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Indigenous Esan Epistemology as a Response to the Challenges of Public Morality

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Abstract

Our society today echoes the presence of public immorality and conflict of values, as well as a dwindling trust of the public in scientific or traditional epistemological solutions for resolving all issues of life. These call for a more critical look at the 'other' as an object of knowledge especially as epistemological conceptions of the 'other' form the background to the moral valuation of the person. The prevailing Western theories of representation separates the subject of knowledge from the object of knowledge, and group together the person-object (the 'other') and the nonperson-object (plants, animals, things, etc.) as object of knowledge; thus it dehumanizes the 'other' and undermines morality which is an essential aspect of the human person. Using the critical and analytic methods, this paper aims at resolving public immorality and conflict of values. To achieve this aim, it critically evaluates the Western epistemic theories of representation to show how they dehumanise the person-object of knowledge, and further analyses Indigenous Esan epistemology which bonds the subject of knowledge with the person-object of knowledge on communal, rational and moral grounds (but this bond does not exist for nonperson-objects that are amoral). Thus, Esan epistemology resolves the dehumanization of the person-object (the 'other') and creates the "interactivist" and epistemic intercourse between the

subject and the person-object of knowledge that can help resolve these public moral problems and value challenges of our time. If adequately articulated, Esan epistemology can serve as an alternative epistemology to the Western theories of representation.

Keywords: Indigenous Esan Epistemology, Personhood, Public Morality, Rationality, Theories of Representation

Introduction

In indigenous Esan thought, knowledge of the person-object, that is, the 'other' or other co-subjects of knowledge (as opposed to nonperson-objects, which are things, plants, animals, reptiles, birds, fishes, etc.) is overtly moral. This is because the person in indigenous Esan thought is essentially a rational and a moral being. Morality is an essential aspect of human rationality such that your moral rating reflects the extent of your rationality. This also explains why in African ontology, of which Esan ontology is a part, a person's moral rating plays a vital role in his or her vital force in the hierarchy of being.

Public morality is derived from culture, social milieu, the state or constitution, and it has undergone changes especially with the advent of the 'new morality' with its excessive uninhibited sexual expression. It is an offshoot of Western epistemological theories of representation which does not discriminate between knowing a person-object and a nonperson-object. This non-discriminative nature of Western epistemic theories of representation dehumanises the person-object of knowledge, disconnect human morality from rationality, and makes it difficult, if not impossible, to resolve the public moral and value challenges of our time.

To resolve the public moral and value challenges of our time, there is the need to bond morality with rationality as essential attributes of the human person. An aspect of the epistemology of indigenous Esan people does this. It splits the object of knowledge between persons and nonpersons; and on rational and moral grounds established a bond between the subject of knowledge (who is a person) and person-object of knowledge

(who are other persons – the ‘other’). This bond does not exist between the subject of knowledge and nonperson-object of knowledge because the nonperson-object of knowledge is not attributed with morality; it is believed to be amoral. Thus, the personhood of a person that possesses rationality but is deficient in morality is questioned.

To adequately articulate the rational and moral bond between the subject of knowledge and the person-object of knowledge towards resolving public immorality and conflict of values of our time, this paper, using the critical and analytical methods, will critically analyse the Western epistemic theories of representation to show how the grouping together of the person and nonpersons as object of knowledge dehumanises the person-object of knowledge. Thereafter, an aspect of indigenous Esan epistemology that bonds the subject of knowledge with the person-object of knowledge on rational and moral grounds will be critically examined and proposed as an alternative epistemology that can help solve the moral and value challenges of our time. To understand indigenous Esan epistemology to which the person is central, this paper will begin with an analysis of the nature of the human person.

Personhood

What constitutes a person bothers around the whole notion of personhood and personal identity. Here we are concerned with human persons knowing fully well that there are other beings who are not human but are considered as persons; like God, demons, angels, and aliens.¹²² . Substance monists and substance dualists are two Western philosophical approaches to the notion of personhood or personal identity.

