

TOWARDS AN IGBO THEORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract

The question of consciousness remains one of the most enduring concerns in philosophy. From classical metaphysics to contemporary philosophy of mind, scholars have sought to explain the nature, structure, and significance of conscious experience. Discussions on consciousness have largely been shaped by Western philosophical assumptions that privilege individual subjectivity and self-contained rationality. This orientation has often obscured alternative conceptions of

consciousness embedded in non-Western intellectual traditions. Drawing on Igbo epistemology and African relational ontology, this work develops an Igbo theory of consciousness grounded in selfhood, spirituality, and relational existence. Employing phenomenological and hermeneutical methods, the work examines the interconnected roles of personhood, communal belonging, ancestral continuity, and sacred participation in shaping conscious experience. It argues that consciousness in Igbo thought is not merely a private mental phenomenon but a relational mode of existence constituted through participation in communal, spiritual, and ontological realities. Via the concepts of ontological consciousness, relational consciousness, spiritual consciousness, communal consciousness, and participatory consciousness, the work proposes a Relational Theory of Consciousness which offers a broader understanding of consciousness rooted in interconnectedness and existential participation.

Keywords: Ontological Consciousness, Relational Consciousness, Spiritual Consciousness, Communal Consciousness, Participatory Consciousness

Introduction

Few philosophical questions have generated as much sustained reflection as the question of consciousness. Human beings not only exist in the world; they are aware of their existence, reflect upon their experiences, interpret their surroundings, and assign meaning to their lives. The phenomenon of consciousness therefore, occupies a central place in philosophy because it touches the very foundation of human existence. Questions concerning self-awareness, personal identity, subjective experience, intentionality, and the nature of reality inevitably lead to inquiries about consciousness itself.

The philosophical investigation of consciousness has produced diverse and often competing perspectives. Descartes identified consciousness with the certainty of the thinking self, placing subjective awareness at the center of philosophical reflection. Subsequent thinkers such as Locke, Brentano, Husserl, Heidegger, and Nagel developed different approaches to understanding conscious experience, each emphasizing particular dimensions of subjectivity, intentionality, perception, or existential awareness. Despite these differences, much of the dominant discourse has remained largely focused on the individual subject as the primary locus of consciousness (Nagel, 1987; Husserl, 2001). Contemporary philosophy of mind has further expanded these discussions through debates concerning

mental representation, cognition and neural processes. The increasing sophistication of these debates has not resolved a fundamental problem- they often overlook the communal, spiritual, and relational dimensions through which consciousness is experienced in many non-Western traditions.

African philosophy offers an important corrective to this limitation. Rather than conceiving the individual as an isolated center of awareness, African thought generally understands human existence within networks of relationships involving community, nature, ancestry, and the sacred. Menkiti (1984) opines that personhood is not merely an individual achievement but a relational reality shaped by participation in communal life likewise, knowledge, identity, and meaning emerge within broader structures of relations rather than within detached subjectivity.

Within this wider African background, Igbo epistemology offers a particularly rich framework for understanding consciousness. The Igbo worldview conceives reality as an interconnected order in which human beings exist in dynamic relationship with family, community, ancestors, divinities, and the cosmos. Consciousness, from this perspective, cannot be reduced

to cognitive awareness alone. It is inseparable from selfhood, spirituality, moral responsibility, and existential participation. The human person does not stand apart from reality as a neutral observer but lives within a web of relationships that shape perception, identity, and understanding. Thus consciousness in Igbo thought is fundamentally relational and participatory. Such a perspective challenges individualistic accounts of consciousness and opens new possibilities for philosophical reflection.

Consciousness in Philosophical Discourse

The philosophical study of consciousness has occupied a prominent position in intellectual history because it concerns one of the most immediate yet elusive aspects of human existence. Every act of perception, reflection, memory, imagination, and judgment presupposes some form of conscious awareness. Despite its familiarity, consciousness remains difficult to define with precision. Philosophers have approached it from different angles, emphasizing self-awareness, subjectivity, intentionality, embodiment, cognition, and existential experience. These diverse approaches have both enriched philosophical discourse and simultaneously revealed the complexity of the phenomenon itself.

