UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHSS)
Homepage: https://ukrpublisher.com/ukrjahss/
Email: submit.ukrpublisher@gmail.com
Volume 2, Issue 6, 2026
ISSN: 3107-359X (Online)

The Social Self: A Philosophical Perspective

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DOI: *https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20726149*

Article History

Original Research Article

Received: 14-04-2026

Accepted: 18-05-2026

Published: 17-06-2026

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Citation: Charles Ikechukwu Okoro, PhD. (2026). The Social Self: A Philosophical Perspective. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHSS), 2(6), 123-133.

Abstract

Human nature undergoes a form of evolutionary continuum in its physical transformation—from the embryonic stage through infancy and adolescence to adulthood. A similar developmental trajectory is evident at the epistemological level, where the human mind progresses from a state of limited experience and undeveloped rationality to one of maturity, characterized by enriched experience and the responsible use of reason. The history of philosophy is marked by a persistent epistemological dispute concerning whether knowledge originates from experience or from reason. Empiricists maintain that experience is the primary source of knowledge, arguing that the senses serve as the windows through which knowledge is acquired. In contrast, rationalists uphold reason as the ultimate foundation of knowledge. At the heart of this debate lies the issue of the reality of conceptual schemes. Empiricists generally deny the existence of inherent conceptual frameworks, whereas rationalists insist that such frameworks are indispensable for genuine knowledge. Philosophers such as René Descartes, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant have all contributed significantly to attempts at resolving this dispute. Despite these efforts, certain aspects of the conflict remain unresolved. Nevertheless, philosophical inquiry continues to advance. A modern philosopher, John McDowell, offers a promising intervention by granting legitimacy to knowledge derived from experience through his notion of conceptually structured experience. This intellectual and philosophical exposition draws on McDowell's thought to affirm the idea of a conceptually structured human experience, which constitutes the proper domain of sociology, and thereby supports the claim for the fundamentally social nature of the self.

Keywords: *epistemology, empiricism, rationalism, conceptual schemes, John McDowell.*

Introduction

The Renaissance, spanning the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries—or, in its extended interpretation, the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries—constitutes a crucial epoch in the rediscovery and affirmation of human potential. Its central concern was the deliberate cultivation and actualization of human capacities. Without this transformative intellectual and cultural movement, humanity might have remained in a state of stagnation. Humanism thus emerged as a defining project: the comprehensive development of the human person in all dimensions of existence. In contemporary terms, this project finds expression in what is now designated as the humanities. Within the various faculties of the humanities, numerous disciplines converge in their inquiry into the human person. This intellectual enterprise seeks to illuminate the being of man, understood as both unique and plural. Such plurality underscores the multifaceted nature of the human person, a complexity that demands systematic, careful, and methodologically rigorous investigation aimed at uncovering the nature of selfhood. This development has enabled diverse human disciplines to investigate human nature from their respective perspectives, employing distinct methodological principles in a reasoned search for understanding the self. Interdisciplinary engagement—drawing from philosophy, psychology, sociology, and even artificial intelligence—further expands the horizon of inquiry into the nature of the human person and selfhood. Until recently, philosophy

maintained a dominant role in determining the nature of the self, relying primarily on its conceptual frameworks. However, this dominance has been significantly reconfigured through the intervention of contemporary philosophy, particularly in the work of John McDowell. His notion of a conceptually structured experience provides a framework in which human experience is understood as intrinsically rational, thereby extending its implications beyond philosophy into domains such as sociology and broader social interactions. Within this study, the analysis is situated in an African conceptual framework encompassing communalism, socialism, and Ubuntu. These traditions collectively emphasize the primacy of sociality, proposing that relationality is not merely accidental but constitutive of the very essence of the human person. Following this, the study undertakes an explication of the key concepts of nature and sociality. Furthermore, it engages with foundational philosophical conceptions of selfhood as articulated within Western traditions, particularly through the works of Descartes, Locke, and Hume. This is followed by an exposition of the pioneering contribution of Chukwudum B. Okolo (1992: 116-128) especially as articulated in his work *African Social and Political Philosophy*, where the social nature of the self is robustly defended. Substantial evidence is then presented to demonstrate the manifestation of the self within social relations, pointing to what may be described as its "incarnational power and influence" in lived reality. The study ultimately advances a well-argued thesis that provides compelling reasons to regard sociality as an essential and constitutive dimension of selfhood.

