TOWARDS AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN ETHICS FOR THE TECHNOLOGICAL AGE: WILLIAM SCHWEIKER'S CHRISTIAN ETHICS OF RESPONSIBILITY IN DIALOGUE WITH AFRICAN ETHICS

BY

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SUPERVISOR:

PROF DAWID ETIENNE DE VILLIERS

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Faculty of Theology,

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August, 2013

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Signed _____

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Summary of PhD Research

Technology has several advantages, but the growing fear is that the power of human beings over nature through technology is growing in an alarming rate so that, if not checked with a new ethics of responsibility, we may be heading to the destruction of nature and the annihilation of humanity. In response to this fear, Hans Jonas set a whole new debate into motion, both in Germany and America, when he argues (in his book entitled, *The imperative of responsibility: In search of ethics for the technological age* (1984) that the existing approaches to philosophical ethics, including theological ethics, are inadequate since they do not tackle the serious issues produced by the rapid expansion of modern technology. He then asserts that we must make a concerted effort to develop a theory of responsibility, so that humanity could be salvaged from future extinction. Whereas Jonas denies that religion could form the basis of a universal ethics of responsibility, Schweiker strives to prove him wrong by producing a Christian version of an ethics of responsibility from that of Jonas. Using Schweiker's formulation of a Christian ethics of responsibility, this researcher aims at taking the debate to another level by engaging his Christian ethics of responsibility with African ethics to come out with an African Christian ethics of responsibility. The reason why we are formulating an African Christian ethics of responsibility is that if Africa is seen as the fastest growing Christian continent in the world, then formulating an African Christian ethics of responsibility is worthwhile since such an ethics addressing the negative impact of modern technology will be available and accessible to a substantial part of the world population. Although African and Christian in its point of departure, this ethics of responsibility claims to be universal in a normative sense of the word. It strives to provide moral guidance that should be heeded by everyone. This is because in our formulation, we will call Christians and non-Christians alike to emulate the altruistic love of Christ for the world as the core of an ethics of responsibility that is future-oriented.

KEYWORDS

Ethics of responsibility, African ethics, Christian ethics, technology, communalism, Ubuntu, Hans Jonas, William Schweiker

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

We live in a world in which the rapid expansion of technology is threatening the very basis of life. Technology is everywhere in modern society. Technology is so important for life that we find it in the computers we use, the televisions we watch, the cars we drive, the implements and gadgets in our hospitals, and in our farms, in the aircrafts we travel in across the continents, space crafts, the clothes we wear, the microwaves we use, weapons of our warfare, in our kitchens, in our bathrooms, etc. Quite recently in Ghana, there was a fault with our national computer grid for only half a day and it managed to create panic and brought most of the cities in Ghana almost to a standstill. Whenever there is an electricity outage in Accra and Kumasi and the traffic lights go off, there is always chaos on our roads as nobody wants to wait for the other vehicles to go first at our crossroads. In fact, without technology, human beings would have died in their millions from various types of diseases, hunger and accidents. Without technology, we would still be using old and difficult ways of farming - without implements and tractors; rivers and oceans would have been difficult to cross, etc. We live in a technological environment; once technology is taken away from our societies, the human culture may collapse (Schuurman 2010: 109). Don Ihde puts the importance of technology this way:

> One of the most obvious positive results arising out of modern technologies relates to much of what we take for granted with respect to a

standard of health which is relatively disease-free. Slow, accumulative results which effect this state relate to the growth of hygienic practices in a great many areas – the isolation or removal of harmful organisms through cleanliness techniques relating to food and water supplies, as an example – compared to the quick and dramatic fixes which occur through the development of medical solutions such as the Salk vaccine for polio, a disease which ravaged tens of thousands of people in the days of today's students' parents or, at most, grandparents (Don Ihde 1993: 53; cf. Bujo 2001: xi).

But technology has its disadvantages too. Modern terrorist attacks have made it very clear how vulnerable modern culture could be because of its dependence on technology. Some byproducts of technological expansion include "scarce and poisoned water, infertile soil, polluted air and a shattering of the relationships that nurture a sense of belonging and companionship" (Conway 1999: 2-3). We are able, miraculously, to send human beings to the moon and back; we design computers that are able to do countless things; we build missiles that are able to reach their targets with an amazing accuracy, and create atomic bombs that are capable of wiping out a whole city of its inhabitants. The growing fear is that the power of human beings over nature through technology is growing at such an alarming rate that, if not checked with a new ethics of responsibility, we may be heading to the destruction of nature and the annihilation of humanity. Hans Jonas outlines the problem concisely this way:

Modern technology, informed by an ever-deeper penetration of nature and propelled by the forces of market and politics, has enhanced human power beyond anything known or even dreamed of before. It is a power over matter, over life on earth, and over man himself; and it keeps growing at an accelerating pace…. The net total of these threats is the overtaxing of nature, environmental and (perhaps) human. Thresholds may be reached in one direction or another, points of no return, where processes initiated by us will run away from us on their own momentum – and towards disaster. (1984: ix; cf. Jonas 2003: 200; see Bujo 2001: xii).

In the midst of all these, some strongly believe that human beings are capable of managing their own affairs without reference to a transcendent force. Corliss Lamont, a leading promoter of humanism in the West, surmises that

The philosophy of humanism, with its conscious limitation of the human enterprise to this existence, sets us free to concentrate our entire energies, without distraction by either hopes or fears of individual immortality, on that building of the good society that has been the dream of saints and sages since the dawn of history (Lamont 1974: 115).

Coupled with the relativism and individualism of the West with their concomitant problems, the indications are that the technological advancements are most of the time made without adequate reference to its moral implications. When the ethical

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implications are not well reflected upon, we will get to a time when technology may bring the whole human race to extinction, as warned by Jonas. This is the reason why Christians and other religious people, governmental policy makers, scientists, etc. have to make special efforts to let the world know that believing in ourselves is very important if ever we wish to be able to move forward in this world, but at the same time, it is equally important to note that when the activities of the world are taken out of the domain of the Creator, the sustainer of this world, the consequences are fatal. David J. Hawkin points out the problem from another angle when he emphasizes: "There is surely a need for a radical change of attitude, and Christian theology can help to bring this about by showing that human autonomy is not at all incompatible with a nurturing and conserving attitude towards God's creation" (Hawkin 1985: 6; cf. McFadyen 1997: 62). Dealing with Akan moral thought, Kwame Gyekye, a Ghanaian philosopher aptly notes that

> Unlike Western humanism, however, Akan humanism is not antisupernaturalistic. On the contrary, it maintains a rigid supernaturalistic metaphysics that is rejected by Western humanism. The rejection by Western humanist thinkers of supernaturalism stems, I think, from their supposition that such an outlook would divert the attention and concern required to promote human welfare in this world (Gyekye 1987: 143).

In the light of the above worrying problems and consequences, Hans Jonas set a whole new debate into motion, both in Germany and America, when he argues (in his book

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entitled, *The imperative of responsibility: In search of ethics for the technological age,* (1984) that the existing approaches to philosophical ethics are inadequate since they do not tackle the serious issues produced by the rapid expansion of modern technology. He then asserts that we must make a concerted effort to develop a theory of responsibility, so that humanity could be salvaged from future extinction. This, indeed, is a serious task and one that, without doubt, must be tackled with all seriousness to enable the human race, life and nature to exist for generations to come. He refers to this new theory of ethical responsibility as a "scientific futurology…," that will entail, "… an underpinning of man's prosperity and the plenitude of terrestrial life under his dominion" (1984: x).

Like Jonas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer[1], Richard H. Niebuhr (1963; see A. R. Jonsen 1968 and W. Schweiker 1995 for a discussion on Christian ethics of responsibility), Dieter Birnbacher (1988), Karl-Otto Apel (1988), and others also worked on an ethics of responsibility that is future-oriented. According to De Villiers, in contemporary times, the concept of ethics of responsibility seems to be the preferred one over against the concept of duty ethics because the prescriptive nature of duty ethics suggests authoritarianism, whereas responsibility ethics harmonizes with the current mindset, which favours individualism and personal initiative (2006: 470).

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[1] He worked out his version of Christian ethics of responsibility in the late nineteen thirties and early nineteen forties. His *Letters* and *papers from prison*, was published after he was hanged by the Nazis in 1945.

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A very useful philosophical discussion on the term "responsibility", according to Huber, is conducted by the late German philosopher Georg Picht (1969, 1980. see Huber 1993: 579). Since Jonas's proposal for an ethics of responsibility that would effectively counter the risk of technological development, a number of Christian ethicists have also taken up the mantle by developing a Christian version of the ethics of responsibility. Among them are the German scholars Wolfgang Eric Müller (1988), Wolfgang Huber (1990, 1992, 1993, 1994 – the first Protestant theologian to do so), the Roman Catholic theologian - Josef Römelt, who comes out with a "Theology of Responsibility" (1991), Johannes Fischer (1992), and Ulrich Körtner, (1996) in response to Hans Jonas' ethics. Hartmut Kress (1997) also contributed to the debate. Huber goes beyond human beings to include the biosphere as well. Unlike Jonas, Huber also emphasizes the need to have an ethics of responsibility that is theological in nature. In the nineties, the American philosopher, William Schweiker also came out with a Christian version of the ethics of responsibility in response to the debate set forth by Hans Jonas (i.e. 1993, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2004).[2]

It is worth mentioning in this introductory section that William Schweiker has particularly been chosen because he makes a significant contribution to the kind of Christian ethics that we should have in the face of the dangers inherent in the development of technology. Furthermore, whereas Jonas is sure that religion could not form the basis of

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[2] Since then scholars like Dawid Etienne de Villiers (2006), Ernst Wolff (2009) and others have also made interesting contributions to the debate. De Villiers expresses his disappointment in the fact that proponents of the ethics of responsibility have not been able to "establish a distinctive alternative approach in Christian ethics" (2006: 470). Ernst Wolf is of the view that Jonas's work needs more interpretation than they have received so far, and came out with a re-reading of his work (see his 2009 articles on Jonas's work).

a universal ethics of responsibility, Schweiker attempts to prove him wrong by producing a Christian version of an ethics of responsibility. As to whether Schweiker indeed proves Jonas wrong about the status of religious ethics to tackle future ethics of responsibility is yet to be seen.

What makes our contribution unique is the African moral element of communalism that we are introducing to the debate. One may, however, ask why it is necessary to introduce African ethics to the debate on responsibility ethics and to attempt to develop an African Christian ethics of responsibility? African ethics is important to the debate for the following reasons: first, it is important to note that so far no African philosopher has made a conscious effort to introduce African ethics into this relatively new debate on the provision of a future-oriented ethics of responsibility for the technological age that will ensure the future existence of humanity and the biosphere, even though African ethics has a lot to contribute to the debate. Second, we are introducing African ethics into the debate because, as could be seen in the Literature Review below, we believe that certain belief systems of the African community can contribute positively to the debate. For instance, among others the concept of *Ubuntu* (selfless caring) among the Bantu-speaking people of Africa and *musuo* (taboos) among the Akans of Ghana may bring fresh meaning to the debate. Whilst the concept of *Ubuntu* aims at ensuring the continued existence of the community, *musuo* is a danger to the very existence of the community since flouting it may result in the wrath of the gods and ancestors on the whole community. Third, if the unborn Africans are part of the people whose lives are to be preserved in the face of the technological advancement, then it is important that

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Africans also use their own language and belief systems to describe and address the problem.[3] Fourth, on October 19, 2010, President Jacob Zuma of South Africa visited Egypt and made a very important speech at a business forum in which he asserted: "We remain firm in the view that after Asia and Latin America, Africa is the next zone of economic growth and development. It is estimated that the market size of the developing world will be larger than the developed world by 2020."[4] If this is true, and globalization also affects Africa, then it is pertinent that we Africans should also enter into the debate in earnest to provide a future-oriented ethics of responsibility that will guide not only Africans, but the world at large in our quest for an ethics of responsibility for the technological age.

The reason why we are formulating an African Christian ethics of responsibility is that if Africa is seen as the fastest growing Christian continent in the world, then formulating an African Christian ethics of responsibility is worthwhile since such an ethics addressing the negative impact of modern technology from the African context will be available and accessible to a substantial part of the world population. Although African and Christian in its point of departure, this ethics of responsibility claims to be universal in a normative sense of the word. It strives to provide moral guidance that should be heeded by everyone. This is because in our formulation, we will call upon Christians and non-Christians alike to emulate the altruistic love of Christ for the world as the core of an ethics of responsibility that is future-oriented.

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[3] It is important to note that the unborn, with the ancestors and the living are at the heart of African communalism.

[4] http://www.polity.org.za/article/sa-zuma-address-by-the-president-of-south-africa-to-the-south-africa-egypt-business-forum-cairo-19102010-2010-10-19

1.2   The research questions/problems

Given the above introduction, the overarching research question is therefore:

What are the prospects of an African Christian ethics of responsibility for the technological age? In order to adequately answer this question, the following more specific research questions need to be answered.

1.2.1   How did Hans Jonas originally conceptualized the ethics of responsibility? The answer to this question is important because Jonas is the philosopher who instigated the contemporary debate on an ethics of responsibility in the context of a discussion on the ethical assessment of modern technology.

1.2.2   Which shortcomings in Jonas's ethics of responsibility have the debate on his ethics exposed?

1.2.3   How successful is William Schweiker's attempt to develop a Christian or theological ethics of responsibility in close proximity to Jonas's ethics of responsibility?

-   Has Schweiker been able to overcome the weaknesses of Jonas's ethics of responsibility and does he, with his Christian version, overcome Jonas's doubt about the adequacy of religious ethics in tackling problems relating to the future?

-   Does traditional African ethics hold any promise for the development of an African Christian ethics of responsibility?

-   Can Kwame Gyekye's "ethics of altruistic responsibility" (see Gyekye 1996: 70) be used as the point of departure in the formulation of an African Christian ethics of responsibility?

- How would the framework of an African Christian ethics of responsibility look like?

1.3 Research objectives

The research objectives which follow from the research questions are:

.1   To investigate the current debate on what constitutes a Christian ethics of responsibility for the future of the technological age in order to make a contribution to the debate;

.2   To find out how Hans Jonas originally conceptualized the ethics of responsibility.

.3   To discuss which shortcomings in Jonas's ethics of responsibility the debate on his ethics have exposed.

.4   To examine how successful William Schweiker's attempt to develop a Christian or theological ethics of responsibility in close proximity to Jonas's ethics of responsibility is?

.5   To investigate whether Schweiker was able to prove Jonas wrong by showing that current religious ethics is capable of tackling problems relating to the future, and whether his Christian version was able to overcome Jonas's weaknesses;

-To assess the prospects of an African Christian ethics of responsibility for the technological age.

.6   To see whether Kwame Gyekye's "ethics of altruistic responsibility" can be used as the point of departure in the formulation of an African Christian ethics of responsibility?

.7   To suggest a framework for an *African Christian ethics of responsibility* for the technological age that emphasizes an ethics of altruistic responsibility - something that has not been done before. At the heart of this *African Christian ethics of responsibility* will be the imitation of the love of Christ - built into the African concept of *Ubuntu* and *musuo* - that enabled Him to selflessly come down to suffer in order to die to save a sinful world. In this work, we will not call people to be Christians, but invite everyone to imitate the altruistic love of Christ if we want to save the future of the world in the face of the technological threat.

1.4   Relevance of this study

This study is relevant for the following reasons:

Firstly, our library search for suitable literature yielded very little, if at all, in the area of African Christian ethics of responsibility. Secondly, most discussions on the topic of ethics of responsibility are being done by Western and South African scholars. One exception is the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwame Gyekye, who specifically deals with the topic under the heading, "an ethic of responsibility" (Gyekye 1996: 63), but from an African moral context; it was not discussed in the context of a future ethics with Christ at the center of that ethics. Another African scholar that comes close to discussing the issue of responsibility in the African context is the Nigerian philosopher, Simeon O.

Ilesanmi in his article entitled "Religion and public life in Africa: A comparative perspective on the ethics of responsibility" (in Winston Davis (ed.) 2001: 253-271). But instead of dealing with ethics of responsibility in the Africa context in detail before going on to address the problem he sets out to tackle, he mainly discusses why Islam and Christianity should be blamed for the economic crisis in Africa. This means that the topic of an ethics of responsibility that is future-oriented is new in African moral philosophy. Thirdly, none of the literature that we have read so far engages Western ethics of responsibility for the technological age with African moral thought. Fourthly, as would be seen from the literature review, the last word has not yet been said on the topic.

1.5   Research methodology

Theoretical research is the pivot around which this thesis will evolve. In fact, theoretical research is indispensable in this research as most of the research will compare and contrast different views expressed by different scholars on the ethics of responsibility for the technological world, especially the Christian and African ethics contributions made in this area, in order to come out with an independent, novel and integrated contribution to the debate. It is, however, important to add that the research methodology will also be conceptual as it will address different interpretations of the concept of responsibility. Part of the thesis will also be historical in nature as we will try to trace the argument from its inception to the present day to give a clear picture of the gap in the discussion. In terms of African ethics, the method will also be socio-ethical in nature as we will try to look at the relationships, the culture and traditions of the African community in order to come out with an ethics of responsibility in the African context. My experience as an African

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will also play a role in this research. But on the whole, our research will dwell on a theoretical analysis for our conclusions.

In an attempt to come out with a first class work on the subject under investigation, books relating to the field of theology, philosophy, anthropology, sociology and African religion and philosophy have been consulted. Relevant articles in scholarly journals and conference reports have also been consulted.

The primary works to be analyzed and assessed will be the classic work by Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility,* and William Schweiker's *Christian Ethics of Responsibility*. Jonas's book will be assessed, because Schweiker seems to have drawn on his work to produce his Christian ethics of responsibility. Schweiker's aforementioned book and others that he wrote will be the primary sources for this research because, as the title indicates, our mission will be to formulate an African Christian ethics of responsibility that will result from the assessment of the work of Schweiker. Many other relevant books by Western and African authors and others will also be consulted.

A particular methodological problem that this kind of research on Christian ethics of responsibility will address is whether it is feasible to come out with a Christian ethics of responsibility that is universal in nature. There are different views regarding the nature of ethics. These are Universalists, Particularist and Contextualists, among others. Universalists argue that the subject matter of ethics must be universal in nature, and

thus the scope of the moral principles and judgments must be relevant to all people no matter their cultural background (see Ikuenobe 2006: 94). As such, a Universalist ethics is universal, rational, abstract, analytical, critical and systematic in nature. An example of a typical Universalist ethical principle is Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative, which states: "Act so that you can will that the maxim of your action be made the principle of a universal law" (Jonas 1984: 10). The same applies to Hans Jonas's imperative of responsibility, postulated alongside that of Kant, which states: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life," or expressed negatively: "Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life" (Jonas 1984: 11).

Particularist ethicists, like Contextualists, insist that " the subject matter of ethics may involve the rational moral thought systems or the moral beliefs, values, and principles of a particular group of people and the cultural ways in which individuals in a culture justify and explain their actions, obligations, interactions, and moral judgments" (Ikuenobe 2006: 94). African traditional ethics is a particularist ethics because it involves the moral thought pattern of a particular group of people that stems from their own experience and history. In the words of Ikuenobe, "Morality in African thought is substantive and particularistic in the sense that it is tied to the idea of caring and showing concern for specific relationships that are defined by a community" (Ikuenobe 2006: 6). It may not necessarily apply to Western ethics, which is more individualistic and autonomous in nature. It is essential to note that it is not all Africans who subscribe to the fact that

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African moral thought is particularistic. But we will advance the arguments in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

The question that we will have to address critically, therefore, is whether Christian ethics of responsibility is Universalist or Particularist in nature. Christian ethics is difficult to classify because it clearly has elements typically belonging to Particularist ethics, but at the same time make Universalist claims. In our opinion, Christian ethics of responsibility could be developed as a normative Universalist ethics. This is because, God has revealed Himself in two main ways: general revelation (Rom. 1:19-20; 2:12-15) and special revelation (Rom. 2:18; 3:2). God has revealed himself both in nature (Ps. 19:1-6) and in Scripture (Ps. 19:7-14). General revelation contains God's commands for all people, including Christians. Special revelation declares his will for believers in particular. Since in either case, the basis of human ethical responsibility is divine revelation, efforts will be made to come out with a Christian ethics of responsibility that is universally valid, but one that won't lose its Christian character, else it will fail to be called a Christian ethics of responsibility. As Karl Barth indicates, "The word 'theology' includes the concept of the *Logos*. Theology is a *logia*, logic, or language bound to the *theos*, which both makes it possible and also determines it" (Karl Barth 1979: 16). We do not, therefore, subscribe to Schweiker's conclusion that the imperative of responsibility should be, "in all actions and relations we are to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God" (Schweiker 1995: 2, 125). This is because, as it stands, our impression is that Schweiker is of the opinion that religious ethics of responsibility can be universal without its Christian character. As his imperative stands now, it could easily

pass for a Moslem or Jewish or Buddhist maxim. It will be argued that even though African morality is particularistic in nature, it also has a Universalist character. In other words, integrated principles of African morality could be universally relevant. Consequently, we will suggest an African Christian ethics of responsibility that is altruistic in nature. One that is akin also to the idea of *ubuntu* (explained in Chapter 5 below) among the Bantu-speaking people. At the heart of the *African Christian ethics of responsibility* that is proposed is the imitation of the love of Christ, built into the African concept of community, that enabled Him to selflessly come down to suffer in order to die to save a sinful world. In this work, we will not necessarily call people to be Christians, but to invite everyone to imitate the altruistic love of Christ if we want to be able to save the future of the world in the face of the technological threat. This formulation of an *African Christian ethics of responsibility* for the technological age may be a unique contribution to the debate.

A second methodological problem is the use of the concept African morality. The question is, can we talk about one African morality or should we talk about African moralities? It is generally believed that African morality is culture specific and heterogeneous. It is a particularist ethics. According to Pieter Coetzee "In the African context, the idea of a perspectival model is ascendant. Perspectival models fragment the moral geography, making moral philosophy radically pluralistic and heterogeneous" (Coetzee 2002: 274). But it is important to note that the fragmentation comes in two opposing ways: those who insist on constructing their models on ethnic

rather than non-ethnic grounds, and those who construct theirs on 'left' or 'right' interpretations of communitarian moral theory.

Neville Richardson, distinguishes two approaches to the study of African ethics: one in which a factual study of the moral situation of Africa is done that involves an almost impossible task as one has to do a "massive research on phenomena in African society deemed to be indicators of the moral state of that continent, or at least of certain parts of Africa" (1998: 37). The second approach is to do a study of African morality looking at a specific area within the African continent. Gyekye is, however, of the view that you do not have to speak about the whole of African philosophy before it could be called African. He argues that "…for me a philosophical doctrine does not have to be shared by all Africans for it to be African; it need only be the product of the rational, reflective exertions of an African thinker, aimed at giving analytical attention or response to basic conceptual issues in African cultural experience." (Gyekye 1987: x-xi; cf. Gyekye 1996: 55-56). The approach we are going to use in this research is the perspectival model described by Coetzee, which also is in line with Gyekye's approach.

A third methodological problem has to do with whether it is appropriate to use the term "African culture" or rather "African cultures," which will be used from time to time in this thesis. According to E.B. Taylor, a well-known anthropologist, culture is "a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a community" (Taylor 1891: 1f). This means that culture is community-oriented; culture is that which pins a person down to a

particular community. From the definition of Taylor, when we talk about "my culture", we mean character traits that we learn from a particular community, which includes belief systems, mannerism, customs, morality, etc. As a result of this, we believe that there is no one African culture and that African culture is diverse. When commenting about whether or not African Traditional Religion has to be in the singular or plural, J.V. Taylor has this to say,

> But is it possible to speak of African Religion as if it were one and the same throughout the continent south of the Sahara? Certainly there is not one homogeneous system of belief throughout Africa. One tribe gives prominence to an element which is only vaguely conceived in another. In several ways the traditional culture of the whole Niger basin reveals a sophistication and an individuation that is not known elsewhere. Nevertheless anyone who has read a number of ethnological works dealing with different parts of Africa must be struck not only by the remarkable number of features that are common but by the emergence of a basic world-view which fundamentally is everywhere the same. To quote an Akan proverb, Man's one speech has thirty varieties but they are slight (Taylor 2001: 9-10).

Moreover, when culture is used as a resource, we can talk about one African culture from which we draw, for instance, moral resources for a particular project on the African people. According to Coetzee, "Culture is an open-ended resource of social meanings

on which members of a community draw to mediate the contingencies of their everyday lives" (Coetzee 2002: 274, cited from R. Thornton 1988). It is in this sense that African culture will be used in this thesis.

Given the above methodological focus, there are four major areas to this research, and each one corresponds to a specific chapter in the thesis.

1. Through literature study, to give a detailed analysis and critical assessment of the ethics of responsibility for the future postulated by Hans Jonas (chapters 2 and 4).

2. Through literature study, to give a detailed analysis and critical appraisal of the Christian ethics of responsibility suggested by William Schweiker (chapters 3 and 4).

3. Through literature research, to see how African moral thought could contribute to the debate (chapter 5).

4. Through analytical reflection, to come out with an *African Christian ethics of responsibilit*y capable of allaying our fears with regard to the impending disaster for the future existence of humanity, other living things and the ecological environment in the face of technological advancement (chapter 6). In the process, an attempt will be made to develop an ethics of responsibility that takes altruism seriously in the formulation of an ethics of responsibility.

1.6 Review of relevant literature

The literature that will be used here are the relevant ones that inform and impact directly on the research presently under investigation. Other works will be used as part of the construction of this investigation on the basis of the relevant works identified and reviewed in this section. Most of the other books and articles that deal with the debate under investigation will be discussed in Chapter 4 when the analysis and assessment of the works of Hans Jonas, William Schweiker and others on the ethics of responsibility are being done. This literature review is intended to give an idea of the contents of the sources consulted whilst developing this proposal. The sources are not exhaustive, but are sources from which much will be drawn for this work. The primary function of this section is to point us to the gaps on the topic under investigation.

The two main books on the (Christian) ethics of responsibility that are considered primary for this research are the English translation of Hans Jonas' book, *The imperative of responsibility: In search of an ethics for the technological age* (1984)[5] and William Schweiker's book, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (1995). We will, however, not do a review on Hans Jonas and William Schweiker here to avoid duplication as they will be discussed extensively in Chapters 2 and 3.

The books that are considered primary on African ethics are John Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy* 2nd ed (1989), a collection with P H Coetzee and A P Roux as

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[5] It is important to note that Hans Jonas translated his own book from German (1979) to English (1984). This thesis will deal with his English version.

editors: *Philosophy from Africa, 2nd ed, A text with readings* (2002), Kwame Gyekye's *African cultural values* (1996) and *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme* (1987). Bénézet Bujo's *Foundations of an African ethic: Beyond the universal claims of Western morality* (2001) is also considered one of the key books on African ethics. Other books and articles used in this literature review are considered secondary materials for this research even though, as would be seen, they are chosen for important reasons.

It may be asked why these books below are selected for review and not others. The following are some of the reasons why the books below are considered relevant for inclusion in this review.

First, the views expressed by some of these writers correspond directly or indirectly to our view that we need to develop an ethics of responsibility for the future that will guide the technological developments in the face of the ever-growing power of humanity over nature so that humanity do not end up annihilating the world.

Secondly, the literature we have chosen contributes significantly to the topic under discussion, and most of them express the view or appear to conclude that the debate on the future ethics of responsibility has not yet been exhausted.

Thirdly, even though the writers on African ethics do not speak directly on the debate on the future ethics of responsibility, they contribute valuable insights into the topic of African ethics.

Fourthly, some of the writers have also been chosen because they discuss the meaning and nature of altruistic ethics, which is crucial to this study.

It must be noted, however, that even though these books and articles have been chosen, it should not give the impression that they are the only ones that are used in this research since there are others that also throw light on the topic.

In the end, it will be shown that the discussion on the relevance of the ethics of responsibility for the technological age goes on unabated, and that within the African moral scene, the topic of the ethics of responsibility is new in African moral philosophy. Furthermore, through the theoretical search, it will be shown that this thesis will make a unique contribution to the debate on the ethics of responsibility for the technological age as it is the first to combine African morality with Christian ethics of responsibility to suggest an *African Christian ethics of altruistic responsibility*.

1. Wolfgang Huber, *Towards an ethics of responsibility* (1993).

In this article, Huber sets himself the task of discussing "how theological reflection can contribute to a constructive theory of responsibility appropriate to the challenges of our time" (p. 574). Huber elaborates on the nature and a function of an ethics of

responsibility by looking at what some scholars have done so far, and comes out with three major contemporary challenges regarding responsibility that ethics has to deal with: 1. crimes of obedience, 2. globalization of technology and, 3. the crisis of modernity. Firstly, concerning the crimes of obedience, he is of the view that if the solidarity in the crimes of obedience committed during the twentieth century could be geared towards the destiny of the weak and victims of suffering in society, a lot will be done to reverse the horrendous happenings in the history of human relations. He argues that humanity "needs memorials like the Hiroshima Peace Park or Yad Vashem in Jerusalem more urgently than it needs columns of victory" (Huber 1993: 590). He laments that it is a shame that Germany has not so far recognized the genocide during the Nazi period with an appropriate monument to their memory.[6] Secondly, with regard to the globalization of technology, which he agrees is the most serious challenge for an ethics of responsibility, he reiterates the need for a solution not on the future of humanity alone, as Jonas does, but on the future of the entire life in the biosphere. Thirdly, with regard to the crisis of modernity he concludes that

> the tendency toward a global monoculture fostered by mass media and mass consumption, by the international communication system and internationalized economic interests, is self-destructive. A global monoculture will in the end be no culture at all. The 'dialectics of enlightenment' can be regarded from two sides: as the way out of a rather

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[6] Wolfgang Huber wrote before Germany built a monument in Memorial of the Murdered Jews of Europe during World War II (also known as the Holocaust Memorial) in Berlin, which was finished on December 15, 2004. It was opened to the public on May 12 of the same year.

unenlightened past or as the way into a rather unenlightened future (Huber 1993: 577).

In the end he argues that a multicultural effort is needed in the global arena if victory is to be achieved over monoculturalism. He observes that one of the successes of modernity today has to do with the open dialogue and cultural exchange that has been established over the years. According to him, the imperative of an ethics of responsibility might be formulated this way: *so act that the consequences of your actions remain compatible with the future existence and dignity of human as well as nonhuman life in the biosphere. Or negatively: avoid actions that are incompatible with the future existence and dignity of human as well as nonhuman life in the biosphere* (Huber 1993: 587).

This is another Universalist form of ethics of responsibility. Huber shies away from a normative Christian universalist form of ethics of responsibility which we deem important for the future of this debate. This is why we think that the world, especially the Western world, needs an ethics of responsibility that may shift its focus from humanistic value systems to the example of Christ's altruistic sacrifice of himself for humanity more seriously. This focus is lacking in Huber's contribution, and, as will be seen, in the contributions of Jonas and Schweiker on the subject.

Unlike Jonas whose motivation for suggesting an ethics of responsibility comes solely from the danger of the growing power of humanity over nature in the face of

technological developments of our time, Huber explains that his motivation for an ethics of responsibility also comes about as a result of the mass genocides and mass murders planned and brutally executed by Germany in the twentieth century (1993: 574). Huber's motivation for his ethics of responsibility is also to some extent one-sided since there are other equally serious things happening in the contemporary world that call for an ethics of responsibility. The genocide and the massacre of innocent lives in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and other parts of Africa, the bombing and terrorizing of innocent lives in Iraq and Afghanistan, the battle to preserve certain animal species, the ecological environment, etc., are a few cases in point.

Huber's article has primarily been chosen because it adds another important dimension to the debate on the ethics of responsibility that is lacking in Jonas's ethics of responsibility. He is of the view that the whole life in the biosphere and humanity should be the focus of the debate on the future ethics of responsibility.

2.   **Don Ihde, *Philosophy of technology: An introduction* (1993).**

This book has been chosen as one of the key books because it makes a contribution towards the problems of technological advancement in this world in an interesting way. This is because Ihde also goes beyond the one-sided solution of Jonas – beyond the future survival of humans – to also discussing the Greenhouse Effect of technology on the environment. According to him,

The amplifying/magnifying power of technologies, in the late twentieth century, has brought to the fore the human-technological power of a geological force. One of the illustrations of such geological force brought about by industrialized technologies currently discussed is the Greenhouse Effect, which has been reported to include changes in the atmosphere of up to 24 percent of certain gases of 'homogenic' origin (p. 51).

Ihde adds that the disasters that occur through the utilization of mega-technologies, for example, the unleashing of oil by super tankers and the spills of petroleum and petrochemical products such as that of the Valdez incident in Alaska in 1989, or even worse, the eco-terrorism of the Gulf War in which oil spills and oil well fires were deliberately unleashed in the conflict also call for an ethics of responsibility. This again, points to the fact that there are many problem areas with regard to which the formulation of a future ethics of responsibility will be of immense help. The book also discusses the nature of responsibility and technology, which will be useful for this study.

3. **Dawid Etienne de Villiers, *Prospects of a Christian ethics of responsibility* (Part 1 & 2) (2006)**

De Villiers, a South African ethicist, makes a very important assertion when he, after carefully looking at the works of Hans Jonas and William Schweiker and others, concludes that Jonas is not convincing because he elevates responsibility to the substantive normative fundamental principle of ethics (2007: 89). He further argues that

Schweiker's attempt to develop a Christian ethics in close proximity to Jonas's view of an ethics of responsibility is also not convincing. He, therefore, asserts that the question as to whether Christian ethics today should be developed as ethics of responsibility is left open for further research (2006: 468-487). Regarding the work of Jonas, he like Huber, indicates that Jonas's attempt to come out with a future-oriented ethics of responsibility is one-sided since he concentrates on the future existence of mankind to the exclusion of the risks technology poses to the biosphere. In saying so, De Villiers makes it very clear that one can hardly deny the fact that "… today all ethics have to deal with the phenomenon of the enormous increase in, but also severe lack of, moral responsibility that accompanies the expansion of human power as a result of technological development" (2006: 469). This is clearly a pointer to the fact that the last word on the ethics of responsibility has not yet been said.

Moreover, after looking at the works of the German scholars Wolfgang Huber, Johannes Fischer and Ultrich Körtner to appraise their views on a Christian ethics of responsibility, he concludes that the prospects of a Christian ethics of responsibility would only be promising if it can be demonstrated that "… responsibility should stamp contemporary ethics in a fundamental way…" (2007: 106). He is of the view that a more systematic account of the fundamental role that responsibility should exercise in contemporary ethics, is still lacking, and that such systematic exposition should tackle the problem as to whether a Christian ethics of responsibility could take a central position in contemporary Christian ethics (2007: 107, 108). He is also of the opinion that special

attention should be given to Max Weber's original differentiation between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility.

Another observation by De Villiers that justifies this research is when he notes that in spite of the fact that so many Christian ethicists and theologians have written on the subject of the ethics of responsibility, there is no one defining view. He, therefore, rightly suggests that more research has to be done to come out with an integrated Christian ethics of responsibility that will incorporate the features of Christian ethics of responsibility outlined by other Christian scholars so far. We think that this anomaly may be corrected by the *African Christian ethics of altruistic responsibility* that this research aims to propose.

4. **Ernst Wolff,** ***Responsibility in an era of modern technology and nihilism, Part 1. A non-foundational rereading of Jonas*** **(2009).**

This is a detailed analysis of the work of Jonas from a different perspective. In this article, and Part 2, entitled *Responsibility in an era of modern technology and nihilism. Inter-connection and implications of the two notions of responsibility in Jonas*, Wolff sets out to "develop a non-foundational re-reading of Jonas' ethics" (2009a: 577). From the beginning, Wolff makes it clear that he is coming out with a new assessment of the work of Jonas by outlining the following objectives: "(1) to foreground an interpretational approach that has not been explored and (2) to use this approach to clarify a number of issues in Jonas's work that seem to deserve more attention than they have received thus far" (2009a: 578).

According to him, the problems that Jonas highlight, namely the dangers brought about by the growth of human power in the form of modern technology, and the subsequent problem of nihilism, are so closely tied to each other that both have to be assessed at the same time. He reveals that this concern of Jonas is taken from his reading of Heidegger's philosophy of *Dasein*, and Heidegger's discussions on the "implications of the co-originality of meaning and action in the phenomenon of care" (2009a: 578).

He identifies *two voices* in the work of Jonas: philosophical and theological voices. The limitation of these voices, according to him, leads Jonas's argument into a dead end (2009a: 578). That is why he finds the need to re-read Jonas' work in the light of his myth (for his myth, see Jonas 1966: 275ff; 1992a: 193ff, and Wolff 2009a: 585 - we will discuss his myth in chapter 2). It is only then that Jonas's work could be understood. *The Jonasian myth*, as Wolf calls it, is a way of bringing God back into ethical discussions, but by so doing, it rather recedes God out of the equation (2009a: 585). This is because the God that is brought into the discussion by Jonas to counter nihilism is a personal God, incapable of solving the nihilistic problem, which proposes that God is "dead" and that moral laws died with him. The following is the way Jonas introduces God into the argument:

> In other words, I have chosen for myself the alternative that can not at all be based any further, that I want to hold on to the notion of God: full stop. I gave no reason for doing what I do; and the alternative is left perfectly

open, that is, the atheistic answer to that which took place in this century –

the terrible things of which world history is not poor. (1994: 177, cited in

Wolff 2009a: 581).