Substance monists view the human person as a purely material being, and no more. Of all the features of the person listed by substance monists, Elizabeth Burns and Stephen Law noted mental intelligence and the ability to make moral decisions

¹²² Sylvester Idemudia Odia, “The Problems of Philosophy” in Nkeonye Otakpor (Ed.), *Philosophy and Logic: A Concise Approach*, (Benin City: General Studies Unit, University of Benin, 2016), Pg. 63.

on rational grounds.¹²³ Mental intelligence or rationality is identified with the brain. Thus, thinking, reasoning, dreaming etc. become mental states, mental functions. And when the soul is talked about as in the case of Democritus, it is considered as something material, as something made up of atoms; and these soul-atoms are “responsible for animation and consciousness in living bodies.”¹²⁴

Substance dualists, on the other hand, believe that the human person is made up of a material body and an immaterial soul/spirit. While the body possesses senses, there is also reasoning, remembering, etc. which are of the brain. Now there is also consciousness. For John Locke, the essence of the human person is consciousness; and consciousness, which is of the human soul, is something immaterial and unites past and present actions of the human person into the same person, and thus, account for personal identity:

*Consciousness alone unites actions into the same person. But though the same immaterial substance or soul does not alone, wherever it be, and in whatever state, make the same man; yet it is plain, consciousness, as far as ever it can be extended – should it be to ages past – unites existences and actions very remote in time into the same person, as well as it does the existences and actions of the immediately preceding moment: so that whatever has the consciousness of present and past actions, is the same person to whom they both belong. ... For as to this point of being the same self, it matters not whether this present self be made up of the same or other substances – I being as much concerned, and as justly accountable for any action that was done a thousand years since, appropriated to me now by this self-consciousness, as I am for what I did the last moment.*¹²⁵

123 Elizabeth Burns & Stephen Law (Eds.), *Philosophy For AS and A2*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), Pg. 182.

124 B. A. G. Fuller, *A History of Philosophy*, Revised Ed., (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1945), Pg. 91.

125 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 1999), Pg. 123 – 124.

For Descartes, who is also a substance dualist, reason as well as the senses make up the human person. The senses are of the body, while reason, which is the thinking being is essential to the human person and separates humans from animals.¹²⁶

From both the substance monists and the substance dualists of the Western philosophical tradition, rationality plays a supreme role in determining personhood or personal identity. And where morality is added, in the case of substance monist, it is subsumed under rationality. The reason for the silence on morality, or the subsuming of morality under rationality may be found in the Western theories of representation.

Western Theories of Representation

Both the rationalists and the empiricists' traditions have epistemic theories of representation. Descartes is a good example of the rationalist tradition, and Locke is a good example of the empiricist tradition. For Descartes, the essence of the human person is the thinking being. The thinking being, the mind, is distinct and separate from the body that houses it, and it has the following characteristics: "It is a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, that imagines also, and perceives."¹²⁷ The body possesses the five external senses that bring impressions of material objects into the human mind for the mind to comprehend and intuitively make them meaningful.¹²⁸ Thus, whatever the mind intuitively makes of the representations of objects from the senses, is what objects are.

For Locke, all ideas and materials of thought are all from experience. From experience "all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself."¹²⁹ These impressions

¹²⁶ Rene Descartes, *A Discourse on Method, Meditations on the First Philosophy, Principles of Philosophy*, Trans. J. Veitch, Introd. A. D. Lindsay, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1912), Pg. 3 – 4.

¹²⁷ Rene Descartes, *A Discourse on Method, Meditations on the First Philosophy, Principles of Philosophy*, Pg. 88.

¹²⁸ Rene Descartes, *A Discourse on Method, Meditations on the First Philosophy, Principles of Philosophy*, Pg. 90 – 94.

¹²⁹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk II, Ch. I, No. 2, Pg. 87.

are represented in the mind just as a mirror does of objects in front of it. This representation is not the same as the object; it is like the reflection of a mirror or a picture of an object. This representation in the mind is all we can be sure of because we cannot go beyond it to know how the object it represents really is. In other words, we are only cocksure that “the idea we receive from an external object is in our minds;”¹³⁰ but that this idea is of objects existing independent of us is something we cannot be very sure of, at best, we can only reasonably assume that they exist independent of us.

These Western epistemic theories of representation of both the rationalist and empiricist traditions present to us the idea that the mind of a solitary individual – uninfluenced by culture, society, or the environment in which he grew up – can produce knowledge that will be relevant to his culture, society, or environment. This asocial solitary individual epistemic agent (the subject of knowledge) further groups knowing a person-object and nonperson-object together as object of knowledge. “To be known (either as a person-object or a nonperson-object) is for the asocial subject of knowledge to have a picture, a mirror, or a mental representation that corresponds to the object known.”¹³¹ Thus, persons become known just as we know nonpersons; and since we do not impute morality to nonpersons, persons who are known the same way nonpersons are known are stripped of their morality. Morality ceases to be an essential attribute of humans required for knowing a person-object of knowledge.