A recurring theme in many philosophical discussions is the relationship between consciousness and the self. The question of whether consciousness originates from an autonomous subject, emerges from social interaction, or participates in a broader ontological order continues to generate debate. These debates provide the conceptual background against which an Igbo theory of consciousness can be developed.

Descartes and the Conscious Self

Modern discussions of consciousness are often traced to René Descartes. His famous declaration, *cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"), established conscious self-awareness as the foundation of certainty. Faced with radical doubt, Descartes maintained that while external realities could be questioned, the existence of the thinking subject could not (Descartes, 1996). Consciousness therefore became closely associated with the self-certainty of the mind.

The Cartesian legacy profoundly influenced subsequent philosophical thought. Descartes elevated individual consciousness to a privileged position in epistemology and metaphysics by locating certainty within the thinking subject. The human person appeared primarily

as a self-conscious rational being capable of reflecting upon it independently of external influences.

This approach also introduced a dualistic model that separated mind from world, subject from object, and consciousness from existence. Cartesian model successfully emphasized self-awareness, but left unresolved questions concerning the relational and communal dimensions of conscious experience.

Brentano and Intentional Consciousness

A significant development occurred with Franz Brentano's revival of intentionality. Brentano argued that consciousness is distinguished by its intentional character; every mental act is directed towards an object, whether real or imagined (Brentano, 2008). Perceiving, remembering, judging, hoping, and desiring all involve a movement of consciousness beyond itself.

This insight shifted philosophical attention away from consciousness as a static substance towards consciousness as an activity. Mental life could no longer be understood merely as an internal state; it possessed an inherent orientation towards meanings, objects, and experiences. Dewalque (2020) observes that Brentano's

contribution re-established consciousness as a central philosophical problem by emphasizing the structure of mental acts rather than their physiological causes. Consciousness became a dynamic phenomenon characterized by directedness and engagement.

Nevertheless, Brentano's framework remained largely centered upon individual consciousness. Although intentionality connected the subject with the world, the individual mind continued to function as the primary locus of analysis.

Husserl and Phenomenological Consciousness

Edmund Husserl expanded Brentano's insights and transformed intentionality into the foundation of phenomenology. For Husserl, consciousness is always consciousness of something; every experience possesses an intentional structure that reveals how objects appear to awareness (Husserl, 2001).

Phenomenology sought to describe experience as a gift in consciousness rather than explaining it through psychological or scientific theories. Husserl believed that careful analysis of conscious experience could disclose the structures through which meaning becomes possible.

One of the enduring strengths of Husserl's project lies in its emphasis on lived experience. Consciousness is not treated as an abstract entity but as a field of meaningful engagement with reality. Human beings encounter the world through acts of perception, memory, imagination, and judgment that disclose significance and understanding.

At the same time, Husserl's analysis remained closely linked to transcendental subjectivity. The constituting ego retained a central role in the formation of meaning.

Heidegger and Existential Consciousness

Martin Heidegger further introduced a decisive shift in the discussion of consciousness by directing attention away from the isolated subject towards existence itself. Rather than beginning with consciousness as a mental phenomenon, Heidegger examined the human being as *Dasein*, a being already situated within a meaningful world (Heidegger, 1962).

This move altered the philosophical landscape significantly. Human existence was no longer interpreted as detached observation but as involvement, care,

concern, and practical engagement. Meaning emerges through lived participation rather than through abstract contemplation.

Klaskow (2011) notes that Heidegger's reformulation of intentionality challenged representational models of consciousness by emphasizing existential participation. Consciousness becomes inseparable from being-in-the-world. Human beings encounter reality through relationships, projects, histories, and possibilities that shape their understanding.

Heidegger's contribution is particularly relevant for this work because it opens the possibility of interpreting consciousness relationally rather than merely subjectively. Nonetheless, his analysis remains primarily focused on individual existence and does not fully explore communal and spiritual dimensions of awareness.

Nagel and Subjective Experience

Thomas Nagel introduced another important perspective by emphasizing the irreducibility of subjective experience. In his critique of reductionist theories, Nagel

argued that consciousness possesses a first-person character that cannot be fully captured through objective description (Nagel, 1987). According to Nagel, there is always something it is like to be a conscious subject. This subjective dimension resists complete explanation through physical or neurological accounts. Scientific descriptions may reveal much about the mechanisms of consciousness, but they do not exhaust the reality of lived experience.