This, according to Wolff, makes the God of Jonas a personal God, and as such incapable of universal ethical application. The reason that Jonas gives for taking his stand is that "an ethics no longer founded on divine authority must be founded on a principle discoverable in the nature of things, lest it fall victim to subjectivism or other forms of relativism" (Jonas 1966: 284, cited in Wolf 2009a: 582). Wolf then concludes that the theological voice could not fulfill its mission since

one could conclude that this opposition to the death of God or this

response to the 'impasse of ethical theory' should be considered valid for

or of use only to the individual (in this case, Hans Jonas), but need not

have any effect beyond that, except, of course, for readers who want to

follow his example, but again without any universally valid grounds for

doing so (2009a: 580-581).

According to Wolff, the philosophical voice, which is also an attempt to solve nihilism, has also failed since Jonas makes it categorically clear that moving from *is* to *ought* "will likely forever remain controversial" (Jonas 1992a: 130, in Wolf 2009: 584). This means that Jonas should be read from a different perspective, and Wolff then sets out to do so in his second article.

In the second article, Wolff identifies two philosophies of responsibility in Jonas's writings (2009b: 851) - this is also a point of departure from other scholars who had assessed Jonas's work. The first is the *foundational rule of ethics*, and the second is the principle as beginning of ethics (or *the principle of ethicity*). The foundational rule of ethics, Wolf notes, is synonymous to the "principle" of ethics of responsibility. Jonas defines the principle in the following way, "the existence or essence of the entire human race may never be made a stake in the betting [or risk taking] of action*"* (Jonas 1979: 81, cited in Wolff 2009b: 850). But, according to Wolff, this "principle" is just the beginning of the search for the ethics of responsibility since it is just *the principle-as-foundational-rule,* and not *the principle-as-beginning-of-ethics (*or *the principle of ethicity)*. The latter principle is the foundation of the former, explained Wolff. Wolf adds that there are series of foundational rules, but the one that is of concern to Jonas is responsibility, which is what has to be emphasized in the light of the danger brought about by the advancement of technology (2009b: 852; cf. Jonas 1979, chs 1 and 2). The *heuristic of fear*, according to Wolff, is the emotion that accompanies the transition between the principle of the foundational rule and the principle of ethicity (2009b: 860). He further joins with Jonas in affirming that the responsibility that is called for should be a collective one (Wolf 2009b: 856).

 He concludes by alluding to the fact that one of the important shortcomings of the work of Jonas is his inability to tackle "the question of the relation between responsibility and other forms of ethics… *since* that touches on the very heart of the philosophy of

responsibility." (2009b: 861, the italics is my addition). As could be seen above, this is also one of the criticisms of De Villiers against Jonas in part 1 of his articles, which we hope to discuss in chapter 4 of the thesis to be written.

However, our criticism of Wolf is that he did a detailed analysis and exposition of Jonas's writings without making a concrete and elaborate contribution to the formulation of an ethics of responsibility that will help curb the dangers of the development of technology. What he, therefore, ends up doing is to provide an apologetic of Jonas. His analysis is a useful exercise, though. On the basis of our criticism, we feel that the title of Wolff's article should have been *Responsibility in an era of modern technology and nihilism: In defense of Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility,* since his two articles on the writings of Hans Jonas are very polemical in nature. This contribution of Wolff will also throw light on the work of Jonas and the concept of responsibility as we assess and analyze his painstaking analysis.

5.   **Bénézet Bujo, *Foundations of an African ethic: Beyond the universal claims of Western morality* (2001)**.

This is a very important book on Africa moral thought. It is written by Bujo, a Roman Catholic priest, as a contribution to African ethics. In this book, Bujo asserts that the source of African morality is not exclusively anthropocentric, as postulated by Western authors, but also includes the "invisible community", that is, God, the ancestors and even the unborn (p. 1). Africans, according to him, do not speak very much about God, but rather speak about human beings because they believe that

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one who pays heed to the dignity of the human person also pleases God, and that one who acts against the human person offends precisely this God. African ethics treats the dignity of the human person as including the dignity of the entire creation, so that the cosmic dimension is one of its basic components… The main goal of African ethics is fundamentally life itself. The community must guarantee the promotion and protection of life by specifying or ordaining ethics and morality (p. 2).

The holding together of the community for today and the future existence of humanity is the main goal for morality in the African context. According to Bujo, the Western idea that you can act responsibly only if you use your rational capabilities (*cogito ergo sum* – "I think, therefore I am") is not African, and that within the African community, the existential *cognatus sum*, *ergo sumus* – "I am known, therefore we are" – applies.

These comments by Bujo lead us straight into the heart of our research, which is to find whether African morality is useful for the formulation of a future ethics of responsibility. This is because, according to him, African morality aims at providing laws and taboos with the sole aim of preventing the extinction of the community.

6. Pieter H. Coetzee, Morality in African thought: Particularity in morality and its relation to community, Introduction, in *Philosophy from Africa, 2ⁿᵈ ed, A text with readings* (2002).

This article by Coetzee makes a huge contribution to the study of the nature of community in relation to morality in African thought, and therefore, will be very useful for this research. According to Coetzee,

> A community is an ongoing association of men and women who have a special commitment to one another and a developed (distinct) sense of their common life. The common life is any public discursive space which members construct through action-in-concert… and to which members stand in a dialogical relation (2002: 274).

He explains that the *dialogical relation* occurs in two ways: one in which through social interaction a person identifies with the community and gains his/her identity; secondly, the relation also encourages choices from the accumulated goods of the community, and through which individual life decisions are made. He refers to a moral tradition which postulates that "a society is just if it's social life is lived in accordance with its own self-understanding," and argues that "such a tradition links justice to culture, yielding a cultural account of morality" (Coetzee 2002: 275). In our thesis, special attention will be given to his definition of society above, and also emphasis will be laid on "a community as an ongoing association of men and women who have a special commitment to one another." The clause "*an ongoing association of men and women*." will be expanded to build an ethics of responsibility. The word *ongoing* is of special note here. This is because the ethics of responsibility that we are about to contribute is one which will promote actions among human beings, and between human beings and the ecological

environment that will promote   the *continued existence* of life on earth in the face of technological advancement. The quote we cite below throws light on his African *social thesis*, as he calls it:

> an individual's choice of way of life is a choice constrained by the community's pursuit of shared ends. This pursuit of the common good is the primary goal of the political community and always takes precedence over the pursuit of individually chosen ends. Communal ends cannot – all other things being equal – be overridden or vetoed because shared ends have much greater weight (value) in the life of the community than other ends. The common good is conceived of as a good which fits the patterns of preferences of individual members; it is not a single good, but many goods, each fitting a sphere of social life and resting on a consensus (agreement) about its value… The good life for an individual is conceived of as coinciding with the good of the community, and a person's choice is highly or lowly ranked as it contributes to or detracts from the common good (2002: 276, in Wiredu 1992).

The above quotation also explains why Bujo's work is regarded as primary in this research.

7.   Kwasi Wiredu, The moral foundations of an African culture, in *Philosophy from Africa* (2002).

Wiredu begins the article by affirming the fact that morality plays an important role in all cultures. He notes that morality refers to rules and regulations that one observes in order to bring harmony between him/her and others in a community. He further notes that the motivating factor for observing rules and regulations in a society is not only for a harmonious relationship, but also to serve the interest of others, at times at the cost of one's own interest. He is of the view that "a certain minimum of altruism is absolutely essential to the moral motivation" (p. 287). He affirms that altruism is universal in all human societies, even though he agrees that not all individuals are known to have been altruistic. He, however, observes that different peoples and individuals have different understanding of morality for various reasons. Some of the distinctive features, he notes, are related to the concrete cultural context within which one finds his/herself, the contingencies of space, time, and clime in a particular society, and the way the community sees the relationship between male and female, pleasure and pain, life and work and so on (p. 287). It is to be noted here that his observation that altruism is a condition for a harmonious living in a community, and which he develops further in this article, is a laudable one which will be explored further in this research. We do not, however, agree with him that in Akan thought morality comes from the society and has nothing to do with religion. We believe that insofar as it is unanimously believed by Africans that God is the creator of human beings and the universe, and also that God is believed to be morally impeccable, then Africans, and for that matter Akans, derive some of their religious inclinations from God. Admittedly, society also plays a role in the origination of morality, but it may be erroneous, as far as we are concerned, to pin the origin of morality only to society.

8. **Kwame Gyekye,** *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme* **(1987).**

In this classic major book on African Philosophy, which concentrates on the philosophy of the Akan people of Ghana, Gyekye brings out some pertinent issues that are relevant for most Africans. According to him, the Akan people refer to God as *Onyankopōn*, meaning the Supreme Being or the Great one. He is called, *Obōadee*, meaning creator, or *Bōrebōre*, meaning creator, excavator, hewer, carver, architect, originator and inventor (Gyekye 1987: 70). This means that God is the ground of all being. God is also regarded as the embodiment of all goodness, and as such evil cannot be ascribed to God. In fact, God did not create evil, evil comes from two sources: the deities and humankind's own will (1987: 126, 124,125).

But when it comes to the origin of morality, there is no agreement among scholars. According to Kofi Opoku (1978:152), Bishop Peter Sarpong (1972:41), Kofi Abrefa Busia (1967: 10, 16) and J.B. Danquah (1944:3), all renowned Ghanaian scholars, God is the originator of morality in Akan thought (see Gyekye 1987:130). Joshua Kudadjie, a Ghanaian moral philosopher, believes that there are other sources of morality apart from religion that account for morality in a community (Kudadjie 1973: 47, in Gyekye, 1987: 131). Gyekye, on the other hand, argues, like Wiredu, that morality in Akan

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philosophy originates from the community and not from religion or any other source. He writes,

> In Akan thought goodness is not defined by reference to religious beliefs or supernatural beings. What is morally good is not that which is commanded by God or any spiritual being or in accordance with the will of such being… That which is good is decreed not by a supernatural being as such, but by human beings within the framework of their experiences in living in society" (pp. 131,132).

The reason he gives for his stand is that the Akan religion is not a revealed religion like Christianity or Islam or Judaism. In a revealed religion, divine truth is transmitted to a founder, who in turn teaches it to others, which is not the case in indigenous African religion, he intimates. But it is interesting to note that when he was refuting Mbiti's assertion that Africans have only a two-dimensional time, he appeals to Akan culture, which to us affirms the fact that religion comes from God. He points to the fact that those born on a certain day in the week have some inborn moral characteristics. For example, those born on a Monday are said to be suppliant, humble, and calm. Those born on Tuesdays are said to be compassionate, and those born on Sundays are said to be protectors, and so on (p. 172). It may follow logically that if such moral traits solely come from the teachings of the society, they would not have been assigned to days people were

born. If Africans, and for that matter Akans, believe that humans come from God, then it follows that God might have given this personal moral traits at birth.

Like Kudadjie, we are of the view that morality stems not only from religion, but also from society as human beings try to live together in harmony. We will elaborate on this in Chapter 5.

Commenting on morality and community, Gyekye sees morality among the Akan as that which maintains the welfare or well-being of the community. "The concern for human welfare constitutes the hub of the Akan axiological wheel," he notes (1987: 143). This fact is crucial for our understanding of an African morality as a contribution to the ethics of responsibility. If morality is that which promotes the well-being of the community, then it follows that morality also contributes to the continued existence of the community. This concept could be used as a source for the search for an ethics of responsibility that takes the future well-being of humanity and the biosphere into consideration.

Gyekye further distinguishes between two types of evil in Akan community, which are significant for our research. These are *bōne* and *musuo*. *Bone*, which is the usual Akan word for evil, refers to what he calls, the "ordinary evil" in the community, for example, theft, adultery, lying, backbiting, and so on. *Musuo*, on the other hand, refers to the "extraordinary" evil in the community, which results

in corporate punishment from God or the spirits. Particular instances of this evil are also referred to as taboos. In his own words, he intimates that

> *musuo* is generally considered to be a great, extraordinary moral evil; it is viewed by the community with particular abhorrence and revulsion because its commission is believed not only to bring shame to the whole community, but also, in the minds of many ordinary people, to invite the wrath of the supernatural powers (1987: 133).

Gyekye gives examples of *musuo* as suicide, incest, having sexual intercourse in the bush, rape, murder, stealing things dedicated to the deities or ancestral spirits, etc. (1987: 133). The corporate punishment that goes hand in hand with the idea of *musuo* is significant to our study because, to some extent, the results of *musuo* could be equated to the dangers that the advancement of technology poses to the future existence of the world as a whole. *Musuo*, if not checked, could result in the annihilation of the whole community. This means that threats involved with *musuo*, which spells doom for the community, commensurate with threats involved with modern technology, the atomic bomb, for instance, which is also a source of danger for the continued existence of humanity. We will develop this further in Chapter 5 of this research.

Furthermore, *the fear of public disgrace* that acts as "inspiration" for acting morally among Africans will be explored in the formulation of the ethics of responsibility. As

Gyekye rightly notes, "The fear or thought of shame or disgrace, of loss of social esteem and opportunity, and so on, constitutes a real influence on moral conduct *among Africans*, and as such can be regarded as a kind of sanction, if an obscure one" (Gyekye 1987: 141, italics mine). John Taylor also makes the same observation about Africans when he notes that, "to some extent the primal world-view *of Africans* belongs to a 'shame-culture' rather that a 'guilt culture', and goes on to allude to the fact that E. R. Dodds's assertion about the earliest Greek states could easily be applied to the Batutsi of Rwanda or the Lughara in the following words:

> Homeric man's highest good is not the enjoyment of a quiet conscience but the enjoyment of time, public esteem…. And the strongest moral force which Homeric man knows is not the fear of God but respect for public opinion…. In such a society anything which exposes a man to the contempt or ridicule of his fellows, which causes him to 'lose face', is felt as unbearable (Taylor 2001: 119, he cited Dodds 1951: 17-18).

Jonas's argument that the ethics of responsibility involves a "heuristic of fear," which is the fear that encourages us to act ethically for the future wellbeing of mankind (Jonas: 26), will be used to throw light on the African fear experience.

9.   Kwame Gyekye, *African cultural values: An introduction* (1996).

In this book, Gyekye discusses African traditional religion and communal values. According to him, "A community is a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds –

which are not necessarily biological – who share common values, interests, and goals" (p. 35). He notes that in African social community, every member of the community is expected to work towards the well-being of every individual in the community. Not to do so is regarded as inimical to the continued existence of the community. Children are trained right from the beginning through proverbs, folklore, maxims, etc., to inculcate the habit of recognizing the needs of others, and to work for the welfare and well-being of every member of the community. He indicates that the main features of an African social community are cooperation, mutual aid, interdependence, solidarity, mutual help, collective responsibility, reciprocal obligations, altruism, and the like. He advocates that in Africa, morality is designed in such a way that it promotes human well-being. He expresses it this way:

> Thus, in African morality, there is an unrelenting preoccupation with human welfare. What is morally good is that which brings about - or is supposed, expected, or known to bring about – human well-being. This means, in a society that appreciates and thrives on harmonious social relationships, that which is morally good is what promotes social welfare, solidarity, and harmony in human relationships. An action, habit, or pattern of behavior is considered good only if it promotes human and social well-being (p. 57).

The values that promote the well-being of the community are regarded as the highest good of the society. Some of these values, according to him, are kindness, compassion,

generosity, hospitality, faithfulness, truthfulness, concern for others, and the action that brings peace, justice, dignity, respect, and happiness (p. 58).

On the ethics of responsibility within the African context, he explains that children are trained right from the beginning not to be selfish, but to live in such a way that their actions contribute to the well-being of the community. He stresses that "The ethic of responsibility, rather than the ethic of individual rights, is inculcated from the outset *in children*" (p. 63, italics mine). We will have a detailed discussion on Gyekye in Chapter 5 so let's leave this discussion till then.

10. **Neville Richardson, Ethics in an African context, in Kretzschmar, L & Hulley, L (eds), *Questions about life and morality: Christian ethics in South Africa today* (1998).**

In this article, Richardson elaborates on what he regards as the salient features of an African ethics. According to him, these include holism, vitalism, communality, authority-by-consensus, and *ubuntu* (p. 38). Holism, he notes, refers to the holistic nature of African thought. Among Africans, he observes, togetherness is prided over separatedness. In other words, harmony and interdependence is at the center of African life. This natural harmony is between human beings, and between human beings and the environment, to the extent that the harmony has to be maintained by all. If this natural harmony is disturbed in any way by anyone, rituals will have to be resorted to for the disharmony to be redressed. Augustine Shutte puts it more succinctly this way: "The European idea is the idea of freedom, that individuals have a power of free choice. The

African idea is the idea of community, that persons depend on other persons to be persons" (Shutte 2001: 10). Richardson further notes that the sole aim of the holistic nature of African life is "the good of all, and the social ethics of Africa is deeply concerned with the good of all" (p. 39). The natural harmony among human beings and between human beings and the natural environment will be useful tools in the formulation of this thesis as emphasis will be laid on the future survival of both humans and the biosphere.

He calls the force, which enables the dynamic harmony and the interdependence among Africans, the *life force*, which indwells a person in a smaller or greater measure. When it diminishes, for instance, through sickness or misfortune or the inability of a woman to conceive and deliver a healthy baby, traditional rituals have to be resorted to increase the life force among Africans. When a calamity comes upon the people, it is because the vital link between the people and the gods and ancestors has been broken and in that case, rituals are needed to re-establish the vital link. The life force, in that case, is then strengthened (p. 39).

With regards to authority-in-community, Richardson refers to the African way of consulting the elderly in society, the ultimate consultant being the chief, when a difficult problem arises. He contrasted it with the Western way of life in which the final decision lies with the individual, even if another person is consulted with a problem. This consultation is also vital in the future ethics of responsibility. The arguments going on in the scholarly circles can be akin to the African authority-in-community consultations; the

difference here is that the degree of expertise in an area is the sole basis for the consultation.

What he writes about communality among Africans has already been outlined above. At the heart of communalism among Africans are mutual caring and sharing, and these, according to Richardson, define *ubuntu*. Even though it is difficult to precisely define *ubuntu*, he is of the opinion that "humanness", "compassion", and "fellow feeling" explain what *Ubuntu* is. It is the selfless caring for another person without expecting a reward, an altruistic kind of life. He gives an example of *ubuntu* as the way people retain and care for the handicapped and the elderly among Africans without sending them to institutions to be cared for. The selfless way with which strangers are welcomed and cared for is also an example of *ubuntu*. In his article, *The ethics of ubuntu (1996)*, Ramose goes further to add another element to the meaning of *ubuntu*. According to him, "*Ubuntu* evokes the idea of be-ing in general" (p. 324). He further notes that this is in line with the philosophic view that *motion is the principle of be-ing*. This means that the moral nature of human beings, and for that matter, Africans, is dynamic in nature. Linked to the explanation of Richardson, it means that Africans, and for that matter humanity, are continually growing in compassion, fellow feeling, and caring, to mention a few. Applied to our research, the implication is that the future ethics of responsibility debate is an ongoing process that may lead ultimately to an ethics that may enable human beings to preserve the future existence of humanity and the biosphere. Our research is, therefore, one in many to come.

11. **Nancy K. Morrison & Sally K. Severino,** *Altruism: Towards a psychobiospiritual conceptualization* **(2007).**

In this article, Morrison and Severino, following from Darwin's theory of evolution, set out to investigate the origin, development and meaning of altruism, which they regard as the goal of human evolution towards becoming "fully human." Their main aim for this article is to explain altruism so that others may live that way to save our world from destruction (p. 37). They trace the first use of the word "altruism", which is a Latin word, *alter*, meaning, *other*, to Auguste Comte in the 1930s, and demonstrate that the concept of altruism starts right from our infancy. According to them, the phase of human evolution in which we now find ourselves is called "human" and that we are daily evolving into a future phase where we will be "fully human" (p. 25). They define altruism "as a regard for or devotion to the interest of others with whom we are interrelated" (p. 25). When we have an altruistic nature, we see ourselves and others as interrelated, they explain. But when we have an egoistic and nepotistic nature, we regard others separate from us and, therefore, we believe that we are not affected by the consequences of our actions on others (p. 34).

In their conclusion, they join Hans Jonas and others in affirming that

> Perhaps the most powerful implication of our conceptualization of altruism
> is that each person can change his physiological, and his spiritual aspects
> to become more altruistic. Becoming more altruistic individually affects
> others. This is particularly relevant today, as an incredibly violent twentieth

century ends and we face the invention and diffusion of increasingly effective (and increasing long-distance) means of mass destruction (p. 37).

As may have been realized, their explanation on the development of altruism among humans rhymes with the explanation given by Ramose on the nature of ubuntu. Even though we do not believe in everything that is articulated in this article, the explanation of the meaning and function of altruism will be helpful in our research.

12.   Mbiti, John S., *African religions and philosophy*, 2nd Ed (1989).

This is an excellent book on African anthropology. In this book Mbiti makes a conscientious effort to explain African religion and ontology, and in the process explains how African culture and traditions need to be understood in contrast to Western thought. In his presentation on religion, he makes it clear that everything about the African is religious; there is no separation between religion and the secular. But more importantly, he indicates that African religion is a religious ontology. And in order to be able to understand that ontology, it is important to understand that it is an anthropocentric ontology that centers around five categories: God, who is regarded as the creator and the sustainer of all things; Spirits, including ancestors, are the unseen participators in the community; Man, who includes the unborn; Animals and plants; and all phenomena and objects without biological life. These constitute, in summary, the world-view of the African.

Our attention will be particularly on the African concept of time and communalism as described by Mbiti. Mbiti describes the African concept of time as a two-dimensional phenomenon. According to him, whereas the Western linear concept of time involves an indefinite past, a present time and an infinite future, the African concept of time only dwells on the long past (Zamani) and the present (Sasa). The Zamani and the Sasa, which are Swahili words, overlap. Concerning the future, he is of the view that the African concept of time do not go beyond two years; Africans are mainly interested in seasons within the year, and they name the seasons according to agriculture, cattle or the farming year. Whereas in the West "time is a commodity which must be utilized, sold and bought…," in traditional Africa, "time has to be created or produced" (1989: 19).

Gyekye (1987: 169-177) rightly refutes the above assertion of Mbiti about African time, arguing that the fact that in two East African languages, Gikuyu and Kikamba, time is limited to Zamani and Sasa does not mean that it is the same for all Africa. He insists, by drawing from the language, proverbs, folklore, dirges and maxims of the Akan people that time in Akan thought is akin to the Western linear concept of past, present and future. According to him, the Akan word *bere* (time) expresses both the abstract and concrete concept of time. The Akan proverb, "Time is like a bird: if you do not catch it and it flies, you do not see it again," the maxim "Time changes" (*bere di adannan*), the saying "wo bedi hen (daakye)", that is "You will be a king (in the future)," - to mention a few - all point to the fact that the Akan has a concept of time that points to the past, the present, as well as the future. This argument on the concept of time will be dealt with in this thesis. But it is important to note here that Mbiti's observation is true for most

Africans. This is because, when you observe even the modern enlightened or Westernized Africans, they still have a 'hang-over' of the African time consciousness, in that when they tell you they will meet you at 2pm, they mean that they will meet you in the afternoon. In other words, lateness with regard to meetings and appointments by the African may be intrinsically cultural. What is called "African time" in this globalized world is prevalent in places where Africans are populated.

The implication of the concept of time among Africans is significant for this thesis since the focus of this thesis is to propose an African Christian ethics of responsibility in the face of technological advancement that is future-oriented. What contribution or inhibition will the African concept of time observed by Mbiti have on the formulation of this thesis?

Secondly, the difficulty which has to be reconciled among African thought and Christian faith is immortality. In other words, how can we go about bridging the belief systems of Christians and Africans concerning the future? Among Christians, there is a future expectation when the world will come to an end with the Second Coming of Christ, whereas among the majority of Africans, life is a continuous process that never ends. This is because life continues in the ancestral world.

Most of the things Mbiti notes on the African concept of communalism have been highlighted by other African scholars above so I need not repeat them here. What he says about communalism which is not clearly mentioned by other African scholars is the fact that the future well-being and continuous existence of the community is the

responsibility of every member within the community. In the African community, therefore, responsibility is corporate, rather than individual. According to Mbiti, the individual within the African community sees himself in terms of "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (1989: 209).

13. Peter Sarpong, Aspects of Akan ethics, in *The Ghana Bulletin of Theology* (1972)

In this article, Bishop Peter Sarpong, a Roman Catholic theologian makes an interesting assertion about the Akan people. According to him, in Akan thought, "… a person is what he is because of his deeds" (p.40). This means that among the Akans, you are not judged abstractly, you are judged based on what you do; your actions are directly linked to who you are. You are a bad person not because of your appearance, but because of what you do. In the same way, you are regarded as a good person because of the good things you do in the society. For the Akan, "No man therefore is 'good' or 'evil' outside the context of what he does or omits to do" (p.40).

Sarpong, unlike Wiredu, agrees with our argument that morality also comes from God. In his discussion on the ethics of the Akans, Sarpong notes that "Some people, before they are born into the world, are supposed to have their course of life well-laid out for them by God. Others enter the world with their own 'plans.' Neither the divinely-imposed Fate (Nkrabea) nor the self-determined Destiny (Hyɛbrɛ) is avoidable except through very extraordinary magico-religious

means" (Sarpong 1972: 42). This, for the Akan, explains why some people are by nature "kindhearted, affable, gentle, hospitable, respectable, while others are wicked, ungentlemanly, dishonest, and generally prone to evil" (p. 42). Even though this belief in the double destiny has its own logical problems, it infers that some morality come from God. However, Sarpong indicates that the Akan people also create their own laws so that wicked people do not take advantage of the slowness of God to punish wickedness (p. 43).

The reason why this article has been chosen is that, like Mbiti, Sarpong emphasizes personal and corporate responsibilities in Akan ethics that will be useful in the writing of this thesis. Among other things, he observes that in Akan ethics, the things that are inimical to the continued existence of the community are catalogued under taboos (p. 41). Failure to observe taboos is not so much an offence against another person, but against the gods (abosom), the ancestors (nsamanfoo) or the Supreme Being (Nyame), which warrants corporate punishment, resulting in calamity or illness within the whole community. In order for the community to avoid this, each member of the community acts as a watchdog against flouting the taboos. In his own words:

> First, the evil consequences of infringement of taboos are said to affect the whole society. When a girl under the physiological age of puberty commits fornication, she is deemed to threaten her society with pestilences, untimely deaths, droughts or famine. It is therefore of concern to me that every young girl of and in my society should keep the taboo on

sex relations. As a good citizen, I have the right and duty to make any girl observe it meticulously whether I know her personally or not (p. 41).

The above quotation rhymes with Hans Jonas's insistence that everyone should be involved in making sure that the future of humanity is not jeopardized by the advancement of technology and the concomitant growth of human power.

On the other hand, Sarpong adds that certain sins automatically result in individual punishment among Akan people. For example, a woman who will have an extra-marital affair may have a difficult labor, which may eventually end her life, unless she confesses to the act and reveal the accomplice. Another instance is that when one insults his father, he is likely to fall sick and eventually die. He can only survive if he confesses to the act and pacifies his father's spirit (p.43). This clearly shows that there is individual responsibility also among Africans.

The corporate and individual responsibility explained here will be useful to our thesis in the sense that even though your actions now should be geared towards the future existence of humanity and the biosphere, you may also be held responsible for your act.

1.7 Academic contribution

This thesis is about moral responsibility in an age of technological power, and seeks to make a contribution to Christian ethics and to scholarship by providing a new ethics of

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responsibility that, to use Schweiker's words, *respects and enhances the integrity of life before God*.

Secondly, the end product of this thesis could be used by scientists, engineers, business institutions and business people, theological institutions, etc. for further research and study.

Thirdly, it will provide an African ethics of responsibility, and ultimately, an African Christian ethics of altruistic responsibility that could be used by both African theologians and philosophers, and Christian theologians as well.

Fourthly, it aims at clarifying God's role (in Christ) in current history by producing a Christian ethics of responsibility to guide the technological advancement.

Lastly, but not the least, it aims at conserving the future existence of humanity, the ecological environment and other living things – this will be a huge contribution for the continued existence of humanity and the biosphere.

1.8   Limitation of the research

This thesis may have the following limitation:

Normatively, we strive to formulate a universal African Christian ethics of altruistic responsibility, calling on everyone – Christians and non-Christians alike – to dwell on the example of Christ's sacrificial act for the world as a basis for the future preservation

of life on earth in the face of the danger of technological advancement, but we are also aware of the empirical fact that no universal acknowledgement of such an ethics could be expected.

1.9 Organization and plan

Chapter 1

This chapter provides the background to the study, an overview of the research problem, objectives, methodology, the literature review and the purpose of the study. In the process, the nature of ethics and the concept of responsibility are discussed.

Chapter 2

A detailed sketch of Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility will be provided here. The question to be answered here is how Hans Jonas originally conceptualized the ethics of responsibility.

Chapter 3

This chapter provides a detailed sketch of William Schweiker's Christian ethics of responsibility.

Chapter 4

This chapter deals with the analysis and assessment of Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility and William Schweiker's Christian ethics of responsibility. How does the debate on Jonas's ethics of responsibility expose his shortcomings? The other question

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to be answered here is how successful William Schweiker's attempt to develop a Christian or theological ethics of responsibility in close proximity to Jonas's ethics of responsibility is? Has he been able to overcome the weaknesses of Jonas's ethics of responsibility and does he, with his Christian version, overcome Jonas's doubt about the adequacy of religious ethics in tackling problems relating to the future?

Chapter 5

The main aim of this chapter is to explore the prospects of an African Christian ethics of altruistic responsibility. Does traditional African ethics hold any promise for the development of an African Christian ethics of responsibility? What is the relationship between African morality and Christian morality? For instance: "What is the relationship between the African concept of 'ubuntu' and Christian love?" And: "How do we formulate a normatively universal Christian ethics from the African concept of "ubuntu" and Christian love?"

Furthermore, the meaning and function of "responsibility" among Africans will be explored in detail. What role does the African concept of time play here, and what are the implications for *futurology* (apologies to Hans Jonas) with regard to the African concept of time in the context of *eschatology* in Christianity?

The idea of *musuo* as a corporate punishment is also significant to our study because, to some extent, *musuo* could be equated to the dangers that the advancement of technology poses to the future existence of the world as a whole. *Musuo*, if not checked,

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could result in the annihilation of the whole community. This means that the doom *musuo* spells for the community, commensurate with the doom associated with the atomic bomb, for instance. Both *musuo* and the atomic bomb are sources of danger for the continued existence of humanity. The equivalent of *musuo* in Christianity will also be discussed here.

The fear of shame that acts as "inspiration" for Africans to act morally will be explored here to contribute to the African ethics of responsibility. Of particular interest will be Hans Jonas's suggestion that the heuristic of fear is the fundamental step towards the formulation of an ethics of responsibility for the future existence of humanity.

The blame syndrome in African way of life where responsibility is externalized when something goes wrong will be fully discussed here. For instance, do Africans have to continue to blame others, the deities, ancestors, evil forces, wars, colonialism, other preceding political leaders, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, etc. for our inability to free ourselves from the shackles of poverty, or do we have to blame ourselves? President Sarkozy's recent comment on this topic will also be assessed here.

Chapter 6

Following from Chapters 4 and 5, we will attempt the formulation of an *African Christian ethics of altruistic responsibility* as a contribution to the debate on the ethics of responsibility for the technological age. In the end, a normatively universal Christian

ethics of responsibility that emphasizes the concept of altruism will be formulated. As indicated in the methodology, at the heart of this *African Christian ethics of altruistic responsibility* will be the imitation of the love of Christ that enabled Him to selflessly (*Ubuntu*-like) come down to suffer in order to die to save a sinful world. In this work, we will not call people to be Christians, but invite everyone to imitate the altruistic love of Christ, under girded by the African concept of community, in order for them to be able to save the future of the world in the face of the technological threat. The African Christian imperative of responsibility in this case may be formulated thus: *In all your communal relations and actions, let the altruistic love of Christ for the world be the guiding principle for the continued well-being and future existence of humanity and the biosphere.* Expressed negatively: *In all your communal relations and actions, let not the imitation of the altruistic love of Christ elude you in your attempt to foster the continued well-being and future existence of humanity and the biosphere.* This African Christian imperative will be fully unpacked in this chapter.

The other question that is of prime importance is: what is the prophetic task, or role of the Church in all of these?

1.10 Conclusion

A summary of the findings and recommendations for future research will be made here.

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CHAPTER 2

Hans Jonas

2.1. His life and work in brief

Hans Jonas was born in Mönchengladbach, Germany, on May 10, 1903. His parents were Jewish. Their names were Gustav Jonas and Rosa Horowitz. His father was the owner of a textile factory in Germany, and was also at one time the Chairman of the Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith. The aim of the association was to help Jews to remain Jewish whilst at the same time assimilate into German culture, something his son, Jonas, did not agree with. Jonas, unlike his father, joined the small local Zionist group in Mönchengladbach-Odenkirchen-Rheydt in Germany (Wiese 2007: 3). The Zionists looked forward to the day when they will return to their homeland, Palestine, and insisted on being recognized as Jewish Citizens in Germany.

Jonas studied at the Universities of Freiburg in Southern Germany under Edmund Husserl and did his doctoral studies at the University of Marburg in 1928 under the supervision of Martin Heidegger. Jonas taught for ten years all together in the universities of Marburg, Freiburg, and Berlin.

By 1935, at the wake of the Nazi regime, Jonas decided to move to Palestine because he "had reached the conclusion that he could not remain in a country that deprived Jews of their civil and human rights without losing his dignity" (Wiese 2007: 9). Subsequently, Jonas emigrated to Palestine, first passing through London and spending a year there to take care of the publication and printing of his book, arriving in

Jerusalem in the spring of 1935 after securing "for himself a so-called *Kapitalistenzertifikat* (Capitalist Certificate) or *Tausend-Pfund-Zertifikat* (Thousand Pound Certificate), which guaranteed him unhindered emigration to and sufficient livelihood in Palestine" (Wiese 2007: 9). In Jerusalem, Jonas found himself in the company of an exile community of German Jewish scholars. Jonas taught at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1938. When war eventually broke out in 1939, he decided to fight the Nazis face to face, and therefore joined the Jewish Brigade of the British 8th Army (Troster 2011). In the army, he was offered a safe position of acting as intelligent officer, but he refused that position, opting rather to fight in the war front. He, therefore, went back again to Germany with the British troops through Italy and Austria (Memoirs 2008: xii), where to his dismay he found out that his mother has also been killed in Auschwitz in1942. He returned to Jerusalem and after spending five years in all in the army, he accepted a teaching appointment in Canada in the early 1950s and moved from Israel to Canada where he taught in Montreal and Ottawa. In 1955, he accepted an appointment to the graduate faculty of the New School for Social Research in Manhattan, New York, USA, where he spent 40yrs of his life. He became the chairman of the philosophy department from 1957 to 1963. He was also the Alvin Johnson Professor of philosophy from 1966 until his retirement in 1976 (Pace 1993:1). It was here in the New School that he wrote some of his major books: *The Phenomenon of Life* (1963) and *The Imperative of Responsibility: In search of an ethics for the technological age* (1979). In 1943, he married Eleanor Weiner, and had three children with her – John, Ayalah Sorkin and Gabrielle.

The last words he publicly spoke were the acceptance speech he gave when he was awarded the Premio Nonino Prize for excellence. The acceptance speech is contained in his article entitled "The outcry of mute things," which is prophetically charged:

> It was once religion which told us that we are all sinners, because of original sin. It is now the ecology of our planet which pronounces us all to be sinners because of the excessive exploits of human inventiveness. It was once religion which threatened us with a last judgment at the end of days. It is now our tortured planet which predicts the arrival of such a day without any heavenly intervention. The latest revelation – from no Mount Sinai, from no Mount of the Sermon, from no Bo (tree of Buddha) – is the outcry of mute things themselves that we must heed by curbing our power over creation lest we perish together on a wasteland of what was creation.

He died only a few days after the above speech in his home in New Rochelle, New York, at the age of 89.

In November of 2005, a conference was held in his honour in the Arizona State University, which eventually produced the volume: *Judaism and the phenomenon of life: The legacy of Hans Jonas*.