Conceptual Framework

The most adequate conception of selfhood within the African worldview is that of the social self. Any meaningful reflection on the sociality of the self requires an appropriate conceptual and cultural context. Historically, philosophical reflections on the self have largely taken a conceptual and individualistic turn, often with little or no attention to the social dimension of selfhood. This tendency can be attributed, in part, to the absence of a robust conceptual framework for articulating the social self within earlier philosophical traditions, particularly since the early modern period inaugurated by René Descartes. The oft-repeated assertion that "man is a social being" is not merely a descriptive claim; rather, it is an identity statement. To be human is, fundamentally, to exist in relation with others. Within the African context, the proper framework for understanding this relational self is communalism. Communalism denotes a social order characterized by cooperation, mutual care, and the pursuit of a harmonious and functional society. It affirms individuality, yet without dissolving it into the collective. Instead, it integrates personal identity within a network of relationships defined by cooperation, reciprocal responsibility, empathy, love, justice, and a shared spirit of solidarity. This same orientation is evident in broader communitarian thought, which emphasizes the well-being of others through shared moral responsibility and a balanced recognition of both the rights and duties of individuals within society. A concrete expression of this vision can be found in Julius Nyerere's *Ujamaa*, which offers a distinctly African articulation of socialism. Unlike certain Western variants—particularly those associated with Karl Marx—that often foreground structural conflict, *Ujamaa* advances a model grounded in unity, solidarity, love, and mutual care. It promotes a form of social organization centered on altruism and reciprocal responsibility among members of the community. Similarly, the ethical philosophy of *Ubuntu* underscores the profound interconnectedness of human existence, captured by Tutu, D. (1999, 34-35)" a person is a person through other persons." This principle carries far-reaching implications for human relations, moral responsibility, and social justice. Within this framework, priority is given to the common good over and above narrow individual interests. Such a conception of selfhood—rooted in relationality, moral responsibility, and communal flourishing—ought to serve not only as a defining feature of African identity but also as a potential normative model for humanity at large. Consequently, this vision of the social self demands sustained philosophical attention and critical scrutiny.

Explication of terms: Nature and Sociality.

Our interest here is to explain these two concepts `nature` and `sociality, and, to indicate how much relevance they command to our course.

i. **Nature**: Within the context of African cosmology, the concept of nature encompasses the totality of the created order, extending from the visible realms to the invisible realms of existence. Nature belongs to the social environment and, is rightly the sphere of every human experience. This sphere embraces both material and immaterial realities, the animate and inanimate, the organic and inorganic, as well as human beings within the broader ecological order. In nature, life forms (organisms) within the eco-system do not even exist in isolation. Their being-ness is described as dynamico-ontological networks of interdependence, and not mere aggregates of independent units. This paints exactly the same picture of individuals within communal existence. Notably, human nature shares significant affinities with these various dimensions of existence, understanding the interconnectedness of all being. Comparatively, human life, in particular, depends profoundly on the sustaining power of nature, as evidenced in the intricate relationships between plant, animal and

human life. A striking example of this interdependence is the process of photosynthesis, a biological mechanism through which green plants, algae, and certain bacteria convert light energy into chemical energy. Through this process, carbon dioxide and water are transformed into glucose - stored chemical energy - and oxygen. Occurring within the chloroplasts of plant cells, where chlorophyll captures light energy, photosynthesis plays a vital role in sustaining life on Earth. It provides the primary source of food and releases the oxygen necessary for respiration, thereby maintaining both the flow of energy and the atmospheric balance of the planet. It is therefore not surprising that, within the African worldview, nature is perceived as `alive` and engaged relationally, much like a living being. Consequently, nature is regarded as sacred and, in a profound sense, personal - worthy of reverence and respect. The earth, upon which human life depends for cultivation and sustenance, is often conceived as a mother, the generative source of fertility and fruitfulness.

ii. **Sociality**: The term *social* derives from the Latin root *socius*, meaning companion, associate, or ally. A related derivation is *socialis*, which denotes companionship or that which pertains to allies. From this etymological grounding, the concept *social* conveys the ideas of companionship, association, and living with others. Such an origin already establishes the fundamentally relational dimension of human existence. This relational mode of existence is what is identified in both philosophy and sociology as *community*. However, the notion of community invoked here does not refer merely to interactions among already constituted individuals. Rather, it denotes a primordial reality that, in a significant sense, precedes the individual. It is structured by shared culture, customs, and traditions, and is sustained by a common identity, purpose, interests, and patterns of behavior. *Ab initio*, human existence assumes a communal orientation. The community, therefore, is not an artificial construct but a natural institution and, *ipso facto*, ontological in status. J. S. Mbiti (1969: 108) captures this insight succinctly in his well-known formulation: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" This statement does not merely affirm a network of interactions; rather, it articulates the very ground of personal identity. Without the community, the identity of the individual becomes illusory. It is within the community—and not outside it—that the self lives, moves, and draws its being. In this sense, the self is both a *being-with* others and, more profoundly, a *being-through* others. It is, therefore, most appropriately understood as the *social self*. This conception carries universal implications, particularly for the broader project of fostering a sense of one human family across the globe. In this regard, the term *socius* functions as a linguistic bridge to universal human relationality. Consequently, the social self must promote core communal values such as justice and respect for individual rights, the responsible exercise of freedom, authentic communication, reverence for life and human dignity, cooperation and participation in the pursuit of the common good, social equality and solidarity, as well as a commitment to education and meaningful work.