Nagel's position remains influential because it highlights the limits of purely objective approaches to consciousness. His work reminds philosophers that consciousness involves qualitative dimensions that cannot be reduced to external observation alone.

Some Contemporary Perspectives on Consciousness

Contemporary philosophy of mind continues to investigate consciousness through diverse approaches. Some scholars emphasize cognitive processes and mental representation, while others explore embodiment, social cognition, and phenomenological experience. Crane (2013) and Searle (1983), for example, have contributed significantly to discussions concerning

intentionality, consciousness, and the relation between mind and world.

These debates have expanded our understanding of conscious experiences. They have revealed the complexity of mental life and challenged simplistic explanations of awareness. Even so, many contemporary theories remain shaped by assumptions inherited from earlier traditions, particularly the tendency to treat consciousness as the property of autonomous individuals.

This tendency becomes especially apparent when compared with African philosophical perspectives. While Western discussions often begin with the individual subject, African thought frequently begins with relationships, community, participation, and interconnected existence. Consciousness is not merely something possessed by a person; it is something lived within a network of relationships that extends beyond the individual self.

Foundations of Consciousness in Igbo Thought

Any attempt to develop an Igbo theory of consciousness must begin with the worldview from which such consciousness emerges. Consciousness does not exist in a vacuum. It is shaped by a people's understanding of reality, personhood, knowledge, and existence. In Igbo thought, reality is not conceived as a collection of isolated entities existing independently of one another. Rather, existence unfolds within a network of relationships that connect human beings, ancestors, divinities, nature, and the wider cosmos. This relational outlook profoundly influences how consciousness is understood. Unlike many modern theories that approach consciousness primarily as an internal mental phenomenon, Igbo thought situates awareness within lived existence. Consciousness therefore reflects a way of being-in-the-world that is simultaneously personal, communal, moral, and spiritual.

Relational Ontology

A defining characteristic of Igbo thought is its relational understanding of reality. Human existence is not interpreted in terms of radical individuality but through interconnectedness. This orientation is evident in many strands of African philosophy. Mbiti (1969) maintains that African conceptions of existence emphasize relationships rather than isolated individuality. The

individual derives meaning through belonging to a wider community of persons, both living and departed.

Asouzu (2007) develops this insight further through his theory of complementary ontology. According to him, beings attain significance through mutual interdependence. No reality exists in complete isolation because every being functions as a complementary part of a larger whole. Existence itself is characterized by interconnectedness.

This ontological structure has important implications for consciousness. If reality is fundamentally relational, then consciousness cannot be adequately explained as a self-enclosed mental activity. Awareness emerges within a world already structured by relationships. The conscious subject is not an isolated spectator but a participant in an interconnected order of existence.

Personhood and Conscious Awareness

The Igbo understanding of consciousness is inseparable from its conception of personhood. The human person, *mmadu*, is not simply a biological organism or a rational mind. Personhood involves moral responsibility, social

participation, spiritual significance, and existential belonging.

Menkiti (1984) argues that in African philosophy, personhood is not merely given at birth but achieved through participation in communal life. One becomes a person through relationships, obligations, and moral engagement with others. The individual therefore develops within a social and ethical framework that shapes identity and consciousness.

This perspective offers a different way of thinking about self-awareness. Consciousness is not merely awareness of oneself as an isolated individual. It includes awareness of one's place within a community, one's obligations to others, and one's participation in a broader moral order.

Consequently, self-consciousness in Igbo thought possesses a relational character. The self comes to know itself through interaction with others. Identity is formed within relationships rather than prior to them.

Spirituality

Another important foundation of consciousness in Igbo thought is spirituality. The Igbo worldview does not sharply divide the sacred from the secular. Spiritual realities are woven into everyday existence and shape how individuals understand themselves and the world around them.

Mbiti (1969) observes that African life is deeply religious because spirituality permeates all dimensions of existence. Human beings live within a universe populated not only by visible realities but also by spiritual forces, ancestral presences, and divine agencies. Existence therefore possesses dimensions that extend beyond empirical perception.

