size. This shows how science has changed traditional thoughts, as having many children or wives was once seen as a sign of being a good person. The dynamic nature of contemporary society demands flexibility, not rigid cultural systems. Over-reliance on elders, believed to be wise, neglects individual thinking and novelty.

Ibibio culture, used as a philosophy, must allow for flexibility and individual reflection (Noah & Okon, 2020). Cultural history offers explanations of the world, but

relying solely on antiquity is not enough. The invention of modern medicine, for instance, was not a product of elderly wisdom but contemporary innovation. This highlights the importance of embracing change and progress in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Ibibio culture denies the *eti-owo* title to celibates or eunuchs, emphasizing marriage as a criterion for a good person. However, being married does not necessarily mean one is good. This raises questions about the validity of such a criterion, as individual character and actions should be the primary measure of goodness.

Furthermore, philosophers like Henry Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead saw a universe with novelty and creativity without fixed reality. Similarly, allowing creativity in Ibibio culture, with a balance between individual and community, can actualize real ethical values without dehumanizing individuals. This requires a shift from the current extremism favouring the community over the individual to a more balanced and holistic understanding of *eti-owo*.

Finally, Ibibio aesthetics, manifested in ethics, equates beauty with goodness. A famous adage says, “*edu akpetie nte idem*” (physical outlook must resemble character) (Umotong, 2015). However, beauty should not be normatively bound to communal approval. Boumgathan's conception of aesthetics as appreciation by the senses (3) allows for individual taste and admiration without communal relevance. This raises questions about the validity of using beauty as a criterion for goodness. Can't an individual appreciate beauty without communal approval? Can't an artist create something beautiful without considering communal norms? Must beauty always be tied to goodness?

RECONSIDERING 'ETI-OWO' WITHIN IBIBIO ETHICS: SUBJECTIVE-COMMUNAL APPROACH

The Ibibio idea of a good person is entirely communal, with extremism favoring the community over the individual. However, this neglects individual thinking and creativity. The dynamic nature of contemporary society demands flexibility, not rigid cultural systems. Over-reliance on elders, believed to be wise, neglects individual thinking and novelty. Ibibio culture, used as a philosophy, must allow for flexibility and individual reflection. This requires a shift from the current extremism favoring the community over the individual. By embracing individual creativity and innovation, Ibibio culture can actualize real ethical values without dehumanizing individuals. A good-person or an (*eti-owo*) as Ibibio will put it is not a tag given subjectively in Ibibio (Essien, 2005). It is when one works or aligns with the community's norms, values, standards and traditions.

This paper suggests subjective-communal an alternative approach to *eti-owo* in Ibibio ethics. The subjective-communal approach is a moderate way of saying there should be a marriage between the person and the community, with room for the individual. The communal standard should be subject to consideration by the individual, without being at the expense of the individual. In turn, the individual

should also acknowledge, in a moderate way, the community standard. For instance, an elder calling a child *eti-eyen* (good child) must not be seen as being good solely because the child acknowledges, respects, and obeys the elders. The idea of a good child will be from the grounds that the child acknowledges, respects, and obeys the elders. However, in introducing the idea of subjective-communal approval, where the elder's view is seen as the community standard and believed to be an extreme standard, what happens when the elder is mistaken, as they cannot be right all the time? Must the child do the biddings of the elders at all times to maintain the tag of an *eti-owo*?

There are indeed aspects where the elders are wrong, and the child is right. Some community standards established from ancient antiquity were pragmatic at the primitive time they were established. However, will these standards continue to be operational in contemporary society without adjustment? Some community standards may be harmful to the individual person, and when the individual person is not in line with these standards, it is seen as a deviance act, leading to what we call *idiok-owo* (bad person). That is to say, an individual cannot, through their desires or sentiments, call themselves or another subject an *eti-owo* without taking cognizance of the supremacy of the community standards. With this kind of routine, the society or community has already dehumanized the functionality of an individual person because of the community or communal standards.