Cartesian notion of the self

Here a flashback on Western philosophers' ideas on the self is crucial. At least, to let our readers know that our main area of concern is not the Western conception of the self. It is rather, to see in what sense the 'sociality' of the self differs from its Western counterpart. We begin with Descartes. Descartes uses Methodic doubt in his philosophy. And by resting securely on the Archimedean principle, a landmark discovery of the cogito was made. The cogito is the certain and unshakeable truth. The famous cogito argument is expressed thus: 'I think, therefore, I am.' The Cogito first occurred in the *Discourse*. Descartes believes that every other thing could be faulted except the doubter or thinker. He considers beyond doubt the existence of the doubter. Thinking for Descartes necessarily connotes existence. His philosophy rests on the indisputable existence of the thinker. (AT VII, 32; HR 1, 101). Descartes's methodic doubt makes him to distrust his senses and whatever previous knowledge either through his teachers or libraries. Obviously Descartes has interest in existence. The *Discourse* puts stress not necessarily on existence, but on the thinker. What precedes existence is thought. What defines existence is thought. Without thought existence is worthless. To anchor the self on 'thought' becomes for Descartes that Archimedean point beyond contestation. According to Gertler, B. And Shapiro, L. (2007: 164-9), the cogito was for Descartes the first item of knowledge. When Descartes pushed away certain thoughts regarding what his past fed him with about man as a rational animal, or soul or body, he was taking full responsibility of what he makes of the knowledge either from Aristotle or Plato, or Scholastics. Clearly, Descartes fought to enthrone the mental edifice of the world.

The things of worldly substance would matter not so much for him. In his cogito analysis, Descartes is fully at home with the limiting nature of analytic philosophizing. The *Meditations on First Philosophy* vividly offers Descartes's sense of the cogito. His focus was the clearest emerging idea of all. Thinking was the necessarily true beyond question. Descartes's 'I think' is connected to the mind, or intelligence, or intellect or reason. Thus, in his book *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes (1996: 18) designates the subject as the 'I am' that necessarily thinks. Therefore at the heart of Descartes's mind or intellect or reason is thought. The cogito for Descartes is a multifunctional concept that can doubt, understand, affirm,

will or unwill, imagine or engage in sensory perceptions. What Descartes wishes to communicate about what happens with the Wax experiment in the Second Meditations is important. The Wax experiment shows the mind's capability to understand corporeal things independent of the senses. Already Descartes has prepared our minds by stating the impossibility of picturing the self through imaginative power. He equally wishes to disclaim the possibility of such knowledge through the senses. Thus, his concern in the Wax experiment proved the intellect could comprehend the wax's essence unaided. What lay beneath the cogito is the dualism it created. Descartes is highly introspective. Michael Löhr (2006: 76) says Descartes equates cogito with consciousness, thus changing the subject, an ontological substance identifiable with the soul to something psychological that reflects on its conscious self. The word that stands for Descartes's consciousness is thought. Thought is an all-embracing word that touches on conscious awareness of all that exists or happens in man. It is doubtful whether we are conscious at all times. In his unpublished Master thesis, C. I. Okoro (2015: 76) notes that Descartes is insistent on his cogito not being a product of syllogistic reasoning, that is, from general to particular, but rather from particular to general. In defense of the cogito, Descartes appeals to intuition, being a natural light of reason that captures reality instantly. The principle of instantiation, of participation holds that for a property to exist, it must inhere as a natural and integral part of an object or substance. Thus, what validates Cartesian cogito is the instantiation of the Ego/Self in thought. Hume's empiricism hardly supports this. But before considering Hume's position let us examine Locke's view, at least, in respect of the chronology of their thoughts.

Lockean notion of the self

In his *Personal Identity A Philosophical Survey*, Nnoruka S. I. (1995: 24-25) appeals to continuity theory whereby whatever endures in memory and character qualifies for personal identity criteria, otherwise not. He mentions Locke's senses of identities spanning from the inorganic through living bodies and to persons. There must be durability of inorganic materials with their atoms admitting no addition or subtraction of particles. The living bodies must maintain a stable, unchangeable organizational structure admitting changes of their parts. Personal identity applies to organized body. He (1995: 25) further quotes J. Locke on man's identity, whereby identity means participation in one continued life, the fleeting particles constantly in succession but vitally united to organized body. Distinguishable also is a person's identity from man's identity. He continues with his reference to Locke on a person's identity. Accordingly, a person is ever characterized by intelligence, capable of reasoning and reflecting, and where consciousness and thinking are inseparable (1995: 25). Thus, personal identity in Locke is grounded in the self-conscious mind. The presupposition is the mind's ability or autonomy to think or perceive the person's identity. Then it is only a conscious mind that can establish personal identity. There is equally no place in Locke for the entertainment of innate ideas or pure intellect. Then all ideas must pass through consciousness and memory. The contrary for Ayers M. (1998: 1094) is impossible. Two key terms, memory and consciousness are crucial in understanding Locke on personal identity. Thomas J. (2009: 155- 6) says that Locke as an empiricist makes the claim that all ideas derive from experience. By Locke the mind is devoid of Cartesian innatism, not always conscious and transparent to itself. He believes that certain ideas occupy the mind without the mind ever being conscious of them. Also certain other ideas can access the mind unheralded, meaning before its arrival. Thinking equates to a conscious thought in Locke, while ideas are sustained by thought. But what is memory for Locke? For J. Thomas (2009: 156), Locke discusses memory under 'Retention' that keeps or retains simple ideas received from sensation and reflection. Retention is accomplished either by keeping the idea ''actually in view'' or by invoking its ''power to revive again in our Minds those Ideas, which after imprinting have disappeared, or have been laid aside out of Sight.'' He further describes memory as a ''storehouse or repository where ideas are laid up or retained or where perceptions are revived and new ideas ushered in on the mind ''without recourse to those sensible qualities, which first imprinted them there.'' Locke names contemplation as a tool for reviving ideas anew on the mind. We may ask about the origin of the power that revives or acts on those memory ideas since the sensible qualities that gave rise to them may be absent? We examine also Locke's Consciousness. Here J. Thomas (2009: 156, 160) tells us again that Consciousness for Locke means 'the Perception of what passes in a Man's own mind.' Locke goes further to add that an idea that is not perceived by the mind counts as nothing. He believes that conscious awareness and thought, since they admit of such wide and subtle variation - are the central capacities of the mind but not its essence. Locke therefore makes consciousness or perception by the conscious mind the anchor that certifies the identity of persons.