This spiritual orientation influences consciousness in significant ways. Awareness is not restricted to sensory experience or cognitive reflection. It also involves sensitivity to sacred realities, moral obligations, and transcendent meanings. Rituals, prayers, sacrifices, and communal ceremonies become important modes through which individuals participate in and interpret the spiritual dimensions of existence. What emerges from this perspective is a conception of consciousness that is simultaneously spiritual and existential. Human awareness extends beyond immediate experience

towards realities that provide meaning, continuity, and orientation.

Knowledge as Participation

The Igbo understanding of consciousness is also connected to its conception of knowledge. Knowledge is not simply the accumulation of information or the representation of external objects. It is closely tied to participation in life itself. Okere (1983) argues that African philosophy must be understood within its historical and cultural contexts because meaning arises through lived engagement rather than detached abstraction. Human beings come to understand reality through involvement in communal practices, traditions, relationships, and experiences.

Chimakonam and Nweke (2020) similarly emphasize dialogue and relational engagement as important dimensions of African philosophical reflection. Understanding develops through interaction rather than isolation. Knowledge therefore possesses a participatory character.

This insight broadens the meaning of consciousness. Awareness is not merely an internal state of mind; it is a way of engaging with reality. Consciousness grows through participation in family life, communal responsibilities, ritual practices, moral decisions, and spiritual experiences.

The knowing subject is not separated from the world being known. Instead, the subject belongs to that world and acquires understanding through active involvement within it.

Selfhood, Spirituality, and Relational Existence

The preceding discussion established that consciousness in Igbo thought emerges from a worldview shaped by relational ontology, communal personhood, spirituality, and participatory existence. These foundations invite a deeper question: what constitutes conscious life within such a worldview? A closer examination reveals that selfhood, spirituality, and relational existence are not separate dimensions of human experience. Rather, they are interconnected realities through which consciousness is formed, expressed, and sustained.

Selfhood

The question of selfhood occupies a central place in discussions of consciousness because every account of awareness presupposes some understanding of the self. In many Western traditions, the self is frequently presented as an autonomous center of experience that exists independently of others. Consciousness, on this view, originates within the individual subject and is subsequently directed towards the world.

Contrary to this western understanding of the self, the Igbo conception of selfhood follows a different path. The self is not an isolated entity standing apart from its environment. Instead, it emerges through relationships that connect the individual to family, community, ancestors, and the wider order of existence. Personhood is not simply a private possession; it is lived and expressed through participation in communal life (Menkiti, 1984).

This understanding has significant implications for consciousness. Self-awareness is not merely the awareness of one's private thoughts and experiences. It includes an awareness of belonging, responsibility, and participation. The individual recognizes himself or

herself as part of a larger whole. Consciousness consequently acquires a relational dimension because the self comes to understand itself through its connections with others.

Such a perspective does not deny individuality. Rather, it situates individuality within a broader framework of relationships. The self remains distinct, yet its identity is enriched and sustained through communal existence. Consciousness thus reflects both personal uniqueness and relational belonging

***Chi* and Personal Consciousness**

An important aspect of Igbo selfhood is the concept of *chi*. although interpretations of *chi* vary, it is generally understood as a personal spiritual principle associated with destiny, guidance, and individuality. The concept occupies a unique place within Igbo thought because it links personal identity with a transcendent dimension of existence.

The significance of *chi* lies in its role as a bridge between individuality and spirituality. The human person is not merely a biological or social being but also a spiritual reality. Through *chi*, consciousness acquires

depth beyond ordinary awareness. Personal existence is connected to a larger order that shapes purpose, direction, and meaning.

This connection introduces a richer understanding of self-consciousness. Awareness is not confined to immediate experience or rational reflection. Individuals often interpret their lives in relation to destiny, vocation, and spiritual guidance. Consciousness therefore includes a reflective engagement with questions concerning purpose and existential meaning.

The presence of *chi* within Igbo thought demonstrates that consciousness cannot be adequately explained through material or cognitive processes alone. Human awareness possesses a spiritual orientation that shapes how individuals understand themselves and their place in the world.