It is noteworthy that, the Ibibio sees it to be bad if the subject beats his chest and egoistically says “ami ndo eti owo” (I am a good person). It is believed that it is only the community that has the right to call one a good person, like Inyang (7) will say, “ekpe atoro idem” (Lion that praises itself). Inyang believes that the Ibibios see the act of praising of oneself to be entirely condescending as there is an employment of selfishness and pride, and it is believed that the person is trying to behave as though there is no community standard. But the question is, what bad is it or how is it a bad act for one to see himself as a good-person or praise himself which his actions are in fact praise worthy? A person can see himself as being good even if the community does not. A good example is the Athenian society. If the Athenians were to give or call who a good person is, then Socrates would be excluded, for the Athenian leaders, or what is seen to be elders in the African context, never saw Socrates as a good man. However, deep inside, Socrates knew he was upright. Extremism in Ibibio tradition is a disease; there should also be room for an individual to see themselves as an *eti-owo*.

Another example can be seen in the perspective of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who was seen as a deviant but saw himself as good and doing the works of his father. There were community norms, just like the Ibibio norms, that there should be no miracles on the Sabbath. Jesus Christ did this and saved a soul, which was known to be a bad act, and he was called a bad person for going against the norms of the community. The truth is that communal extremism is a problem to individual liberty and freedom, so there is a need for a marriage of both individual and community rights.

In Ibibio, even an artist or sculptor cannot be called a good artist or sculptor if their work of art does not picture the norms of the community or is not relevant to the

community. For instance, if a sculptor in Ibibio sculpts a snake or a naked lady, they are automatically seen as an *Idiok-owo* (bad person). The question is, must every work of art portray the society? Can't one sculpt a work from their desires? What if the artist had to sculpt something that egoistically has relevance? This is the reason why the subjective-communal approach is necessary. This modus will see room for both the community and the subject, with each complementing the other.

Innocent Asouzu, in his complementary ontology captured in his *Ibuanyidanda*, argued that the existence of things and reality must complement each other; anything that exists in Africa exists to save a missing link of reality (141). Asouzu tries to show the relevance of complementarity, where the short need the tall to survive, where the fair need the dark skin, where the spirit needs the flesh to manifest. However, this is seen lacking in Ibibio ethics, as their criteria for a good person is viewed from the perspective of communal authority. In as much as the individuals make of a community, and the community serves as the identity of the individual, it points to the fact that both exist to serve each other. In other words, there is need for complementarity. Therefore a subjective-communal good (*eti*) is when the individual can also be called a good person, independent of the community, and can also be seen as a good person from an Afro-communal perspective. It shows that one could actually say, “*ami ndo eti-owo*” (I am a good person), without communal or elderly approval, but because the person or individual knows so. There are some individuals in the Ibibio community who are helping people privately.

CONCLUSION

The idea of who a good person is a general concern. Ethics is that branch of philosophy that makes us know a good and bad act, and every moral agent will always want to have a tag of a good person. The Ibibio's extremely rely on the culture, traditions, elders, and communal norms to determine who an *eti-owo* is. The very idea of a person in Ibibio is given by the community; a person in Ibibio is conceived from an afro communitarian perspective (Obioha, 2014). Ethical consideration is one of the dimension through which a good person (*eti-owo*) is achieved within Ibibio ethical framework. The paper showed that there is no room for individual creativity, flexibility and development in such extremism. For the Ibibios, anyone who does not align by the rule and the traditions of the people, either in obeying the elders or keeping to the communal norms and standards can be called an *idiok-owo* meaning, bad person contrary to an *eti-owo*. This paper attempted to see how to replace the fixed, rigid and absolute reliance on a given ideology as a criterion to judge a good-person (*eti-owo*) within Ibibio ethics. It introduced a moderate, free and flexible ideology to fit the contemporary society through its subjective-communal approach as a better alternative. This research is proposes that the attainment of *eti-owo* using this new paradigm requires that one should act morally upright, not just because it is the standard kept by the community, but because such action will promote the interest and welfare of humanity.

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