The problem of conscious awareness is manifold. B. Gertler and L. Shapiro (2007:5) itemize such problems as being private, subjective, inner, introspective and ineffable. It is the problem associated with subjective self-awareness, where certain things may escape our conscious awareness. At times such as this, one may not remember or re-activate the mind's contemplative power or even have access to the stored memory events. When the consciousness of being

the same person who witnessed or performed a particular action must be certified by perceptive or contemplative mind, it portends serious consequences on morality and human conscience. It might even exonerate a criminal for whatever reasons. Incrimination is possible either by falsely remembering being the alleged criminal. This conjures up in the Heraclitan notion about motion that may render personal identity null and void given the unstable nature of reality. There might be no culprits anymore in society for any wrongful acts committed. The Western notion as discussed in the philosophies of Descartes, Hume and Locke reveals interesting results about the self. Two major philosophical traditions are noteworthy, rationalist and empiricist. Whereas the rationalists have a conceptual framework or conceptual capacity, the empiricism to which Locke and Hume belong lack these potentials. Locke's handling of ideas provides an epistemological treatment to a metaphysical issue. The self remains a metaphysical entity. Western philosophy bristles with dualism. Descartes puts an un-passable chasm between self and world. And Hume's bundles contain no idea of self. P. Iroegbu (1995: 78) in his *Metaphysics, The Kpim of Philosophy* offers reasons why Western philosophy treated selfhood along consciousness, or freedom, or autonomy. Accordingly, Locke wanted to protect individual liberty. Liberty becomes a decisive power to choose, reject and appraise life's actions, and to highlight his distinctness, difference and separation from all other things. Next is Hume.

Humean notion of the Self

To understand Hume on the self we must be conversant with his simple and complex ideas, impressions or perceptions and imagination. Hume replaces reason with imagination. Briefly explained, an impression involves hearing, seeing, and feeling without active engagement by the mind. An idea results when the mind actively engages its content as experienced. A simple idea is devoid of complexity, while a complex idea is a combination of other ideas. By the workings of the imagination simple ideas metamorphose into complex ones. According to C. I. Okoro (2015: 24), there is no one to one correspondence for Hume between complex ideas and impression. One understands that many complex ideas never had impressions that corresponded to them; also many complex impressions are never exactly copied in ideas. The complex idea of self bears no correspondence in simple impressions or copied exactly in ideas. Hume's famous quote on his bundle theory is thus revelatory of what he thinks about selfhood. Hume believes that any introspective search for the self yields no positive result. Then the experience is merely one of seeing a bundle of perceptions without any substantial core to account for those perceptions. Hence Selby-Bigge L. A. (1978: 252) attests that for Hume any experience of an enduring or perduring self, mind or soul becomes a charade. Here, Hume labels all perceptions, which he believes are mere floating ideas as fiction. Hume denies the substantiality of the mind. The mind is merely invoked for epistemological considerations.

For H. W. Nooan (1999: 81-82), Hume appeals to his Conceivability and Separability Principles, and holds that two distinct perceptual objects to which a substance belongs can exist separately without any need of dependence on each other or any need of anything to support their existence. Hume assumes that his bundle theory reasoning is correct, and thus, reduces all mankind to a bundle of perceptions. Because things are in constant flux, no substantiality can be captured or guaranteed in those bundles. Denying that the mind is a substance, Hume (1978: 252-3) compares it to a theatre where things happen quite rapidly lacking in any unified identity. The mind is simply a bundle of perceptions, and always in constant flux. One could hardly distinguish between perceptions and invariably between persons. D. Teichert names Hume's identity bundle inconsistent. It is not applicable to any given body or used to distinguish between persons. Then no subject or substance exists to account for the perceptions. He proposes two ways of comparing several perceptions were they to exist, 1) there should be a correspondence of one single bundle of perceptions (B1) to a single person (P1) resulting to B1=P1, and 2), Or that those perceptions can be bundled to other perceptions, this time corresponding to several persons. In the end each bundle would equal a person. Further Hume tinkers with perfect and imperfect identity. Perfect identity is that identity that remains unchanged regardless of the season. Such objects lie either within or beyond experience. Here belongs the soul or self. While imperfect identity refers to objects that lie in succession for being closely related. The watchword is then the diversity, or several-ness, succession, or similarity or difference. Which means that imperfect identity harps on unity and not identity (Okoro, 2015: 87-89). As an empiricist Hume used empirical principles to handle a metaphysical reality such as the mind. The empirical principles he used bear eloquent testimonies to this. The use of empirical principles is inadequate a tool to search for selfhood. The causal principle may be suited to the physical sciences, but not the science of metaphysical realities. Hume ended up giving the mind an epistemological content.