Spirituality

Spirituality represents one of the most distinctive dimensions of consciousness in Igbo thought. While many contemporary theories focus on cognition, perception, and mental representation, the Igbo

worldview recognizes that conscious life is also shaped by encounters with sacred realities.

Spirituality is not confined to formal religious practice. It permeates ordinary existence and influences how individuals interpret events, relationships, successes, failures, and moral choices. The sacred is woven into daily life, providing a framework through which experiences acquire meaning. Mbiti (1969) observes that African life is deeply informed by religious consciousness because spirituality penetrates every sphere of existence. Human beings do not move between separate sacred and secular worlds. Rather, they inhabit a reality in which spiritual significance is continuously present.

This spiritual awareness contributes to the formation of consciousness in several ways. First, it expands the horizon of experience beyond immediate sensory perception. Second, it encourages individuals to interpret life within a larger moral and existential order. Third, it fosters an awareness of realities that transcend the individual self. Lastly, it opens the discussion for further discussion of transcendental consciousness in Igbo worldview.

Ancestral Presence

One cannot fully understand consciousness in Igbo thought without considering the place of the ancestors. Ancestral presence occupies an important position within communal life because it provides continuity between past and present generations.

Ancestors are remembered not merely as historical figures but as participants in the ongoing life of the community. Through rituals, commemorations, oral traditions, and collective memory, they remain part of the moral and spiritual landscape. Their presence reinforces communal values and strengthens the bonds that unite generations.

This ancestral dimension broadens the scope of consciousness. Human awareness extends beyond immediate personal experience to include historical memory and inherited wisdom. Individuals understand themselves not only as members of a present community but also as participants in a continuing story that links the living with those who came before them. Consciousness thus acquires a temporal depth often

overlooked in individualistic accounts of awareness. The past remains active within the present, shaping identity, meaning, and moral orientation.

Relational Existence

Perhaps the most important feature of consciousness in Igbo thought is its relational character. Human beings exist within relationships that shape perception, identity, and understanding. These relationships extend in multiple directions: towards family, community, ancestors, spirituality, and the wider cosmos. Wiredu (1996) argues that African conceptions of existence emphasize interconnectedness and mutual dependence. Individuals do not flourish in isolation because human life is sustained through relationships. Consciousness reflects this reality by developing through interaction, participation, and shared experience.

Relational existence transforms the meaning of awareness itself. To be conscious is not simply to possess subjective experiences. It is to inhabit a world of relationships and to recognize one's place within that world. Awareness becomes inseparable from belonging. This insight provides a powerful alternative to theories that reduce consciousness to mental states or cognitive processes. It suggests that consciousness is

fundamentally a way of existing rather than merely a function of the mind.

Towards An Igbo Theory of Consciousness

The foregoing discussions reveal that consciousness in Igbo thought cannot be adequately explained through the categories that dominate much of contemporary philosophy of mind. Neither subjective awareness alone nor cognitive representation sufficiently captures the richness of conscious experience as understood within the Igbo worldview. Selfhood is relational, spirituality permeates existence, and human life unfolds within networks of communal and ontological participation. These features suggest the need for a theoretical model capable of accounting for the distinctive character of consciousness in Igbo thought.

This work proposes an Igbo theory of consciousness grounded in five interconnected dimensions: ontological consciousness, relational consciousness, spiritual consciousness, communal consciousness, and participatory consciousness. These dimensions do not function independently of one another. Together, they form what this work described as *Relational Theory of Consciousness*.

Ontological Consciousness

At the heart of this proposed theory lies the idea that consciousness is rooted in existence itself. Human awareness is not merely an internal mental event occurring within an isolated subject. Rather, it emerges from the individual's participation in the wider structure of reality. Asouzu's (2007) complementary ontology provides an important foundation for this insight. His argument that beings derive meaning through mutual complementation suggests that existence is fundamentally interconnected. Human consciousness therefore develops within an ontological order that precedes individual reflection.

Consciousness is not simply awareness of being; it is awareness through being. Human beings encounter themselves within a world already constituted by relationships, meanings, and existential possibilities. The conscious subject does not stand outside reality examining it from a distance. Rather, the subject is already situated within the reality that becomes the object of awareness.