Jonas's interest in philosophy began at an early age of sixteen or seventeen when he would quote a line from Immanuel Kant from time to time. Even though he studied under

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), he was very much influenced by Kant. The book of Amos in the Bible was also influential in his formative years (Schürmann 1993:1). It was during an interview in the Spring of 1990 that Jonas revealed that he had been strongly influenced by Kant. Jonas puts it this way:

> And one essay by Kant which tremendously influenced, impressed, and determined me, Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten, Foundation of Metaphysics of Morals, which had, well, an almost defining influence on my life because it fixed in a way for all time the idea, the secret idea I have of ethics, of a philosophical ethics (2003:4).[7]

In the interview, Jonas also reveals that his philosophical thought from Kant was modified when he read Aristotle. His philosophical life and work went through three stages: the early period when he dealt with existential philosophy in the form of Gnosticism. He was encouraged to go into this area by Rudolf Bultmann, his theology teacher and mentor at the University of Marburg (Wiese 2007: 8). This led to the publication of the book *The Gnostic Religion* in Germany in 1934, translated into English in 1958. In the later period, he turned his attention to nature and the natural sciences, which led to the publication of *The Phenomenon of Life* in 1966. What brought him to the lime-light was the publication of *The Imperative of Responsibility* in 1979 in Germany. Jonas translated this book into English in 1984. His book had an unexpected record sale of 150,000 copies in a short time, especially in Germany and France

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[7] The Interview was conducted by Dr. Harvey Scodel, a commercial real estate appraiser in San Francisco.

(Schürmann 1993:1). Jonas is also credited with *Philosophical Essays*, 1974, and a host of other articles.

Even though Jonas does not mention Martin Heidegger, his teacher, Heidegger's teaching on the *Sein*, *Zeit* and *Dasein* (meaning Being, Time and You or I respectively) in his existential philosophy seems to have an influence on Jonas's teaching on the care for humanity's future existence, especially Heidegger's teaching on *Dasein*. This is so because, in his teaching, Jonas explains that whenever we see *Dasein* in Heidegger's writings, we should substitute it with "You" or "I" (1994: 818). But *Sein* refers to a different kind of *being*; it is *being* in its infinity since in its verbal form *Sein* means "to be". Heidegger describes *Sein* in its relationship to this world; when *Sein* combines with *Zeit*, it means *being* in time or *being* in its temporaliness (the German *Zeitlichkeit* means temporality). This means that the *being* described is in relationship with the world in a temporal form. Like Heraclitus, Heidegger teaches that *Sein* is in a flux, always changing. In *Da-sein, Sein* finds itself in relation to this world, since the prefix "da" means that "this special form of being surrounds itself with a horizon towards which it lives" (1994: 818). In *Dasein*, the *Sein* refers to a *being* that *throws* or *projects* itself into the future. In its numerous attributes, *Dasein* also refers to a *being* that is concerned with something, but within the consciousness of itself. According to Heidegger, without this concern for something, *Dasein* will perish since in its conscious state it is constantly exposed to nothingness (1994: 819). Because *Dasein* is mortal, it has to be in constant relationship with something, else it will drift into nothingness, and this will spell its annihilation or death. According to Jonas, for this reason, Heidegger refers to the

intrinsic nature of *Dasein* as "caring." This means that it is in *caring* that *Dasein* finds its being. And this ontology of *Dasein*, for Jonas, is the heart of Heidegger's *existentialism* (1994: 819).[8]

Concerning *existentialism*, Jonas explains that "It is in the perspective of care that the world can confront us as the quintessence of 'at-handedness' and the things of this world as potential 'stuff' or 'equipment,' as something that can be of service in the end-means situation" (1994: 819). Jonas further explains that Heidegger's *Dasein* finds its "fulfillment in total devotion to other beings," and that "much else that is transitory is encompassed by care: other persons – for example in the mode of 'care-for' or 'concern-for,' perhaps to the point of self-abnegation – and even inanimate things, such as the uncompleted work to which the artist devotes his life" (1994: 819).[9] So in *Dasein*, our being is subjugated to nature.

Jonas further indicates that Heidegger's reflection on the "authenticity" and "inauthenticity" in *Dasein* leads into the ethical realm even though Heidegger simply describes the words and stops there. To exist "authentically" means to reflect on one's own self or one's own death, and this leads to people deciding to be their own selves, i.e. to live "authentically" (1994:820). And living "authentically" means to be conscious of one's own existence in selfless "care" for others and the world. But according to Jonas, by teaching about "authentic" choice of being without delving into the ethical

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[8] According to Jonas, this term was not used by Heidegger himself.

[9] Heidegger describes the German *Mitein-ander-sein* as *being-with-others*, and *Sich-Vorwegsein* as *being-ahead-of-oneself*.

realm, Heidegger did a lot of injustice to moral philosophy. Jonas succinctly puts it this way,

> By ignoring the concrete basis of ethics, Heidegger's interpretation of inwardness denied itself an important means of access to this field; with this lack, ethics for him remained empty of real content. It was crucial for human beings to choose, but *what* choices they should make were not stated (1994:821).

In another article, Jonas insists that whenever power is made available to human beings, morality becomes operational (1976: 16). As indicated earlier, even though Jonas did not mention Heidegger in his teaching about the care for humanity's future existence in the face of the growing power of humanity through technological advancement, it seems quiet plausible that Heidegger's *Da-sein*, and even his teaching on *futurity* (*Zukünftigkeit*) at least in some respects might have influenced Jonas's philosophical views.

2.2. The imperative of responsibility

In his book, *The imperative of responsibility*, Jonas set out for himself the task of finding out how life could be an object of responsibility in the face of the fast growing human technology. Jonas warns that the unprecedented technological development in modern times has increased the power and control of humanity over reality such that if care is not taken, humanity will end up annihilating not only itself, but the whole of life on earth.

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He reveals that "The net total of these threats is the overtaxing of nature, environment and (perhaps) humans as well." (1984a: ix). He further warns that

> experience has taught us that developments set in motion by technological acts with short-term aims tend to make themselves independent, that is, to gather their own compulsive dynamics, and automotive momentum, by which they become not only, as pointed out, irreversible but also forward-pushing and thus overtake the wishes and plans of the initiators. The motion once begun takes the law of action out of our hands… (1984a: 32; see 1976: 17).

This means that when care is not taken, humanity may not be able to control what he/she creates, and this will lead to global catastrophe! "The raping of nature and the civilizing of himself go hand in hand," Jonas observes (1973: 33). According to Jonas, the awareness of the danger of technology for humanity's continued existence became prominent after the Hiroshima bombing and the nuclear weapons following immediately after it (1994: 825). Jonas also is of the view that the threat technology poses to the planet's ecology became apparent in the second half of the twentieth century. This resulted in philosophers again reflecting on the age-old dualism – the relationship between human being and nature, and between mind and matter – but which took on a totally new form at this stage. As far as Jonas is concerned, this practical new focus is becoming the source of reflection for philosophy and will continue for years to come. In his own words, he notes that

Thanks to this exceedingly practical aspect of the problem, the reconciliation between our presumptuous special status as humans and the universe as a whole, which is the source of our life, is becoming a central concern of philosophy to address, both at the present moment and into the coming century…we must work on the idea of a peace pact between mind and nature, for the sake of which arrogant humans must renounce much of that to which habit appears to entitle them (1994: 826, 830).

Egbert Schuurman echoes the same sentiments of Jonas in what he refers to as "the downside" of technology in the following words:

People discuss the threat of nuclear weapons or radioactive waste from nuclear power plants, the depletion of raw materials, the extinction of many plant and animal species, deforestation, the loss of useable land to salinization and desertification, the depletion of the ozone layer and the increase of exhaust fumes with their far-reaching consequences for life and climate, and the scale of urban sprawl and reduction of arable land. Then there is the growing threat of overestimating the repercussions of cloning and human genetic therapy… Technology is no longer the liberator, but itself stands in the service of power over humans and nature

and, as such, binds humanity, destroys nature, and threatens culture
(Schuurman 2010: 107, 118)

Jonas also suggests that apart from ecology, which includes its subdivisions of land, sea and air, demography, economics, bio-medical and behavioral sciences, and even the psychology of mind pollution by television, are some of the areas that need the direction of a new ethics of responsibility (2003: 200).

He also notes that with the change in human power over nature with the development of technology, human action has changed, and since ethics is concerned with action, it calls for a new ethics to guide this new form of power that humanity has found (1973: 31). Jonas then expresses the opinion that it will take the same mind, which created the problem in the first place, and the rethinking of the concept of responsibility, to correct the danger posed by technology, and that no god will do this for humanity (1994: 831-832).

He further suggests that the traditional ethics that we have is not able to guide the future scientific developments, because it works under the assumption that "… given the impossibility of long-term calculation, one should consider what is close at hand only and let the distant future take care of itself" (1984a: 34). Traditional ethics works under the assumption that because humanity is not able to foresee what will happen in the future, and therefore human responsibility and power is limited, humanity should not be blamed for any well-intentioned actions that later backfires. In other words, traditional

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ethics absolves actors of blame for consequences they cannot foresee. But according to Jonas, this assumption of traditional ethics is no longer able to solve the current growing problems posed by the advance of technology because "human ability to act has outstripped the power to predict the consequences of actions." The reason being that in an effort to advance technology, which is seen by many as a good thing, humanity is gaining a lot of power and control over nature and the environment to the extent that the external environment and human nature are being altered in a disturbing way through genetic engineering, new techniques in medicine, behavior modification and the production of nuclear weapons (which are even detrimental to the survival of the human species).

He argues that the moral injunctions, both in scripture and in tradition, deal with the horizontal (anthropocentric) and vertical (theocentric) relationships of life, and that we need an ethics that will look into the future existence of humanity, and at the same time make humanity responsible for the consequences of the lethal misapplications of technology. He, therefore, recommends that we need to do serious ethical reflections to come out with an ethics of responsibility that will do away with the anthropocentric standpoint of current ethics (where man is the center of ethics), and come out with an ethics of responsibility that is future-oriented (1984a:12) and capable of tackling the problems highlighted above. In other words, since the effects of the actions of humanity are not only affecting humanity alone, but also the eco-system and the future existence of humanity, the anthropocentric ethics that has existed since the time of the Sophists,

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must be done away with, and a new one that tackles the ethical problems of the technological age be formulated.

In order to show that if care is not taken humanity is heading to a future doomed by technological inventions, he cites three examples of what technology enables us to do, but which also make *homo faber* (Latin for "Man the Smith" or "Man the Maker") the object of technology. In a number of instances, he sees *homo faber* turning upon himself/herself with unguided technological advancement. These areas of technological experimentation are man's mortality, behavior control and genetic manipulation.

2.2.1. Man's mortality

Concerning man's mortality, he laments that humanity is consciously getting more and more interested in prolonging his life beyond the biblical injunction of the "threescore years and ten, or by reason of strength fourscore" instead of previously leaving the end of life to chance. He cites, for example, the scientific advances into cell biology in order to prolong our lives by making use of knowledge of biochemical processes of aging (1984a: 18). Man, according to him, is now fighting against his oldest foe – death. But the question he expects us to ask is this, "How desirable is this? How desirable for the individual, and how for the species?" (1984a: 18). He observes that when this anti-age scientific process continues without check, it will create a world in which there will be "… a decreasing proportion of youth in an increasingly aged population" (1984a: 19). He accentuates that what scientists and all of us should be thinking of is how good or bad such a situation will be for the human species. He adds that when we try to abolish

death, we should also try to abolish procreation since life's answer to procreation is death. "This ever renewed beginning, which is only to be had at the price of ever repeated ending, may well be mankind's hope, its safeguard against lapsing into boredom and routine, its chance of retaining the spontaneity of life," he surmised (1984a: 19). We must, therefore, be careful so that what appears to be a blessing for humanity does not rather turn out to be a nightmare.

2.2.2. Behavior control

The second example that he looks at is behavior control. This is the situation where scientists are coming out with chemical or electrical ways of controlling the brain through the implantation of electrodes for scientific purposes. Beneficial as this may be, it also has its potential dangers. He warns that when this is extended to society it may even have more dangerous consequences as it may produce humans with "programmed behavior systems" (1984a: 20). According to him, that is what happens when we go beyond the human way of dealing with human problems. He then poses a number of questions, which for clarity I quote below:

Shall we include learning attitude in schoolchildren by the mass administration of drugs, circumventing the appeal to autonomous motivation? Shall we overcome aggression by electronic pacification of brain areas? Shall we generate sensations of happiness or pleasure or at least contentment through independent stimulation (or tranquilizing) of the appropriate centers – independent, that is, of the objects of happiness,

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pleasure, or content and their attainment in personal living and achieving?
(1984a: 20)

According to him, when we control human behavior that way, a certain dignity is taken from humanity since by so doing humanity is reduced from responsible subjects to programmed behavior individuals. "Never must the existence or the essence of man as a whole," he warned, "be made a stake in the hazards of action" (1984a: 37).

2.2.3. Human genetic control

The third example has to do with human genetic control. This is the scientific process where humanity takes his/her own evolution into his/her own hands. What he was concerned with was the ethical implications of such a move. The question is, who will be the image-makers, and what standards and knowledge are they going to use? Do we have the moral right to do so?

In the light of the above examples, he warns that "By the kind and size of its snowballing effects, technological power propels us into goals of a type that was formerly the preserve of Utopias (1984a: 21). This, then, calls for a new kind of ethics that looks into the future with responsibility and humility, one which is within the range of our power, a power to foresee, evaluate and judge the future. But because of our ignorance of the future, it calls for restraint. The question is, is it appropriate to use force to subdue the situation? Here, Jonas appeals to political philosophy since he concedes that he has no answers. He suggests that even before force is applied, we must try to draw up the

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parameters – the new ethics of responsibility – upon which to make demands. He observes that nihilism seems to be the accepted norm in Western society, and argues that until we get to the situation where the sacred, destroyed by the scientific enlightenment, is brought into our dealings again, we may not be able to come out with a new ethics of responsibility that is capable of coping with our ever-growing technological powers. He further argues that ethics cannot be taken out of the life of humanity since our power to act is regulated by ethics, and the more our ability to make decisions grow, the more our ethics should also grow. He emphasizes that the "… novel powers to act require novel ethical rules and perhaps even a new ethics" (1984a: 23). Fear, according to him, can do the job since fear "… is often the best substitute for genuine virtue or wisdom" (1984a: 23).

He surmises that the theory of responsibility which he is about to formulate is lacking so far. In order to prove his point, he went on to show the inadequacies of four traditional ethical systems. These are *the categorical imperative, the ethics of fulfillment in the life hereafter, the statesman's responsibility for the future,* and *the modern utopia*.

What I propose to do subsequently is to give his criticisms of the above four traditional ethical theories, then go on to give his own proposed hypothesis on the imperative of responsibility. The critical assessment of his work by other scholars, including my own assessment, will be made in Chapter Four of this thesis.

2.3. Jonas' criticism of traditional ethical systems

2.3.1. The categorical imperative

The categorical imperative was proposed by one of the influential German philosophers, Immanuel Kant. This imperative, which states that *Act so that you can will that the maxim of your action be made the principle of a universal law*, had a substantial bashing from Jonas. Jonas indicates that at the heart of the *categorical imperative* is "willing alone", which uses *reason*, a principle of universality, and *feeling*, which is evoked by "reverence" to the moral law itself, to make moral judgments. According to him, the fact that willingness is evoked by "reverence" flaws Kant's categorical imperative since it amounts to "self-limitation of freedom…" (1984a: 88-89). In other words, you limit your freedom when your action is directly related to a universal approval. Jonas argues that Kant's categorical imperative cannot measure up to the future-oriented ethics needed because it is designed to help individuals to make logical judgments on the here and now. He further notes that Kant's maxim does not even measure up to moral judgments. In his own words he emphasizes that "The 'I can will' or 'I cannot will' expresses logical compatibility or incompatibility, not moral approbation or revulsion." (1984a: 11). *The categorical imperative*, therefore, has no objective responsibility but a subjective one. What the "new imperative" seeks to do, which the categorical imperative fails to do, is to source a time horizon ethics, which will guide the future continual existence of humanity. His emphases that such an imperative of responsibility will also include the responsibility of a collective whole, rather than an anthropological responsibility (1984a: 12). In other words, Jonas makes responsibility not only the work of one person, but the duty of all humanity.

Nonetheless, Jonas admits that the Kantian distinction between the hypothetical and categorical imperative fits into the new imperative. This is because the hypothetical imperative, which says: *If there are human beings in the future – which depends on our procreation – then such and such duties are to be observed by us towards them in advance*, takes the future ethical actions of people into consideration (1984a: 43). But is it really true that Kant's categorical imperative cannot apply to future ethics of responsibility? This question will be discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

2.3.2. The ethics of fulfillment in the life hereafter

According to Jonas, in traditional ethics, one refrains from participating in a certain way of life because one wants to live a happy life with God in the life hereafter. In order to achieve this objective, one has to lead a life that is pleasing to God such as "justice, charity, purity of heart, etc. …" (1984a:13). He further asserts that it is a life in which one makes conscious effort to daily progress "… from impurity to purity, from sinfulness to sanctity, from bondage to freedom, from selfhood to self-transcendence" (1984a: 14). He argues that this kind of life is an individualistic way of life in which one lives his/her ethics in the here and now for a future reward. Such ethics, he further argues, fails to look into the future life sustenance of humanity, let alone worry over the dangers of technological developments for the continued existence of humanity on earth. He notes in his own words that "… in the 'moderate' version of the belief in the soul's salvation (of which, if I am not mistaken, Judaism is an example) we still deal, after all, with an ethics of contemporaneity and immediacy, notwithstanding the transcendent goals; …" (1984a:

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13). Again, we leave the assessment of this assertion by Jonas until Chapter Four of this thesis.

2.3.3. The statesman's responsibility for the future

Jonas went on to deal with another kind of traditional ethics he describes as an *innerworldly future-oriented ethic*. According to Jonas, in this ethics, the statesman and the legislator plans for the "future good of the commonwealth" in which the aim is not to have a perfect state as such, but to have the best possible state (1984a: 14, 15). The rationale behind this is that for the best future state to be achieved, the present state must also be a good one, since a present good state replicates itself in the future. The politician, therefore, is expected to apply wisdom and moderation to the way of life of the present state in order to achieve the desired objective. Jonas concludes that because the future state is supposed to be a replica of the current state and not different from and superior to it, this kind of ethics too is inadequate (1984a: 15).

2.3.4. The modern utopia

The Modern Utopia is a situation where action takes place 'today' to benefit future posterity and not the initiators nor their contemporaries. Jonas describes this kind of state as the "otherworldly hopes" or "the utopian politics, which presupposes a previously unknown dynamic eschatology of history" (Jonas: 1984a: 15, 16). It is a situation where life is led in such a way that those future generations may have a perfect world to live in. In Jonas's own words, "Only with the advent of modern progress, both as a fact and as an idea, did the possibility emerge of conceiving everything

present as a stepping-stone to the future" (1984a:16). The different versions of the ethics of utopian politics do not necessarily regard the present world as either good or bad; their motivation only come from the future perfect world which they want to build for posterity. Jonas then argues that, even though the modern utopia looks into the future, it still does not supply answers to the kind of future ethics of responsibility he is proposing since "It is still an ethic of the self-vindicating present, not of the retroactively vindicating future …" (1984:16). He, therefore, concludes that the ethics of responsibility he is looking for is anti-utopian and non-eschatological (1984a: 17).

In his closing remarks on the four examples above, he asserts that what he is questioning is not the validity of the four systems, but their sufficiency for the future, which "requires a commensurate ethic of foresight and responsibility which is as novel as the eventualities which it must meet" (1984a: 18).

2.4.   Foundations of the new ethics of responsibility

2.4.1. The doctrine of moral principles

a) The heuristic of fear

The first foundational requirement for the ethics of responsibility is what Jonas describes as "the heuristic of fear." The *heuristic of fear*, according to Jonas, is that fear which encourages us to act ethically for the future wellbeing of mankind (1984a: 26). He asserts that in order for us to really appreciate what we cherish in every moral philosophy, the negatives should evoke the positives. For instance, sickness should enable us to appreciate health; war's misery should enable us to appreciate peace, etc.

This means that for ethics to function well, it must have fear as its basis, and so *the heuristic of fear* should be the foundational principle for the new ethics (1984a: 26, 27).

b) Visionary

He further notes that coupled with fear should be the ability to visualize "the long-range effects of technological enterprise" (1984a: 27). In other words, the one who chooses to engage with the formulation of the new future ethics should be visionary. He argues that such a person should not only be visionary, but one who is also able to bring about a feeling of fear that enables one to visualize the future safety of the planet. Such fear, according to him, should be a "spiritual sort of fear which is, in a sense, the work of our own deliberate attitude" (1984a: 28). It should be an *altruistic fear* that enables one to act with a clear understanding that neither he/she, nor anyone connected with him/her, is going to enjoy the benefits of the safety that they are fighting for to preserve the continued existence of posterity. Such an attitude, Jonas observes, must be cultivated to the extent that it moves our inner being to be part of that visionary process.

c) Non-reciprocal responsibility and duty

He further indicates that the idea of reciprocity, whereby one pays another in his/her own coins or insists on his/her right does not fit into the new future ethics that he is envisaging. What the new ethics requires is a "… nonreciprocal responsibility and duty" (1984a: 39). This is a responsibility and duty which enables one to think about the future wellbeing of his/her children without expecting a reward. In other words, the responsibility is unconditional and one-sided (1984a: 41). It is also a responsibility which

makes sure that future existence is secured and their quality of life assured, even when it has nothing to do with our own descendants. When we do this, he argues, we are respecting their humanity, and it enables the future generation to live the way they ought to live.

d) The existence of mankind

Another requirement for the imperative of responsibility is the idea of the on-going existence of mankind (1984a: 43). He describes this as the "ontological idea" or the "ontological imperative" of man, the idea that there should be humanity in the future that we are envisioning (1984a: 43). And here he agrees that the principle of the envisaged new ethics of responsibility is consistent with that part of the categorical imperative of Kant which also insists that there should be the existence of human beings in the future for the principle of categorical imperative to apply.

e) Faith in revealed truth

He further contends that "faith in revealed truth" can provide a foundation for a future existence of mankind, but also realizes that such faith cannot be summoned at command. In other words, such faith can be absent. He therefore argues for the need of a rational metaphysics in the formulation of the new ethics, since God, the creator, creates us in His image and expects that His creation will live ethically (1984a: 45). He also surmises that the anthropocentric exclusivism, which characterizes Hellenistic-Judaism and the Christian ethics of the West, should not solely typify this new ethics (1984a: 45).

2.5. Theory of responsibility

2.5.1. Formal and substantive responsibility

According to Jonas, the first condition of responsibility is "causal power", i.e. the ability to act. He notes that "power" is that which binds "will and obligation together," and therefore, "moves responsibility into the center of morality" (1984a: 130). The ability to act, he accentuates, is that which makes an impact in the world. But if one should act responsibly, the action should be under the person's control, and he/she must also see, to some extent, the consequences of his/her actions, and be accountable for his/her actions (1984a: 90). But added to this is the responsibility "for" another agent. So whereas one is accountable for one's own actions, one is also responsible for the needs of others.

He then went on to describe *formal and substantive responsibilities*. According to him, a *formal responsibility* is "when we say that someone is responsible for what happened" (1984a: 90). In *formal responsibility*, a person is held responsible for the consequences of his deeds. This means that *formal responsibility* could be regarded principally as legal and not necessarily moral. It is legal in the sense that the harm may not necessarily be a misdeed, or intended, or foreseen, and yet must be compensated for. To illustrate his point, he re-calls the story of the missing horseshoe nail, in which Smith, the journeyman, is not to be blamed for the loss of the horseshoe nail which accounted for the loss of the battle, even though he was careless. Rather, the blacksmith, who may be blameless, is to be ultimately answerable for the lost battle. He then notes that "legal responsibility to indemnify can be free of all guilt" (1984a: 91).

Substantive responsibility, he writes, is not the one in practice today, which makes someone responsible for his deeds, but one in which the agent agrees to be responsible for the future actions of those who have been committed to his care. The subject may not foresee the future actions of the objects, but he nonetheless agrees to be responsible. Jonas explains that, "This siding of sentiment with the object originates not from the idea of responsibility in general but from the perceived *right-plus-need* of the object, as it affects the sensibility and puts the selfishness of power to shame" (1984a: 92-93). He describes the action of the subject as *ought to do* and the object as *ought to be*, since by virtue of the power of the subject, he is called to care for the object. If this kind of action is coupled with "love", then responsibility goes beyond duty and becomes the mark of the future responsibility that is required.

Furthermore, he explains that what qualifies a person as irresponsible is when the person gambles with all his fortune (whether he wins or loses), and in the process is insensitive to the needs of his dependents. The careless driver is also irresponsible even if everything goes well because he endangers the lives of others. He also explains that the captain of a ship is to be held responsible for the lives of the people in the ship, even if he endangers the lives of the people because of the adverse advice of the owner of the ship. He puts it precisely this way:

> The well-being, the interest, the fate of others has, by circumstance or agreement, come under my care, which means that my control over it

involves at the same time my obligation for it. The exercise of the power with disregard of the obligation is, then, 'irresponsible,' that is, a breach of the trust-relation of responsibility (1984a: 93).

2.5.2. Parent and statesman as eminent paradigms

Jonas observes that, as children are born into the world, human beings begin anew, and with it the continued responsibility for mankind (1984a: 134). According to Jonas, responsibility is intrinsically anthropocentric, i.e., responsibility is supposed to be exercised from person to person. This responsibility, he admits, includes reciprocity as every human being, in one way or the other, is responsible for someone. Responsibility, he notes, is inherently human (1984a: 99). But much as responsibility is supposed to be anthropocentric, it is also supposed to be exercised towards inanimate things (1984: 100). But he emphasizes that at the end of the day the "causes" of responsibility "… is life, actual or potential and above all human" (1984a: 101).

Concerning parental and political responsibility, Jonas names "totality," "continuity," and "future" as characteristics of the kind of responsibility that is to be exercised (1984a: 101). In terms of "totality," he affirms that this type of responsibility could be akin to parental responsibility since a parent has "total" care towards his ward. Parental responsibility, he affirms, is the origin and paradigm of all responsibilities. He notes: "The concept of responsibility implies that of an ought – first of an ought-to-be of something, then of an ought-to-be of someone in response to the first" (1984a: 130).

The *ought-to-be of something* will, in this instance, refer to the child, and the *ought-to-be of someone* will refer to the parent.

Like parental responsibility, the object of the true political leader is the people he rules over, as such the totality of their lives becomes his responsibility. According to Jonas, "Its compass makes it an analogue of parental responsibility. It too extends from physical existence to the highest interests; from security to abundance of life, from good conduct to happiness" (1984a: 102). He surmises that it is in the education of the "child" that the functions of the parent and the political leader overlap, since at some stage in the "child's" life the government takes over the education of the child. He notes: "As a consequence, the modern state, be it capitalist or socialist, liberal or authoritarian, egalitarian-democratic or elitist, is becoming in effect ever more 'paternalistic'" (1984a: 103).

But as one who comes from the community in which he now rules, the statesman has an emotional attachment to the community as he sees himself as equal among equals, and this solidarity engenders some love for the community he is supposed to give a better life to. As the child depends totally on the parent, so the community depends totally on the statesman for the betterment of the community. Since the statesman is a "child" of the community, he takes into his care what has been handed down from his descendants, and he is supposed to better it and preserve it for the immediate community and for posterity (1984a: 105). This then leads us to the other characteristics of responsibility – "continuity" and "future."

He observes that "total responsibility" involves "continuity," since the sole aim of the subject should be the caring of the object in its historicity and in its future (1984a: 106). "Total responsibility" should look at the history of the person, and from there take the person into the future, even though that future may not be known. So there is to be continuity into the future as far as "total responsibility" is concerned. The fact that one may not know what will happen in the future or how the object may behave in the future is a paradox. He further surmises that the freedom of the future person is paramount, if true responsibility is to take place.

2.5.3. The horizon of the future

The aim of every parent in child-rearing, Jonas intimates is not indefinite, but to see the child grow into adulthood to take responsibility for his/her own life – whether the child has been trained well or not is another matter. "'Maturity' just implies this indelible chance, which takes over where parental responsibility ceases. That preordained threshold defines the latter's terminal goal," he writes. (1984a: 108). The difference between the statesman and the parent is that the responsibility of the statesman extends indefinitely into the future – only the term-span of the statesman ends -, whereas, as has been noted above, the parent's responsibility ends at some point in the child's life (1984a: 117). It is, therefore, the responsibility of the statesman to make sure that politics continues into the future.

But the unknowable future is even more widened in the face of technology, and "will grow bigger as we go on with bigger technology" (1984a: 118). We of the present generation can project into the future more than our predecessors, but we still know less, he argues. "This unknown *x* of permanent innovation haunts every equation," he stresses (1084a: 120). This will affect the whole destiny of humanity, he warns. This, then, should bring about a new focus of ethical theory that will guide the future unknown technological dynamism.

2.5.4. Why "responsibility" was not central in former ethical theory

He further states that "the concept of responsibility nowhere plays a conspicuous role in the moral systems of the past or in the philosophical theories of ethics" (1984a: 123). Why then was "responsibility" not central in former ethical theory? According to him, the answer lies in the fact that "power and knowledge," (the more power or knowledge you have, the more responsibility you have) from which responsibility is derived is so limited in the past that people had to live their moral lives in the here and now, and only prepare their children, and subsequently future generations with the same ethical values and actions. According to him, it is like leaving the same furniture to your children and future generations to use (1984a: 123, 128). "What is being prepared is always the next generation, and later ones are seen as its repetition…" he argues (1984a: 123). The reason for this is the commonly held view that "what is good for man as a personal and public being now will be so in the future; therefore, the best pre-shaping of the future lies in the goodness of the present state which, by its internal properties, promises to continue itself' (1984a: 124).

2.5.5. The future of mankind and the future of nature

Jonas further suggests that the responsibility for the care of the future of mankind should be the collective work of all humanity. He notes that this responsibility has become even more acute considering the rapid growth of "scientific-technological-industrial civilization" (1984a: 140). The result is that humanity has become not only dangerous to himself/herself, but also to the biosphere since the interests of nature and humanity coincide. This, responsibility, he suggests, should be beyond self-interest (1984a: 136). Because this new ethics of responsibility is borne out of danger, it must have an element of survival, preservation and prevention, he argues (1984a: 139).

As part of the solution of the problem civilization has brought upon us, Jonas suggests the use of, "the Baconian program – namely, to aim knowledge at power over nature, and to utilize power over nature for the improvement of the human lot…" (1984a: 140). This means that we must try to know nature in such a way that we can have control over it to the benefit of mankind – and this could be done through scientific technology. Even though the *Baconian program* ultimately fails because it has led to the domination of nature, it leads us to the idea that we must use the dialectic of power, which can only be overcome by a further degree of power itself. "Power over the power is required now before the halt is called by catastrophe itself…," he emphasized (1984a: 141).

2.5.6. The paradigm of Marxism

According to Jonas, the power that is needed to overcome the danger of the advancement of technology may be achieved by looking at the alternative of

communism. This, then, leads us to Marxism, but not the kind that Marx formulated - which leads humanity to the fulfillment of his/her dreams in future - but one in which salvation from disaster becomes the focus (1984a: 142). Marxism is chosen because of its future-oriented focus on the wellbeing of mankind, which is akin to the focus of the new ethics of responsibility. Marxism, Jonas notes, is "… born in the sign of the 'Principle of Hope' and not the 'Principle of Fear' (1984a: 144). Marxism, he emphasizes, originates from the Baconian revolution, and it is, in fact, its executor. And Marxism can eventually become its master if it renounces the Utopia idea of the Baconian revolution and concentrates on the prevention of disaster for the future of humanity (1984a: 144). In this state, the future classless society of Marxism will be reduced to the condition for mankind's continued existence in the future society.

Jonas then goes on to give the philosophy upon which Marxism was developed. Man, it is believed, is created "good" and it is bad circumstances that make man bad. Good circumstances promote the goodness of man. In order for man to progress in life, the bad circumstances must be removed. Drawing from this, Marxism surmises that once the obstacles of class society and class struggle have been removed, a true society, a classless society, will be achieved. Hence, the "good" man will come to the fore. This, then, defines the "Utopia" of Marxism (1984a: 158). Goodness" goes with morality and therefore, the good man will be morally sound. This, in effect, will create a morally sound society. He precisely puts it this way:

There indeed it will be readily granted that with a just, less unequal distribution of vital goods, as a socialized economy is intended and expected to bring about, many of the incentives to violence, cruelty, envy, avarice, fraud, and the like will disappear, and perhaps a generally more peaceable, if not more brotherly, disposition will prevail among people than in the pitiless bustle of competition, where "the devil takes the hindmost" (1984a: 159).

Jonas is quick to add that because human beings are not angels, it is highly impossible for a sinless society to be achieved (1984a: 160).

One characteristic of Marxism, which Jonas also upholds, is the future vision of a society that will be ruled and permeated by morality, one which the masters of Marxism themselves upholds (1984a: 147). "Real equality," which is also one of the dreams of Marxism is one of the qualities that will well fit the future society. This is because it will avert the day to day suspicion of favoritism (1984a: 150, 151). Jonas is of the view that Marxism, unlike communism and capitalism, will be able to better meet the harsh expectations of the future. He argues that capitalism, a profit-economy, promotes waste into the society by encouraging consumption. But he also added that capitalism has its positive side, in that it encourages competition which aims at reducing cost in the market economy (1984a: 145). He argues that communism, which aims at quality in a society by state control of the means of producing everything on behalf of the people, stifles private initiative, and its inward nature excludes the welfare of other states.

Communism is capable of treating other states "as an object, if not as an enemy," he stressed (1984a: 152). Moreover, communism has the tendency to reduce society into "haves" and "have nots" as, for example, Russia has done, and he is of the view that China will soon follow (1984a: 154). Another tension which communism could also bring is that it will take power from the rich and this will let them fight back; at the same time, it will prevent the poor from aspiring to be rich, and that also has its repercussions. He concludes that the Marxist principle is the key to the future that he anticipates in the following words:

> "The important point here is that the technological impulse is built into the essential nature of Marxism, and to resist it will be all the more difficult as it is bound up there with a stance of extreme anthropocentrism, to which all of nature (including human) is but a means for the self-making of still unfinished man. This psychological factor, though not quantifiable, must be counted in the evaluation of chances in which we are engaged" (1984a: 156).

Marxism projects into the future, but leaves a gap to be filled as what it anticipates is not quite what Jonas wants to eventually happen.

2.5.7. Nietzsche's "superman" as the true man to come

Jonas then turns his attention to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche on the future plight of mankind. According to Nietzsche, man, developing from the animal world, is always

getting better, and he anticipates a tomorrow in which man will grow into a "superman." This "superman" will also develop beyond itself into something else, and the process will continue endlessly. Even though Nietzsche did not teach about a future state in which there will be quality or future happiness, Jonas agrees that the fact that he expected a great thing to come in the future puts him in contention with what he is anticipating (1984a: 157). Jonas, however, faults Nietzsche in that, according to him, he fails to outline how this superman could be realized.

2.5.8. A critique of utopia and the ethic of responsibility

According to Jonas, Marxism observes that a classless and free society is the only state in which the true nature of humanity could be realized. And when this is achieved, it will bring prehistory to an end and a genuine human history will begin. This, Jonas notes, is the humanistic Marxist ideology. Its analogy, surmises Jonas, is the Christian doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ. At the Second Coming of Christ, there will be a new creation of both nature and humanity. In Christ, a new "Adam" will replace the old "Adam" and in the process human nature will be purified. The new nature will be without sin, pure and renewed in the *imago Dei*, and dwell in a perfect world (1984a: 178). But there are differences between the two systems. In the socialist utopia, the new Adam will stand for "… the external conditions of life, which can be politically instituted, namely, through the socialization of production and distribution in a classless society" (1984a: 178-179). Just as in Christianity the new world would come about by divine intervention, so in Marxist Utopia, revolution will bring about the change. The falling of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples that caused a transformation in their lives is

comparable to the effects the new order will have on the people in the Marxist Utopian world; the class society is the sinful world that will be renewed in Marxism. The "true man" that is to emerge in Marxist Utopianism, is hidden and yet to be revealed, and the conditions that will arise is also never known. Jonas, however, notes two main requirements for utopianism. Firstly, in order to satisfy the needs of everyone, there should be material *plenty*, which secondly, must be shared with *ease* (1984a: 186). The fulfillment of these requirements will then generate an air of leisure and comfort in the new world since there is relaxation and freedom from toil if wants are supplied. These requirements can be obtained through what Jonas describes as a *perfected technology*; and by that he means, an unlimited technology. This unlimited technology would be used to "reconstruct nature" in order to generate the expected material *plenty*, or where necessary, supplement the use of nature with artificial means. The other thing also that could be done to generate this *plenty* is "through the mechanization and automation of the labor processes which in the past had consumed human strength and time," Jonas suggests (1984a: 187). In other words, for the *plenty* to be achieved, humanity should be liberated from toil through massive use of machines to do the things that human beings would normally do. The process, according to Jonas, is already underway. But the question that Jonas raises is this: how much of this can nature take? Can nature withstand the onslaught? Of course, artificial means (e.g. fertilizers for the soil) could be used to aid nature. But the question which utopia has to answer is this: "With this help, how far can nature go?"