In Book 11 of Part 1 in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, precisely under the section of Passion of Pride and Humility, Hume would have rescued the self from going extinct (1978: 324). However he lacks the metaphysical spine to designate self as subject, that receives either praise or blame. Also, Hume falsely reasoned that the

anatomical similarities between animals and humans in the expressions of their passions are not sufficient to attribute personal identity to humans. A different explanatory category exists for the Igbo-African. The self remains a metaphysical/ontological entity, though with relational (social/communal, moral) capacities. To investigate this is our present concern.

C. B. Okolo on the social self

In his publication on the 'sociality' of the self, Chukwudum Okolo was vehement in pushing for the social selfhood, and claiming that it supports the African conceptual scheme which is deeply rooted in relationality and communal existence. My position here is one of critique with respect to his idea of social self since it lacks a conceptual framework. However at the end of the day, and in light of McDowell's exposition, we shall propose a re-think of this critique. First, we begin with the critique of sociality of the self. Chukwudum Okolo (1993: 116-128) in his book *African Social and Political Philosophy* presents 'personal Identity' or social self. Our review of his work will center primarily on his work on *African Social and Political Philosophy Selected Essays*, published 1993 (pages 116-128). We refer our reader also to his earlier publication with the theme ''Self as a Problem in African Philosophy'' in *International Philosophical Quarterly* vol. XXXII, No. 4 Issue No. 128 December 1992, pp. 477-485. The sociality of the self is an issue in Chukwudum Okolo (2007: 119). Indisputable, he says, that the common world of black African embodies a worldview as well philosophy, and metaphysical realities. While elaborating on the metaphysical realities, he subscribes to reality as a unit whole comprising the visible and the invisible natures of existence. He emphasizes that Igbo metaphysical world is hierarchically structured. He calls man the ''ontological mean between two spheres of existence (2007: 120), and he assigns man the responsibility of maintaining harmonious existence. He thus infers that ''sociality'' is the category for explaining selfhood (2007: 127).

Realities across the spheres of existence interact with ease, as there are no boundaries. Further he recognizes that such realities are dynamic against the Aristotelian individuated, discrete substances (2007: 123). He sounds dogmatic about the term of ''dynamism'' that describes reality in African world, and, thus designates African identity in social terms. This means the self is born within the dual contexts of dynamism and sociality. Dynamism points to the relational capacity of the self toward the visible and invisible worlds. Let us have a word about his sociality. At birth a child is surrounded either by family members or clan or the larger community. And so no individual is alone. This seems to give the impression that the community appears first in existence before the individual. He cites Placide Tempels description of Bantu's stance on being. Tempels has claimed for the Bantus's equation of being to force, meaning they are used interchangeably in every sense and context (2007: 124). He equally recognizes the hierarchical stratification existing between vital forces, describing their relationships as ''intimate and personal (2007: 124). He reiterates that no individual is alone but must form a living, active link that cuts across all levels of relationships from top to bottom (2007: 124-125). An objection may be pertinent at this juncture. Okolo has already made a candid acceptance of the metaphysical explanation of reality. He stated this while re-echoing the observation made by Bishop Shanahan that the Igbo is no materialist. He is culturally trained to interpret reality and indeed all events from this metaphysical angle, and that rootedness in materialism is inconceivable (2007: 119). The author is correct when he observed that the Igbo African is no materialist. And that he perceives, conceives and interprets reality from a spiritual angle. We concur with him that conceiving personal identity should follow along metaphysical lines. However he compromised his earlier position on the metaphysical explanation of reality he confessed characterized the Igbo. Instead his explanation follows along materialistic lines. The researcher maintains that whatever he says should have taken a metaphysical turn rather than the social. He responded somewhat to this objection, though inadequately (2007: 125). His response has been that the self as a ''we existence'' is the problem (2007:125). This entails specifically viewing the self not as possessing an ontological status. It must then be viewed from the perspective of relationships of humans in society. The consequence, he fears, would be enormous because the self would no longer be marked by the quality of independence, or described in terms of a being with an inner core, an end in itself and free'' (2007: 125). He appeals to experience, and thus, argues that any talk about individuals as distinct selves would not enjoy any philosophical support. (2007: 125). Evidently, it is likely he did not trust his experience. Perhaps he least considered the weightiness of the individual losing his independent status. Although he adopts John Dewey's self with double status, and recognizes Kwame Gyekye's dual composition of body and soul, and Arinze's *mkpuruobi* and spirit, yet he sticks to a social self. He rightly identifies African names as no empty labels but as the concrete embodiments of their personality, uniqueness and discreteness. And this for him corroborates what Tempels said that name touches on the substantial part of their bearers, and, therefore, cannot be something merely external (2007:126-127). His weakness resurfaces as he abandons the metaphysical reasoning and explanation. He finds individuality problematic, and thus gives reasons that violence still trails individuality. Thus, he prefers sociality and turns his back on ontology. There is here an obvious

mistrust about the ontology of selfhood or personhood by the author. For him, sociality answers the question bordering on the identity of a person within African setting (2007: 127). There exists a noticeable gap concerning the ontology of the self and the question of human freedom in C. B. Okolo's conception of the sociality of the self, a gap that John McDowell's exposition is well positioned to fill. McDowell bridges this gap by introducing a conceptually structured human experience. Before addressing this issue, however, it is important to examine the self within the context of social relations.