Ontological consciousness thus refers to the awareness that emerges from participation in existence itself. It reflects the recognition that human life is embedded within a larger order of being that shapes understanding and meaning.

Relational Consciousness

A second dimension of the theory concerns the relational character of consciousness. If personhood develops through relationships, then consciousness must also bear a relational structure.

The individual comes to self-awareness through encounters with others. Family, community, friendship, dialogue, and social interaction all contribute to the formation of conscious identity. Human beings do not first become fully self-aware and then enter relationships. Relationships themselves play an important role in shaping awareness. Mbiti's (1969) well-known expression, "I am because we are," captures this insight with remarkable clarity. Human existence is grounded in interconnectedness. Consequently, consciousness cannot be understood apart from the relational contexts within which individuals live and act.

Relational consciousness therefore refers to the awareness that arises through interaction and mutual recognition. It highlights the fact that human understanding develops within shared worlds rather than within isolated minds.

This perspective offers an important corrective to Western theories that emphasize radical individualism. Consciousness is not merely private interiority. It is also a relational achievement sustained through engagement with others.

Spiritual Consciousness

Another indispensable feature of an Igbo theory of consciousness is spirituality. The spiritual dimension of existence influences how individuals interpret reality: understand themselves: and relate to the world around them.

Within the Igbo worldview, human life unfolds within a universe that includes both visible and invisible realities. Spiritual forces, divine presence, ancestral continuity, and sacred meanings all contribute to the texture of

conscious experience. Awareness is therefore not limited to empirical perception alone.

Spiritual consciousness refers to the human capacity to perceive and respond to transcendent dimensions of existence. It includes awareness of sacred realities, moral obligations, and existential meanings that extend beyond immediate sensory experience.

This dimension challenges reductionist accounts that attempt to explain consciousness solely through physical or neurological processes. While biological and cognitive factors undoubtedly contribute to conscious life, they do not exhaust its significance. Human beings continually seek meaning, purpose, and connection with realities that transcend ordinary experience. Hence, spiritual consciousness reflects openness to dimensions of existence that cannot be reduced to material explanations alone.

Communal Consciousness

Closely related to relational consciousness is the notion of communal consciousness. While relational consciousness emphasizes interpersonal interaction,

communal consciousness focuses on the collective dimensions of awareness.

Communities embody shared memories, values, traditions, symbols, and narratives that shape how individuals perceive reality. Through participation in communal life, individuals inherit ways of understanding the world and interpreting experience. Thus, the significance of communal consciousness becomes particularly evident in the transmission of traditions and collective memory. Through language, rituals, stories, and social practices, communities preserve forms of knowledge that shape individual awareness.

Menkiti (1984) emphasizes that community plays a constitutive role in the formation of personhood. A similar observation may be made concerning consciousness. Awareness develops within cultural and communal frameworks that provide meaning and orientation.

Communal consciousness therefore refers to the shared dimension of awareness that binds individuals together within a common world of meaning. It reminds us that

consciousness is never entirely private because it is continually influenced by communal life.

Participatory Consciousness

The final dimension of the theory concerns participation. Throughout Igbo thought, knowledge, identity, and existence are closely connected to active involvement in life. Consciousness reflects this participatory orientation.

Human beings become aware through engagement rather than detachment. Understanding develops through action, relationships, moral responsibility, ritual practice, and lived experience. Awareness is not merely something one possesses; it is something one enacts. This insight of Okere (1983) suggests that consciousness should be understood as an active process of participation in the world.

Participatory consciousness therefore refers to awareness as lived engagement. It emphasizes that consciousness grows through involvement in the realities that constitute human existence. The individual does not merely observe life but participates in it.

This dimension completes the proposed theory by bringing together ontology, relationality, spirituality, and community within a single framework. Consciousness emerges as a dynamic process through which human beings engage with themselves, others, and the wider realities that shape existence.

Taken together, ontological consciousness, relational consciousness, spiritual consciousness, communal consciousness, and participatory consciousness provide the foundation for an Igbo theory of consciousness. The theory challenges purely individualistic and reductionist models by presenting consciousness as a relational mode of existence grounded in participation, belonging, and interconnectedness.