2.5.9. Global environmental degradation – the bane of utopia

According to Jonas, when we consider the nature of things around us, we come to the conclusion that in order to achieve the global environmental science that is needed, all the following sciences should be galvanized to aid in the process: the biologist, the agronomist, the chemist, the geologist, the meteorologist, the economist, the engineer, the city planner and transportation specialist, and so forth (1984a: 189). Environmental pollution occurs as humans satisfy their needs in these three important areas – food, raw materials, and energy. Utopianism will, therefore, need these three things in abundance if its dreams could be realized. But Jonas indicates that this may not be realistic, and goes ahead to give reasons for his stand. According to Jonas, the more the population grows, the more food and other services are needed, and therefore, the more pressure is put on the soil by way of the application of fertilizers and other chemical means to increase productivity. When this continues, it gets to a stage where the sensitive, life-bearing upper film of the earth's crust begins to demand its price in soil and water conditions, not forgetting the prices to be paid for the use of other strategies such as irrigation and its resultant soil salinity, erosion resulting from tilling of grasslands, and oxygen depletion through deforestation. Jonas then goes on to argue that utopianism is not achievable because there will not be enough mineral resources to satiate the permanent mass civilization of plenty. He further argues that

> Even granted their inexhaustible crustal presence as such, their extraction from ever-deeper strata and lower concentrations for the multiplied human billions of the future that are to live in utopian style will require an energy

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expenditure such as the planet can either not deliver or not bear in its biospheric impact (1984a: 190).

Jonas goes on to elaborate on the repercussions of energy usage by humanity if the standard of the rest of the world were to be raised to the standard enjoyed by the developed countries, whilst at the same time the world's population continues to grow. When this happens, he cautions, disastrous climate changes could occur through the heating up of the atmosphere and the melting of the polar ice caps and so on. He further argues that assuming we set into motion plans to circumvent all the pollutions that will be generated there will still remain thermal pollution, which will heat up the closed box of our terrestrial environment. "Thus, if not from energy starvation, utopia can come to grief from energy gluttony," he discloses (1984a: 191). Consequently, he warns that we must tread with caution in view of the likely irreversibility of some of the initiated processes beyond some unknown point. Once uncertainty is at the fore, moral consequences come into play. He concludes this section by stating that

> Not timidity, but the imperative of responsibility issues the novel call to modesty. Utopia at any rate, insofar as harnessed to material plenty – the immodest goal par excellence – must be renounced; not only because, if ever attained, it could not last, but more so because already the road in that direction leads to disaster (1984a: 191).

He, however, concedes that with low numbers of people, utopianism may be viable (1984a: 192). If utopianism happens, what happens to work? Are the utopianistic people going to just enjoy themselves without work because machines are going to do the work? But since time must be filled and humanity must be occupied, there appears a paradox which will be very difficult to unravel. But Ernst Bloch, one of the modern day advocates of utopianism, suggested that the *hobby* could replace work in the world of utopianism, since the hobby helps one to escape from the boredom of the unavailability of work. In his own words, "Until then, we can learn from the hobby how actively filled leisure is privately dreamed about: as work that feels like leisure" (*Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, 2 vols.: Frankfurt, 1959: 1061, in Jonas 1984a: 196).

But Jonas rebuts this solution on three grounds: "… loss of spontaneity in the hobby becoming a duty, loss of freedom in its necessary public supervision, loss of reality in its fictitious character" (1984a: 196).   He explains that because the hobby normally occupies part of our time, it may soon become boring if all of a sudden we find ourselves indulging in it full-time. When the state insists that everyone should be doing his/her hobby daily, it will lose its freedom, and therefore will not become attractive anymore. With regard to the loss of reality, he says: "With the society-wide stimulation, organization, and enforcement of leisure-time activity will not help because it is mere pretending" (1984a: 197). This will lead to the loss of reality and with it human dignity.

2.5.10. The ethics of responsibility

Responsibility, he observes, is not without hope but at the same time it is strengthened by fear. The heart of responsibility is to see to the welfare of humanity in the midst of its

weaknesses. Utopianism fails because it does not take into consideration the vulnerability of humanity and limitation of humanity. Responsible progress is one that is guarded, and progresses into the future with care for humanity, but at the same time, one that also thinks about the welfare of the natural environment as it progresses with technology.

He argues that nuclear weapons can be abolished without affecting human existence (1984a: 202). His main worry is about the apocalypse of the "too much," with the resultant exhaustion, pollution, and despondency of the earth. In order for this gloomy picture to be averted, a complete change of life-style and habits will have to be made by the industrialized world. This, he observes, will be much more difficult than the prevention of nuclear destruction looming ahead. "Therefore, with all respect for the threat of sudden destruction by the atomic bomb, I put the threat of the slow incremental opposite, overpopulation and all the other "too much," in the forefront of my fears," he stressed (1984a: 202). He went on to state that the apocalyptic destruction that he envisages is one that is even more than the threat of the atomic bomb; it is one in which all human society is included in the process of gradual destruction of the earth. And unfortunately, it may be our grandchildren who may have to suffer for it.

He then turns his attention to the objections that may be raised that he overemphasizes the dangers of technology to the neglect of its benefits. He agrees that his emphasis is one-sided, but he is unrepentant because he does not find in his time any questioning of the technological imperative, even though it is of the utmost importance for the future of

humanity. According to him, "the peril of excess" calls for an ethical emphasis. When the temptation becomes more powerful, the moral emphasis is to keep free from guilt. He gives the example of the decision of the ancient ethical council of Aristotle, which postulates the need to fight one's weaknesses more, and lean towards the stronger side when faced with the "mean" between the two extremes of excess and deficiency (1984a: 203). According to him, "This, in a time of one-sided pressures and mounting risks, is the side of moderation and circumspection, of 'beware!' and 'preserve!'" (1984a: 203).

2.5.11 Jonas's universal ethics of responsibility

As far as we are concerned, Jonas failed to combat nihilism in his ethics of responsibility even though that is one of the main reasons why he sets out to come out with an ethics of responsibility for the technological world. His imperative of responsibility which states that *Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life*, or expressed negatively: *Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life* (Jonas 1984a: 11), shies away from an ethics of responsibility that is theologically inclined. As Christian Wiese puts it,

> There is much to support the idea that in the Imperative of Responsibility
> Jonas endeavored to develop a universally plausible ethics for a global
> secular society… He wanted to avoid the risk of his project being branded

a "Jewish ethics" and thus having its breadth of influence impaired (Wiese 2008: 111).

It is not surprising that Jonas produced an ethics of responsibility that is not theologically inclined because Jonas did not belief in the theistic concept of God that emphasizes the immanence of God, and the fact that God is active in the day to day activities of the world. In an attempt to explain the problem of evil in the world, especially in the face of the brutal annihilation of Jews at Auschwitz, he created his own *myth of creation* which rhythms with the deistic concept of God that God created the world, put all the laws of nature in place and left the world to run on its own.[10] He is of the view that after God created the world, God took a risk when He left the running of the world in the hands of human beings. According to him, the evil in the world may not be attributed to God since human beings are in control of the world.

From the Christian point of view, William Schweiker regarded the universal imperative of responsibility of Jonas to combat the nihilism of the West as inadequate, and therefore sets out to produce an ethics of responsibility along the lines of Jonas, but one with a Christian bias.

The next chapter, therefore, deals with how William Schweiker developed a Christian imperative of responsibility along the lines of Jonas. In Chapter 4, we will find out

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[10] See his article, "The concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish voice

whether Schweiker was able to produce an ethics of responsibility that rectifies the inadequacies of Jonas's ethics of responsibility in the face of the nihilism of the West.

CHAPTER 3

William Schweiker

3.1. A brief summary of his life and work

William Schweiker was born in 1953 at Des Moines, Iowa. He obtained his bachelor's degree from Simpson College, his Master of Divinity degree from Duke University and his Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Chicago, where he is currently the Director of the Martin Marty Center. He is the Edward L. Ryerson Distinguished Service Professor of Theological Ethics at the Divinity School and the College of the University of Chicago. He has been a guest professor at Uppsala University and also the University of Heidelberg.[11]

William Schweiker is an ordained minister of the United Methodist Church. He is a moral philosopher who largely concentrates in the field of theological ethics, and wrote extensively on Christian ethics, global dynamics, and history of ethics, hermeneutical philosophy and comparative religious ethics. He wrote a good number of books and several articles and award winning essays, some of which are *Mimetic Reflections: A Study in Hermeneutics, Theology and Ethics* (1990); *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (1995); *Power, Value and Conviction: Theological Ethics in the Postmodern Age* (1998); *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics: In the Time of Many Worlds* (2004). In addition, he was also a contributor to and chief editor of the book entitled *A Companion*

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[11] The information on Schweiker's birth and work was taken from the following websites: http://divinity.uchicago.edu/faculty/schweiker.shtml and http://www.amazon.com/William-Schweiker/e/B001H6NSZU

to Religious Ethics (2004). He co-authored *Religion and the Human Future: An Essay in Theological Humanism* (2008). In addition to the above, he has also edited and contributed to six volumes of books, including *Humanity Before God: Contemporary Faces of Jewish, Christian and Islamic Ethics* (2006). His latest book, which was published in the fall of 2010, is entitled, *Dust that Breathes: Christian Faith and the New Humanisms*.

3.2. The dangers of technological and scientific developments to future human existence

In his book entitled *Responsibility and Christian ethics* (1995), Schweiker sets out to formulate what he describes as "an integrated ethics of responsibility" within the Christian context. This, according to him, is needed to tackle the dangers of technological and scientific developments to future human existence. To show that his mission is necessary, he does a survey of the various ethical traditions to prove that he is formulating a new ethics of responsibility. He indicates that he is coming out with a book on Christian ethics with a slant on "responsibility" to engage not only with Christians, but with the wider secular world as well. He further notes that his book comes at a time when pluralism has undermined the basis of morality in the human world. The book also comes at a time when Schweiker believes that moral theorists are themselves confused because of the different moral theories they consistently produce for the academic world, and for the world as a whole. A book that focuses on responsibility as core human value for individuals as well as moral communities, he observes, is imperative.

After looking at the ethical theories, he also concludes, like Hans Jonas, that the existing moral theories, including current Christian ethics, do not tackle the future life-threatening dangers that technological development poses to the future existence of humanity. Like Jonas, he argues that in Western ethics and much of traditional Christian ethics, our moral lives are determined by the consideration we give to others and to God. In his own words, he writes: "Morality is defined by obligation to others which includes reasons for self-sacrifice" (1995: 10). This ethics, according to him, is not able to guide the persistent dangers of scientific developments in the world since it concentrates on satisfying one's neighbor and God, before oneself. He refers to this anomaly in traditional ethics as "other-regard," which in his judgment permeates all cultures as well as traditional Christian ethics. For instance, he notes that others come first in the Christian injunction to do to others as we would have them to do to us; and also that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (cf. Matt. 19:19; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8). He also cites Feminist ethicists who bemoan the fact that women lose their self-esteem when they suppress "… their needs, sensibilities, and actions to the demands of traditional roles and obligations to others" (1995: 11). In his book, *Theological ethics and global dynamics*, he concludes that it is because of the inadequacy of traditional ethics that the world has turned elsewhere for the solution to moral problems. He puts it this way: "The inadequacy and poverty of ethics, I contend, is due in some measure to the modern banishment of religious sources from moral thinking, coupled with the assumption by many religious thinkers that valid ethical arguments are confined to their community" (2004: x; see 1998: 22). In his estimation,

individualism forms the core of human values in contemporary Western cultures. Consequently, the search for the goodness and satisfaction in human life is found, not in religion, but in *fulfillment and authenticity*, where *fulfillment and authenticity* are defined in the context of enrichment and enhancement of human life here on earth (1995: 12). This philosophy of life, according to him, does not cater for future ethical responsibility, and explains why a new ethics of responsibility is needed.

Schweiker further surmises that his book comes at a time when belief in religion is in the decline, especially in the West, and notes that his new ethics of responsibility in the Christian context will contribute to the multi-faceted and complex secular society. Schweiker makes it categorically clear that Christian faith entails the conviction that who God is is revealed within the travail of history. Moral inquiry is also historical in this sense. It seeks to chart the development of concepts and values basic to our sense of what life is about by engaging other positions. It affirms history as the arena in which the truth of human existence and the good is to be revealed, recognized, and identified (1995: 223; cf. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Ia, q. 44, art. 1).

At a time when the secular world seeks to increase its power over nature, when the secular world has equated power with value, and also when the culture of fulfillment and authenticity seems to be the accepted norm of the Western world, Christian ethics, he argues, should emphasize the goodness of the power in humanity, and redirect the world to the source of all power – the divine – and seek to interpret human life in the context of the care, respect and the enhancing of the integrity of life before God.

According to him, human power is increasing to the extent that we are capable of altering our species and our environment (1998:19). He quotes Paul Ramsey as warning that "we face a situation in which 'human beings' who come after us might not be genetically like us" (Schweiker 1998: 22). The solution to this problem in our time, he argues, "centers on the complex connection between power and value expressed in Christian convictions about God, Christ, and human life" (Schweiker 1998:1). He further argues that human life is degraded when it fails to connect with God, and that our relationship with God must be seen in the relationship we have with others. This, according to him, is the central theme of Christianity. He affirms his assertion by quoting from 1 John 4:20, where the apostle John insists that we are liars if we say we love God and yet hate someone. (1998: 8). He notes that the challenge of our time is to "put technological resources to work in respecting and enhancing the integrity of life" (1995: 211).

According to him, the prevailing problem in the ethics of responsibility is the radical expansion of human power in the contemporary world. This problem, he argues, is manifested in a lot of current ethics and "… centers on the radical extension of human power through technology in all of its forms, for instance, medical, military, communicational, and environmental technology …" (1995: 25; see 1998: 1). He insists that an ethics of responsibility is helpful for morality since it deals with the appraisal and direction of power and that since responsibility hinges between agent and deed, it becomes very important in a world in which human power is increasing (1995: 28). He observes that ethics of responsibility searches for the proper use of power in morality.

Theological ethics of responsibility, on the other hand, refers to a worldview in which the power and dignity of humanity ought to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God (1995: 30). For Schweiker, "The supreme ethical good is moral integrity" (1998: 13). Theological ethics of responsibility, according to him, is the heart of the quest for an ethics of responsibility. For Schweiker, Christian ethics is *fides quaerens intellectum moralem*, i.e., "faith seeking moral understanding" (1995: 227). The imperative of responsibility, he declares, is this, that *in all actions and relations we are to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God* (1995: 2, 125).

3.3. The dimensions of ethics

I wish, under this heading, to bring together Schweiker's teaching on what ethics and morality means, in order to set the stage for his discussion on the theories of responsibility.

According to Schweiker, the most basic and important question about life has to do with the goodness of existence (1998: 4). He agrees with Charles Taylor who insists that human beings live in a *moral space*, and so the question of morality will daily confront us (1998: 5). As far as Schweiker is concerned, for one to be able to explain adequately what ethics is, the question that should be asked is this: "how should we live?" He emphasizes that the answer we give to that question will deal with the question of human existence and the world in which we live (2004: 29). According to him, ethics is a study of morality, and therefore, deals with what is right and wrong, good and bad in relationships. Morality, he surmises, "is what backs valid norms, imperatives, and rules

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that a society or culture holds about how to live. A morality is a table of values. It is a scheme about what ought to be done and what kinds of persons we should be, based on convictions about what is valuable in and for human life" (1998: 24). Ethics seeks to establish how we should live. In his estimation, a life considered to be a moral life should be a life that seeks to do what is right; it should be a life that is self-examining; and a life that seeks to examine his/her relationship with others. He concisely puts it this way: "The task of ethics is thus to articulate the values one ought to seek, to assess them critically, and thereby to provide guidance for how to live" (1995: 34). According to him, ethics provides the means necessary for us to think lucidly and broadly about our way of life. It provides the means necessary for us to make good choices in life. He notes that ethics could be described as the well from which we draw morality for life.

He observes that the primary questions about what comprises the dimensions of ethics are: what is going on? What is the norm for how to live? What are we to be and to do? What does it mean to be an agent? And how do we justify moral claims? (1995: 35). Schweiker notes that there are, at least, five dimensions of ethics to be derived from the questions above. These are the interpretative (that is, to provide interpretations of moral situations); normative (that is, to specify values and norms that ought to orient personal and social life); practical (that is, to clarify the demands of practical reasoning about moral questions); fundamental (that is, to develop and defend some pictures of human existence in relation to self, others, and God); and meta-ethical dimensions of ethics (that is, to provide arguments for the truth of the moral vision) (1995: 35; see 1998:3). These five dimensions of ethics, he surmises, are very important because they attempt

to answer the questions which permeate our lives as moral agents. As moral agents, we are faced with taking moral decisions all the time; decisions about the truth of our lives, what kind of people we want to be, and how to live a fulfilling and authentic life. The dimensions of ethics, therefore, deal with what Schweiker describes as - "a moral ontology", that is, an account of why we are here on earth, and how to live in this world (1995: 38).

After looking at the nature and meaning of ethics, Schweiker went on to explore the meanings of integrity and responsibility since those two words play an important role in the formulation of his *imperative of responsibility*. He went on from there to look at the theories of responsibility to prove their inadequacies in the face of technological advancement.

3.4.   The nature and meaning of integrity

According to Schweiker, in order to understand responsibility, we first have to look at the concept of integrity. The word "integrity" is taken from the Latin word *integri*, which means, "as whole" (1995: 32). This implies that the word integrity means wholeness or completeness. "Integrity" connotes a commitment to some mission. It describes the standard around which an entire life is to be seen or evaluated. When one is considered as having moral integrity or being responsible, it means that person is committed to a specific moral principle and lives by all the standards and dispositions this principle involves.

From the above, Schweiker deduces that moral integrity or moral responsibility is a wholeness of life that entails "… a commitment to respect and enhance diverse goods in personal and social life" (1995: 33). According to him, the term *integrity of life* explains two things. First, "integrity means the integration of complex goods into some coherent, complex whole," and second, that "the integration of human life, our existence as moral agents, is always through commitment to something that brings wholeness of life" (2004: 37). He further notes that in terms of interrelation, "integrity" brings three things together:

> First, the dynamic of living things (they struggle to integrate their being against forces of disintegration), and second, also a specific project of that dynamic (living things strive to integrate various levels of goods in relation to others thereby to flourish). Taken together this dynamic and project (the 'integrity' of life) is that for which we are responsible in actions and relations to and with others. Third, when we so live as responsible persons and communities, the ethics holds, another kind of goodness comes into being, namely, *moral integrity* (2009: 474).

He argues that value is found in every human interaction and that to be a man or a woman of integrity, one ought to be principled and live out his/her convictions. He is of the opinion that "The distinctly moral good is a life whose wholeness is found through dedication to respecting and enhancing the integrity of life" (2004: 37). He further surmises that this commitment is the moral meaning at the heart of Christian faith

because it involves seeing, assessing, and moderating all things under the canopy of God. He further observes that *an imperative of responsibility* could be formulated from this estimation in the following way: *In all our actions and relations we are to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God* (1995: 33). He then concludes that *respecting and enhancing the integrity of life* is the meaning of responsibility. In fact, the integrity of life, he argues, is the moral good, and the source and character of the moral good is derived from God.

3.5. The meaning of responsibility

In his discussion on the meaning of responsibility Schweiker notes that the word "responsibility" arrived late in Western ethics in the seventeenth century, appearing first in German, English, and French (1995: 58;cf. Schweiker 2004: 26. see Jonsen 1968: 3; cf. Richard McKeon 1990).[12] According to Schweiker, the early usage of responsibility could be found in a standard philosophical dictionary as follows:

(1)   "the moral obligation, sometimes sanctioned by law, to repair the harm done to another;

(2)the situation of a conscious agent with regard to those actions which he has really willed to perform. It consists in his being able to offer motives for these acts to any reasonable person and in his being obligated to incur - praise or blame for them according to the nature and value of these motives … It is the solidarity of the human

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[12] These references are from Schweiker's book under consideration, p.58

person with his actions, the prior condition of all real and juridical obligation" (1995: 60-61).[13]

According to Schweiker, the word responsibility derives from the Latin word *respondeo*, which means *to promise a thing in return for something else*. In legal language it means *to give an opinion, advice, decision,* or, generally*, an answer when one is called to appear in court*. He observes that the latter sense harmonizes with the German *Verantwortung*, which means *answering* (1995: 55; see 2009: 480). This implies that, a responsible agent is someone who takes responsibility for his/her actions, and therefore willing to appear before a court to answer questions regarding his/her actions – whether to himself/herself or to another person. Schweiker notes that "the 'self' appears in the activity of answering and responding to others" (1995: 56; cf. H Richard Niebuhr 1963: 56). Schweiker infers that the *activity of answering* is the key in the process. This means, the self exists to answer and to respond to others. The obvious conclusion then is that others are a necessary condition in defining a self, and subsequently, responsibility engulfs the whole of life, since responding to others outlines the meaning of self.

Schweiker, however, argues that to be responsible is to promote the wellbeing of life before God. He observes that living a responsible life before God fulfills the Biblical injunction that we should "lose ourselves" in order to gain ourselves (Mat. 10:39; LK

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[13] André Lelande (ed), *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la Philosophie*, 6th edn. (Paris, 1951), pp. 426-427. This passage is cited in Jonsen, *Responsibility in Modern Religious Ethics.* Jonsen also notes that "responsibility" does not appear in the Dictionnaire des Sciences Philosophiques (1851) or the *Wörterbuch der pilosophischen Begriffe und Ausdrücke* (1899). It did appear in English in the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (1902). These were cited in Schweiker's endnotes.

17:33). This, then, is the worldview of a theological ethics of responsibility. He further notes that responsibility encompasses "… beliefs about moral agents, patterns of interaction and responsiveness, and also social practices of praise and blame" (1995: 33). The best definition for an ethics of responsibility, he avers, is "… that form of moral reflection, which, in distinction to other forms of ethics, uses 'responsibility' as the means for relating systematically the dimensions of moral inquiry" (1995: 38). He argues that most theories of ethics are inadequate because they dwell on one aspect of moral responsibility to the neglect of the others. What Christian moral philosophers should do is to interpret and assess Christian ethics along the lines of the imperative of responsibility (1995: 40). He further contends that the integrated Christian ethics of responsibility that he formulates is in consonance with the imperative of responsibility.

3.6. The identity of a person

He further argues that the confusion in ethical discussions on responsibility in the twentieth century is over the identity of a person. In his view, there is no dispute in the twentieth century over the fact that an agent is someone who makes decisions and acts. What is in dispute, however, is the way humanity should be viewed. In other words, what is the identity of a person?

Some argue that the identity of a person is defined in the context of subjectivity. The person exists because he is a dialogical being. In other words, he exists because he is capable of answering others. Schweiker gives the following example to explain this point:

… if I utter the sentence; 'I broke the promise,' then the connection between the reflective first-person pronoun 'I' and the particular deed is manifest in such a way as to specify me as a person: I am the one who broke his promise. My identity appears, as it were, in uttering this sentence. I exist in the event of discourse through answering others (1995: 61).

Others like Bradley, however, argues that if the Latin word for "person," *persona*, means an actor's mask or a person in a play, then the identity of a person should be pinned to his role in the society. So for instance, when you say "I am a father," it shows one of your roles in the society, and that should identify your personhood. This means the identity of a person could be derived from his/her "… duties, virtues, and values that role entails" (Schweiker 1995: 62).

Theologians, according to Schweiker, argue that the message of Jesus is a proclamation calling for a response to God. It is a "call-response" relationship. And the Christian's responsibility lies in his/her response to that call. This identity lies in Jesus' call to the disciples to follow Him (cf. MK 1:17-18; Mat. 4:18-20). "The life of faith is defined by one's response in total obedience to that summons," Schweiker accentuates (1995: 63). Appended to this meaning is a "representative action." This means that a person comprises a self through dialogical relationships and through representative actions. You are identified through your answering others and acting for others.

Schweiker next turns his attention to where these ideas about the identity of a person come from. And in order to do so, he decided to look at the traditional sources of responsibility ethics.

3.7. The traditional idea of responsibility

What is the source of the modern idea of responsibility? According to Schweiker, one source derives from the moral philosophy of Aristotle. Schweiker notes that the modern idea of responsibility comes from Aristotle's analysis of responsibility in his work, *Nichomachean Ethics III*. In this book, Aristotle focused on two key words – voluntary (*hekousion*) and involuntary (*akousion*) – to determine whether a person should be praised or blamed for his/her action. According to Aristotle, an action is voluntary when the agent is the cause of the action, whether he/she did that for pleasure or not, and it is involuntary if the cause is external or compulsory to the agent. Another condition for involuntary action is when the person is ignorant of the action (1995: 67; see *Nichomachean* Ethics III: 21-25). The voluntary must be free from constraint or duress and ignorance. Voluntary is, therefore, the stipulation for responsibility.

Schweiker notes that Aristotle's idea of responsibility is based on *agent causality,* where the circumstances determine the rule for correctly *assigning responsibility* (1995: 68; cf. J. R. Lucas 1993: 275). But Schweiker observes that Aristotle interprets the formation of moral character through the mirrors of *virtues, moral and intellectual*, rather than through the idea of responsibility. According to Schweiker, the Aristotelian theory of

responsibility is a "weak" one since it dwells on the "agent/act relation in determining the moral rightness of social acts of assigning responsibility, that is, praising and blaming" (1995: 68).

In Schweiker's view, the medieval philosopher and theologian, Thomas Aquinas derives his idea of responsibility from Aristotle's 'weak' ethics of responsibility. This is because Aquinas teaches that, in measuring the principle of action, one should find out whether the action is internal to the agent. Once the action is internal to the agent, it means the agent acted voluntarily. Consequently, he/she must be held responsible for his/her action[14] (see Schweiker 1995: 69). So here again, the moral basis of the action focuses on what causes the agent to act, and the position of the principle of action. This, Schweiker observes, has been fundamental to Christian ethics.

Following from the above teaching, Christian theologians over the centuries insist that in so far as human beings act in their will, God cannot be held responsible for their moral actions even though God knows the choices they will make. Hence, in traditional Christian ethics the conditions that must be met for an agent to be held responsible for an action are that he/she must act voluntarily and without compulsion. In Schweiker's view, the responsibility ethics of Aquinas and Aristotle characterizes the traditional Western perception of responsibility. In our view, this means that in the traditional Western perception of responsibility, responsibility is anthropocentric and heteronomous rather than theocentric, and defines the nihilism of the West. Schweiker went on to

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[14] Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 5, I/II, q. 62.

outline what, from the Christian perspective responsibility entails. Remember that his main reason for the formulation of his ethics of responsibility is to prove to Hans Jonas and the academic world that a universal ethics of responsibility could also be formulated from a theological perspective.

3.8. Responsibility and Christian inwardness

According to Judith Shklar, the problem which most modern ethics has is that they deny their origins in Christian teaching, and yet without the idea of sin, morality is baseless. Sin is concomitant to Christian thought. The Christian faith has never stopped insisting on the interiority of human life. A classic example of this can be found in Romans 2:13 -16. In this passage, St. Paul insists that the law of God, the conscience, has been written in the hearts of everyone, and that at the judgment day, whether we know the law or not, we will be judged according to the state of our consciences (cf. Deut. 10:16; Jer. 31:33-34). So whether, for instance, we are existentialist or relativist, we will be judged according to the condition of our inward person, our consciences. This means that the ethics of responsibility is embedded in the will of God through our consciences.

Schweiker, however, argues that Shklar is not right to insist that the notion of responsibility originates only from Christianity. He believes that the notion of responsibility also originates from the community in which one finds himself/herself. He agrees with Marion Smiley who argues that classical Greek philosophy also taught the relationship between individuals – the community – and an external blamer – God. This could be found, for instance, in the teaching of Aristotle about the community and its

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social observances of praise and blame. In Smiley's opinion, God is the one who blames. (Smiley 1992: 10; see Schweiker 1995: 72). Schweiker quotes Hans Jonas as stating that the modern shift of moral responsibility is on power (1995: 73). The modern person is defined in the context of action, and therefore, of power. In Schweiker's opinion, by denying the theological background to the ethics of responsibility, the modern idea of responsibility has failed to properly understand the human condition.

3.9.   Theories of responsibility

In this section, Schweiker categorizes all previous theories of responsibility into three groups: agential, social, and dialogical theories of responsibility (1995: 40). The purpose of this exercise, like in the case of Hans Jonas, is to show that all previous theories of ethics are, indeed, inadequate in tackling the dangers science and technology pose to the future of the world and the continued existence of humanity and the biosphere, and to come out with a theory of responsibility that best addresses the problem.

3.9.1. The agential theories of responsibility

The agential theory concentrates on an agent as the source of responsibility – "agent" here means the one who performs the action. In this wise, the agent is held responsible for his/her actions. It is referred to as the *agent/act* responsibility theory. Agential theories of responsibility, Schweiker stresses, emphasize the accountability of the agent (1995: 65). When an action takes place, the agent could be held liable if it is proved beyond doubt that he/she is indeed responsible for the cause of the action. But if, on the other hand, the agent can be shown not to have caused an action or in the event of

taking the action there were very good reasons to excuse his actions, then he/she is not held morally responsible for the action.

Schweiker further distinguishes between *strong* and *weak* agential theories based on the judgment of a moral action. According to Schweiker, if valid moral principles could be imputed on something else, say the community or the will of God other than the agent himself/herself, but still the theory holds the agent responsible for the moral offence, then the agential theory is a *weak* one. On the other hand, "if a principle of moral choice and judgment is claimed to be valid only when grounded in the self-legislating capacity of the agent, then the theory is a *strong*, agential theory of responsibility" (1995: 78). In other words, the agential theory of responsibility is a *strong* one when the agent could be held directly responsible for his/her action. On the one hand, the agential theory of responsibility is a *weak* one when the agent is held responsible for an action, which is the remote cause of another person or a system. Responsibility for self or moral autonomy, according to Schweiker, is the first principle of ethics.

Schweiker cites Immanuel Kant as being one of the strong agential theorists. Even though Kant did not use the word "responsibility" in his theory of morality, he could still be regarded as a strong agential theorist because his work concentrates basically on responsibility for self. Kant sets out to determine the supreme principle of morality, which he calls the categorical imperative. Kant clearly delineates his conception of the categorical imperative this way: *Act always on such a maxim as thou canst at the same*

time will to be a universal law; this is the sole condition under which a will can never contradict itself; and such an imperative is categorical (Kant 1949: 54). The imperative is categorical because it characterizes an action that is essential by itself without reference to ends or consequences. This means that an action is right or wrong as a result of its objective importance and not the result of its ends. Consequently, the objective agent is enjoined to concentrate on the imperative. According to Schweiker, Kant wants to show through his categorical imperative that a person can legislate maxims to guide his/her own actions; the maxims should be such that you will be pleased for it to be practiced everywhere. But by so doing you must never use persons as means to your end; every person must be regarded as belonging to the Kingdom of Ends (see 1995: 80).

Kant concentrates on the human will in the categorical imperative. According to Kant, the human will is not free because of the a priori concept of reason in the "nature" of man/woman, which obligates us to act in a certain way, and therefore, deprives us of our freedom. In other words, we are obligated by a foreign will to act (the will of God) and therefore, we are not acting freely. To change this, Kant sees freedom as the basis of obligation and formulates the law of freedom as the categorical imperative, and consequently specified the moral good. How did he do this? He decides that in order for moral agents to be truly free, they must legislate their own actions. In other words, moral agents must formulate laws that will guide them to act freely. This is because when you formulate laws for yourself, you are no more under any compulsion. In order for this freedom to take place, Kant introduces the idea of good will; you act from good

will when you give respect to the law. In fact, the only good without conditions is the good will. The objective nature of the action is determined subjectively by pure respect for the practical law (Kant 1949: 18). In his own words he observes that, "The object of respect is the law only, that is, the law which we impose on ourselves, and yet recognize as necessary in itself" (Kant 1949: 19). These objective laws, in the eyes of the agent, must be universally applicable in order to harmonize with the meaning of the categorical imperative.

Schweiker then directs his attention to the applicability of the categorical imperative to the ethics of responsibility. For an agent/action to be responsible there should be a correlation between what Schweiker describes as "causal judgments and evaluative judgments"(1995: 81). This means that agents/acts are praised or blamed based on what they have directly or indirectly done. And this rule also applies to Kant's categorical imperative. But in Kant's moral theory, one is held responsible for praise or blame for the motive of one's free actions, and not held responsible for the consequences of the action. In other words, the motive of your choice is very crucial in determining the praise or blame of the action.

In the categorical imperative, the freedom and the promotion of the goodness of the will is what is of prime importance. This implies that the aim of an agent's good action is not directed towards promoting any goodness in the world, but directed towards the happiness of the will (1995: 82). Once a choice of action is universally praiseworthy, then the freedom and happiness of the will is achieved.

Schweiker approves of the categorical imperative as an ethics of responsibility because it postulates respect for persons as basic to morality. But does the categorical imperative meet the conditions of an integrated ethics of responsibility? The verdict of Schweiker is negative. This was because, Kant fails to address "… the demand to enhance or promote the integrity of all of life, but just the goodness of the will" (1995: 82). Kant's categorical imperative is also inadequate because it fails to take seriously the social dimensions of responsibility, Schweiker argues.

After declaring Kant's categorical imperative as inadequate, Schweiker then turns his attention to Paul Tillich's ethics on *theonomy* (1995: 82), to assess whether Tillich's ethics is an integrated ethics of responsibility. According to Schweiker, Tillich uses the idea of *theonomy* to formulate a Christian version of the ethics of responsibility, an agential theory of responsibility. This is in opposition to Kant's teaching that theological ethics is *heteronomous* because the agent is controlled by a foreign will, the will of God. Tillich insists that the moral law, which is the law of our essential nature, is not something we imposed on ourselves (*autonomy*), nor is it something that was imposed on us by another person (*heteronomy*), but that the moral law of God is our true being. For the Christian message, true freedom is *theonomous*. Tillich emphasizes that the "moral imperative is the command to become what one potentially is, a person within a community of persons" (Schweiker 1995: 82).

According to Tillich, it is through conscience, the silent voice, that our essential nature judges our actual lives. The essential nature is, therefore, an imperative that is part of us, it is not a law imposed from outside (heteronomy), as Kant thought. If the moral imperative is part of our essential being, then when we act, we act out of freedom. True freedom is something we derive from God, and not something we legislate for ourselves, as Kant suggests. The "will of God," according to Tillich, "is manifested in our essential being; and only because of this can we accept the moral imperative as valid. It is not a strange law that demands our obedience, but the 'silent voice' of our own nature as man, and as man with an individual character" (Schweiker 1995: 83). So the essential nature of humanity is grounded in the "will of God." It is in God that the actualization of a person as a person is realized.

Tillich further teaches that our actual being is not our true being, and that our lives are characterized by fragmentation; there is a conflict between self-integration and disintegration, which is the result of our anti-moral act as against the nature of the moral act (Schweiker 1995: 83). This problem, according to Tillich, could be solved by agape love, the ultimate principle of morality. To Tillich, agape "points to the transcendent source of the content of the moral imperative" (Schweiker 1995: 83-84). It is through agape that our actual nature, the divine nature and our essential being, the fallen nature, could be unified, producing a higher mode of being, which in turn is able to live as a person in community with other persons.

According to Schweiker, Tillich postulates a Christian agential theory of responsibility. He explains that for Tillich, "An agent is responsible for self-actualization under the law of essential human nature" (1995: 84). He, therefore, concludes that Tillich postulates an integrated ethics of responsibility, since he insists on the appropriate "integration of the multidimensionality of life and its various goods" (1995: 84). However, because he relied only on the essential and actual self, and consequently neglected "… the integrity of diverse goods in historical and social life," he fails to formulate an integrated ethics of responsibility. His ethics, Schweiker further argues, is centered on intuitionism by appealing to the " 'silent voice' of conscience about what to do, rather than examining the range of questions which constitutes the field of morality in terms of the actual values and disvalues of life" (1995: 84; cf. Gustafson 1980: 42).

3.9.2. The social theory of responsibility

The social theory is a theory of responsibility that dwells on the social observance of praise and blame. This means that an agent is ultimately held responsible for the roles and social positions he/she holds. It was first formulated by F.H. Bradley in his *Ethical Studies*. According to Schweiker, "Social theories of responsibility focus on social roles, vocations, stations, and thus communal unity" (1995: 92). In the social theory, for example, when something goes wrong in an organization, the head of the organization is held responsible for the failure. In much the same way, when things go right, praise is apportioned to the leader even though he may not be the only one who brought about the success. But more importantly, in the social theory of responsibility, the self as a moral person is identified through social roles or the station that one holds, or through

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descriptions. Consequently, personal identity does not exist before the allotment of responsibility through descriptive practices of praise and blame. According to Peter A. French, in the social theory, moral persons "come into existence at various levels of description or, more to the point, via descriptions" (French 1992: 5; see Schweiker 1995: 87). Bradley notes that what constitutes the self is a prototype of associations within a community.