Self in social relations

The Western idea of individualism promotes selfhood in a culturally individualistic morality that sits on human selfishness. Because Igbo morality is communal, the self reaches out and bridges the gap of selfish inclinations of the heart. We shall embrace a metaphysical journey in this section. The metaphysical will involve the moral and legal, theological and the social. *Ab initio*, the individual discovers that his nature is oriented toward others. And he realizes that withdrawing from the company of others would be detrimental to his wellbeing. Intuitively, aware that he needs others, the option left to him is to draw close to others so as to harness the available resources for optimal advantage. With this he shrinks from life of selfishness to that of mutual cooperation and fellowship. Somehow inspired by the Kantian starry sky above, he speculates there might be other existent beings inhabiting the heavenly realm of existence. The same thought inspires in him the existence of other beings beneath the earth surface. His experience of burying the dead might have suggested to him about existence of super beings in this realm, namely the gods that perhaps give welcome to the deceased as a mother would to her children among the living. And this inspires awe in him. Objects in their organic and inorganic forms in his surrounding daily confront him. Without doubt, he felt some forces around him. The reality of these forces surrounding and enveloping his world taught him the lesson of his life. The lesson is to preserve his species in existence. He must seek ways of dealing with nature. Thus, one practical measure will be to initiate actions that would promote a harmonious relationship through obedience to natural and moral laws. As a relational category, the Igbo individual relates harmoniously to all these different spheres of existence. This background's picture of the social or communal characteristics is important. The Igbo individual is a good communicator with exceptional adaptive skills. Thus, he seeks communion and engages in progressive ventures. Language is at the heart of communication. Because relationship is involved, he applies himself to pursuing the goals of justice, social equality, happiness and respect for the dignity of others. From this angle, we can see how seriously the social, moral or communal perspectives in the search for identity should be taken. They safeguard being as wholeness, thus giving room for the diverse human intuitions. This thought is well accommodated by A. N. Whitehead in his process metaphysics. (1929: 21). Process philosophy or metaphysics entertains the thought that realities of metaphysical nature are not strictly static but can undergo changes, or become something else. Ulrich Steinvorth (2009: 22-23) notes that becoming a person goes in stages. He outlines certain conditions to reach this end. Thus, one must be equipped at birth to assume moral responsibility. Next is the training in language and the consciousness of not being a finished product. Lastly, the fact of representing one's independent opinion is scarcely attained. Accordingly, the self begins with proto-self, makes progress in stages before attaining maturity. The author states clearly that the maturity of persons comes in stages. Three conditions are noteworthy: the competent stage of moral responsibility, the development of communicative skills, and the relational dependence on others. Interestingly, Steinvorth stresses dependence of individuals on the community toward realizing their personhood. Language enables individuals reach full integration within the community. Dr. T. V. Ogan has reflected deeply on the community's need to aid the individual acquire language skills, and become a person. He describes a scenario whereby a mother gives birth and abandons her child to the mother Ape. So, the mother Ape finally became the mother of the child and grooms him. At last he rhetorically asked, 'when the child grows up whose language would he speak, human or Ape?' Although the question was addressed to no one in particular as to require any immediate answer, the response came almost immediately, that the child would undoubtedly wear full semblance of an Ape in thought and action.

Thus, the family or community remains the principal facilitator in linguistic training. K. Wiredu (1996: 13) states that communication is central to anthropology. He further noted that one without language may remain human biologically, but mentally subhuman. The human use of language, he (1996: 21) continued is a factor that distinguishes humans from non-humans, and is constitutive of the community Obviously, John Mbiti gives a socio-centric account of the individual person. Influenced by J. Mbiti, the individual becomes in the language of Ifeanyi Menkiti a self that is extended. The individual as self extends naturally to the community. On what the 'extended self' could mean, Menkiti (2004: 324) notes that an extended selfhood should not be understood in a representative sense. Rather the individual recognizes that his existence and essence are traceable to the being of the community, such that unsupported by the community, the

individual disintegrates into nothingness. On account of this, Menkiti (2004:326) proposes making the individual an extended being. Part of this extension is to be morally relevant. For him this must also include the notion involving yardsticks or gradations . . . an expectation that certain ways of being or behaving . . . may be so off the mark as to raise important questions regarding the person-status of their doers. Assuredly, the individual that catches Menkiti's fancy is not the equal of Heideggerian *Dasein* abandoned in the 'desert-world,' or predetermined to suffer and fend for his life alone. Rather his finitude offers him the free scope to act. Plato opines that the state is individual's writ large. Plato gives the individual primacy vis à vis the state. In an Online contribution, Sharma Krish (2018) explains the expression to mean that whatever good possessed by the state first pre-existed in the individual. Plato deserves our commendation for appreciating the human individual which invariably gives goodness or justice a human face. This implies that a state is functional and progressive whose members lead responsible, excellent, harmonious, and peaceful lives. The individuals embody in themselves all social values such that the good functioning of the state depends on them. Deference is given to the individual for Plato, while Menkiti gives it to the community. The community requires the individual to be morally responsible. However in Menkiti, the community seems to lord it over the individual. Morality is the dominant factor in Menkiti. But morality features quite prominently by the Anarchists as well.