Critical Evaluation

The Igbo theory of consciousness developed in this work offers a significant alternative to dominant individualistic and reductionist accounts of conscious experience. Its principal strength lies in its capacity to integrate selfhood, spirituality, community, and existential participation into a coherent understanding of consciousness. By emphasizing relationality, the theory draws attention to dimensions of human awareness that

are frequently overlooked within contemporary philosophy of mind and consciousness studies. In doing so, it demonstrates that African philosophical traditions possess conceptual resources capable of contributing meaningfully to global discussions on consciousness.

A further strength of the theory lies in its challenge to the assumption that consciousness is exclusively a private mental phenomenon. By locating awareness within communal life, ancestral continuity, and spiritual participation, the Igbo perspective presents a broader account of human experience than approaches that focus solely on cognition, representation, or neurological activity. This contribution aligns with Chimakonam's (2021) argument that African philosophy should not be treated merely as a regional intellectual tradition but as a source of original conceptual frameworks capable of transforming contemporary philosophical discourse. From this perspective, the theory contributes to the decolonization of knowledge by expanding the range of categories through which consciousness may be understood.

Despite these strengths, certain limitations remain. The theory is primarily philosophical and interpretive in orientation, making it difficult to establish direct points

of engagement with empirical research in neuroscience, psychology, and cognitive science. While the relational and spiritual dimensions of consciousness provide valuable insights into human existence, they may not easily lend themselves to empirical verification within dominant scientific methodologies. Furthermore, the diversity of Igbo cultural experiences suggests that no single theoretical framework can exhaustively capture every understanding of consciousness within Igbo society.

The theory also raises questions that invite further investigation. How might relational consciousness be brought into dialogue with contemporary theories of embodiment and social cognition? In what ways can spiritual consciousness contribute to interdisciplinary studies of human awareness without losing its philosophical depth? These questions indicate that the present work should not be regarded as a final account of consciousness but as an invitation to continued philosophical inquiry.

Nevertheless, the theory succeeds in demonstrating that consciousness can be understood beyond the limits of individualism and material reductionism. By foregrounding relational existence, spirituality,

communal participation, and ontological belonging, it opens new directions for philosophical reflection. More importantly, it affirms Chimakonam's (2021) contention that African philosophy can generate innovative concepts capable of enriching and reshaping global philosophical debates. The Igbo theory of consciousness therefore stands not merely as a cultural interpretation of awareness but as a genuine philosophical contribution to contemporary consciousness studies.

Conclusion

The enduring challenge in consciousness studies has been to explain not only how human beings are aware but also what kind of reality consciousness discloses about human existence. Many philosophical traditions have approached this question by focusing on subjectivity, cognition, mental representation, or neurological processes. While these approaches have generated important insights, they often leave insufficient room for the communal, spiritual, and existential dimensions through which consciousness is experienced in many cultural traditions.

The Igbo perspective explored in this work suggests a different point of departure. Consciousness is not

primarily an isolated mental event occurring within a self-enclosed subject. It is a mode of existence that emerges through participation in relationships that connect the self to community, spirituality, ancestry, and the wider structure of reality. Human awareness develops within a world already inhabited by meanings, obligations, memories, and sacred possibilities. The conscious person is therefore not merely a thinking being but a participating being.

From this standpoint, consciousness appears less as a possession of the individual and more as an expression of relational existence. Selfhood, spirituality, and communal belonging are not external influences upon consciousness; they are among the very conditions that make conscious life possible. Awareness is shaped by encounters with others, sustained through shared forms of life, and deepened by engagement with realities that transcend immediate experience.

The Igbo theory of consciousness proposed in this work ultimately invites a reconsideration of what it means to be conscious. It challenges the tendency to reduce consciousness to cognition alone and argues for a richer understanding grounded in participation, belonging, and interconnectedness. In doing so, it offers a philosophical

vision in which consciousness is neither detached from the world nor confined within the individual self. Rather, it is the living expression of humanity's ongoing relationship with being, community, and the sacred. Seen in this light, consciousness is not simply awareness of existence; it is a way of dwelling meaningfully within existence itself.

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