Schweiker observes that the social theory is a responsibility theory that dwells on representative action in the moral life. According to him, this type of responsibility theory also does not qualify for an integrated ethics of responsibility because it "… often fail to explore the inwardness of our lives as individuals" (1995: 41).

He then went on to look at the pragmatic, social theory of responsibility proposed by the philosopher Marion Smiley. Smiley traces his theory from Aristotle, thus going beyond Bradley. Aristotle claims that responsibility is linked, in part, to the social observance of praise and blame. Smiley's theory moves away from other theories that dwell on free-will and determinism to formulate an ethics of responsibility. The main argument of Smiley is that the practice of praise and blame does not focus on judgments outside of social and political practice, but are rather apportioned by society or the community or by political authority based on the believes and practices of that community. This is at variance with the agential ethics of responsibility, which focuses on the blame and praise of the agent based on something internal, i.e., either the soul or conscience or practical reason. In her own words, responsibility is "a judgment that we ourselves make

about individuals on the basis of our own social and political points of view" (Schweiker 1995: 88; see French 1992: 81). She is of the view that responsibility is something we *assign* to an individual rather than *discover* about them. According to Schweiker, Smiley expands the meaning of the social theory to include "a practice of assigning praise and blame keyed to causal judgments, social norms, and the roles of agents" (1995: 88).

The practice of blame is the means by which society or the community assigns responsibility to the individual. The practice of blame, therefore, acts as the means through which the social world is controlled as it helps form the character of the agent, as well as collective integrity. This means that the integrity of the self is defined by the social practice of blame. Peter French states it precisely when he wrote, "Experiences of shame are characterized by a sensation of the loss or the slipping away of the identity one has tried to maintain and project to others. To be shamed is to be stripped of one's self-image" (French 1992: 67, see Schweiker 1995: 90). However, French and Smiley believe that we do not have to find out the cause of every action to establish its moral position. As far as an agent's identity is at risk, the social practice of praise and blame is vital to a theory of responsibility.

Smiley's theory of social responsibility is also different from the others in that she cautions against laying responsibility at the door-steps of an agent when the event may be beyond his/her control. This is because moral situations are precarious. If care is not taken, assignments of responsibility will be undermined, she stressed. But this does not signify that we should sacrifice the consideration of responsibility for external harm.

3.9.3 Christian ethics and the social theory of responsibility

According to Schweiker, Christian ethics presents a weak social theory of responsibility because the main aim of Christian ethics is not to assign responsibility but to build Christian identity. Schweiker intimates that in order to understand this type of ethics, the work of Stanley Hauerwas, a proponent of a weak, social ethics of responsibility in Christian ethics should be examined. According to him, Hauerwas argues that the first question of Christian ethics is not "what ought we to do?" but, rather, "what kind of people ought we to be in order to live out the story of God's action in Christ?" (1995: 90) According to Schweiker, "the question of the meaning, formation, and moral implication of Christian identity is the central focus of his ethics" (1995: 90-91). For Hauerwas, Christian identity is recognized when one is described within the biblical account and one accepts his/her own life from that viewpoint.

Hauerwas surmises that the authority of scripture for a community dwells in its being utilized to nurture and renew a community's self-identity as well as the character of its members. Community and scripture relate in the formation of Christian character since the formation of human character takes place within a community's dependence on scripture. Hauerwas was of the view that "Christians are to present an alternative vision of life to the violent forms of life found in the world, a vision of peace rooted in God's action in Christ" (Schweiker 1995: 90). For Hauerwas, God's action in Christ for the world is the first principle of Christian ethics.

Schweiker observes that Hauerwas presents a social theory of responsibility because he teaches the formation of moral identity through social practices. Schweiker has this to write about Hauerwas's ethics of responsibility: "Neither human responsibility nor practices of praise and blame are morally central, rather God's action is the first principle of Christian ethics" (1995: 93). Schweiker agrees with Smiley's observation that the social theory of responsibility fails to clearly account for the authority of social practices. In particular, it fails to adequately answer the question "Why ought we to abide by the norms of our community?" And secondly, "How do we determine the validity of those values and norms?" (1995: 94)

3.9.4. Dialogical theories of responsibility

The dialogical theories have been formulated in two dimensions: Karl Barth's divine command ethics, and H. Richard Niebuhr's social ethics. Other proponents of the latter dimension are the Roman Catholic moral philosopher Bernard Häring, Charles Curran, and the moral teaching of Jesus Christ, to name a few. The basic teaching of the dialogical ethics of responsibility centers on an agent and his/her response to some "other." The "other" could be a human being or the divine. It defines the identity of a person from his/her relation to the world, others and to God (1995: 94).

The dialogical theory is referred to as the *self/other* theory of responsibility because it focuses responsibility on the interpersonal relationship of individuals. They center ethical reflection on the observable fact of answering. They all develop their ethics along

the lines of responsiveness to others and to God (1995: 43). Schweiker quotes Richard Gula, a Roman Catholic ethicist, as stating that,

> Jesus' message is an announcement calling for a response. The whole moral life is a response to a call, to the divine initiative. Call-response forms the structure of the moral life in the message of Jesus, though nowhere does Jesus, or the New Testament at large, provide a moral system as such (Gula 1968: 5; see Schweiker 1995: 43).

In the Christian moral instance, people are called to be morally responsible to others and to God in obedience to God's action in the world through Christ Jesus. This paradigm of *call-response* or the *I-Thou encounter* ethics has become the ethical theory that almost all Christian ethicists follow in their ethics of responsibility, he asserts (1995: 45, 46).

The divine command ethics, according to Schweiker, is a responsibility ethics that centers on encountering the other. According to Karl Barth, in any situation in which one finds himself/herself, the answer to the question "what ought I to do?" should be to obey the command of God (1995: 95). The Other, God according to Barth, reveals Himself to humanity as commander. The meaning of moral concepts like good or duty or obligation, finds its expression in the command of God. In every moral situation in which humans find themselves, they are faced with the divine command, and their identity is defined by their response to God's command. According to Schweiker, Barth's divine

command ethics is a normative as well as a meta-ethical ethics as far as the source of morality is concerned (1995: 95). Christ becomes the meaning of the good as a question in meta-ethics, and the actual command of God in normative ethics (1995: 97). Any definition of the human good that excludes Christ, and outside of the command of God, for Barth, is sin.

It is through the preached Word of God, and the action of God as creator, redeemer, and reconciler that every moral action should be derived. In fact, one acts rightly only when one adheres to the command of God – the Word of God. This means that the rightness or wrongness of a moral action depends on our obedience or disobedience to the divine command. Barth argues that,

> When God confronts man with His command, what he wills is purely ad hoc actions and attitudes which can only be thought of as historically contingent even in their necessity, acts of obedience to be performed on the spot in a specific way, pure decisions the meaning of which is not open to discussion, because they do not point to a higher law, but is rather contained in the fact that God has decided in this way and spoken accordingly, so that human decisions can only obey or disobey the divine decisions (see Schweiker 1995: 96).

For Barth, what qualifies a person to be ethical is the person's response to the Good. The Good in this instance is Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God, also referred to as

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God's being-in-act (1995: 96). Schweiker further contends that Barth reiterates the fact that 'the Law is the form of the Gospel; the command of God is the form in which we hear and respond to the human good, the Word of God' (1995: 97). So it is not in divine power that God's claim over humanity could be found, but in God's self-giving to the world. In other words, it is in God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ that one can find power. According to Schweiker, Barth insists that the import of God's freedom and power, the mystery of God, is evident in God's being God for us, and being gracious in Jesus Christ. This means that by deciding to respond to the will of God, humanity has "definitely decided not to be obedient to power as power" (Barth 1936: 553; see Schweiker 1995: 97). For Barth, the being of God, manifested in His grace, is grounded in the divine election in Christ Jesus, and not in the exercise of power. In fact, the divine command of God reveals God's love for humanity.

Responsibility (*Verantwortung*), in Barth's judgment, is an obedient answer (*Antwort*) to the command of God. The totality of the Christian life and morality is found in the Good, the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. The accomplishment of the human response to God has been fulfilled in Christ. For Barth, to be responsible is to sanction Christ's obedient action. It is a divine ethics because the heart of moral consideration is not dependent on human beings, but on God (1995: 98).

Other Christian moralists differ from Barth in that they explore responsibility as the first principle or source of ethics. In this particular instance, the self and the "other" become the main focus of responsibility where the self encounters the "other" in responsiveness

and in social interactions. This type of responsibility ethics is mainly proposed by H. Richard Niebuhr in his book, *The responsible self*. For him, "All life has the character of responsiveness" (Niebuhr 1963: 46; see Schweiker 1995: 98). This means that in addition to the biblical witness, the work of ethics is to help us to appreciate ourselves as moral agents.

Niebuhr is of the view that in the Western account of the human as agent two fundamental symbols or images are dominant. The first is where the human is described as *man-the-maker*. In this instance, humanity is seen as capable of deciding which end(s) he/she ought to pursue and to respond towards that end(s). This is a response to action upon us. In other words, human life is based on how one responds to different situations. The self-definition of a person, it is believed, lies in its interaction with other persons (Niebuhr 1963: 71). Niebuhr notes that that this inter-activeness differentiates human beings from other creatures.

The second fundamental symbol that describes humanity as an agent in Western thinking is *man-the-citizen*. The fact that human beings are members of a community, and as such citizens, makes them moral agents. The moral life then dwells on our responses to the rules and regulations within any particular society in order to achieve our desired moral end. Niebuhr criticizes the above two notions of Western thought by arguing that unlike animals, our responses to the society and others are not brute reflexes or established by instinct, otherwise, we would not be held morally responsible for our actions. To Niebuhr, in order to be able to decide what to do, we should ask the

question "what is going on?" It is then that we would be able to take a responsible action. Niebuhr notes that "we interpret the things that force themselves upon us as parts of whole, as related and as symbolic of larger meanings" (Niebuhr 1963: 61-62, in Schweiker 1995: 100). How to respond appropriately is the difficulty. Schweiker notes that this is deontological ethics since it spells out the duties or norms for agents, how to perform those duties, the origin of those norms, and what makes those norms binding on the agents.

After analyzing the two fundamental symbols of humanity as an agent in Western thought, Niebuhr comes out with his own. He describes the agent as *man-the-answerer*, which makes the agent a responsive being in society (see Schweiker 1995: 99). This is an agentic-relational form of ethics of responsibility. Niebuhr astutely describes it this way,

> The idea or pattern of responsibility, then, may summarily and abstractly be defined as the idea of an agent's action as response to an action upon him in accordance with his interpretation of the latter action and with his expectation of response to his response; and all of this is in a continuing community of agents (Niebuhr 1963: 65; see Schweiker 1995: 100).

This means that the agent, in this instance, is expected to anticipate the response to the response upon him from the community, since he/she is a responsive agent. In other words, the agent is held morally responsibility for the anticipated response to his/her

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actions. Therefore, "Responsibility lies in the agent who stays with his action, who accepts the consequences in the form of reactions and looks forward in a present deed to the continued interaction" (Niebuhr 1978: 64; see Schweiker 1995: 101).

Niebuhr further adds a second element of responsibility that gives an account of the human as a moral agent. This he called *social solidarity*. According to him, the identity of the self is realized in the womb of society. Our constant interaction with society contributes to the continuing social reality. The problem here is the scope of the moral community and the extent of our moral relations, and not only the laws that govern that society, as in *man-the-citizen* form of ethics. For Niebuhr, an ethics of responsibility expresses a relational theory of value. Niebuhr astutely states it in the following words:

> value is present wherever one existent being with capacities and potentialities confronts another existence that limits or completes or complements it. Thus, first of all, value is present objectively for an observer in the fittingness or unfittingness of being to being (Niebuhr 1970: 103; see Schweiker 1995: 102).

According to Niebuhr, to understand all things in the multidimensional realm of value is to understand all of life as a response to God (see Schweiker 1995: 102).

In Christianity, the scope of the moral community, according to Niebuhr, is universal in that life is lived at last in obedience to the One God (see Schweiker 1995: 101). So the

action of God in Christ is "action which is fitted into the context of a universal eternal, life-giving action by the One," Niebuhr succinctly states (Niebuhr 1970: 145; see Schweiker1995: 101). For Niebuhr, the meaning of responsibility lies in the agent responding to the actions of God upon him/her.

The difference between Kant and Niebuhr is that, whereas the former insisted on the universalization of the maxims of our actions, the latter insisted on the universalization of the moral community. For Niebuhr, human agents must make an appropriate choice as to how to respond to others.

But Schweiker regrettably notes that the dialogical ethics of responsibility, which we have just discussed in its varying forms, "simply lacks the resources to address the complexity of the late-modern social world." (1995: 45). It fails to address the use of power in the world. An integrated Christian ethics of responsibility translates power into the hands of God, and redefines human power in the ability to serve others and enhance the integrity of life before God. Power is not good in itself; it is subject to moral evaluation. Schweiker cites an example from the Old Testament where prophets insist that true power lies in the seeking of justice, and walking humbly with God (Micah: 6:8). Schweiker then insists that

> The most radical claim of Christian faith … is that ultimate power, the
>
> divine reality which creates, sustains, judges and redeems all of existence,
>
> is known and understood as binding its identity to the respect and

enhancement of finite reality. Christian claims about 'God' are interpretations of power which render all exercises of power subject to moral evaluation. One can thus speak about a 'personal' God in order to specify the belief that power alone is not the ultimate value, but not to give causal explanations of the physical world (1995: 49-50).

Schweiker concludes that the limitations of the above theories of responsibility, which in fact represent the traditional theories of responsibility, call for an ethics of responsibility that will bring all the theories above into an integrated theory of responsibility. He emphasizes that the difference between the Christian ethics of responsibility that he is proposing and that of the traditional ones has to do with method and content. He states: "The focus of an integrated theory of responsibility is the connection between commitments basic to the identity of agents, or communities of agents, and the power to act in relation to others and the environment" (1995: 42). An adequate ethics should, therefore, incorporate all three theories in its meaning. Schweiker therefore agrees with Albert R. Jonsen when he emphasizes that responsibility is the "basic, irreducible conception which serves as a starting point for the development of a coherent and comprehensive ethical doctrine" (Jonsen 1968: 175). This makes responsibility the primary standard for ethics.

He further reveals that earlier theologians in the century formulated Christian ethics of responsibility concentrating on how we ought to live in the light of the revelation of God in Christ. Any theologian, therefore, who violates this pattern in his/her Christian moral

philosophy, is seen to have formulated an ethics of responsibility other than Christian ethics. Consequently, Schweiker argues, values like happiness, and moral perfection vanished from Christian moral doctrines (1995: 44-45). He bemoans this development in the history of morality by concluding: "The dialogical paradigm was unable to deal with the full complexity of our available moral discourse," and also "unable to address the complexity of life in a late-modern, technological world" (1995: 45).

The dialogical ethics of responsibility also is lacking as an integrated ethics of responsibility because it reduces questions of responsibility to the responsiveness of persons. In his criticism of the dialogical ethics of responsibility, Schweiker makes a very important point:

> In so far as the self is constituted by its encounter with the other, what room is there for duties to self, for the demand to respect and enhance the integrity of one's own life as well as the lives of others? How is it that we are responsible for ourselves? Does responsibility mutilate human goods? (1995: 103).

For Schweiker, in an attempt to emphasize responsiveness in the dialogical theories, a very important aspect of life, the self, is excluded in the definition of the ethics of responsibility. But according to him, an ethics of responsibility that plays down the role of the self is not an adequate ethics of responsibility. Subsequently, Schweiker goes on

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to give some suggestions as to what the integrated ethics of responsibility should look like.

3.9.5. Towards an integrated theory of responsibility

According to Schweiker, an integrated theory of responsibility, or what he describes as an adequate theory of responsibility, must bring together all the above ethical theories of responsibility. He then suggests a *dialectical approach* to the moral life, in which "we must conceive of the moral life as the dialectical relation between actualization of self and encounter with others mediated by social roles and vocations" (1995: 104). According to Schweiker, the agentic-relational account of persons from the viewpoint of an integrated ethics of responsibility should include,

a)   self-understanding

b)   response to others and

c)   respect for the roles or vocations one has in the society.

Therefore, in order to act morally, the agent, first of all, must know himself/herself or gain his/her identity. The self-realization could only be achieved through the participation of his/her roles within a society. It is in dealing with others that the personal identity could be defined; it is by actively playing one's social roles in the midst of other persons that you can be judged morally; none can be judged morally in isolation. This means that it is within the interplay of these three elements – agents, roles and others – that the integrated ethics of responsibility could be achieved.

Secondly, an integrated ethics of responsibility could be achieved, argues Schweiker, if the above elements include

d)   the relation between the goods which people are to respect and enhance and

e)   the principle for right action.

In order for all the above elements of an integrated ethics of responsibility to be achieved, Schweiker continues, one has to specify the various levels of value embedded in basic human needs, plus coming out with an imperative of responsibility, which will reconcile the self-understanding of those agents who have difficulties with the integrity of their own lives with regard to others in the midst of the social roles and vocations (1995: 104). It is only in this way, he concludes, that the agential, dialogical and social theories could be incorporated into an integrated ethics of responsibility.

The integrated ethics of responsibility also emphasizes the goodness of moral integrity. The central goodness of the integrated ethics of responsibility lies in its using "the value of power to serve other values," Schweiker claims (1995: 105).

In the context of theology, the role of the divine must be included in the above meaning of an adequate theory of responsibility. He is of the opinion that an integrated ethics of responsibility must affirm the "concerns of deontological and teleological theories within a multidimensional theory of values" (1995: 106). Schweiker then goes on to the part II of his book to present an imperative of responsibility from the theological point of view.

3.10. The source of morality

In order to find the true meaning of responsibility, contemporary ethicists are debating on whether human beings invent or discover morality. What is the connection between morality and reality? In other words, what is the connection between ethics and metaphysics? According to Schweiker, the debate about the source of morality centers on realism and antirealism (also described by Schweiker as constructivism in ethics). Traditional moral realism advocates that morality is part of the reality of life. It is believed that there is a moral order to life and that the more we discover that moral order, the more we lead a good life. In fact, Epictetus, a Stoic philosopher, insists that a natural moral order that guides actions is embedded in the structure of reality. This natural moral law, it is believed, can be known through the use of reason. Classical realism argues that the nature of reality suggests that there are values we ought to pursue. According to Schweiker, "Most religions and certainly the Christian faith, we should note, have always been strongly realist. Believers hold that goodness is rooted in the nature of things, the sacred, God's will" (Schweiker 2004: 28; cf. 1998: 27). Christian ethics, which endorses some form of moral realism, postulates that morality exists prior to our discovering it, and that the moral law is under divine revelation. In fact, conscience is the law of God implanted in every human being irrespective of your religious or social inclinations. But, according to Schweiker, this assertion by realists has been rejected by the modern Western world. He further notes that most advanced Western cultures or liberal democracies are virtually atheistic as far as morality is concerned. Consequently, they insist that there should be a separation of church and state to affirm their belief that morality should be centered on something else other than

God (1998: 27). Schweiker further notes that the advances of modern science and technology have also questioned the validity of the assertion of realism (1998: 28).

Antirealism, which affirms the beliefs of the modern Western world and liberal democracies, and is the result of a concern for human freedom, advocates that morality is not part of the reality of the world, and that morality comes about as a result of the activities of human beings. In other words, human beings do not discover moral truths; they are invented by them as they try to improve their relationships. J.L. Mackie, a strong advocate of antirealism, clearly puts it this way, "values are not objective, are not part of the fabric of the world" (Mackie 1977: 15; see Schweiker 1995: 107). According to the anti-realists, the self-identity of humanity depends on the language of a particular community. Richard Rorty insists that there is no human identity that is not the result of "the dignity of some specific community …" (Rorty 1991: 197; see Schweiker 1995: 109). Schweiker explains that anti-realism "insists upon the intimate relation that exists between social existence, language, and the constitution of human identity. Identity and moral responsibility is without remainder the product of a social and linguistic community" (1995: 109, cf. Schweiker 2004: 28). According to Schweiker, the pivot around which moral constructivism evolves is the notion that all our morality is a reflection on our cultural tradition, and that there are no universally shared human values or norms for behavior (1998: 29).

Internal realists (who argue that we can talk about "truth" only in relation to scientifical knowledge of "truth" and that our access to reality is limited by our cognitive linguistic

and perceptual faculty) agree with anti-realists when they argue that different moral values are to be found in different moral worlds. For internal realism, moral reasoning is empty without a community, since it is within the community that moral reasoning operates. Simply put, internal realists believe that morality comes from our society and not from any innate rational experience. In order for us to understand responsibility, internal realism claims, accessibility to an entire set of beliefs and conceptions about reality must be the key.

The kind of realism that Schweiker advances is what he calls *hermeneutical realism*. For him, morality flows from the *complex relations among things:* relations that, according to him, improve or destroy life (Schweiker 2004: 28). Furthermore, he is of the opinion that morality cannot only come from social interactions, but also from our "complex acts of imagination, understanding, and interpretation. The work of moral imagination is constant. The interpretive act, moreover, draws on the ambiguous, open-ended resources of traditions, linguistic forms, symbols, and images in order to discover the meaning and direction of life" (Schweiker 2004: 28). For Schweiker, conscience is basic to our moral way of life since through conscience human beings are able to evaluate and criticize our relations with others (2004: xviii). He, therefore, concludes: "The so-called 'fallen conscience' is thereby a fit symbol for the frightful disintegration of self and constitutive relations with and for others" (2004: xviii). He further argues that conscience has the capacity to draw "on the linguistic and conceptual resources of a community's values and norms. This means that even though Schweiker believes that morality is inborn, he also believes that the inborn morality is informed by the

experiences around us. But he is quick to add that because communal values and traditions shape our moral life, they must be tested from time to time for distortions. Schweiker agrees with John Wesley when he reiterates that "conscience presumes consciousness", but adds to it that the main work of conscience "is to excuse or accuse, to approve or disapprove, to acquit or condemn" (Wesley 1944: 124; see Schweiker 2004: xviii). In view of this, Schweiker is of the view that because we live in an age "endangered by the threat of over-humanization," we need to emphasize a life deeply committed to the integrity of life, and this could be achieved by the use of "conscience as a way to articulate the character and labor of moral being" (2004: xix).

For Josef Fuchs, a Roman Catholic moralist, the meaning of being a person is found in the phenomenon of conscience (see Schweiker 1995: 112). For Schweiker, the claim basic to most Christian moral theologians is that "the reality and/or will of God, and not human needs or specific communities, are morally normative and exist prior to our understanding of them" (1995: 110). For the Christian theologian, the moral identity of the Christian is found in the Christian narrative, and not in other forms of moral understanding. Christian ethics is, therefore, realistic in that its moral norms are embedded in the nature of human beings as created by God, the source of morality. As a result of "the reality of sin and also the special content of Jesus' double-love commandment, the Christian moral outlook was believed to correct, deepen, and radicalize natural moral knowledge" (1995: 113). Schweiker then concludes that an integrated theory of responsibility attempts to bring together the teachings of both realism and anti-realism in ethics. The result is that morality is neither invented nor

discovered, but rather it is "invented in order to discover the truth of our moral condition" (Schweiker 1995: 114).

According to Schweiker, Bonhoeffer is right to insist that the greatest challenge for Christian ethics is the antirealist insistence that morality is invented by human beings and not discovered. In such a situation, morality has been moved from its original source, God, and human beings have become the source of goodness. Consequently, human beings have now been made the originators of good and evil rather than God. This is a falling away from God as the origin of humanity, and as such the source of morality. It is therefore the duty of Christian ethics to redirect the source of reality from humanity to Christ, the divine revelation of God, and that the path of reality is not from humanity to reality, but from God to reality. Bonhoeffer argues that "The ultimate principle of reality is Christ and not the self or nature" (Schweiker 1998: 148). So for Bonhoeffer, deputyship defines human responsibility and power. This means that to be responsible is to act for and on behalf of others in much the same way as Christ acted for and on behalf of others. So the paradigm of Christ becomes a pattern worthy of emulation. This is because, for Bonhoeffer, the "world, like all created things, is created through Christ and with Christ as its end, and consists in Christ alone" (Bonhoeffer 1963: 207; see Schweiker 1998: 149). Christ, therefore, becomes the embodiment of the unity of power and value. In fact, it is in Jesus Christ that reality enters the world. Schweiker further notes that for Bonhoeffer, "the self is understood within a Christological, symbolic framework of acting for and on behalf of others…Responsibility is acting in accordance with the reality of Christ and in accord with the concrete,

relational nature of human existence" (Schweiker 1998: 148). Responsible power is, therefore, when human beings define power in the action of Jesus Christ and treat others as such. Schweiker then concludes that "in so doing, Bonhoeffer also provides an important response to the ambiguity of power found in Christian thought" (Schweiker 1998: 150). For Schweiker, therefore, an ethics of responsibility is expected to explore "the exercise of power by agents within complex domains of value and social relations. It attempts to provide direction for how agents can and should respond to, influence, and shape reality" (Schweiker 1998: 154). He then warns that if in our course of actions in this world, social organizations and public policy makers fail to adhere to this meaning of the ethics of responsibility, he fears that the future existence of this planet is bleak.

3.11.   The Christian faith and the imperative of responsibility

The task that Schweiker sets himself to do here in this section is to discover the principle for responsible action, that is, the imperative of responsibility, by looking at the wholeness of values basic to the moral life. He starts by stating what to the theological philosopher is basic to the origin of morality, namely that God, the ultimate moral human good, exists before moral traditions. Consequently, Christian ethics, he affirms, is committed to some form of realist moral theory, what he calls hermeneutical realism in ethics. He argues that to advance the hermeneutical realism in ethics, these two basic principles of any moral theory must be observed:

a)   The moral theory must specify which values ought to be respected and/or promoted in life;

b)   The moral theory must supply a principle of choice to show which actions fit together with moral value(s) (1995: 114, 116).

In the first principle, the theory must state which moral value is of prime importance to the theory. For instance, in utilitarianism, the moral good is to promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. So in this instance, happiness is the key. For the Christian, Schweiker went on, promoting the reign of God on earth is the key moral value, since Christian ethics centers on advancing the reign of God in human relations and the world. In contemporary Western society, the key moral values are fulfillment and authenticity.

In the second principle of morality, how agents ought to respond to values must be spelt out. In normative ethics, this is called theory of value; it deals with the principles of choice. Normative ethics has been divided into two basic theories, which, in fact, spell out two basic choices in moral values. These choices are termed deontological and teleological ethics. In the deontological ethics, emphasis is placed on the means to achieving a moral end. The welfare of one's self and others plays a vital role in reaching the moral end. In other words, in deontological ethics, others are never used as a means to achieve an end; the dignity of the self and the well-being of others are of prime importance in reaching the end of the moral good. This is because, respect for self and others take priority in the process to achieving an end. It concentrates on the legitimacy of his/her intentions, and consequently, is insensitive to the interests of others. According to Schweiker, deontological ethics "is the deepest root of the

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contemporary value of authenticity; one ought never to be untrue to oneself" (1995: 116).

On the other hand, teleological ethics places emphasis on the end result of the moral action, and not necessarily on the means to achieving the end. As Schweiker puts it, "the teleologist argues that in any situation of choice one ought to promote values determined to be good, since it is the state of affairs realized by human action, including states of mind, that are objects of moral evaluation" (1995: 116). He quotes Charles Fried as noting that "consequentialism subordinates the right to the good, while for deontology the two realms, while related, are distinct" (Fried 1978: 9 see Schweiker 1995: 116). Schweiker indicates that the teleological ethics finds meaning in the contemporary Western value of fulfillment; that the end result of any project initiated by an agent should not work to the disadvantage of the well-being of humanity (1995: 117).

As noted in the beginning of this section, these theories will assist in the postulation of the hermeneutical realism in ethics, or the imperative of responsibility. According to Schweiker, the imperative of responsibility must not only deal with human choices, but as argued by Grisez and Finnis, it "enables us to formulate a judgment about the truth of our moral condition and with this paradoxically to constitute a new mode of life in the world" (1995: 121). This new mode of life, Schweiker continues, is the imperative of responsibility, which expresses the integrity of life before God and identifies this as a standard of choice. He agreed with Hans Jonas's assertion that the "secret or paradox of morality is that the self forgets itself over the pursuit of the object, so that a higher self

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(which indeed is also a good in itself) might come into being," and went further to indicate that the "higher self" is the moral integrity which Christians must use as commitment to respect and enhance the multiplicity of goods which typify life (Jonas 1984: 85; see Schweiker 1995: 122). Schweiker correctly stated that it is by living responsibly that we gain ourselves.

For Schweiker, the principle of choice for an integrated ethics of responsibility is a moral imperative about how to make choices for ourselves, relations and the world at large. This principle of choice spells out the standard for deciding whether an action is morally right or wrong. By acting on the imperative of responsibility, a unique good, the good of moral integrity, is realized, Schweiker reasons. For Schweiker, the moral imperative is deontological and teleological at the same time because it deals with the ends as well as the means in a multidimensional theory of value. This is because Christians are called upon to seek the reign of God in their lives and in the world, as well as love their neighbor as themselves. He succinctly states that

> the deontological dimension of an integrated ethics of responsibility finds its correlate in a teleological vision of well-being. The imperative articulates a mixed theory of right. It relates the insights of deontological and teleological theories by charting their difference but mutual entailment (1995: 128).

For Schweiker, the imperative of responsibility must be stated this way: *In all actions and relations we are to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God* (1995: 125). He explains that because at the heart of this imperative is *the integrity of existence*, and not *responsibility* implies that responsibility plays a different role in this moral outlook as in other Christian ethics. He goes on to explain each term in the imperative and why they are important in the formulation of the imperative.

In the first place *respect* is a key value if we are to honor the integrity of life. In all our actions and relations, we are obliged to respect the integrity of life. When we do this, we will never use anyone or ourselves as means to other ends. Respect, according to Schweiker, is at the root of all forms of social life. In every community, we are obliged to acknowledge others and their claim to respect. Because of the levels of values embedded in creation, the demand for respect has deontological standing, Schweiker notes. And this claim to respect derives its authenticity in the source of morality, the divine. Regarding the source of power in all these, Schweiker emphasizes that "the demand to enhance life is situated within a duty to respect the integrity of life. The ordering of the injunctions to respect and enhance the integrity of life is to insure that the power to affect the world, and thus to enhance values, is always in the service of goods other that itself" (1995: 127).

Christians are called upon, and in fact, enabled to enhance the integrity of life in all their dealings with humanity and the world around them. Consequently, Christians are to maximize what Schweiker enumerates as "pre-moral, social, and reflective

goods" (1995: 128). This means that Christians have the duty to mitigate human suffering, provide the means of education in order to build up the mental, creative, and cultural capabilities of persons in the communities in which they find themselves. Furthermore, in Schweiker's estimation, Christians are also expected to uphold social values and fight for the just treatment of all persons, as well as the integrity of non-human life (1995: 128). In a nutshell, the imperative encourages Christians to contribute to the richness of life. Living a responsible life means one respects and enhances the integrity of life before God.

By integrity of life, Schweiker means, "first, the integration of the vitalities, needs, and interests of life into some coherence and identifiable whole…," and "secondly, how life ought to be lived" (1995: 129). The imperative of responsibility is formulated to judge contemporary ways of life and social relations. It identifies how we ought to live and the things in life that we ought not to do. The imperative of responsibility is an answer to the notorious problem of how to direct power; that power finds its expression in the ability to serve and respect others and the world around us. In Christian terms, the imperative of responsibility enumerates the unique features of Christian ethics in modern terms. It emphasizes the biblical injunction that we are to promote justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before God.

3.12. Responsibility and Christian ethics

Schweiker emphasizes the theocentric nature of Christian ethics in the following statement: "Christian ethics contends that human beings live, move, and have their

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being in God. Our most basic relationship to the universe is a relation to the divine" (1995: 214). It is in the divine that we understand ourselves, which means that knowledge of the divine and knowledge of ourselves are functionally linked together. Schweiker rightly makes it clear that for an ethics to be called Christian ethics, it must explore "the inner possibility for the exercise of power," which can be found in "the symbol of creation, the idea of covenant, and beliefs about Christ's self-giving love" (1995: 215). It is important to note in Christian ethics that "God has acted and is acting in history," Schweiker reiterates (1995: 223). Christian ethics, he reiterates, is expected to make an explicit assertion about the moral life, which is that life in Christ brings about a higher, fuller form of life. To substantiate his point, he quotes from Mat. 10:39 in which Jesus said that "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (see Schweiker 1995: 215). In Christian ethics, therefore, moral responsibility is deep-seated in God as the source of power, in Christ who poured out Himself and took the form of a servant, and in the Holy Spirit who authorizes people to be responsible agents (1995: 216; cf. Phil 2: 1-11).

Christian ethics, Schweiker notes, has a lot to offer in a world where there is an increase in human power and globalization, which has subjected life on this earth to human decision and power. Christian ethics is to interpret the moral life in such a way that power is directed into respecting and enhancing the integrity of life. In loving God and loving ourselves, we are called upon also to love our neighbors' worth and dignity and use that to transform human power in order to respect and enhance the integrity of life on earth. According to Schweiker,

Given the core moral insight of Christian faith, two further convictions follow… One conviction is that we understand ourselves rightly only in relation to the divine. The knowledge of self and knowledge of God are intimately linked…. The second conviction is the moral correlate of the first. Theologians have long argued that the basic moral precepts are the love of God and the love of neighbor, precepts which also entail, as St. Augustine noted, the proper love of self. We are to know and love others and ourselves in God (1995: 216-217; see St. Augustine 1958: 14).

What Schweiker emphasizes in his book about Christian ethics is that the basic Christian involvement in life is to have a relationship with God and respect and enhance the integrity of life before God (1995: 214). He is of the view that traditional Christian ethics dwells too much on the individual relation with God and his fellow human beings, and that it should go beyond that to include the respect for the future of human life and the ecological environment. In other words, Christian ethics should desist from only concentrating on individual salvation in Christ, but also see how humanity could leave a legacy that will improve the life of posterity. This means that Christian moral philosophers and theologians should also reflect on the implications of scientific and technological developments for the future of human life. Schweiker clearly puts it this way: "… an ethics is developed not simply by appeal to divine revelation, the Bible, or Christian tradition. A variety of sources must be used to develop an ethics … Theological ethics must show that it can articulate the meaning and demonstrate the

truth of Christian faith in the context of ongoing inquiry into the moral life and the problems and possibilities of life" (1995: 221-222).

Schweiker concludes his book, *Responsibility and Christian ethics*, by making it clear that the book has been able to achieve four purposes. Firstly, he has been able to engage contemporary thought on the theme of responsibility. Secondly, he has been able to deal with previous accounts of Christian responsibility and show why they are unable to tackle sufficiently the current demand on ethics. He has also, thirdly, been able to contribute to contemporary moral investigation by outlining an ethics of responsibility, which expresses the meaning of Christian faith and answers basic moral questions. And finally, he has been able to redeem for the modern age the idea of Christian moral philosophy (1995: 227). His idea of Christian ethics, he argues, is "faith seeking moral understanding; *fides quaerens intellectum morale*" (1995: 227).

Schweiker set out to prove to Jonas that the imperative of responsibility is capable of being formulated in a theological context. Now that the Christian ethics of responsibility of Schweiker have been discussed, it is our duty, in the next chapter, to analyze whether Schweiker was able to prove to Jonas that the imperative of responsibility in a Christian context is capable of being formulated in a universal way or not. In the next chapter, we will also discuss the weaknesses and strengths of Jonas's ethics of responsibility.

A critical analysis of the views of Hans Jonas and William Schweiker

on the ethics of responsibility

4.1   Introduction

This chapter will deal with the analysis and assessment of Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility and William Schweiker's Christian ethics of responsibility. We will, first of all, investigate how the debates on Jonas's ethics of responsibility expose his shortcomings. The other question to be answered here is how successful William Schweiker's attempt to develop a Christian or theological ethics of responsibility in close proximity to Jonas's ethics of responsibility is? Has he been able to overcome the alleged weaknesses of Jonas's ethics of responsibility and does he, with his Christian version, overcome Jonas's doubt about the adequacy of religious ethics in tackling problems relating to the future?   Finally, it will be concluded that the debate on the ethics of responsibility for the technological world is not complete without looking at the substantial contribution that African ethics could bring on board to move the debate to a different academic level.

4.2   An evaluation of the ethics of responsibility of Jonas and Schweiker

The first weakness that we will like to discuss here is what Schuurman describes as the *cosmological deficiency* in the philosophy of technology (2010: 117). This is the situation where the world or reality is not addressed in its entirety, but only part of it is addressed to suit a particular agenda or propaganda. This *cosmological deficiency* results from the work of Francis Bacon (who advocates that nature must be enslaved and made to serve

humanity), then later René Descartes (who argues that nature is like a machine and can be manipulated to human advantage), and reached its peak during the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century,[15] culminating in the nihilism of the West, which is the philosophical belief that "nothing has any value, especially that religious and moral principles have no value."[16] Technology, the application of science to human advantage, is seen as a "saviour" and that which brings authenticity and fulfillment to humanity. Humanity is seen as having arrived, and that the world can be controlled and manipulated by using science and technology as tools for the advancement of the goal of humanity, which, as we mentioned earlier, is to attain authenticity and fulfillment in this world. With the help of Friedrich Nietzsche, God was declared "dead" together with His moral norms, and hence any relationship with a god. Immanuel Kant describes the motto of the Enlightenment as: "Have the courage to use your own understanding." Human reason was seen as the sole arbiter of truth. Henceforth, humanity fully has control over reality, and with the new found power (technology as a tool to control the cosmos), technology can be used to manipulate the cosmos to foster his/her agenda on earth. It is important to reiterate here that technology in itself is not bad. In fact, when used properly, it is supposed to serve and better the life of humanity and the biosphere.