Let us briefly summarize the kern of Anarchist morality as sponsored by Peter Kropotkin in Marxist Internet archive. (August 14, 2018). For them human and animal natures are the same. They identify instinct and group solidarity as essential elements propelling a successful social living. Both man and animal species operate with sympathy. The goal of sympathy is to share pleasure or ameliorate painful experience. Ultimately their morality captures the age-old golden rule: 'do to others what you would have them do to you in the same circumstance.' This golden rule ensures solidarity of action. Both species of man and animal possess immense energy, and are disposed to release this energy generously for the preservation of their generations. Their aspirations are well intentioned since their collective good is vigorously pursued on all fronts. However human virtue got corrupted through the influence of extraneous factors. So, man is motivated either by pleasure or avoidance of pain. Therefore the same motivation is behind all animal pursuits. Hence all animal species work to preserve their races. Reflections on African morality show a similar thought also. The contribution of K. Wiredu (2003: 283-293) centers on morality. Accordingly, morality is far from being purely personal or intellectual, but includes passion as well. His moral project emphasizes solidarity and sympathy as special ingredients. The absence of sympathy breeds all manner of selfishness. A different version of the golden rule is hereby expressed: 'Do not do unto others what you would not want that they do unto you.' He names mutual respect and reciprocal actions the crowning point of life. One major difference however is that whereas the Anarchists base their reflections on human nature, Menkiti's is based on man as a cultural being. Again, for the Anarchists both human and animal natures are considered as being the same. On his part, Menkiti does not consider them on an equal footing. Karl Peschke (1996: 32) makes reference to Kant's golden rule: ''So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle establishing universal law.'' It is evident here that Kant wants to base his universal moral principles purely on reason alone. For him reason should be independent of heteronomous factors (God for instance) as they may be inhibiting full expression of human freedom.

Peschke (1996: 33) has given an insightful response to Kant. Man, he says, who cannot claim to be existentially independent, cannot be independent while executing any action. Therefore Kant's observation that dependence on God is an enslaving relation remains unconvincing. Peschke opines that dependence on God would enable man live authentically. Enslavement, he says, comes by total dependence on a creature that vitiates one's freedom toward attainment of one's purpose in life. We equally submit that individual or self's dependence on the community within the African society does not deprive the individual of his freedom since such dependence helps him attain his full potentials. For Friday Uduigwommen (2001: 54), morality that is anchored solely on reason, independent of experience suffers the same deficiency resulting from the fragmentation of being. Similarly J. Fletcher's Situation Ethics is antithetical to the African spirit because it trivializes the weightier matters such as abortion, euthanasia, adultery, fornication, contraception and lying. Africa prides herself on her moral heritage and rectitude, and cannot sacrifice all that at the altar of situation ethics. The above reasons inform Omoregbe's criticism of situation ethics according to Uduigwomen (2001: 80-81). Even T. Okere (1996: 117-130) in his *Identity and Change* has argued for the preference of African communal morality to the poverty-stricken Christian individualist morality of the West. But we must straighten facts about the conception of reality in African thought pattern. The Igbo or African pattern of thought is never at home with fragmentation. Whether between male and female, or whether community and individual, what obtains is complementarity. And complementarity would mean mutual support for one another. Any conflict arising from freedom is amicably resolved through dialogue. Whether by Okere (1996: 159- 160), or whether by Ramose (2002:

70), the indispensability of the community is a top priority. The community is the locus for the authentication of the self. The Igbo preference for communality aims at wholeness against the fragmentation of being. The researcher equally throws his weight behind the community-oriented selfhood.

John McDowell's Credence to the Sociality of the Self

John McDowell's (1996: 66-86) contribution in *Mind and World* remains profoundly relevant to the development of epistemology and to the restoration of balance between the knowing subject and its object. His position may be understood as a significant improvement upon the epistemology of Immanuel Kant. Kant accorded primacy to the knowing subject as the active agent in cognition. According to him, the mind engages the object of inquiry actively and spontaneously through the imposition of the categories of understanding. In this way, Kant demonstrated how knowledge can arise through the interaction of a priori structures and a posteriori experience. Nevertheless, this line of thought appears to leave the object of inquiry largely passive, contributing nothing intrinsic to the constitution of knowledge. McDowell rightly observes that treating the objects of sense experience as raw, non-conceptual givens from which judgments or beliefs are subsequently formed cannot yield genuine knowledge. This insight informs his rejection of the "Myth of the Given." Interestingly, McDowell's epistemology complements rather than entirely abandons Kant's position. Kant famously argued that "intuitions without concepts are blind, while concepts without intuitions are empty." By this, Kant meant that raw sensory data, lacking conceptual structure, cannot produce knowledge, while concepts themselves cannot function meaningfully in isolation from reality. These concepts, for Kant, are supplied by the mind.