In addition, the asocial solitary individual epistemic agent is alienated from himself and the ‘other’ (other persons as social co-producers of knowledge). As observed by Sandra Jovchelovitch, this alienation “radically dehumanised the

¹³⁰ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk IV, Ch. II, No. 14, Pg. 527.

¹³¹ Sylvester Idemudia Odi, *Personhood and Epistemic Interactivism in Indigenous Esan Thought*, Ph.D. Thesis, Dept. of Philosophy, Faculty of Art, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 2016, Pg. 13.

subject of representation,"¹³² and the 'other', the person-object of knowledge becomes deprived of morality and values. And as our attitude towards the 'other' has a foundation in the theory of knowledge we adopt, these Western epistemic theories of representation dehumanised the person-object and have contributed negatively to public morality and values of our time. Hence we are currently plagued with injustices, segregation (tribalism and racism), corruption, violation of fundamental human rights, terrorism and so on. Let us now look at the mutual relationship between knowledge and public morality.

Knowledge and Public Morality

There are basically two ways of acquiring knowledge in the Western tradition. Knowledge can be mediated through the senses (aided or enhanced by scientific instruments), or immediate (not gotten from sense perception like knowledge from revelation). The Western tradition has emphasised mediated knowledge over immediate knowledge; and in the Modern period of Western philosophy, theories of representation were produced especially as articulated by Descartes (in the rationalist tradition) and Locke (in the empiricist tradition). These theories of representation separate the subject of knowledge from the person-object (that is, the 'other') and group together the person-object and nonperson-objects as object of knowledge. The knowledge produced becomes propositional.

Propositional knowledge in Western epistemology separates the subject from the object of knowledge. The proposition must be true or false to the extent that it corresponds to reality, coheres with other already accepted true propositions, or is practical, and for Duncan Pritchard and Bernard Rosen, the knowledge produced is both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable.¹³³

132 Sandra Jovchelovitch, *Knowledge in Context: Representations, Community and Culture*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), Pg. 19.

133 On the intrinsic and instrumental value of knowledge see Duncan Pritchard, *What Is This Thing Called Knowledge?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), Pg. 17 – 19; and on the nature of intrinsic value see the 6th chapter of Bernard Rosen, *Ethical Theory: Strategies and Concepts*, (California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1993).

That knowledge has both intrinsic and instrumental value suggests a very strong relationship between epistemology and morality. For Plato, to do good and avoid evil, to discover what is right “the good” and do it, is to have knowledge. In other words, “evil is due to lack of knowledge.”¹³⁴ The knowledge Plato advocated for discovering what is the “good” is that of virtue (through the development of good habits) and mental powers (through studying philosophy and mathematics).¹³⁵ Hume’s argument that one cannot from “is” (an epistemic propositional statement of an event or state of affairs) make an “ought” (a moral judgement of the said event or state of affairs) statement was an attempt to sever this relationship but it was all to no avail. Also, Barry Hallen has rightly noted the foundational role played by epistemology both to morality and other disciplines thus: “Considerations of how and what people claim to believe and to know are always fundamental. They underlie every aspect of human endeavour: aesthetic, commonsensical, moral, social, political, technical, etc.”¹³⁶

Currently, we live in a world dotted with a variety of problems that are of public morality in nature, that is, ethical problems and value challenges such as injustice, violation of fundamental human rights, segregation (tribalism and racism), terrorism, and corruption. Alasdair MacIntyre explained the moral predicament of our time in the first chapter of *After Virtue*. He pointed out that a catastrophe took place in morality long before the birth of academic history, such that academic history derives from the catastrophe hence it could not detect it. This for him explains why “the language and the appearances of morality persist even though the integral substance of morality has to a large degree been fragmented and then in part

134 Richard H. Hopkin and Avrum Stroll, *Philosophy Made Simple*, 2nd Ed., Revised, (New York: Doubleday, 1993), Pg. 3.

135 Richard H. Hopkin and Avrum Stroll, *Philosophy Made Simple*, Pg. 3.

136 Barry Hallen, “What’s it mean?: ‘Analytic’ African Philosophy”, *Quest Philosophical Discussions: An International Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. x, No. 2, Dec., (1996), Pg. 70.