The world-view that technology, and not any religious revelation, can be used to manipulate reality to humanity's advantage has affected Western scholarship, and seems also to have affected Hans Jonas's work on the ethics of responsibility for the

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[15] According to Schuurman, "The spirit of the Enlightenment, in particular, promoted the influence of the technical control mentality."

[16] From the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

technological world. This is because in an attempt to formulate a future-oriented ethics of responsibility for the technological world, Jonas satisfies the nihilism of the West by formulating an ethics of technology that is objective in nature, but which excludes reference to God, and thus fails to look at reality holistically. By trying to satisfy the West, Jonas also falls in the trap of Schuurman's *cosmological deficiency*.

It is not surprising that Jonas produced an ethics of responsibility that is not theologically inclined because Jonas did not believe in the theistic concept of God that emphasizes the immanence of God - the fact that God is active in the day-to-day activities of the world. In an attempt to explain the problem of evil in the world, especially in the face of the brutal annihilation of Jews (including his own mother) at Auschwitz, he created his own *myth of creation,* which rhythms with the deistic concept of God that God created the world, put all the laws of nature in place and took a risk by living the running of the world in the hands of human beings. Thus, Jonas managed to turn Nietzsche's "dead God" into an "absentee God." According to Him, the evil in the world may not be attributed to God since human beings are in control of the world. The implication is that because God is "absent" from this world, no one has the right to impose his/her God or morality on anyone. It is no wonder, therefore, that Jonas produced an imperative of responsibility that is universally inclined and not theologically oriented. His imperative of responsibility, which states: *Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life*, or expressed negatively: *Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future*

possibility of such life (Jonas 1984: 11), shies away from an ethics of responsibility that aims at tackling holistically the nature of reality from the context of the God of creation.

If, indeed, Jonas believes that God created the world and took a risk by leaving the running of the world in the hands of humanity, then it is equally true that he should have emphasized the stewardship of humanity over God's creation by including that discourse in his ethics of responsibility for the technological world. He should have emphasized the fact that humanity has a huge responsibility to preserve what God has entrusted into their hands by virtue of His withdrawal from the world and leaving the running of the world in the hands of humanity. Unfortunately, his discussions did not include the stewardship of humanity over God's creation. As Christian Wiese explains,

> There is much to support the idea that in the Imperative of Responsibility Jonas endeavored to develop a universally plausible ethics for a global secular society… He wanted to avoid the risk of his project being branded a "Jewish ethics" and thus having its breadth of influence impaired (Wiese 2008: 111).

This kind of ethics has a limited purview, and fails to take account of the universal nature of reality. An ethics of responsibility that fails to take into consideration the many-sided nature of reality, and as such the transcendental nature of reality, and hence, excludes reference to the God of creation, or the metaphysical nature of reality, is

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bound to suffer from *cosmological deficiency*. Schuurman succinctly describes the situation this way:

> Reality is often reduced to the world that science and technology aim to control – to a positivistic cosmology, a view of the cosmos to which technology is the key. This lopsided take on the world does not do justice to the many-sided dimensions and coherence of reality in its fullness and pays no attention to its dependence on and orientation with respect to its divine Origin, no heed to the transcendental direction of everything (2010:117).

Reality is not only about materialism; there is a spiritual dimension to it, and that is what Jonas fails to recognize in his imperative of responsibility. Such a world-view, as Schuurman also notes, suffers from *ethical deficiency*, as the object of technology is directed solely to the satisfaction of the whims and caprices of humanity to the neglect of the ecological environment and the biosphere as a whole. Technology is meant to serve the needs of humanity, but where there is no objective, transcendental source of ethical reference, the world capitalizes on the vacuum so created and many fatal consequences ensue. For example, in a situation like that, the business world focuses on profit as the sole aim of production, and that defeats the purpose and function of technology. We are aware that governments are supposed to make laws to govern the technological world, but where governments find themselves in the same predicament, who

should be the ultimate judge of ethical norms?[17] We emphatically suggest that ultimately, God or the divine should be the arbiter of such ethical norms. Schuurman argues: "The norms that follow from the values of the technological world picture are effectiveness, standardization, efficiency, success, safety, reliability, and maximum profit, with little or no attention given to the cost to humanity, society, the environment, and nature" (2010: 116). For instance, the current European horse-meat scandal, where horse meat is criminally canned as beef to maximize profit is a case in point. The blatant misuse of technology with the resultant effect of the depletion of the ozone layer is another example to point to the fact that if care is not taken, the future existence of humanity is in grave danger. America and the international community are pushing Iran very hard to stop the production of nuclear weapons because it also may have a devastating effect on the future existence of humanity if the nuclear weapons fall in the hands of, for instance, terrorists. With the production and testing of missiles that are capable of carrying nuclear weapons, North Korea is another place where the attention of the world must be focused. In this light, we agree with Schuurman when he argues that, "Technology is no longer the liberator, but itself stands in the service of power over humans and nature and, as such, binds humanity, destroys nature, and threatens culture."

Furthermore, it is important to note that human nature is made up of a complex mixture of freedom and responsibility; where there is freedom, there is

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[17] Sartre and Levinas argue that global ethics cannot be left in the hands of governments and politicians alone, but it must also be laid in the hands of individuals.

responsibility. "Freedom" chooses between alternatives, between good and bad. The modern technological world-view emphasizes the freedom of humanity to the neglect of responsibility. The Enlightenment slogan that "Man is of age," and as such does not need any God to tell him/her what to do with his/her life is a way of embracing freedom to the neglect of the responsibility that goes with free will. Where freedom is emphasized to the neglect of the responsibility that accompanies freedom, then there is bound to be disaster. Jonas is able to point to the fact that freedom alone in this world may lead humanity to despair and vacuity (1982b: 211-234), but did not follow it up by stressing that the neglect of the existence of the God of creation by the Western world is the key to the problem of nihilism, and until God, the creator of humanity and the universe is brought back into the picture, humanity may continue to misuse the growing power and control that humanity wills over the whole of reality by the advance of science and technology. For Jonas, the answer to the question, "What are we responsible for?" is "the future existence of mankind" (1984a: 81), or we ought to preserve the "the idea of Man" (1984a: 84). But from his myth of creation, we can infer that the answer to that question should be: 'humanity is responsible to the deistic God' who has made them responsible over all of reality by virtue of His withdrawal.

For us, the transcendental and biospheric dimensions of reality are important if ethics could gain a universal significance. This is where, we believe, Hans Jonas's weakness lies, and where William Schweiker took up the mantle!

In his book entitled *Responsibility and Christian ethics* (1995), Schweiker sets out to formulate what he describes as *an integrated ethics of responsibility* within the Christian context to diffuse the impression given by Jonas that religious ethics has no place in secular ethics in this modern world. Whereas Jonas is of the opinion that the dominance of religion in the West is lost forever, and therefore formulates a secular ethics of responsibility to respond to the current situation, Schweiker is of the view that a universal theological ethics of responsibility could still be formulated to salvage the inadequacy of current traditional and religious ethics. The similarity between Jonas and Schweiker is their desire to make the responsibility for the future welfare of humankind (and other life-forms) central to ethics.

As far as traditional and religious ethics are concerned, Jonas is of the opinion that a completely new approach is needed as all traditional ethics, including religious ethics, is inadequate. He then went on to give his ethics of responsibility for the technological world as discussed in Chapter 2 above. Schweiker agrees on the inadequacy of traditional ethics, but is convinced that a renewal of Christian ethics can provide the ethics that is needed. He then came out with a Christian ethics of responsibility for the technological world as elaborated in Chapter 3 above.

In his response to Jonas, Schweiker agrees that traditional ethics, including religious ethics are not adequate to tackle the current problem posed by the technological advancement to the future existence of mankind. After looking at the dimensions of

ethical theories,[18] Schweiker emphasizes, like Jonas, that the existing moral theories, including current Christian ethics, do not tackle the future life-threatening dangers that technological development poses to the future existence of humanity. He is of the view that traditional Christian ethics dwells too much on the individual relation with God and fellow human beings, and that it should go beyond that to include the respect for the future of human life and the ecological environment. In other words, Christian ethics should desist from only concentrating on individual salvation in Christ to the neglect of the ecological life, but should also see how humanity could leave a legacy that will improve the life of posterity. This means that Christian moral philosophers and theologians should also reflect on the implications of scientific and technological developments for the future of human life (1995: 221-222).

In addition to his observation that traditional and Christian ethics fails to take into consideration the respect for the future of human life and the ecological environment, Schweiker further argues that in much of Western ethics and virtually all of traditional Christian ethics, a person's moral life is determined by the consideration he/she gives to others and to God, and that is where the inadequacy of modern ethics lies. In his own words, he writes, "What is under criticism is the belief that the consideration of the well-being of others or one's duty to God ought to determine a person's conduct and also what kind of life he or she should strive to live. Morality is defined by obligation to others, which include reasons for self-sacrifice" (1995: 10). Like Jonas, he insists that this ethics is not able to guide the persistent dangers of scientific developments in the

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[18] Refer to Chapter three of this thesis for a detailed discussion on it.

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world since it concentrates on satisfying one's neighbor and God, before oneself, and therefore fails to portray the reciprocity and all-encompassing ethics that is needed in a future-oriented ethics. Schweiker refers to this anomaly in traditional and Christian ethics as *impartial other-regard*, which in his judgment permeates all cultures as well as traditional Christian ethics (1995: 10). For instance, he notes that others come first in the Christian injunctions that 'we do to others as we would have them do to us; and also that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves' (cf. Matt. 19:19; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8). He also cites Feminist ethicists who bemoan the fact that women lose their self-esteem when they suppress "… their needs, sensibilities, and actions to the demands of traditional roles and obligations to others" (1995: 11). As far as he is concerned, the "Christian faith intensifies the principles of moral equality and reciprocity through its conception of love, or *agape*" (1995: 10). In other words, an ethics of responsibility that starts with the individual and flows into the lives of others and vice versa is better than the one-sided ethics that aims at loving one's enemies and neighbors exclusively. For him, therefore, the latter idea is the false interpretation that most Christians have placed on Christian ethics. In his book, *Theological ethics and global dynamics*, he argues that it is because of the inadequacy of traditional ethics that the world has turned elsewhere for the solution to moral problems. He puts it this way: "The inadequacy and poverty of ethics, I contend, is due in some measure to the modern banishment of religious sources from moral thinking…" (2004: x; see 1998: 22).

According to Schweiker, individualism forms the core of human values in contemporary Western cultures. Consequently, the search for the goodness and satisfaction in human

life is found, not in religion, but in fulfillment and authenticity, where fulfillment and authenticity are defined in the context of enrichment and enhancement of human life here on earth (1995: 12). This philosophy of life, according to him, does not cater for future ethical responsibility, and explains why a new ethics of responsibility is needed (Schweiker 1995: 224).

At a time when the secular world seeks to increase its power over nature, when the secular world has equated power with value, and also when the culture of fulfillment and authenticity seems to be the accepted norm of the Western world, Christian ethics, Schweiker argues, should emphasize the goodness of the power in humanity, and redirect the world to the source of all power – the divine – and seek to interpret human life in the context of the care, respect and the enhancing of the integrity of life before God. Schweiker makes it clear that Christian faith entails the conviction that who God is, is revealed within the travail of history.

Like Jonas, Schweiker affirms that the prevailing problem in the ethics of responsibility is the radical expansion of human power in the contemporary world. As a result of this, "Power makes responsibility basic to ethics in our age" (2009: 489; cf. De Villiers 2006: 470). This problem, he argues, is recognized by many in current ethics and "… centers on the radical extension of human power through technology in all of its forms, for instance, medical, military, communicational, and environmental technology …" (1995: 25; cf. 1998: 1). He insists that an ethics of responsibility is helpful for morality since it deals with the appraisal and direction of power and that since responsibility hinges

between agent and deed, it becomes very important in a world in which human power is increasing (1995: 28; cf. Jonas 1984: 23). He observes that ethics of responsibility searches for the proper use of power in morality.

Schweiker questions Jonas's notion that the *idea of being,* or the *heuristic of fear* should invoke *reverence* in us and enable us to obey the moral law that ultimately helps us to work towards the future existence of humanity. According to him, what gives us moral insight does not simply lie in reverence for being, but in "some idea, symbol, event, or name other that the idea of Man …" (1993:630-631). The solution, for him, lies in the exercise of *radical interpretation* in the context of theology. He explains that *radical interpretation* is the activity in which we freely engage in self-criticism with the aim of transforming our moral lives to the point of gaining respect for the dignity of humanity and the biosphere. This moral transformation gained by the self-reflection would also transform our self-understanding and leads us to care and respect others. This enables us to "see others as good, as ends-in-themselves, as this entails the demand to realize life in others and ourselves" (1993: 632). He surmises that this can be achieved if power finds its ultimate application in the idea of God, the source of power. For the imperative of responsibility to be formulated in the Christian context, it must define God with respect to some "specific values and norms: God is creator, sustainer, and redeemer" (1993: 634). Seeing God in that light will enable us to subject power to the sustenance of humanity. Schweiker avers that his claim to the idea of God is to enable the transformation of "one's moral sensibilities and sense of responsibility" (1993: 631). For him, what makes us understand the worth of others is the *radical interpretation* of

the name and identity of God. This could be achieved in two ways: first, by employing what has been called *the first precept of practical reason*, that is, *seek good and avoid evil*, which when interpreted through the name of God means that we recognize finite life and refrain from its destruction. The second is that, "in all our actions and relations we ought to respect, even reverence, life in relation to God" (1993: 635). These, according to Schweiker, are the conditions for responsible action. "Radical interpretation within a theological perspective is the enactment of the freedom to know and value others and ourselves in God for the sake of the integrity of life," he stresses (1993: 637).

Touching on what constitutes the heart of a Christian ethics of responsibility, Schweiker objects to the contemporary Western society's emphasis on fulfillment and authenticity, and argues that promoting the reign of God on earth is the key moral value, since Christian ethics centers on advancing the reign of God in human relations and the world. Schweiker emphasizes the theocentric nature of Christian ethics in the following statement: "Christian ethics contends that human beings live, move, and have their being in God. Our most basic relationship to the universe is a relation to the divine" (1995: 214; cf. 1993: 617). It is in the divine that we understand ourselves, which means that knowledge of the divine and knowledge of ourselves are functionally linked together. Schweiker rightly makes it clear that for an ethics to be called Christian ethics, it must explore "the inner possibility for the exercise of power," which can be found in "the symbol of creation, the idea of covenant, and beliefs about Christ's self-giving love" (1995: 215). It is important to note in Christian ethics that "God has acted and is acting in history," Schweiker observes (1995: 223). Christian ethics, he reiterates, is

expected to make an explicit assertion about the moral life, which is that life in Christ, which brings about a higher, fuller form of life. To substantiate his point, he quoted from Mat. 10:39 in which Jesus said that "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (see Schweiker 1995: 215). In Christian ethics, therefore, moral responsibility is deep-seated in God as the source of power, in Christ who poured out Himself and took the form of a servant, and in the Holy Spirit who authorizes people to be responsible agents (1995: 216; cf. Phil 2: 1-11).

Contrary to Jonas therefore, Schweiker argues that Christian ethics has a lot to offer in a world where there is an increase in human power and globalization, which has subjected life on this earth to human decision and power. Christian ethics is to interpret the moral life in such a way that power is directed into *respecting and enhancing the integrity of life.* Like Kant, Schweiker avers that in loving God and loving ourselves, we are called upon also to love our neighbors' worth and dignity and use that to transform human power in order to respect and enhance the integrity of life on earth. The imperative of responsibility, he declares, is this, that *in all actions and relations we are to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God* (1995: 2, 125). "God is, Christians believe, the reality – the living power – which enables and requires integrity of life," he stresses (2009: 493). Schweiker argues that to be responsible is to promote the wellbeing of life before God. He observes that living a responsible life before God fulfills the Biblical injunction that we should "lose ourselves" in order to gain ourselves (Mat. 10:39; Lk.17:33). This, then, is the worldview of a theological ethics of responsibility.

For Jonas, the imperative of responsibility is: *Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life*; or expressed negatively: *Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life* (1984:11). Even though Schweiker formulates his imperative of responsibility in close proximity to that of Jonas, the difference is that whereas Jonas's imperative of responsibility is universally oriented, Schweiker emphasizes the theological nature of the ethics of responsibility.

First, to us, the imperative of responsibility formulated by Schweiker does not show that theological ethics of responsibility could be formulated universally, and therefore, he did not prove Jonas wrong. This is because try as you could, atheists will be excluded from a theological imperative of responsibility like that of Schweiker above. Where God is introduced into an imperative of responsibility, atheists and people who do not have the same concept of God as Christians are left out. This means that it may be impossible to have a theological imperative of responsibility that is universal because of its particularity.

Second, as far as we are concerned, *the imperative of responsibility* formulated by Schweiker above does not fully conform to what we will describe as *Christian imperative of responsibility*. This is because, the way it stands, it rhymes with the theistic religions like Judaism, Islam, etc., and does not include the Christian character. This, we believe, is an attempt to fulfill his desire to formulate a theological universal ethics of responsibility. But because of the particularistic nature of Christianity, we don't think that

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it can fall within the universalistic confines of ethics. A Christian ethics of responsibility, as far as we are concerned, comes to contribute to the debate by presenting Christ's sacrifice of Himself for the sins of humanity as a paradigm for the world. From our point of view, a Christian imperative of responsibility that improves on that of Schweiker may be formulated this way: *in all actions and relations we are to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God as portrayed in the altruistic death of Christ for humanity.*[19] The death of Christ is a positive, prospective ethics of responsibility in that it brings hope for today and hope for the future (see John 10:10).[20] It is important to state here that we are not criticizing the whole Christian ethics of responsibility outlined by Schweiker as unchristian. What we criticize is the universal way by which he has stated his *imperative of responsibility.* For us, at the heart of a *Christian imperative of responsibility* should be the portrayal of the sacrificial nature of Christ.

Thirdly, looking critically at Schweiker's argument on whether or not religious ethics is adequate, one observes that his argument is not purely on the inadequacy of traditional and religious ethics as such. Rather the debate is on the misapplication and misinterpretation of traditional and religious ethics. Schweiker is, therefore right to emphasize that the ethics of the *other regard* is incomplete (impartial) if Christian love (agape) is to be practiced correctly, and that love, properly practiced, should be reciprocal. He also calls upon humans to exhibit that same love to the biosphere if love

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[19] We are aware that such a Christian imperative of responsibility may not cater for Islam, Judaism, atheists, African traditional religion, etc. but the sacrificial nature of Christ's death can still be an example for humanity to emulate.

[20] Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and to kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, and have it to the full."

should be practiced holistically. We agree that the Christian love that is described as *agape* should be holistic in nature. Christian ethics should be interpreted in such a way that the individual, his neighbor, God and the environment should be taken into consideration if *agape* love is to be fully practiced. Holistic or *agape* love is expected to extend to the ecological environment because the continuation of life on earth is, to a large extent, dependent also on a healthy ecological environment. Humanity is expected *to respect and enhance the integrity of life* before God in the context of Christ's altruistic love for humanity if holistic love is to be practiced in its fullness. When love is, thus, applied holistically, it will affect positively our attitude to the use of technology and is likely to make us more responsible towards making sure that technological advancement occurs in such a way that the future existence of humanity and the biosphere are not jeopardized in any way.

As far as we are concerned, a Christian imperative of responsibility must include a call to emulate the love of Christ for the world. This will entail the subjection of human power and control to the altruistic nature of the death of Christ. In that case, power gained from the progress of science and technology will not be used selfishly, but will be used to promote *the integrity of life before God* in Christ Jesus. And since one cannot formulate a Christian ethics of responsibility without including, at least, Christ and who he represents for humanity, a universal Christian ethics of responsibility is a mirage (cf. De Villiers 2007:89). As Wolfgang Schoberth generally puts it,

A Christian conception of responsibility can only succeed when it places God's action before the definition of human abilities, and when it reflects on human agency as secondary to God's gifts. The eschatological aspect of responsibility would then not be a completely unachievable demand but instead the invitation to a better, more solidary life. That such an understanding of responsibility cannot be appreciated by everyone is no surprise but simply the result of the fact that it cannot aim for general plausibility if it wants to retain its distinct character (Schoberth 2009: 440-41).

Therefore, even though Schweiker came out with an ethics of responsibility in close proximity to that of Jonas, Schweiker's imperative of responsibility varies from that of Jonas by its theological nature. But Schweiker did not succeed in proving Jonas wrong that theological ethics cannot be used in a universal imperative of responsibility.

Another weakness we will like to look at has to do with Jonas's criticism of the Categorical Imperative of Immanuel Kant. As stated in Chapter two above, Jonas argues that at the heart of the categorical imperative is "willing alone", which uses *reason*, a principle of universality, and *feeling*, which is evoked by "reverence" to the moral law itself, to make moral judgments. According to him, the fact that willingness is evoked by "reverence" flaws Kant's categorical imperative since it amounts to "self-limitation of freedom…" (1984: 88-89). But the question is: If Kant's idea of r*everence*

amounts to "self-limitation, what about Jonas's *heuristic of fear*?[21] Is it not playing the same role of energizing the moral instinct that propels us into action? Jonas argues that Kant's categorical imperative cannot measure up to the future-oriented ethics needed because it is designed to help individuals to make logical judgments on the here and now.

But is it really true that Kant's *categorical imperative* cannot apply to future ethics of responsibility? We don't think so. Much as Jonas has a point in asserting that the *categorical imperative* has to do with the here and now of human relations, for us, it also has the tendency to promote the future existence of humanity since it can also be invoked into guiding the dangers of future technological advancement. This is because in Kant's *categorical imperative,* we are entreated to make sure that our maxims (where *maxim* means a normative principle, which one chooses for himself/herself with the aim of acting upon it)[22] could be taken as *a universal law*. If, in the first place, this moral maxim was given by Kant in the eighteenth century, and I can apply it to my moral life today with some success, it means that we can apply this maxim to include producing our technologies and using them in such a way that we will wish that it will be a universal law that will cater for the preservation of future life on earth. Karl-Otto Apel is right when he writes that the *principle of self-consistency of reason,* postulated by Kant is capable of being used as a universal ethical principle. He remarks:

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[21] The *heuristic of fear*, according to Jonas, is that fear which encourages us to act ethically for the future well-being of mankind (1984: 26).

[22] See Guyer 2006: 349-350

"…Hans Jonas, wanted to supplement or replace Kant's categorical imperative with a principle that would take into account our responsibility for a continued existence of humankind in the future. But he forgot the function of Kant's principle of universalization, when he formulated his three categorical imperatives as demands for ensuring the continuation of the human species (Apel 2000: 143, 151; cf. Apel 1992: 219-260).

For us, at the heart of Kant's *feeling of reverence* and Jonas's *heuristic*[23] *of fear* is continuity. This means that whatever we continue to do in this world through technological advancement to give us a better life, we must wish that it continues to be a universal law that will promote the existence of humanity in the future. It follows, therefore, that when one produces technology and uses it in the context of the principle of the *categorical imperative*, he/she will use it in such a way that it will be beneficial to his generation, and also promote the future of human and ecological existence because whatever we wish for today, implied by Kant, we should also wish that it becomes a universal law for tomorrow. If subsequent generations also use it that way, it means that the *categorical imperative* is capable of allaying the fears that we have about the use of power accompanying technological advancement. This means that whatever we do now concerning the development and use of technology, we must wish that it becomes a universal law for the future existence of humanity.

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[23] According to the Oxford English dictionary, heuristic means a teaching or education encouraging you to learn by discovering things for yourself.

When we cultivate an altruistic fear that enables us to act with a clear understanding that we nor any member of our families are not going to enjoy the benefits of the safety that we are fighting for, coupled with a nonreciprocal responsibility to preserve the continued existence of posterity (Jonas), or when we act in such a way that we preserve and respect the integrity of life before God (Schweiker), Kant's *categorical imperative* also calls upon us to wish that the above ethics of responsibility by Jonas and Schweiker become a universal law for the preservation of the life of posterity.

Furthermore, Kant's second categorical imperative, *Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only,* (Kant: 1959: 46) is another example. In this imperative, humanity is called upon to live with each other in such a way that we do not manipulate each other as say, machines (to use one of the notions of the Enlightenment positively), but to uphold the dignity of humanity. If conscious effort is made to pass this on from generation to generation for every human being to value human life, and never treat each other as a means to an end, it may go a long way to mitigate the negative use of technology. This is not to suggest that everyone become Kantians, but to emphasize the fact that if the new found power of humanity could be used in the context of the *categorical imperative*, it will go a long way to help in our efforts to preserve the future existence of humanity. This means that Jonas is right to assert that Kant's *categorical imperative* deals with the here and now, but fails to see that it transcends the here and now, and therefore, could also apply to the preservation of life in the future.

Paul Ricoeur and Robert Spaemann also criticize Jonas for extending the limit of responsibility endlessly. Reflecting on Jonas's concept of responsibility, Ricoeur and Spaemann criticize his notion of the ethics of responsibility by arguing that he did not name who exactly is responsible for the future continued existence of humanity. In other words, he nearly extended the limits of responsibility endlessly. This also has the tendency to risk the loss of freedom. They opine that Jonas too much pushed responsibility to its limits in that he laid the responsibility at the door-step of everyone. If no one is allotted responsibility, then no one is ultimately responsible, they concluded (see Turoldo & Barilan 2008: 117-118). In other words, if everyone is responsible for an action, and if in the end no one does it, then no one can be held responsible for the inaction. According to Ricoeur and Spaemann, Jonas's future-oriented ethics of responsibility – also referred to as antecedent responsibility – lacks the ability to engage pragmatically with the "future generations" or the "distant people" he is asking to be protected since "antecedent responsibility requires special moral sensibilities that include identification with distant events or complex entities such as future generations and the nonhuman environment" (2008: 118). In this vein, Jonas is only dabbling in imagination and abstraction, and as such, he is only dependent on the "mythical, as it (he) invokes the relationships between man and the whole world" (Turoldo & Barilan 2008: 118, brackets mine).

To a large extent, we do not agree with Ricoeur and Spaemann on their criticism above. This is because, in a situation where the root causes of a problem is manifold it is wise to speak generally and let people take a cue from the warning as they are informed

about the problems at hand. The fact that Jonas's book, *The Imperative of Responsibility* were demanded, which resulted in thousands of copies being printed; the fact that it continues to be used by universities, ethicists, scientists and the general reading public shows that his caution may have had some impact. Moreover, his warning has been discussed at so many scientific, ecological and ethical conferences, which normally result in some concrete decisions being taken. Of course, it is natural that not everyone will agree with him in the various conferences that focus on his work. For Jonas, in the face of the new-found power of humanity over nature, collective social responsibility is necessary if the call to safeguard the future existence of mankind is to be taken seriously.

Another weakness has to do with how Jonas uses the word "responsibility". D. Etienne de Villiers makes a very important argument when he, after carefully looking at the work of Hans Jonas, rightly concludes that Jonas's use of the word 'responsibility' is erroneous since he elevates responsibility to the substantive normative fundamental principle of ethics (2006: 476-479; cf. Jonas 1984: 93). This, according to De Villiers, is a misunderstanding of the role that the concept of responsibility plays in human relations – it is a second level normative concept and never a first level substantive normative principle (De Villiers 2006: 477-478; cf. Bayertz 1995: 65-66). The 'principle' for Jonas's ethics of responsibility is 'reverence for life.' In his formulation of the ethics of responsibility, Jonas used 'reverence for life' as a rule or a norm for life so that 'responsibility' does not really serve as a fundamental first-level principle of morality.

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De Villiers notes that the key function of the concept of responsibility is the establishment of relationships between moral agents and outcomes (2006: 477). So the key component of the concept of responsibility is evaluation, and the evaluation is based on an existing moral theory. The ascription of responsibility, therefore, draws on a moral norm to make conclusions. It is value neutral, in that it only acts as a bridge between the moral agent and the outcome of his actions. Commenting on the comments of Bayertz on the topic, De Villiers has this to say, "The concept of responsibility does not, however, constitute any evaluations, but only "transports" it; it is *value neutral*. For that reason one can say that the theory of moral responsibility feeds on the theory of morality: it lives off moral evaluations that it cannot ground itself (Bayertz 1995: 65-67; cf. De Villiers 2006: 477). The role of responsibility as a second level normative concept is also emphasized by Schweiker when he affirms that an ethics of responsibility is helpful for morality since responsibility hinges between agent and deed, and therefore becomes very important in a world in which human power is increasing (1995: 28; cf. Jonas 1984: 23).

Jonas was also accused of totalitarianism and being undemocratic. This is when he argues that, like the parent, the statesman has "total" care over his ward. Like parental responsibility, the object of the true political leader is the people he rules over; as such the totality of their lives becomes his responsibility (1984: 101). According to him, as the child depends totally on the parent, so the community depends totally on the statesman for the betterment of the community (1984: 105). According to Jonas's critics, this description of the role of the statesman for the community is not democratic enough

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since it makes one person responsible for a large group of people, and is likely to lead to totalitarianism and autocracy (see Drapez 2003: 43; cf. Lindberg 2005: 17). Secondly, it is rightly argued that a global ethics to cater for the future preservation of humanity from the ever-growing power and control of humanity over reality through technology cannot be termed global if it is restricted to the statesman alone, or to a small group of political leaders. Global ethics is supposed to be corporately owned.

Furthermore, Jonas is also accused of introducing a "one-sided responsibility of the parent for his or her child as model for the one-sided responsibility for the survival of future generations" (see De Villiers 2006: 478). According to De Villiers, the use of parental and statesman responsibilities as models for a future oriented ethics of responsibility is not convincing since it is much more limited than the responsibility Jonas has in mind. He argues that because parental responsibility's content is not uniform but culturally determined, it is not qualified to be used as an example for responsibility that is universally oriented since, for example, maternal responsibility does not entail the obligation to breast feed for mothers in all cultures. He agrees with Kettner that 'The prospective responsibility for future generations is unlimited with regard to the extent of obligations, the number of persons and the timeframe involved' (Kettner 1990: 424-426; cf. De Villiers 2006: 478). I agree with De Villiers because, even though, for example, theists have generally accepted the symbolism of God as a Father, it is not true that everyone has the same concept, and for that matter an experience of a father. Moreover, used symbolically, God as father is even problematic in cultures where matrilineal inheritance is the culture of the community; this is because the one being

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inherited may not have a direct daily responsibility and relationship with the inheritor. De Villiers is, therefore right to fault Jonas for using the parent-child analogy to picture a responsibility that is supposed to be universally oriented.

In all the discussions above, what is lagging so far is the inclusion of an African ethics of responsibility in the debate on the ethics of responsibility for the technological world. Jonas's ethics of responsibility focuses on what the responsibility of the present generation is for the continued existence of humanity and the biospheric life in the future. In other words, Jonas concentrates on the present and the future responsibility of humanity for the sustenance of life on earth. Schweiker formulates his Christian ethics of responsibility along the lines of Jonas, except that whilst his ethics of responsibility is theologically-oriented, that of Jonas is secular in nature. African ethics of responsibility, on the other hand, concentrates on the responsibility of the living for the past, present, the living dead and the unborn in the exercise of morality in the community. It is also theologically-oriented. African ethics of responsibility therefore touches on a wider sphere of life than that of Jonas and Schweiker. We wish to contribute to the bridging of this gap by coming out with an *African Christian ethics of responsibility*. It is the aim of the current researcher to attempt to do so in the next two chapters so that the rich African moral heritage could also be introduced into the debate for future researchers to take it up from where we left off.

CHAPTER 5

Towards an African ethics of responsibility for the technological age

5.1   Introduction

In this chapter, we wish to come out with an African ethics of responsibility that will contribute to the debate set into motion by Hans Jonas (which was Christianized by William Schweiker) about the ethics of responsibility for the technological age. We will also look at the African concept of time and how that affects responsibility in the African context. In the process, we will explain the nature of African ethics and an African theory of responsibility from the African concept of communalism, which will include the concepts of Ubuntu, holism, *musuo* (or taboos) and Kwame Gyekye's ethics of altruistic responsibility. In the end, we will discuss whether or not African ethics is adequate for a future-oriented ethics of responsibility for the technological age. As we go along in this chapter, we will be engaging the current debate on the ethics of responsibility from H Richard Niebuhr, Hans Jonas, William Schweiker and others with the unfolding ethics of responsibility in the African context.

The literature that we have worked on so far from the African arena shows that nothing very much have been done on the ethics of responsibility – Kwame Gyekye mentions "ethics of responsibility" in his writings, but that was not the focus of his work so it is not elaborate (Gyekye 1996:63). It seems to me that the debate on the ethics of responsibility for the technological age in particular, is going on mainly in Europe, America and South Africa. As could be seen later on in this chapter, there is a similar debate going on within the African context by Gyekye, Richardson, Bujo, Ramose, Osei,

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etc. but in the context of the ecological environment. This is, however, the first time that an effort is made to seriously engage the current discussion on the ethics of responsibility for the technological age with African ethics. In the area of ethics within the African context, the concentration seems to be on normative, cultural, ecological and philosophical ethics. So what we are about to do in this chapter is a novelty. As to whether African ethics of responsibility falls within the advocates of the *agential theory*[24], or the *social theory*[25], or the *dialogical theory*[26], we are yet to know.[27] It is the hope of this researcher that the genesis of this discussion in the African context will begin a whole new debate within African scholarship that will go a long way to contribute a great deal to African consciousness of responsibility. The key problem that we will like to tackle in this chapter is how to engage African ethics with the contributions of Jonas, Schweiker and others on the ethics of responsibility. Where is the entry point for African ethics in the whole debate?   To what extent African ethics does or does not deal with responsibility and responsibility ethics?

5.2   The nature and characteristics of African communalism

According to Shutte, Léopold Senghor, the famous African philosopher, poet and statesman, and former President of Senegal, was the first person to coin the word

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[24] This theory concentrates on an agent as the source of responsibility.

[25] This is a theory of responsibility that dwells on the social observance of praise and blame. This means that an agent is ultimately held responsible for the roles and social positions he/she holds.

[26] This is a theory of responsibility that centers on an agent and his/her response to some "other." The "other" could be a human being or the divine. It defines the identity of a person from his/her relation to the world, others and to God.

[27] These theories of responsibility were discussed in Chapter 3 under William Schweiker. This discussion is relevant here because it helps place African ethics within an existing theory of responsibility and enables the researcher to properly come out with the nature of African ethics of responsibility.

communalism (Shutte 2009: 93; cf. Nussbaum 2009: 100). And he did that to distinguish African communal living from the socialism and communism of the West. Senghor explains that by communalism he means, "a community based society, communal not collectivist. We are concerned here not with a mere collection of individuals, but with people conspiring together, *con-spiring* in the basic Latin sense (literally "breathing together"), united among themselves even to the very centre of their being" (Senghor 1963: 16). So communalism, as Shutte defines it, refers to a group of people that depend on each other for their survival; any selfish attitude by one of them is seen as a threat to the very survival of the community. Pieter Coetzee also aptly defines community in the following way: "A community is an ongoing association of men and women who have a special commitment to one another and a developed (distinct) sense of their common life. The *common life* is any public discursive space which members construct through action-in-concert" (Coetzee 2002: 274).

In his book, *African cultural values: An introduction*, Kwame Gyekye affirms that "A community is a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds – which are not necessarily biological – who share common values, interests, and goals" (Gyekye 1996: 35). He notes that in African social community, every member of the community is expected to work towards the well-being of every individual in the community. Not to do so is regarded as inimical to the continued existence of the community. Children are trained right from the beginning through proverbs, folklore, maxims, etc., to inculcate the habit of recognizing the needs of others, and to work for the welfare and well-being of every member of the community.

Gyekye rightly indicates that the main features of an African social community are cooperation, mutual aid, interdependence, solidarity, mutual help, collective responsibility, reciprocal obligations, altruism, and the like. He advocates that in Africa, morality is designed in such a way that it promotes human well-being. He expresses it this way,

> Thus, in African morality, there is an unrelenting preoccupation with human welfare. What is morally good is that which brings about - or is supposed, expected, or known to bring about – human well-being. This means, in a society that appreciates and thrives on harmonious social relationships, that which is morally good is what promotes social welfare, solidarity, and harmony in human relationships. An action, habit, or pattern of behavior is considered good only if it promotes human and social well-being (Gyekye 1996: 57).