McDowell's position, however, is that the mind does not possess a monopoly over the constitution of knowledge. The spontaneity of the mind, if left unchecked, renders knowledge suspect because thought risks becoming detached from reality. McDowell therefore insists that the objects of experience are not bare, non-conceptual data; rather, experience is already conceptually structured. For an object of experience to embody reality is for it already to belong to what McDowell calls the "space of reasons." McDowell employs the notion of "constraint" to explain the relationship between thought and experience. Reality exerts a rational influence upon thought through experience. Experience is therefore not merely causal but already conceptually informed. The experience of a tree, for example, is not a bare sensation later interpreted by thought; rather, experience itself already presents the object as "a tree." The implication of this position is that experience constrains thought because the world is directly present within conceptual experience. It is experience that authenticates judgment; without such experiential constraint, thought becomes detached from reality.

Even René Descartes 'famous characterization of the human person as a "thinking thing" did not imply that thought operates independently of worldly reality. When the mind judges that "it is raining," the justification of that judgment cannot reside solely within the mind itself. The reality of rain exists independently of thought and serves as the external ground of the judgment. This further confirms the idea that experience is already conceptually structured. In many respects, McDowell's position may be read through the lens of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel's assertion that "what is rational is real, and what is real is rational" resonates strongly with McDowell's view. Rationality is not external to reality; rather, reality itself embodies rational structure. Experience therefore constrains thought in precisely the manner McDowell describes.

Furthermore, McDowell appeals to the notion of "second nature" to explain human rationality. By this, he means that human understanding is culturally, morally, and socially mediated. This idea echoes the position of Aristotle, who maintained that rational capacities are cultivated through ethical upbringing, education, and participation in culture. These dimensions of human life are themselves conceptually structured and therefore belong to the sphere of reason. Consequently, culture, morality, and sociality are not accidental additions to human existence; they are embodiments of rationality itself. They belong to the world of experience and therefore constrain thought. In McDowell's terms, thought is answerable to these worldly realities. From this perspective, sociality itself must be understood as conceptually structured. Nature, in this sense, is personal. As personal, it is rational. Human beings participate in this rational order, and their social existence is inseparable from it. Being rational beings means that we are imbued with moral capacities and responsible freedom. Thus, within this framework, C. B. Okolo's insistence on "sociality" as the defining category of the self gains philosophical credibility and depth.

Conclusion

Our study of the sociality of the self has broadened our understanding of the human person beyond the traditional notion that focuses primarily on substantiality. There is more to the human person than what appears at first glance, even when we ordinarily affirm that man is unique yet exists in plurality. This reality suggests the necessity of a multidisciplinary approach to the study of the human person. Such an approach underscores both the complexity of man and the need to welcome diverse perspectives in

understanding human existence. Sociology, among other disciplines, therefore becomes indispensable in this enterprise.

The human person is by nature gregarious. He seeks the company of others and appears unable to survive meaningfully without establishing relationships with fellow human beings. It is indeed a truism that man embodies within himself the ensemble of nature. Whatever he shares with nature cannot be foreign to his identity. Among other things, we have established that nature is alive, personal, and intelligible. Rationality itself develops more fully when one becomes consciously engaged with the physical world. In this regard, Aristotle would support the position that human beings acquire conceptual capacities through education, culture, and ethical formation. Let us take the example of education. Human language serves as the vehicle of culture, and through education it nurtures and develops human rationality, as evidenced in the formation of propositional thought. Indeed, language occupies a central place in the making of persons because it mediates social relations and makes meaningful interaction possible. Through language, individuals participate in culture, acquire conceptual capacities, and come to understand themselves and others within a shared social world.

At the horizontal dimension of existence, man's openness to his fellow human beings is unmistakably evident. Yet the human person is also open to transcendence. This openness points to his spiritual nature and aspirations, as well as to what he shares with the divine. More importantly, it also points to what he stands to receive by reason of this openness. Consequently, what we describe as man's openness to others is another way of expressing his sociableness. Such sociableness speaks profoundly of presence, interdependence, human warmth, sympathy, compassion, and mutual concern. The need for the other is therefore a defining mark of our humanity and ought not to be glossed over. Sociability helps to break the yoke of individualism and selfishness; it removes the veil of pride and arrogance by drawing the individual into meaningful communion with others. Our conceptual framework thus places considerable emphasis on diversification—not merely to remain within the confines of the conceptual and individualistic understanding of the self, but also to explore the equally important social dimension of human existence.

We therefore boldly submit that sociality is not accidental to the human person but constitutive of his very essence. The message of his Holiness Pope Leo XIV for the 2026 World Day of Communications on "Preserving Human Voices and Faces'' resonates with the sociality of the self under consideration. This chosen title by the Catholic Pontiff underscores human uniqueness, rooted essentially in our capacity for communication as social beings and possession of dignity as persons. Thus John McDowell makes an important contribution by locating sociality within the sphere of intelligibility, or what he—borrowing from Wilfrid Sellars—calls the "space of reasons." For McDowell, the space of reasons is the realm of rational justification and conceptual thought, distinct from the realm of mere natural law or causal explanation. Since sociality belongs to the essence of the human person, it rightly belongs within this realm of intelligibility. This ultimately lends philosophical legitimacy to the claim that sociality is fundamental to the constitution of the self.

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