destroyed.”¹³⁷ Also, reflecting on the crisis that followed the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections in Nigeria, J. F. Ade Ajayi has this to say:

There was a general feeling that the crisis was not merely at the level of politics and economics; but that, rather, it was a reflection of the collapse of basic moral values at the level of both the individual and society; and that we would not really get out of the crisis until we had re-examined ourselves as individuals and as a people and re-established the basic moral values that should uphold our society.¹³⁸

In *There Was a Country*, Chinua Achebe highlighted “corruption of the ruling class”¹⁴¹ as one of the problems that plague Nigeria after the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. Unless curbed, Achebe opined, corruption can lead to the failure of the Nigerian State and the rise of terrorism.¹⁴⁰ Earlier in *The Trouble with Nigeria*, he listed tribalism, social injustice and the cult of mediocrity, and indiscipline as some of the troubles with Nigeria.¹⁴¹ In addition, John Campbell, in *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink* has this to say: “As early as Shehu Shagari’s 1979-1983 administration, corruption was already deeply embedded in the political culture and the formal and informal economy. It infected even the universities and religious establishments.”¹⁴² Furthermore, reflecting on the moral predicament of our age, Louis J. Munoz synthesised the worrying situation of public morality in two directions: “a continuous and systematic

137 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study In Moral Theory*, (London: Duckworth & Co., Ltd, 1981), Pg. 5.

138 J. F. A. Ajayi, “Foreword” in L. J. Munoz, *Virtues: An Inquiry into Moral Values For Our Times*, (Ibadan & Lagos: Sefer Books, Ltd, 1996), Pg. iii.

139 Chinua Achebe, *There Was A Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2012), Pg. 243.

140 Chinua Achebe, *There Was A Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, Pg. 250.

141 Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble With Nigeria*, (England and Wales: Heinemann Educational Books, 1984), Pg. 5, 19, 27.

142 John Campbell, *Nigeria: Dancing On The Brink*, (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2010), Pg. 31.

aggression of moral principles and the multiplying of models of corruption especially among the young and adolescent."¹⁴³

The confidence in what can be referred to as a scientific or traditional solution to these public moral problems and value challenges forms the background to the enactment of laws, social instrumentations, and religious sanctions. But increasing social unrest in our society today coupled with the dwindling trust of the public in science to help solve these problems has led to the "resurgence of primitive scientific rites and of New Age mysticism".¹⁴⁴ One reason why these scientific or Western traditional solutions seem to have failed in solving these problems lies in the Western epistemic theories of representation that underlie the concept of the human person. These epistemic theories of representation (the Cartesian theory of representation and that of Locke) have not given enough attention to the epistemological conception of the human person.

There is, therefore, the need for a new approach to knowledge that differentiates knowing person-object from knowing nonperson-objects. Such an approach will differentiate knowing the person-object from the nonperson-object, and produce a humanistic knowledge of the person-object based on the characteristics of being part of a community, and possessing reason and morality. This approach can be found among the Esan people of Edo State, Nigeria. Let us now examine the epistemology of indigenous Esan people.

Indigenous Esan epistemology

The Esan people of Edo State, Nigeria (in union with other Edo speaking people of Edo State, and the Gboko people of Benue State) differentiate the subject of knowledge from the object of knowledge. However, they further make a strict distinction between a person as an object of knowledge (person-object)

¹⁴³ Louis J. Munoz, *Virtues: An Inquiry into Moral Values For Our Times*, (Nigeria, Ibadan & Lagos: Sefer Books Ltd., 1996), Pg. 1.

¹⁴⁴ Gian-Carlo Rota and Jeffrey Thomas Crants, "Ten Philosophical (and Contradictory) Predictions", S. Rosen (Ed.), *The Philosopher's Handbook: Essential Readings From Plato to Kant*, (New York: Random House Reference, 2000), Pg. 476.

and nonperson-object of knowledge. This distinction is made on communal, rational and moral grounds. The subject of knowledge and the person-object of knowledge possess, among other values, communality, rationality, and morality. Thus, even when the subject of knowledge distinguishes himself or herself from the person-object of knowledge (the 'other'), he or she is ontological bonded to the person-object of knowledge on communal, rational and moral grounds. Although a bond exists between the subject of knowledge and the nonperson-object of knowledge on ecological grounds in this material world, this bond is different from the one that exists among persons. While the bond between the subject of knowledge and the person-object of knowledge is ontological (communal, rational and moral), the bond between the subject of knowledge and nonperson-object of knowledge is purely ecological. Also, while it is wrong to 'use' the person-object as a means to an end, it is not wrong to 'use' nonperson-object as means to an end.