5.2.1 Main features of an African ethics

Neville Richardson, in his paper, *Ethics in an African context,* opines that the salient features of an African ethics include holism, vitalism, communality, authority-by-consensus, and *Ubuntu* (Richardson 1998: 38). Holism and communalism, he notes, refer to the holistic nature of African thought. Unlike the Westerners who think dualistically, and therefore have opposites to everything, Africans see togetherness in almost everything. There is even no dichotomy between the secular and the religious.

Among Africans, he observes, togetherness is prided over separateness. In other words, harmony and interdependence is at the center of African life. This harmony is also extended to the gods and ancestors, who are the custodians of the people and the continued existence of the community. Community for the African involves the people, the gods, the ancestors and even the unborn. Richardson puts it this way, "Western minds find African communality difficult to grasp because traditional African community means more than belonging to a particular group of people who are alive. It encompasses those still in their mothers' wombs, about to be born, and also the ancestors" (1998: 42). If this natural harmony is disturbed in any way by anyone, rituals will have to be performed to restore the disharmony. Augustine Shutte puts it more succinctly this way: "The European idea is the idea of freedom, that individuals have a power of free choice. The African idea is the idea of community, that persons depend on other persons to be persons" (Shutte 2001: 10, Coetzee & Roux 2002: 326). Richardson further notes that the sole aim of the holistic nature of African life is "the good of all, and the social ethics of Africa is deeply concerned with the good of all" (1998:39).

According to Martin H. Prozesky, African morality refers to the "moral traditions embedded in the many and various cultures of sub-Saharan Africa, the moral traditions of black African cultures" (Prozesky 2009: 4). So African morality refers to the various cultural norms within the numerous cultures of the African community, and African ethics will refer to the science of African morality. Prozesky emphasizes that the most fundamental elements of an African ethics can be found in the concept of *Ubuntu*.

5.2.2 Communalism and tradition

Within the African context, what has been described as tradition is the cultural history of the community. It is the values and tenets, which the ancestors have tested and practiced, and believed to be useful for the common good of the community. Such traditions and cultures are open-ended; meaning that they are dynamic in nature. No tradition or culture remains static, except of course, those values that are the very foundation of the community. Among the Gã People of Ghana,[28] for instance, the Homowo Festival symbolizes unity, plenty and prosperity (Field 1937: 47).[29] This takes place in August of every year. Before that happens, an antecedent tradition is played out in July, which entails that on a particular day, and only on that day, the youth of the community are given the freedom to loot shops and markets and take whatever they lay their hands on. The shop owners who get wind of the day close their shops, or wait till they see the approaching group of youth singing and dancing, before they close their shops. This tradition is supposed to throw light on the *Homowo* (literally means hooting at hunger) Festival that is about to take place: it symbolizes the prosperity that the *Homowo* Festival stands for. True to the meaning of the *Homowo* Festival, there is always, every year, abundance of fish prior to the festival.[30] And like the story of the famine in Samaria which unbelievably turned into plenty at the word of Elisha in the

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[28] I am a member of that tribe and participated in that ritual when I was in my youth.

[29] *Homowo* means hooting at hunger.

[30] When the fish does not come in abundance at the expected time in a particular year, the *Wulomo*, the high priest, and other members of the community will go to the deep seas to sacrifice a cow to the god of the sea. In most cases, fish comes in abundance after that.

Bible,[31] fish are sold very cheaply during that period in Ghana, especially in Accra. But true to the saying that tradition is not static, as I write today, the tradition where the youth are given a day for looting before the *Homowo* Festival has stopped. This is just one of many examples to prove that tradition is dynamic.

5.2.3 Communalism and the origin of humanity

According to Wiredu, among the Akan, three elements constitute a human being. One vital element, which he calls the *life principle*, comes from God, the creator. And it is this *life principle* which points to the fact that all human beings are from the same source, and therefore, are one universal family. "Literally: all human beings are the children of God; none is the child of the earth," he stresses (Wiredu 2002: 289; 313). The other two elements that make up the human being are the *blood principle* and the *charisma principle,* which are from the mother and the father respectively. The *blood principle* constitutes the person's body, and the *charisma principle* constitutes the person's personality (Wiredu 2002: 289). And this biological input of the mother and the father grounds the person in a particular clan within the community, and therefore, constitutes his identity. Because among the Akans there is a matrilineal inheritance, the blood principle identifies you with the family of the woman, and the charisma principle identifies one with the man's family.[32] Once you are situated in the family or the clan or

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[31] See 2 Kings 6:24 through 7:1-20

[32] Among the Gã people of Accra, because they operate in a patrilineal system, there is no emphasis on any *blood or charisma principle*; the person is identified with both families right from the eighth day when he/she is named at the Outdooring Ceremony. It is after the naming ceremony that the clan accepts the child as a member of the clan. Before the Outdooring Ceremony, he/she does not belong to the clan.

the community, the work of introducing you with the normative rules and rites of the society begins. Wiredu concludes his discussion this way:

> Thus conceived, a human person is essentially the centre of a thick set of concentric circles of obligations and responsibilities matched by rights and privileges revolving round levels of relationships irradiating from the consanquinity of household kith and kin, through the 'blood' ties of lineage and clan, to the wider circumference of human familihood based on the common possession of the divine spark (Wiredu 2002: 291; cf. Coetzee 2002: 278).

5.2.4 Communalism and fellow-feeling

This depicts what is described as *fellow-feeling*[33] in the concept of African communality: those who are well-to-do are expected to help those who are in need. This has been described as the extended family system among Africans. In fact, this practice of helping those in need may be one of the reasons why most Africans are not rich. No matter how small the resources of an African is, he/she helps the less privileged in the extended family system. In fact, solidarity is one of the cardinal principles of African communality. As Shutte ably puts it, "The extended family is probably the most common, and also the most fundamental expression of the African idea of community…The importance of this idea for ethics is that the family is something that is valued for its own sake" (Shutte 2001: 29; see Metz & Gaie 2010: 276, 284). This means that in the

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[33] It means caring for one another.

concept of *fellow-feeling*, the well-being of a member of the extended family system is linked to the well-being of another member of the extended family community. We can state the concept of *fellow-feeling* in the following way: *Because you are well, I am well; because you are satisfied, I am satisfied; and because you are clothed, I am clothed*.[34] So within the African communality, " 'Family first' and 'charity begins at home' are recurrent maxims of African moral thinking, where, at a fundamental level, the agent's own, existing communal relationships are given precedence over others" (Appiah 1998; see Metz & Gaie 2010: 276). Flowing from that culture, even when one is preparing food, the visitor and the stranger are also taken into consideration in the amount of food prepared! I remember when I was studying in Nottingham, UK, and one day a friend of mine, a white man, came to visit me when I was eating, I instinctively said to him, "You are invited." Because of his individualistic culture, this sounded strange in his ears. With an air of genuineness and innocence, he said to me, "your food is your food; you don't have to invite me to share with you." Such is the extent to which an African can go with regard to hospitality, and the Westerner with regard to individualism.[35] Léopold Senghor's description of *Ubuntu* referred to by Barbara Nussbaum is appropriate here: "I feel the other, I dance the other, and therefore I am" (Nussbaum 2009: 101). In other words, whatever I do, the people around me, as well as the community, are taken into consideration.

5.2.5 Self-identity in communalism

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[34] The concept of *fellow-feeling* fits very well into Matthew 25:31-46 where Jesus told those on His right hand that so far as they did good to other people, they have done it to Him.

[35] This is not to say that the Westerner does not know how to give.

The foregoing on African communalism means that within the ethics of responsibility for the African context, the responsibility of a person is tied to his relationship with and for the community. The self-identity of the person is derived from his/her obedience and connectedness to the community. What is ethically right or good is not, like the Western practice, tied to what the individual thinks or decides, it is intrinsically tied to the acceptable norms of the community. "There is no other self to be true to, except the communal self. The community, its continuing harmony and well-being, are the measures of what is good," Richardson reiterates. Whatever the individual does is aimed at contributing to the holistic nature and survival of the community. In the words of Ambrose Moyo, "There is no identity outside community" (Moyo 1992: 52; cf. Kretzschmar & Hulley 1998: 43; Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009: 69; cf. Shutte 2009: 90-92). The individual's identity is, therefore, defined by his positive involvement in the community. Richardson aptly observes that "The notion of the sovereign will of the individual is obviously very far removed from the view that one's very identity is known and expressed through one's belonging in the community" (1998: 43; cf. Senghor 1964: 93-94, in Coetzee & Roux 2002: 298).[36] According to Munyaka and Motlhabi, "Only through the co-operation, influence and contribution of others, can one understand and bring to fulfillment one's own personality. One is able to discover a sense of self-identity only in reference to the community in which one lives" (2009: 70; cf. Connor, Decock and Hartin 1991: 189; see Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009: 70). The identity of the person in communalism is, therefore, grounded in the person's relationship with other members of

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[36] cf. Coetzee's *social thesis* in this same book, p. 275

the community and with the *other* (i.e., the gods and the ancestors, and ultimately to God).

This emphasis on the inter-personal relationship with the *other* harmonizes with the views of Martin Buber, Emil Brunner and Amitai Etzioni's on the foundational significance of the "I-Thou" relationship in the formation of a person's identity. According to Buber, a person's identity is expressed in his "I-It" and "I-Thou" utterances. His/her identity comes from the "I," the self, being address by the "Thou." Drawing from this idea of Buber, Brunner concludes that the fundamental being and responsibility of a person is found in the "Thou" calling him/her and communicating Himself to him/her (1995: 62-63; see Brunner 1964: 19; Etzioni 1988*:* 9).

This *I-Thou* relationship or the relationship with the *other* is key for the African ethics of responsibility. In other words, the responsibility of the individual, and as such his/her identity, is also ultimately linked to the demands of the *other* in his/her interaction with the community. This means that the identity of a person is also realized from his/her relationship and *respons-ibility* to the *other*. And this relationship of the individual to the other is crucial because it ultimately affects positively or negatively the well-being and continued peaceful existence of the community. In fact, that is why within the African context, every individual, especially the elderly ones, have absolute rights to inculcate good manners in the children and youth, and to correct the bad behavior of any member of the community. This spells out the adage that when, "the grass burns every member

of the animal world should worry because it ultimately affects all of them". This culture is embedded in the wisdom that "when two elephants fight, the grass suffers."

5.2.3 Consultation in communalism

As a result of the intimacy within the African community, consultation (what Bujo describes as *palaver*)[37] plays a vital role in the moral life of the community. Consultation within the African context is hierarchical: it begins with someone who is older than you – a brother, sister or a cousin - and when the problem is solved, it ends there; if the problem is not solved, it goes on to an elder in the family – it can be the father or an uncle or a grandfather, or a mother or an aunt or a grandmother, or a designated head of the family; if the problem is solved, it ends there. If the situation is such that it cannot be solved and, as a result, threatens the unity and the very existence of the community, it then goes to the chief, who is the custodian of the community on behalf of the ancestors. What the chief decides, in consultation with the elders, is final. In most cases, the discussions will go on until a solution is found (cf. Richardson 1998: 44; see Gbadegesin 1991: 66). Communal consultation, rather than majority vote, is the backbone of an African communality. Consultations are made among the chief and the elders to the point where a consensus is reached. Richardson stresses that in the African community, "Decisions are not arrived at by vote in which the greater number wins, even if the majority is a single vote. Rather, discussion and negotiations continue until consensus is reached" (1998: 44; cf. Coetzee & Roux 2002: 278-79).[38] This is the

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[37] See Bujo 2009: 122-127

[38] This also points to the fact that utilitarianism does not play a role in African communal problem solving.

decision-making method used by the community for, especially, very important matters. This requires great skill and wisdom on the part of the consultants, who are mainly the elders and the chief in serious discussions.

5.2.6 The life force of the community

Richardson claims that the force which enables the dynamic harmony and the interdependence among Africans is the *life force* or the *vital link.* According to him, the *life force* indwells a person in a smaller or greater measure. When it diminishes "through such eventualities as sickness, misfortune such as a car accident or lightning strike, depression, or the inability of a woman to conceive and deliver a healthy baby, the general assumption is that malevolence has been at work," and this, according to him, is mainly caused by a member of the community. In that case, the person has to be identified by diviners and, eventually, rituals have to be performed to rectify the situation. The rituals also have the tendency to increase the *life force* in the person. The ancestors, even though they can be offended, are mainly the protectors and providers to the community, he observes. It is important to add that when calamity comes upon the community like, for instance, so many people dying in a particular family, or there is famine in the community, or rains destroy farms   it is because the *vital link (*to use Richardson's phrase*)* between the people and the gods or the ancestors has been broken. It may be that the people have neglected their duty to the gods or the ancestors, or it may also mean that a member of the community has offended them. In that case, rituals have to be performed to the gods for the re-establishment of the *vital link*. An incident happened in Ghana recently which is worth mentioning here. A train

derailed in one of our villages, killing many people. The chief and elders of the village then attributed the accident to the annoyance of the gods as the train line passes through the abode of a particular god. To make sure that it does not happen again, the villagers called upon the government of Ghana to pacify the gods. They then listed the things needed for the ritual and sent it via a messenger to government. The government in response sent all the things needed for the ritual to take place to appease the gods. This is the extent to which Africans can go to hold the community together and eliminate disaster for the people. For Desmond Tutu, "Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum* – the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good" (Tutu 1999: 35; cf. Metz & Gaie 2010: 273).

Discussing the individual's relationship with the community, Metz summarizes what other African scholars observe about social harmony as follows:

> 'Every member is expected to consider him/herself an integral part of the whole and to play an appropriate role towards achieving the good of all' (Gbadegesin, 1991, p. 65); 'Harmony is achieved through close and sympathetic social relations within the group' (Mokgoro, 1998, p. 3); 'The fundamental meaning of community is the sharing of an overall way of life, inspired by the notion of the common good' (Gyekye 2004, p. 16); [T]he

purpose of our life is community-service and community-belongingness' (Iroegbu 2005, p. 442; cf. Metz and Gaie 2010, p. 276).

The ultimate aim of all these actions, as we stated earlier, is to bring solidarity and harmony in the community. The responsibility of the individual within the African moral context is, first, your relationship with other persons and the biosphere, and second, your commitment to the betterment and continued existence of the community.

5.2.7 Individual Responsibility in communalism

Does the above description of community within the African set-up means that there is no individual responsibility? Does it mean that the rights, initiatives and accountability of the individual have been absorbed by the community and that the individual only depends on the community for survival? Does it also mean that the individual has no say at all in the community? That is not at all the case. Even though the welfare of every African community is paramount, the individual is also held responsible for his/her actions. For instance, among the Gas in Accra, there is an adage which says, "anuu tsofa ahaa helatsɛ," which literally means "one does not drink medicine for a sick person." An Akan adage also says, "The lizard does not eat pepper for the frog to sweat" (Gyekye 2003: 49). This means that even though each member of the community is expected to work towards the welfare of the community, one is also held responsible for his or her own actions. In fact, any individual whose action disturbs the peace or destabilizes the stability of the community will be held responsible for his/her actions. According to Gyekye, "The achievements, success, and well-being of the group

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depend on the exercise by its individual members of their unique talents and qualities. And these talents and qualities are assets of the community as a whole" (Gyekye 1996: 49-50). This means that whereas the individual needs the community to be successful, the community also depends on the talents of the individual for its continued existence. For instance, in Chinua Achebe's classic book entitled, *Things fall apart* a special song is sung for Akafo because he won a very important wrestling match for a particular community. The song goes like this:

> Who will wrestle for our village?
>
> Akafo will wrestle for our village,
>
> Has he thrown a hundred men?
>
> He has thrown four hundred men.
>
> Has he thrown a hundred Cats?
>
> He has thrown four hundred Cats
>
> Then send him word to fight for us (Achebe 1994: 36).

This song indicates that a warrior is expected to use his talents for the wellbeing and continued existence of the community. John Mbiti puts it succinctly this way, "Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the group happens to the individual" (Mbiti 1999: 106).

It is imperative to note that like all other ideas, African cultural traditions originate first from individuals within the community before they find themselves in the collective

cultural pool after it has stood the test of time. According to Gyekye, there is no such thing as a collective philosophy of a community since every philosophy of a community comes from an individual (Gyekye 1987: 24). Africans refer to the ancestors as the originators of the traditions of the community, but as far as we are concerned, the ideas of any community are first initiated by an individual before they become collective ideas of that community, or what is described as the culture of that community. It is therefore not surprising that the ancestors, the living-dead, are described as the custodians of the traditions of the community. The individual is, therefore, very much alive and responsible in the African community in much the same way as the community is fully responsible for the formation of the individual.

Kwasi Wiredu emphasizes the individual nature of responsibility within the African community. According to him, within the Akan context - and this applies to all Africans - each person is held responsible for his/her actions. He cites a popular proverb among the Akans, which says that "it is because God dislikes injustice that he gave everyone their own name (thereby forestalling any misattribution of responsibility)" (Wiredu 2002: 289). More importantly, he also adds that corporate punishment by the gods of the society may also occur as a result of the irresponsibility of an individual.

Often the bad action of an individual has an immediate impact on his/her immediate family. That is why each family has a direct responsibility to teach the tenets of the society to their children right from the onset to be responsible to the needs of the community. This means that the responsibility of the individual and the community, it

seems to us, is reciprocal – you gain from the community as you give to the community. Wiredu succinctly puts it this way:

> Along with this clear sense of individual responsibility went an equally strong sense of the social reverberations of an individual's conduct. The primary responsibility for an action, positive or negative, rests with the doer, but a non-trivial secondary responsibility extends to the individual's family and, in some cases, to the environing community (Wiredu 2002: 289).

Like Mbiti, Peter Sarpong emphasizes personal and corporate responsibilities in Akan ethics. Among other things, he observes that in Akan ethics, the things that are inimical to the continued existence of the community are catalogued under taboos (Sarpong 1972: 41). Failure to observe taboos is not so much an offence against another person, but against the gods (*abosom*), the ancestors (*nsamanfoo*) or the Supreme Being (*Nyame*), which warrants corporate punishment, resulting in calamity or illness against the whole community. In order for the community to avoid this, each member of the community acts as a watchdog against flouting the taboos. In his own words, he notes that

> First, the evil consequences of infringement of taboos are said to affect the whole society. When a girl under the physiological age of puberty commits fornication, she is deemed to threaten her society with

pestilences, untimely deaths, droughts or famine. It is therefore of concern to me that every young girl of and in my society should keep the taboo on sex relations. As a good citizen, I have the right and duty to make any girl observe it meticulously whether I know her personally or not (Sarpong 1972: 41).

On the other hand, Sarpong adds that certain sins automatically result in individual punishment among Akan people. For example, a woman who will have an extra-marital affair may have a difficult labor, which may eventually end her life, unless she confesses to the act and reveals the accomplice. The accomplice is also held responsible for the act. Another instance is that when someone insults his father, he is likely to fall sick and eventually die. He can only survive if he confesses to the act and pacifies his father's spirit (Sarpong 1972: 43). This clearly shows that there is individual responsibility also among Africans. But more importantly, the self-image of the person is identified with his/her responsibility towards the community; the more his actions benefit the continued peaceful existence of the community, the more he/she is identified positively with the community, and consequently, his self-identity. The Person whose actions are inimical to the cohesiveness of the community is likely to be banished from the community. Again, Wiredu aptly puts it this way, "Habitual absences or malingering or half-hearted participation marked an individual down as a useless person (*onipa hunu*) or, by an easily deduced Akan equation, a non-person (*onye onipa*)" (2002: 292).[39]

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[39] Cf. Gyekye's explanation of *onye nipa* in the book under consideration. His assertion that personhood can only be partly conferred by the community is implied since other things like the biological inheritance discussed above also play a role in personhood. See pp. 303, 306

In the political scene, Chiefs are the representatives of the ancestors in the African community, hence their office is sacred. Chiefs are also individually held responsible by the ancestors for their moral life, as well as how they take care of the people and the ancestral lands entrusted into their hands, since they are custodians of the stool lands on behalf of the ancestors.

Individual responsibility is also seen in the qualification to the ancestral world. Not everyone who dies within the African community enters into the ancestral world. At the time of death, the individual must have fulfilled certain conditions that make it possible for him/her to enter into the ancestral world. Before one is able to enter into the ancestral world, the basic conditions are that he/she must be an adult, must have attained an old age, and he/she must also have children. The person is also responsible for his moral life, as one must have lived an exemplary life if one is to enter the ancestral world (see Gyekye 2003: 162). He/she must also die a "natural" death. One cannot enter into the ancestral world if one dies through accident or suicide or through an unclean disease such as lunacy, dropsy, leprosy or epilepsy, and when a woman dies at child-birth (Sarpong 2002: 98). It is believed that if someone fails to attain any of the above conditions and dies, he/she will be reborn into the world to re-live his/her life. It is also believed that some ancestors are also reborn into the world to finish something they started but which they could not finish (Mbiti 1999: 160; see Sarpong 2009: 99). According to Sarpong, "… those who cannot get entry into Asamando roam about as ghosts frightening people, until they are born again" (2009: 99). This is the point where,

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like Hinduism, reincarnation comes into play within the African community. It is, therefore the responsibility of the individual to live in such a way that he/she enters into the ancestral world.

It is interesting to note that in the African community, the ancestors are themselves held responsibility for the way they take care of the living and respond to their prayers. Any ancestor who consistently fails to answer the prayers of the people is gradually cut off as he is not mentioned anymore in the prayers of the people. With time, that particular ancestor will "die" from the oral traditions of the people since if their names are not invoked anymore, they will not be known to future generation, and hence their names will not feature in their prayers. Mbiti asserts that in this state, "The living-dead is now a spirit, which enters the state of collective immortality" (1999: 158). The ancestors are therefore not exempted from individually responsible.

The identity of the individual is, therefore, directly proportional to his/her interaction with the community in much the same way as the collective existence of individuals constitute a community. It is therefore erroneous to affirm that in an African community the individual has no say. Extreme individualism, like in the West, is however not a feature of an African community, even though because of globalization, it is gradually rearing its head in the urban communities.

5.2.8 Communalism and the biosphere?

Within the African communalism, the world is seen holistically. This means that for the African, there is an interplay between human beings and the biosphere, and "Total realization of the self is impossible without peaceful co-existence with minerals, plants and animals" (Bujo 2009: 281). Underlying this holistic notion is the fear of death, and therefore the desire to look out for the adversaries of life in order to overcome them. This tension between life and the enemies of life is believed to affect all life on earth. It is therefore important to find a balance between human life and the metaphysical life. As a result of this, Tempels rightly advocates that "The world of forces is like a spider web, of which one single thread cannot be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole netweb" (1956: 60)[40] For the African, the wellbeing of the community could also be achieved when the community identifies with the forces of nature. In other words, the future existence of the community can only be attained if the community is in accord with the whole of life around and within it. Bujo states it more emphatically when he writes that "All beings – organic and inorganic, living and inanimate, personal and impersonal, visible and invisible – act together to manifest the universal solidarity of creation" (2009: 282). The power that holds all these forces together is the Supreme Being, who is the only one who has power to overcome death. A member of the community can only survive death or remain healthy if that person lives in unity with the world around him/her (2009: 284). The community is therefore seen as a microcosm within the macrocosm of nature, which includes the forest, animals and even herbs. It is

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[40] This is taken from Bujo 2009: 282.

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further believed that human existence could easily break down if the biosphere is neglected.

According to the Zimbabwean Shona concept of Ukama, "a person can only be a person, in, with and through not just other people but also in, with and through the natural environment" (Murove 1999: 10ff. See Prozesky 2009: 302). This is also referred to as the ethic of Ukama, which is holistic in nature. Ukama has to do with interrelatedness among humans and humans with the biosphere (Murove 2009: 316). So the ethic of Ukama widens the explanation of communalism in which a person is defined in his/her relationship with other persons; in the ethic of Ukama there is a horizontal relationship not only with other human beings, but also with the biosphere. This means that the biosphere is also highly respected in the African communalism. In the context of the ethic of Ukama, Murove rightly suggests that

> Distrusting contemporary western ethics, which has failed to halt pollution
> in technologically advanced countries, Africa yet possesses in its own
> traditional culture the roots of an ethical paradigm to solve the current
> environmental crisis. This is an ethics of interdependence of individuals
> within the larger society to which they belong and to the environment on
> which they all depend. This ethics is based on the concept of Ukama and
> Ubuntu (Murove 2009: 315).[41]

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[41] The concept of Ubuntu will be explained in the next section.

The Evu-Mana myth, narrated by Mveng, is a classic example of the interrelatedness of humanity and the biosphere, and as such the need to maintain the balance so that the future of the world would not be at risk. We will narrate it in the words of Bujo as follows:

At the center is the power of evil, symbolised by a woman unable to catch any fish while out fishing. She finds instead a dead antelope on whose meat she feeds herself and her family. Several times she finds such a beast, dead and in exactly the same place. On each occasion she takes meat home until, one day, she meets a terrible monster who tells her that it is he who is killing all the animals. In great excitement, the woman invites the monster home hoping to learn from him the ability to control nature. The monster asks whether there is enough food in the village and then enters the woman's womb. Hardly do they reach the woman's house before the monster starts complaining that he is hungry. His appetite is only satisfied by living beings. On hearing this, the woman offers her husband's herd. After every animal in the herd is eaten, the monster starts on the chickens, dogs and cats. When these are consumed, it is the people's turn, including the woman's husband. Finally, the woman herself becomes victim to the monster, destroying with her the last symbol of life on earth (Bujo 2009: 285).

From the African perspective, the myth above teaches that when humanity tries to be greedy, he/she will eventually end up destroying not only himself/herself, but the whole cosmos as well. The monster, in the modern context may be the nuclear weapons which we create to destroy others, but which eventually will end up destroying ourselves and

the whole of humanity as well. Bujo ends by asserting that "Insatiable hunger for possessions, and the uncontrollable wish to dominate creation, can lead to technology without culture" (2009: 285-6).

African communalism, when applied to the debate on the ethics of responsibility for the technological world, affirms that if humanity is able to live responsibly with one another, and in harmony with nature, then the future existence of humanity and the biosphere could be safely guarded if humanity lives in harmony with one another and the biosphere.

5.2.9   Ubuntu in communalism

Here, we will look at the meaning of African ethics in the context of the concept of *Ubuntu*. This will then set the stage for a discussion on the ethics of responsibility in the African context. So the question is, 'what is African ethics in the context of the concept of *Ubuntu*?' What should be the distinctive features of an *Ubuntu* ethics of responsibility?

According to Richardson, what defines *Ubuntu* among Africans is the mutual caring and sharing. In other words, *Ubuntu* is one's responsibility of caring, sharing and service to the *other*, where the *other,* as mentioned earlier refers to your fellow human beings, as well as the gods, ancestors and God. Ubuntu, according to him, is a descriptive term for caring and sharing. Even though it is difficult to precisely define *Ubuntu* in Western language, he is of the opinion that "humaneness", "compassion", and "fellow-feeling"

explains what *Ubuntu* means (1998:45; see Nussbaum 2009: 100; cf. Ramose 2009: 308). *Ubuntu ethics of responsibility could therefore refer to the selfless caring for another person without expecting a reward; an altruistic kind of sharing*. Richardson gives an example of *Ubuntu* as the selfless way by which people retain and care for the handicapped and the elderly among Africans without sending them to institutions to be cared for.[42] The selfless way with which strangers were welcomed and cared for is also an example of *Ubuntu* ethics of responsibility; in this context, it is also the responsibility one has towards strangers.

According to Buntu Mfenyana, a socio-linguist who researched into the meaning of *Isinto*, to understand *Ubuntu*, one should separate its two prefixes and suffixes and concentrate on the root word *utu*. *Utu*, he reveals, is the name for "an ancestor who got human society going. He gave us our way of life as *human beings*" (Mfenyana 1986: 18, in Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009: 64). *Ubuntu*, therefore, refers to "an internal state of being or the very essence of being human" (Chinkanda 1994: 1, in Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009: 64). This means that we are ontologically *Ubuntu*. At the heart of Ubuntu is also tolerance, compassion and forgiveness (see Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009: 72). Consequently, the main features of an Ubuntu ethics of responsibility include caring, sharing, selflessness, tolerance, compassion and forgiveness.

In his article, *The ethics of Ubuntu*, Mogobe Ramose goes further to explain the inner meaning of *Ubuntu*. According to him, "*ubuntu* evokes the idea of *be-ing* in

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[42] This is not to say that sending the elderly to institutions hasn't got its benefits too.

general" (Ramose 1996: 324). For him, "to be is to be in a condition of –*ness*" (Ramose 1996: 324). Like Heraclitus, he emphasizes that everything, including human nature, is in the state of flux, towards whole-*ness*. He further notes that this is in line with the philosophic view that *motion is the principle of be-ing*. This means that the moral nature of human beings, and for that matter Africans, is dynamic in nature. Applied to morality and to what he states as *ubu-untu*, it means that humanity is supposed to daily grow into perfection. He explains that *ubu-*, which is the prefix of *-ntu*, stands for the unfolding nature of *be-ing* in general, and *–ntu*, which is the essence of *be-ing*, is the source from which *ubu-* evolves. According to him, *ubu-,* the prefix, is ontological in nature, and *–ntu,* the stem, is epistemological in character. But he goes on to stress that they form an indivisible whole, the two coming together to give the true picture of *Ubuntu*. This means that it is the function of the *–ntu* to feed the *–ubu*, the being, with knowledge. And within *Ubuntu* it is a special kind of knowledge – a daily growth towards perfecting, sharing and caring in *being*. This resonates with Augustine Shutte's[43] observation that "Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So although the goal is personal fulfillment, selfishness is excluded" (Shutte 2001:30, in Metz & Gaie 2010: 275; cf. Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009: 65; see Sebidi 1988: 4).

Ramose notes that *Ubuntu* is "linked epistemologically to *umuntu*," *umuntu* representing "the be-ing which renders the coincidence between ontology and epistemology meaningful" (2002: 325). *Umuntu* "is an activity rather than an act," he clarifies. Through

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[43] According to Metz and Gaie, Shutte is 'one of the first professional philosophers to seriously engage with Ubunto/Botho (2010:275). I noted this here because it is of historical importance.

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the faculty of consciousness or self-awareness, *umuntu* releases the speech of being and, pursues its rationality by means of dialogue of be-ing with being" (2002: 324-325). This means that in the act of *Ubuntu*, a person experiences his/her true nature, but ironically, that true nature is a *be-ing* that is in flux towards perfection, the enabler being *umuntu*. This means that *umuntu*, like the Holy Spirit in Christian theology, is acting as the 'one' who enables *being* to practice *Ubuntu*. It is that which moves *being* into action to attain the *summum bonum* of *Ubuntu*. "Whatever is perceived as a whole is always a whole-ness in the sense that it ex-ists and per-sists towards that which it is yet to be," Ramose explains (2002: 324; cf. Prozesky 2009: 306). He indicates that *umuntu* is an ongoing process which is unstoppable until motion itself stops. Link to the explanation of Richardson above, it means that Africans, and for that matter humanity, are continually growing in compassion, fellow-feeling, sharing and caring, to mention a few. This resonates with the Christian assertion that the more believers pray, read God's Word and eschew sin, the more they grow into perfection (cf. Mat. 5:43). The 'one' that enables the continued growth of compassion, fellow-feeling, sharing and caring in being is *umuntu*. So the ultimate essence of *ubu-ntu* is *umuntu*, rendering *ubu-ntu* active. It means that at the heart of every human be-ing is the activity of the *umuntu*, making it possible for every individual to show *Ubuntu* towards each other. Humanity is, therefore, intrinsically a responsive *being*. It is in this sense that when one's actions are inimical to society that he/she is regarded as non-human. The foregoing implies that *Ubuntu* ethics of responsibility is a process whereby humans, and for that matter Africans, have the responsibility to daily practice caring, sharing, selflessness, compassion, and forgiveness as they try to live their day to day lives.

For Desmond Tutu, *Ubuntu* is at the very heart of human essence. He notes that "When we want to give high praise to someone we say, '*Yu, u nobuntu'*; 'Hey, he or she has *ubuntu*.' This means they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate" (Tutu 1999: 34). He further notes, like Ramose, that *Ubuntu* means caring, and has the tendency of joining two people in selfless love for each other. This means that it is in the spirit of *Ubuntu* that one gains his/her identity. In Desmond Tutu's words, "We say, 'a person is a person through other people'. It is not 'I think therefore I am'. It says rather: 'I am human because I belong'" (Tutu 1999: 35).

Desmond Tutu, however, stresses that *Ubuntu* is not something that is easy to practice even though it is very important for the survival of any society. In his own words: "honoring *Ubuntu* is clearly not a mechanical, automatic and inevitable process …" (Tutu 1999: 36). But those who live individualist and selfish lives in the community are often described as *Adanabuntu* (lacking *ubuntu*) or *akangomntu, ha se motho*, meaning, not a person, not human (see Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009: 71). It is important to note that in much the same way that one grows in *Ubuntu* by practicing it, one could lose *Ubuntu* by living a continual selfish and individualistic life (see Sebidi 1988: 4, in Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009: 71). *Ubuntu*, therefore is a normative ethics; it takes a conscious effort to be able to live the *Ubuntu* life.

But as Desmond Tutu indicates above, it is difficult to practice *Ubuntu*. The good news is that as difficult as it may be in practicing *Ubuntu*, some people have given us very

good examples to emulate. For instance, in South Africa, Nelson Mandela practiced *Ubuntu* when he refused to 'pounce' on the whites after being released from prison and eventually becoming the president of the nation. Out of a retaliatory spirit, he could have turned his country into a blood bath (see Nussbaum 2009: 105). *Ubuntu* was also exercised when Jomo Kenyatta and his Mau Mau took over the running of Kenya after independence. He also exercised decorum (*Ubuntu*) in a situation that, at his whims and caprices, could have turned violent towards the whites. The death of Christ on the cross for humanity is also an *Ubuntu* at its best. There are millions of people practicing *ubuntu* in the public and in silence all over the world. One of the main features of an African ethics of responsibility is, therefore, the concept of Ubuntu. At the heart of an African ethics of responsibility are caring, sharing, selflessness and service to others.

Concerning *altruism*, which for us is at the heart of *Ubuntu* ethics of responsibility, Morrison and Severino, following Darwin's theory of evolution, which sees creation as continually taking place, set out to investigate the origin, development and meaning of altruism, which, like Ramose, they regard as the goal of human evolution towards becoming "fully human." Their main aim is to explain altruism so that others may live that way to save our world from destruction (Morrison and Soverino 2007: 37). They trace the first use of the word "altruism", which is a Latin word, *alter*, meaning, *other*, to Auguste Comte in the 1930s, and demonstrate, like Ubuntu, that the development of altruism starts right from our infancy. According to them, the phase of human evolution in which we now find ourselves is called "human" and that we are daily evolving into a future phase where we will be "fully human" (Morrison and Soverino 2007: 25). They

define altruism "as a regard for or devotion to the interest of others with whom we are interrelated" (Morrison and Soverino 2007: 25, 34). This rhymes with the caring and sharing at the heart of Ubuntu ethics of responsibility. When we have an altruistic nature, we see ourselves and others as interrelated, they explain. But when we have an egoistic and nepotistic nature, we regard others separate from us and, therefore, we believe that we are not affected by the consequences of our actions on others (Morrison and Soverino 2007: 34). In their conclusion, they, like Hans Jonas, Schweiker and others, affirm that

> Perhaps the most powerful implication of our conceptualization of altruism is that each person can change his physiological, and his spiritual aspects to become more altruistic. Becoming more altruistic individually affects others. This is particularly relevant today, as an incredibly violent twentieth century ends and we face the invention and diffusion of increasingly effective (and increasing long-distance) means of mass destruction (Morrison and Soverino 2007: 37).

As one may have been realized, their explanation on the development of altruism among humans rhymes with the explanation given by Ramose on the nature of *Ubuntu*. We agree with the analysis Ramose made since that immediately takes human fallibility into consideration. His analysis means that no one is perfect, and that as far as *Ubuntu* ethics of responsibility is concerned, each of us is working towards perfecting *Ubuntu* in our lives with the aid of *umuntu*. It is important to note here that the African culture of

seeing the elder or the old person as the embodiment of wisdom stems from this communalistic believe about the progressive growth of wisdom in *Ubuntu* as one grows from childhood into adulthood. This is affirmed by Ifeanyi Menkiti's observation in the Igbo proverb that "'What an old man sees sitting down, a young man cannot see standing up.'" But this is not to say that every elder or old person within the African community is invested with wisdom; experience does not give us the right to make such a sweeping statement, and the fact that not everyone qualifies for the ancestral world is also an affirmation to that fact. Augustine Shutte emphasizes the progressive nature of Ubuntu in the following words:

> The goal of morality according to this ethical vision is fullness of humanity; the moral life is seen as a process of personal growth. And just as participation in community with others is the essential means to personal growth, so participation in community with others is the motive and fulfillment of the process. Everything that promotes personal growth and participation in community is good, everything that prevents it is bad (Shutte 2001: 30, in Prozesky 2009: 9).