Knowing a person-object is essentially different from knowing a nonperson-object in indigenous Esan thought. The Esan saying: "*ai yole abha len oria*" ("we never say we do not know someone") bonds the subject of knowledge to the person-object of knowledge in a way that highlights the 'humanness' in our personality. Grounded on the three essential characteristics of the human person - communal being, rationality and morality - it distinguishes persons from nonpersons in an "interactivist" way. This interactivist way is a form of an intercourse between the subject and person-object of knowledge. All persons, either as subject or person-object of knowledge have the intrinsic values of rationality and morality, as well as respect, modesty, honour, virtue, dependence on the community, the pivot around which the vital force in the hierarchy of being revolves, etc. Christian Smith has rightly referred to the human persons as "fundamentally moral, believing animals"¹⁴⁵ thus highlighting rationality and morality

145 Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), Pg. 4.

as essential attributes of the human person. Also, Bert Hamminga has stressed the “holistic, community-dependent, power-connected personality”¹⁴⁶ of the African. These intrinsic values are attributed by the indigenous Esan people to all adults not withstanding their sex or gender, culture, and religious affiliation. Knowledge in this context is not propositional even though it is rooted in the experience of the community of the Esan people.

Knowledge of the person-object is based on the experience acquired as one matures in the Esan community. A person is distinct from nonpersons and valuable in himself or herself ontologically. Thus, a person is primarily known in relation to his or her intrinsic values, and secondarily by name, social status, profession, marriage, children, etc. In propositional knowledge, these secondary attributes are what is paramount to knowing a person. Thus, when one meets an acquaintance one can say in contemporary times that one does not know the person. But for the indigenous Esan person, an acquaintance is known ontologically by virtue of the intrinsic values acquired at birth and developed over time as one matures in the community. It is in this sense that in indigenous Esan thought knowledge of the person-object is non-propositional, interactivist, and an intercourse of the personhood of the ‘other’. Also, the Esan saying: “*Ai su egbe iyen*” (“You do not scratch a person” so as to know if blood flows in his or her veins, as you would for a corn to know if it is due for harvesting) demonstrates that knowing the ‘other’ (person-object) is not primarily empirical; it is primarily communal. Knowledge and truth becomes the property of the community of human persons which each adult person contributes to and participates in.

Since the human person is essentially communal, rational and moral, and morality is a critical offshoot of rationality, any serious lack in the moral behaviour or wellbeing of the person

¹⁴⁶ Bert Hamminga, “Epistemology From The African Point Of View”, in Bert Hamminga, (Ed.), *Knowledge Cultures. Comparative Western And African Epistemology*. Poznan studies in the philosophy of the sciences and humanities, (Amsterdam-New York, NY: Rodopi, 2005), Pg. 79.

can lead to a serious doubt about the degree of rationality of the person. In other words, when a person commits a taboo (which is a serious moral misdemeanour), for instance, his rationality is seriously questioned. Thus, he or she can be excommunicated ontologically from the community of persons, and at the same time, excommunicated epistemologically such that one can say one does not know him or her. Hence, the only condition one can say “*I bha len uwe*” (“I do not know you”) to a human adult person is when he or she commits a serious moral misdemeanour that casts doubts on the degree of his or her rationality and the presence of other intrinsic values. Such a person is denied an epistemic intercourse with other persons in the community, reduced to the level of nonpersons, and can be said not to be known. This also “amounts to disregard and slight to the inherent dignity of the person, strips the person of ‘humanness’, cuts off the person from the community of persons, and relegates the person to the level of a nonentity (that is, insignificant and non-existent) disconnected from reality.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, to categorically say one does not know another person when the person has not committed any serious moral crime is to cut off the person from the community of persons, and slight the rationality and moral integrity of the person. Such a person can demand for an explanation as to why he or she has been disregarded, dishonoured, and reduced to the level of a nonperson.

It therefore means that any person irrespective of age, sex or gender in any sector (private or public like those of government at all levels: federal, state, or local) who mismanages or embezzles public funds, is unjust, segregates (guilty of tribalism, nepotism, and racism), is corrupt, in involve in human rituals, violates fundamental human rights, and sponsors or practices (directly or indirectly) terrorism, is, by virtue of these immoral actions, cut off ontologically from the community of persons, denied epistemic intercourse, and can

¹⁴⁷ Sylvester Idemudia Oda, *Personhood and Epistemic Interactivism in Indigenous Esan Thought*, Pg. 24 – 125.

appropriately be told “I do not know you” from an indigenous Esan point of view. This is because his or her immoral actions sever him or her from the community of persons, cast serious doubt on his or her rationality to the extent that one is not sure any more if he or she still possesses “personhood” and all the inherent qualities that go with it. We are ontologically one though at the same time different; hence we are not bonded to the extent of misplacing our identity as individuals who can be ostracised from the community of persons. Anyone whose thoughts as a human person does not recognize this fact of our ontological oneness is not fit to be called a human person, and can be treated as a nonperson-object.

When fully and adequately comprehended, the indigenous Esan epistemology that bonds the subject of knowledge with the person-object of knowledge, and severs this bond only on moral grounds, can help resolve the public moral and value challenges of our time. The glorious welcome given by some communities to some persons who committed some of the immoral actions listed above (irrespective of the sector: private or public) after they leave office is an aberration to most African moral systems that would, in the past, have excommunicated or banished such persons from the community. From the indigenous Esan point of view, such persons will never be given an honoured reception; he or she will be ostracised and disowned by the community, and their names will not be mentioned among the living, nor among the living dead (ancestors).

Therefore, from the arguments presented above, this paper argues that the influence of the Western epistemic theories of representation that separates the subject of knowledge from his emotions, feelings, morality, the community of persons, and group together the persons-object (the ‘other’) and nonperson-object as object of knowledge (thus reducing the ‘other’ to the level of nonperson-objects that are devoid of morality) on the modern and contemporary African is enormous. To salvage Africa, indeed the whole world, from the negative influence of the Western epistemic theories of representation that has

brought about the current public moral and value challenges of our time, it is necessary that we adopt an epistemological approach to knowing the person-object that incorporates morality. Here, the indigenous Esan epistemology that incorporates morality with knowing a person-object is presented as an alternative epistemology that can solve the challenges of public morality and values.

Conclusion

The Western epistemic theories of representation which forms the background to the epistemic conception of the person conceives the person-object the same way it conceives nonperson-objects. Both the person-object and the nonperson-objects are conceived without the added value of morality, especially as nonperson-objects (which include animals) are judged amoral. Deprived of morality, the person-object, irrespective of his or her moral state, can be known once his or her data are scientifically collated just as nonperson-objects are known once their data are scientifically collated. Thus, good and bad persons are known alike, moral worth or value notwithstanding.

In the face of moral and value challenges of our time, we cannot keep working with the Western theories of representation at the epistemic level and expect to find any remarkable solution to these challenges. Once a method or approach has not yielded any significant solution to a problem we should look for alternatives; and the aspect of indigenous Esan epistemology that bonds the subject of knowledge with the person-object of knowledge (the 'other') on the principles of personhood, 'humanness', built on communal relationship, rationality and morality, and the inherent values of regard, honour, respect, and power-connectedness in the vital force is an alternative that resolves the moral and value challenges of our time

With the alternative epistemology of indigenous Esan thought, we can rebuild and regain our lost morality and values. We can individually and collectively say to persons who loot

our treasuries, who are corrupt, who do not respect human rights, who relate with us unequally along the lines of religion, tribe, race, sex and gender, and who are either terrorists or sponsor terrorists: "*I bha len uwe*" ("I do not know you") or "*Iman bha len uwe*" ("We do not know you"). Such declaration will bring to their awareness the ontological fact that they have been excommunicated from the communion of living persons, and if they die without making amends, also excommunicated from the living dead (ancestors). This alternative indigenous Esan epistemology, when properly construed and taught to the current and coming generations of persons, can help resolve the moral and value challenges of our time, and inculcate the values of personhood and 'humanness' exposed here.