From the above discussion, it could be concluded that *Ubuntu* ethics of responsibility is more prospective in nature, and like the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant, it also has the tendency to take care of the day-to-day ethical responsibility of humans. The African imperative of responsibility could therefore be stated as: *In order to protect the future existence of life on earth caring, sharing and service should be our goal in all our*

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interactions with humanity and the biosphere. Sharing, selflessness, service and caring in all our interactions with humanity and the biosphere contribute to the meaning of responsibility in the African context. This means that the activity of sharing and caring in a social setting are one of the core features in an African theory of responsibility. The concept of Ubuntu is one of the ways by which Africa can contribute to the release of modern humanity from materialism, individualism and nihilism.

5.3　Is African ethics of responsibility adequate for a future-oriented ethics?

Based on our discussions on the nature and characteristics of African communalism above, we now want to make some analysis of the above discussions in the context of the debate on the ethics of responsibility for the technological world as described by Hans Jonas, and to explain whether or not African ethics of responsibility is adequate for a future-oriented ethics. What contribution is African communalism bringing to the debate about the ethics of responsibility for the technological world?

According to Jonas, any ethics that is retrospective in nature and looks at human relations in the here and now is not qualified for a future-oriented or prospective type of ethics. A future-oriented ethics of responsibility should be prospective in nature and must aim at preserving the future existence of humanity and the biosphere. Jonas's worry is that if care is not taken, with the growing power of humanity over nature as a result of the advance of science and technology, humanity may end up annihilating the world and, hence, the future existence of humanity. The focus of his ethics is that there should be human beings in the future. As Mazrui et al. put it, "Present commitment to

ethical living arises from the urge to contribute positively to generations to come. Virtuous deeds done with sensitivity to the well-being of future generations will promote the survival of Ukama in the future" (1999: 11; Gelfand 1973: 57, in Murove 2009: 321). President Sarkozy of France said it all when he asserts that

I have come to tell you that you don't have to be ashamed of the values of African civilization, that they do not drag you down but elevate you, that they are an antidote to the materialism and the individualism that enslave modern man, that they are the most precious of legacies against the dehumanization and the 'uniformisation' of the world of today."[44]

How can Ubuntu ethics of responsibility support a positive use of technological instruments within African communities? As Prozesky confirms,

The principle of Ubuntu, expressed through the values of respect and vital force, meets this requirement. It would give global ethics an ontological underpinning, in the form of the principle of universal relatedness, that grounds the central ethical values found in all value systems, namely beneficence – active concern for the good of others – and integrity" (Prozesky 2007: 131, in Prozesky 2009: 12; cf. Shutte 2009: 98-99; see Nussbaum 2009: 109; see also Bujo 2009: 292).

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[44] This is part of a speech given by President Nicolas Sarkozy of France when he visited Senegal 2007. The speech could be read from www.africaresource.com/index.php?...Itemid=346

Mogobe Ramose also emphasizes the same sentiments when he writes,

> Technological advancement continues to reaffirm the need to restore *Ubuntu* because, more than ever before, humanity is faced with the threat of catastrophic ecological disaster. This is exemplified by widespread air pollution, climate change, the destruction of the ozone layer and the ever-constant threat of nuclear homicide. *Botho* can make a significant contribution to the quest for universal peace now threatened by nuclear war, however remote such a war may seem (2009: 313; cf. Murove 2009: 330).

The relationship between science and technology is such that whereas science produces time-tested data about reality, technology applies or uses the data produced by science for practical purposes (see Gyekye 1995: 128; cf. Mosley 2000: 25). In simple terms, science produces the knowledge which technology uses for the benefit of humanity. The advancement of technology poses danger to the future existence of humanity when technology is misapplied, even in Africa. Within the African community, for instance, cutlass is a very good farm instrument, but when wrongly used, the same cutlass could be very deadly. We can recollect what happened in Sierra Leone in recent history when cutlasses and other technological instruments were used to amputate the hands of innocent civilians. So Jonas's warning is timely. Ramose is similarly concerned when he asserts that

Technological advancement continues to reaffirm the need to restore Ubuntu because, more than ever before, humanity is faced with the treat of catastrophic ecological disaster. This is exemplified by widespread air pollution, climate change, the destruction of the ozone layer and the ever constant threat of nuclear homicide (Ramose 2009: 312).

If Ubuntu ethics of responsibility is faithfully applied, it will enable the one who possesses the cutlass or the gun to use them for the benefit of humanity. In other words, Ubuntu ethics of responsibility calls on humanity to care for and share what we possess for the benefit of others. At the heart of Ubuntu ethics of responsibility is service to humanity. As Gyekye rightly puts it,

"In considering technology's aim of fulfilling the material needs of humans, the pursuit of the humanist and social ethic of the traditional African society can be of considerable relevance because of the impact this ethic can have on the distributive patterns in respect of the economic goods that will result from the application of technology: in this way, extensive and genuine social – and in the sequel, political – transformation of the African society can be ensured, and the maximum impact of technology on society achieved" (1995: 141).

The values that promote the well-being of the community are regarded as the highest good, the *summum bonum*, of the society. Some of these values, according to Gyekye,

are kindness, compassion, generosity, hospitality, faithfulness, truthfulness, concern for others, and the action that brings peace, justice, dignity, respect, and happiness (Gyekye 1996: 58). It is important to note here that Hans Jonas will refer to this kind of ethical relationship as something that takes place in the here and now, and therefore, not qualified to be a prospective ethics of responsibility. But it is interesting to note that what Jonas formulates as the maxim of his ethical imperative – *Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life*; or expressed negatively: *Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life* (Jonas 1984: 11) – may as well apply to the African moral situation. This is because when you look at some of the examples of the values that are upheld by the African community, like for example, compassion, concern for others, caring and sharing, upholding of human dignity and justice, one has no qualms but to conclude that in addition to being retrospective in nature, African morality is also prospectively incline.

According to Bujo, the Western idea that you can act responsibly only if you use your rational capabilities (*cogito ergo sum* – "I think, therefore I am") is not African, and that within the African community, the existential *cognatus sum*, *ergo sumus* – "I am known, therefore we are" – applies. This is because, according to him, African morality aims at providing laws and taboos with the sole aim of preventing the extinction of the community. And this idea, though it is limited to the continued existence of a particular community and not the world as a whole, is, to some extent, in tune with Hans Jonas

and William Schweiker's idea that we should live in such a way that there will be humans in the future.

5.4   An African theory of responsibility.

Here, we will attempt a formulation of an African theory of responsibility. This will be done by looking at the theories of responsibility and deciding which of them fits into the concept of communalism in Africa. The blame syndrome in African society will also be discussed here in the context of the recent remark made by Sarkozy, the former president of France.

5.4.1 Responsibility and the African social practice of blame and praise

The question is: Why is Africans not taking control of their destiny after colonialism has come and gone? Why are Africans still blaming colonialism for her problems? Has it got to do with the African blame syndrome? How can Africans move forward and take responsibility for the poverty, the selfish leadership, civil wars and the bribery and corruption that has bedeviled the continent?

Because the theories of responsibility have been discussed fully in Chapter three of this thesis, we will only give a brief summary of what they are in this section. According to Schweiker, there are three main theories of responsibility. These are agential theory of responsibility, dialogical theory of responsibility and social theory of responsibility. Agential theory of responsibility concentrates on an agent as the source of responsibility. It is referred to as the agent/act responsibility. This emphasizes the

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accountability of the agent (Schweiker 1995: 65). The dialogical ethics of responsibility, on the other hand, centers on an agent and his/her response to some o*ther*, who could be a human being or the divine. It identifies the identity of a person in his/her response to the world, others and to God. The dialogical theory is referred to as the self/other theory of responsibility because it centers ethical reflection on the observable fact of answering. The social theory of responsibility, however, dwells on the social observance of praise and blame. This means that an agent is ultimately held responsible for the roles and social positions he/she holds. According to Schweiker, "social theories of responsibility focus on social roles, vocations, stations, and thus communal unity (1995: 92). According to Smiley, the practice of praise and blame, which is tantamount to taking responsibility for our actions, is important for social roles. Whereas Levinas and others took their source of responsibility from the *other*, and Kant from *reason*, the social theorists subscribe to the idea that the source of our responsibility is from social practices of praise and blame. In other words, it is when we take responsibility for our praiseworthiness or blameworthiness with regards to our actions in society that we gain our identity. Smiley notes it succinctly this way, "blaming as a practice is necessary to the construction by individuals of a relationship between them and the external world, a relationship which partly defines, and in turn helps to maintain, their personal integrity" (Fischer & Ravizza: 172).

From all that has been discussed on African communalism, we can conclude that the social theory of responsibility correlates more with the African situation. The social aspect of communalism and the African ethics of responsibility in the context of *Ubuntu*

have been explained in the two sections above, and needs not be over emphasized, but it is expedient to note that Gyekye distinguishes between two types of evil in Akan community, which are significant for *an African social theory of responsibility*. These are *bōne* and *musuo*. *Bone*, which is the usual Akan word for evil, refers to what he calls, the "ordinary evil" in the community. These are, for example, theft, adultery, lying, backbiting, and so on. *Musuo*, on the other hand, refers to the "extraordinary" evil in the community, which mainly results in corporate punishment from God or the spirits. Musuo comes under the purview of taboos. In the words of Gyekye,

> *musuo* is generally considered to be a great, extraordinary moral evil; it is viewed by the community with particular abhorrence and revulsion because its commission is believed not only to bring shame to the whole community, but also, in the minds of many ordinary people, to invite the wrath of the supernatural powers (1987: 133).

Gyekye gives examples of *musuo* as suicide, incest, having sexual intercourse in the bush, rape, murder, stealing things dedicated to the deities or ancestral spirits, etc. (1987: 133). The idea of *musuo* as a corporate punishment is so significant to our study because, to some extent, *musuo* could be equated to the dangers that the advancement of technology poses to the future existence of the world as a whole. For the African, *musuo*, if not checked, could result in the annihilation of the whole community by the gods and ancestors. This means that the examples of *musuo*, which spells doom for the community, commensurate with the idea of the atomic bomb, for instance, which is also

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a source of danger for the continued existence of humanity. In fact, taboos within the African social system are other sources of praise and blame. Because no family or individual wants to be associated with the breaking of a taboo and its resultant disgrace for the family, most people within the community stay clear of any taboo.

The *fear of public disgrace* in the African community acts as an impetus for acting morally among Africans, and brings to the fore the practice of praise and blame in the social theory of responsibility. One could be praised in the community if one upholds the social norms of the community with alacrity. Anyone who commits an act of *musuo* endangers not only his own life, but that of his family as well. As Gyekye rightly notes, "The fear or thought of shame or disgrace, of loss of social esteem and opportunity, and so on, constitutes a real influence on moral conduct *among Africans*, and as such can be regarded as a kind of sanction, if an obscure one" (Gyekye 1987: 141, italics mine). John Taylor also makes the same observation about Africans when he notes that, "to some extent the primal world-view of Africans belongs to a 'shame-culture' rather than a 'guilt culture', and goes on to allude to the fact that E. R. Dodds' observation about the earliest Greek states, could easily be applied to the Batutsi of Rwanda or the Lughara in the following words:

> Homeric man's highest good is not the enjoyment of a quiet conscience but the enjoyment of time, public esteem…. And the strongest moral force which Homeric man knows is not the fear of God but respect for public opinion…. In such a society anything which exposes a man to the

contempt or ridicule of his fellows, which causes him to 'lose face', is felt

as unbearable (Taylor 2001: 119, in Dodds 1951: 17-18).

So the fear of public disgrace is a motivation for upholding personal responsibility. As mentioned above, when an African loses public face, it is also an indictment on his family and extended family as well. Jonas's argument that the first foundational useful phrase for the ethics of responsibility is "the heuristic of fear," which is the fear that encourages humanity to see the dignity of other human beings, and therefore, leads them to act ethically for the future wellbeing and existence of mankind (Jonas: 26), rhymes with this African situation too.   Thus, African ethics of responsibility finds expression in the *social theory* of responsibility.

 Another cultural practice that explains the African social theory of responsibility is the belief that nothing happens by chance in the community. When there is, for instance, death or calamity or famine in the community, the responsibility is laid at the door-step of either the gods or the ancestors or even an individual or a group of people. Even when someone is not doing well in his/her work, which at times may be his/her own fault, the blame is laid either at the door-step of the gods and ancestors or on witches. At all cost, someone must be blamed for the calamity of another person. When a hut collapses in a community, the gods will surely be blamed for it. When, on the other hand, the house of a Westerner collapses, he/she finds the fault in a structural weakness of the building and not in any supernatural realm. When the gods or the ancestors are blamed for a calamity, it means that a member of the community or the

community as a whole has angered the gods or the ancestors, either by ignoring their wishes or living immorally or breaking a taboo, etc. In this situation, it is the responsibility of the people to perform the appropriate ritual to pacify the gods and ancestors. Mbiti puts it more concisely when he writes about the shifting of responsibility in the African community in the following way:

> Every form of pain, misfortune, sorrow or suffering; every illness and sickness; every death whether of an old man or of the infant child; every failure of the crop in the fields, of hunting in the wilderness of fishing in the waters; every bad omen or dream: these and all the other manifestations of evil that man experiences are blamed on somebody in the corporate society. Natural explanations may indeed be found, but mystical explanations must also be given. People create scapegoats for their sorrows (Mbiti 1999: 204).

This social practice of blame and praise in the African society may be one of the reasons why Africans continue to blame colonialism for the poverty of the continent when Africa should be looking at the problems of her economic underdevelopment and take responsibility for them. Addressing students at Dakar's Cheikh Anta Diop University in Senegal as part of a tour of some of France's former African colonies on July 26, 2007, President Nicolas Sarkozy of France criticizes Africans for blaming colonialism for their economic underdevelopment and urges them to take full responsibility for their

economic woes.[45] According to him, Africa's problems lie in her inability to enter into history to "take from it the energy, the force, the desire, the willingness to listen and to espouse its own history, and to "learn to view its accession to the universal not as a denial of what it is but as an accomplishment", and to "appropriate for itself human rights, democracy, liberty, equality and justice … modern science and technology as the product of all human intelligence."

He further notes that Africa's 'tragedy' stems from the fact that "it has not been enough a part of history" and that Africans "should stop repeating endlessly the same words and gestures." Without mincing words, he argues that "Africa is partly responsible for its own misfortune," and warns that Africa should "become conscious that the Golden Age they are regretting will not come back because it has never existed." Though he tries to balance his speech by admitting that the slave trade, "was not only crime against the Africans," but "it was a crime against all of humanity," coupled with the negative aspects of colonization, and the past mistakes of France in her relationship with Africa, he nonetheless emphasizes that the reasons for Africa's woes lies in the bloody wars between Africans, the genocides, the dictatorships, the fanaticism, the corruption, the prevarication, the waste and the pollution. He concedes that

> The colonizer came, he took, he helped himself, he exploited. He pillaged
> resources and wealth that did not belong to him. He stripped the colonized
> of his personality, of his liberty, of his land, of the fruit of his labour.

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[45] The text of his speech could be found in www.africaresource.com/index.php?...Itemid=346

Nevertheless, he also argues that

> The colonizer took, but … he also gave. He built bridges, roads, hospitals, dispensaries and schools. He turned virgin soil fertile. He gave his effort, his work, his know-how… The Muslim civilization, Christianity and colonization, beyond the crimes and mistakes that were committed in their name and that are not excusable, have opened the African heart and mentality to the universal and to history.

After insisting that the colonizers also gave a lot to Africa, he urges Africa to avoid "self-hate" and respect their own "heritage" from Europe, which is an important part of their own history. He is of the view that Africans must take responsibility for their destiny; they must look into the future rather than looking back and always using the past to justify the present. This, according to him, is a cyclical behavior which must be broken if Africans want to break away from their present predicament. So Sarkozy hit the nail on the head when he repeatedly referred to the blame syndrome of Africans as one most important obstacle to the development of Africa. Akintujoye states the problem more clearly:

> The employed blame their bosses for lack of results and non-performance, blame colleagues for conspiracy and corruption, and quickly justify Mr. X's promotion to be a result of his relationship with the MD. The dismissed

blame their extended family for spiritual curses, or friends for jealousy, some even their mothers for witchcraft!... and run to religious houses, some of whom tell the truth, but most of whom leverage on our cultural psyco-pathology to rip citizens off and feed fat and play to the gallery with baseless theories of spiritual interference! (2011: 1).

Even though within the social theory of responsibility the practice of blame is the means by which society assigns responsibility to the individual or to a group of people, it seems to have gone overboard within the African society. If Africans, in this day and age, therefore could move away from the culture of blame and take responsibility for the future development of the continent, much could be achieved. The picture below says it all.[46]

It is about time Africans stop blaming others, take the bull by the horn and work seriously towards the economic growth of the continent for the betterment of the lot of the people. The question is: How can Africans break away from this blame syndrome

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[46] Source: http://www.aiesecnigeria.org/2011/01/the-blame-syndrome-lessons-from-aiesec/

and take their destiny in their hands? Some of the reasons why Africa remains poor are civil wars, bribery and corruption, dictatorship, coup de tats, and the inability to think for oneself. Brain drain is another area that is costing Africa a lot. This is because, after huge sums of money from the scarce resources of Africa has been used to train skilled workers, they travel abroad to use their skills and expertise to serve Western countries instead of using their expertise for the development of the continent. Of course, there is a sense in which colonialism and slavery contribute to the underdevelopment of Africa, but that is in the past and Africans must learn from the past in order to move forward.

The first action that Africans must take is to stop blaming our parents, extended families, colonialism, etc. and begin to look seriously at what is wrong with us or what went wrong. Instead of looking critically at what went wrong and try to acquire the needed skills and competence, most Africans tend to complain forever. For instance, instead of complaining that one didn't have the chance to go to school, steps must rather be taken to educate oneself; as we often say, education knows no age boundary. Again, instead of complaining about what the colonial powers syphoned away, Africans must seek after more natural resources – which is in abundance - and use them to develop the continent. If Africans will develop, we must put aside selfishness, where one leader steals millions of dollars from the national pot, something that belongs to the corporate body, and sends them into a foreign account for himself and his family alone! Such leaders do not care about the plight of the poor in the society. A typical example is Sani Abacha of Nigeria: when he died, it was discovered that he had stolen millions of dollars

from Nigeria and saved them in foreign banks. Ironically, it is these same leaders who publicly blame colonialism for Africa's plight.

If African will develop, it is important also that governments must use the resources of their countries to create opportunities necessary for the citizens to explore and develop themselves for a better future. African countries are also bedeviled with dictatorship governments, instead of democratic governments. Democracy, it is believed, go hand in hand with development, and where democracy is lacking in a country, the process of economic growth is likely to slow down. So instead of Africans blaming others for their woes, they must look at the many problems that the continent is facing to solve them for the betterment of the continent.

5.4.2 African concept of time and its implications for responsibility

The argument put forward on the African concept of time by John Mbiti and the counter argument by Gyekye will be briefly discussed here. In the end we will look at how the African concept of time affects responsibility and attitude to life.

Mbiti describes the African concept of time as a two-dimensional phenomenon. According to him, whereas the Western linear concept of time involves an indefinite past, a present time and an infinite future, the African concept of time only dwells on the long past (Zamani) and the present (Sasa). According to him, Zamani and the Sasa, which are Swahili words, overlap. Concerning the future, he is of the view that African concept of time do not go beyond two years; Africans are mainly interested in seasons

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within the year, and they name the seasons according to the agricultural, cattle or farming year. Whereas in the West "time is a commodity which must be utilized, sold and bought…," in traditional Africa, "time has to be created or produced" (1989: 19). So as far as Mbiti is concerned, for the African, time is not an abstract entity as could be found in Western thought. This means that time is not an academic exercise for the African. Time is measured in seasons and events. According to Mbiti, "For the Akamba, Time is not an academic concern; it is simply a composition of events that have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which will immediately occur" (Mbiti 1971: 24).

Gyekye (1987: 169-177) refutes the above assertion of Mbiti about African time, arguing that the fact that in two East African languages, Gikuyu and Kikamba, time is limited to Zamani and Sasa does not mean that it is the same for all Africa. He insists, by drawing from the language, proverbs, folklore, dirges and maxims of the Akan people that time in Akan thought is akin to the Western linear concept of past, present and future. According to him, the Akan word *bere* (time) expresses both the abstract and concrete concept of time. The Akan proverb, "Time is like a bird: if you do not catch it and it flies, you do not see it again," the maxim "Time changes" (*bere di adannan*), the saying "wo bedi hen (daakye)", that is "You will be a king (in the future)," - to mention a few - all point to the fact that the Akan has a concept of time that points to the past, the present, as well as the future.

Gyekye's argument that the concept of time cannot be generalized for all Africa is valid, but it is our opinion that Mbiti's argument holds for most Africans. It is important to note

that Evans-Pritchard says almost the same thing about the Nuer people of Southern Sudan. According to him, the Nuer has no expression for time in their language. Time is only measured in the relationship between activities (1940: 100). Because they are cattle rearers, time is measured by the activities surrounding the cattle. The same goes for the Logbara of north-western Uganda and north-eastern Zaire who also measure time in terms of events (see Booth 1975: 83-84). Among the Gă people of Accra, apart from also measuring time by events, time is also measured by looking at the position of the sun, and also at times by looking at the position of one's shadow. The closer the shadow is to you, the closer it is to mid-day. At mid-day, the sun comes on top of the person so the shadow is hardly seen. When the Găs decided to name the months of the year, March is named *Otsokrikri*, meaning an intense light. This refers to the intense light of the sun during March. April is named *Abeibe*, meaning time for butterfly. This is because it is the season when a lot of butterflies are seen. The word for time, *be* in Gă, can only be interpreted as an event or a period of time, as in *nugbo* be (time for rain or rainy season), *dole be* (hot season), *homowo be* (period for the Homowo Festival), etc. This means that the Gă people also use events to measure time. For most Africans, therefore, there is no specific time as in Western chronology. Time is to be found in events or periods. What then are the implications for this concept of time for responsibility in Africa?

The concept of time in the African community affects the African's attitude to time in the cities where the precise Western conception of time has been borrowed by the African city dwellers. This is because, when you observe the African city dweller's attitude to time, you realize that they still have no sense of the exactness of time. When, for

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instance, they say they will meet you at 2pm, they mean that they will meet you in the afternoon, and not necessarily 2.00pm. This is happening in this day and age, not only to normal city dwellers, but to the politicians as well. In other words, lateness with regard to meetings and appointments by the African may be intrinsically cultural. Because of this, there is what is called "African time," which refers to the ability not to be punctual. In fact, most Africans of today, whether in North America or in Europe or in African can be described as notoriously late-comers. The "African time" in this globalized world is prevalent in Africa and places where Africans are populated, whether in Europe or in North America. This means that because of the African concept of time, they have no sense of responsibility towards precise time. Time and again, African workers abroad, and in some occasions in Africa itself, have had their employment terminated because of their attitude to time. This is still happening in this globalized world because most Africans still have a "hang-over" of the African cultural time consciousness. Responsibility, in my opinion, entails that when you agree to work for a certain period of time, you have to do exactly that, unless you have the permission to do otherwise. Responsibility calls for fairness, whether in Africa or any part of the world. When we say that the Ubuntu ethics of responsibility calls for us to share with and care for our neighbours, it means also that when we make promises or contracts, we have to obey them to the letter.

From the discussions above on African communalism, what would be Africa's contribution to the debate on the ethics of responsibility for the technological age? Africa's contribution could center on the formulation of a global ethics of responsibility for the technological age grounded on African communalism.

5.5 A global ethics of responsibility for the technological age grounded on African communal ethics

Africa's contribution to the debate on the ethics of responsibility for the technological age will involve developing a global African ethics of responsibility that will address the problem outlined by Hans Jonas with regard to the threat the advance of technology poses for the future existence of humanity and the biosphere. Since the 1970s it has become evident that the effect of science and technology on humanity and the environment has made it necessary to come out with an ethics that is global in nature to guide and protect the use of technology so that it will serve humanity in a positive way, and make the existence of humanity in the future a reality. However, Apel has made it clear that because of the cultural orientation of existing ethics, it becomes very difficult, but not impossible to come out with a universal ethics (see Apel 1987: 199-212). Nonetheless, we think that it is possible to come out with a global ethics of responsibility from the African cultural perspective which even though will be culture-oriented, will still contribute to the proper use of technology worldwide. But Verhoef and Michel are of the view that if we are to come out with a model of universal ethics from the African perspective, then we must choose African cultural practices that "sustain moral patterns" in the world (1997: 394). The features of such an ethics of responsibility as we envisage will be discussed under the following headings: 1) African taboos and responsibility; 2) The concept of Ubuntu in the global village; 3) Communalism and the fear of public disgrace; 4) Communalism and the gods and ancestors; and 5) The holistic nature of

African communalism. Such a discussion will pave the way for the formulation of an African Christian ethics of responsibility for the technological age.

5.5.1 African taboos and responsibility

Etymologically, the word "taboo" is derived from a Polynesian word meaning "forbidden". According to Osei,

> Within the historical context taboo was a sacred term for a set of cultic or religious prohibitions instituted by traditional religious authorities as instruments for moral motivation, guidance, and objectivity for protecting the sanctity of their shrines and the wellbeing of their worshipping communities (2006: 43).

So taboos are religious and social prohibitions used to prevent the community from behaving in such a way that the future existence of the community is not endangered in any way from the fury of the gods and ancestors. Taboos are in two categories: general and special taboos.[47] General taboos refer to taboos that are used in the socio-economic and political life of the people. Special taboos, on the other hand, cover the religious lives of the people. Special taboos, however, come under the general taboos since all the religious prohibitions under the special taboos are also found in the general taboos (see Osei 2009: 43-44). The special taboos are the most serious ones as they are the ones that are

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[47] For the sake of easy categorization, I named them general and special taboos.

committed directly against the gods and ancestors, and ultimately the Supreme Being. What we call "special taboo" is referred to by Gyekye as an "extraordinary" evil in the community (or musuo in Akan and musu in Gã), which results in corporate punishment from the Supreme Being or from the gods and ancestors. In his own words, he intimates that

> *musuo* is generally considered to be a great, extraordinary moral evil; it is viewed by the community with particular abhorrence and revulsion because its commission is believed not only to bring shame to the whole community, but also, in the minds of many ordinary people, to invite the wrath of the supernatural powers (1987: 133).

Examples of special taboos are rape, murder, suicide, incest, having sexual intercourse in the bush, stealing things dedicated to the deities or ancestral spirits, etc. (1987: 133). Failure to obey these taboos may result in the spiritual forces visiting the community with famine, epidemics, infertility, mysterious deaths, etc. Almost all Africans, including most African Christians avoid flouting the taboos in their communities as the punishment for disobedience could be instantaneous and fatal. Such people are made to go through special sacrifices to appease the gods and ancestors. As a result, taboos are a strong motivator for obeying the moral laws of the community.

According to Osei, within the African community taboos are classified into environmental taboos, economic taboos, medical health taboos, birth control taboos and general safety taboos. Environmental taboos are prohibitions geared towards preserving the ecological environment of the community. Examples of environmental taboos are: preventing people from clearing sacred forests or bushes and cutting down forbidden timber species; hunting of animals or fishing during forbidden seasons and sacred days, eating of sacred animals or fish, etc. (see Osei 2006: 47). Concerning these special taboos, Osei is right to assert that

> Evidently, traditional African peasants knew that cutting all or most of the available forests will not only deprive the future generations of rare plants and animals, but will also affect the delicate balance between plants and animals as well as humans and their needs for food, medicine, space, clean water, and clean air etc." (2006: 47).

This means that the authorities of the African communities will only declare a particular thing in the community or the ecological environment as a special taboo because they see it as so important that its extinction or elimination could have devastating consequences for the community and the people, as well as their relationship with the gods and ancestors. Once the thing is so important for the medical, socio-economic and religious lives of the people, its use is restricted so as to keep it going for a long time to come. The gods and ancestors are then invoked to punish whoever flouts the prohibition. As we mentioned earlier on,

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because people are afraid of what the gods and ancestors could do to anyone who disobeys these special taboos, none will be willing to go against them. The fear of punishment from the gods and ancestors, therefore, acts as impetus for the moral responsibility of the people. The flouting of special taboos, if not checked, could result in the annihilation of a whole community.

The efficacy of the gods and ancestors towards corporate punishment from disobeying special taboos could be equated to the international community coming out with serious sanctions against any perpetrators of actions that are inimical to the future existence of humanity. This means that threats involved with special taboos, which spells doom for the community, correspond with threats from the wrong use of modern technology like atomic bombs and nuclear weapons.

Taboos can, therefore, play an important role in the formulation of an ethics of responsibility for the technological world as it may act as motivation for the proper use of power in the exercise of technology. This is because, when a taboo is made a normative principle in the quest for an ethics of responsibility for the technological world, it means that those actions that may be detrimental to the global community, and the existence of human beings in the future, will be tabooed. For instance, the production of nuclear weapons will be completely prohibited. When the production of nuclear weapons is tabooed, it means that anyone or country that is found to engage in such acts in the global community

will be severely dealt with, such that the whole global community, represented by a special global force, will stand up against such a person or nation and move in quickly to completely annihilate the source for the production of the nuclear weapons. Like the gods and ancestors, the response should be immediate and decisive; and the sanction should be such that it ignores the so-called sovereignty of that nation. The current sanctions that are prescribed by the international community are not fair and just, since they rather make innocent people suffer; it is also not decisive enough. In other words, the efficacy of the gods and ancestors to act decisively in the African community should be replaced in the global community with the efficacy of the decisive action that will be taken against a flouting nation. If this happens, it will deter many people and nations from involving in acts that are detrimental to the immediate and future existence of humanity.

5.5.2 The concept of Ubuntu in the global village

At the heart of the concept of Ubuntu in African communalism is caring for, sharing with and selfless service to the other. Ubuntu ethics of responsibility will, therefore, involve the selfless caring and service for one another without expecting any reward; this is an altruistic kind of service to humanity. Ubuntu ethics of responsibility is also extended to include care for the old people and strangers in the community. It is a community that is characterized by responsibility for one another, a clear sense of caring for and sharing with, a life of empathy, dependency, togetherness and a community. A life of Ubuntu is, therefore, the *summum bonum par excellence* that Africans are bringing on the plate for

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the search for an ethics of responsibility that will be the antidote for the dangers that accompany the advance of science and technology in our world (cf. Murove 2009a: 30).

From the African perspective, the world should be pictured as a community with the practice of Ubuntu at the centre of it. In such a community, the power that humanity gains as a result of the advance of technology will be used to foster the continued existence of the world community. In the global African ethics of responsibility for the technological age, the concept of Ubuntu will foster selfless service to the cause of humanity, and therefore will go a long way to preserve the future existence of humanity and the biosphere. Any use of technology would be done with the welfare and continued existence of the community in mind. The concept of Ubuntu, which narrows down to sharing, caring and selfless service to the community will be paramount in such a community. Anyone whose action is inimical to the continued existence of the community will be deemed to be an enemy of the community. People will be careful to go against taboos and commit acts of *musuo*, and any action that brings disgrace to oneself and his/her family will be avoided. This will include the wrong use of technology to the detriment of the future existence of the community. When such a global community knows that the gods and ancestors are there to punish people whose actions are dangerous to the wellbeing of the whole community, then people within such a community will be careful what they do. As Desmond Tutu puts it, "Social harmony is for us the summum bonum – the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague" (Tutu 1999: 35; cf. Metz & Gaie 2010: 273). For Gyekye, "An action, habit, or pattern of behavior is considered good

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only if it promotes human and social well-being" (Gyekye 1996: 57). The African imperative of responsibility in the context of Ubuntu ethics could be stated as follows: *In order to protect the future existence of life on earth, caring, sharing and selfless service should be our goal in all our interactions with humanity and the biosphere.*

As a result of the above, we believe when the world takes on board the Ubuntu concept of responsibility, the fears of Jonas will somehow be taken care of. Unlike the nihilism of the West, such a community will not ignore the presence and relationship with God. The Ubuntu ethics of responsibility may lose its essence without recognizing the existence of the God. Because of the holistic nature of African communalism, care and responsibility for the biosphere will not be excluded in such a community. Mogabe Ramose is right when he asserts that "Technology advancement continues to reaffirm the need to restore Ubuntu because, more than ever before, humanity is faced with the threat of catastrophic ecological disaster" (Ramose 2009: 313). *Ubuntu* ethics of responsibility is a process whereby humans, and for that matter Africans, have the responsibility to daily practice caring, sharing, selflessness, compassion, and forgiveness as they try to live their day to day lives.

5.5.3 Communalism and the fear of public disgrace

As mentioned earlier, the fear of public disgrace in the African community acts as an impetus for acting morally among Africans, and brings to the fore the practice of praise and blame in the social theory of responsibility. Anyone who upholds the laws of the community is praised, and anyone who commits an act of *musuo* endangers not only

his own life, but that of his family and the community as a whole. The family name for many years to come will be tarnished if one behaves unduly. The fear of public disgrace is therefore a motivation for upholding personal responsibility.

If the global community suggested above is organized in such a way that the children within the community are taught to value the name of the family and that they should not do anything that will tarnish the good name of the family as well as the extended family, then as they grow up, they will do all they could in this world to preserve the good name of the family. When this is achieved, it will go a long way to contribute to making sure that the existence of humanity in the future is not compromised.

5.5.4 Communalism and the gods and ancestors

Unlike Western community where there is autonomy from spirits, African community involves a relationship with the spiritual world. According to Verhoef and Michel, "In fact, from the African standpoint everything within the universe is interconnected, existing within a unified whole. Africans live their philosophy of life, their religion of life, as one and the same" (1997: 394). It is interesting to note that in African communalism, there are no atheists. Religion is an inseparable and integral part of African communalism. In African communalism there is a vital link (to use Richardson's term) between the living and the dead. In this relationship, the community depends on the gods and ancestors, and ultimately the Supreme Being for their provision, guidance, and ultimately the continued existence and wellbeing of the community. Libations are poured and

sacrifices are made from time to time to keep the relationship going. In this African community there is no dichotomy between the spiritual and the secular; life is led in constant relationship with the spiritual world.

The main source of African morality is mainly believed to be from the gods and ancestors, even though Kwame Gyekye and others think otherwise. The community lives to please the gods and ancestors, and they in turn protect and provide for the community. The litmus test for the continued existence of the community is when the gods and ancestors and the people live in peace with each other. When as a result of flouting the taboos of the gods and ancestors they threaten the very existence of the community with pestilence, the community has to see where they have fallen short and rectify it by appeasing the gods and ancestors as quickly as possible.

When this relationship above is taken into a global community, it means that for the community to continue to exist and take care of the future community, the divine or God must be brought back into the global community. This means that in the global community grounded in African communalism, the existence of God must form the very basis of that community. For the global world that is akin to African communalism to succeed, God or the divine should be at the center of such a community. In such an environment, the Western world should consider moving away from nihilism to a theocentric environment where God is recognized in the day to day activities of humanity. It is then that there is an ultimate authority to refer to in ethical matters. A

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relationship with God is likely to make people more responsibility in the use of, especially, dangerous technology.

5.5.5 The holistic nature of African communalism

How does holism contribute to the debate on the ethics of responsibility for the technological age? Holism contributes to the debate when we take into consideration the unity that defines communalism. We have learnt that communalism for the African is far more than people living individual lives; it includes the living, the dead, those in their mother's wombs and the unborn. Since the unborn are included in the African community, abortion is tabooed in order to protect those in their mother's womb.[48] The holistic nature of African community means that the identity of a person derives from the person's interaction with the community. The people come together to form the community, and the community in turn forms the people and gives them their identity. In other words, the practical responsibility of the person in the community defines who the person is. If his role defines him as a chief, then he is expected to hold the whole community together. If his role in the community defines him as a father, then he is expected to be the father of all the children in the community. If her role in the community defines her as a mother, then the community expects her to function as a mother to all the children in the community. If the community defines you as a daughter or a son, then you are expected to act in the community in such a way that the continued existence and the wellbeing of the community are not compromised.

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[48] This rhythms with Jonas's assertion that we should be responsible for the future existence of humanity

Neville Richardson is right when he asserts that the holistic nature of African life is the "good of all, and the social ethics of the African is deeply concerned with the good of all." If this concept is globalized, it implies that as technology advances with a subsequent increase in the power and control of humanity over nature in the global arena, care will be taken to use that power for the perpetuation of human and the biospheric life on earth. This is because the responsibility of the individual in the African community is dual in nature: first, your relationship to other members of the community; and second, your commitment to the betterment and continued existence of the holistic community, which includes the ancestors and the biosphere. In a global ethics of responsibility grounded in African concept of communalism, care will be taken in the use of technology to make sure that the future existence of the global community is not compromised in any way. In African communalism, the wellbeing of the global village will be the responsibility of all its members.

So how can we go about developing an African ethics of responsibility in the Christian context? How can we have an African Christian ethics of responsibility where the principle of communalism plays a major role in that community and with Christ as the center of that community? Chapter six will attempt to answer this question by trying to ground Christ in the center of the African communalism.

CHAPTER 6

Towards an African Christian ethics of responsibility for the technological age

6.1   Introduction

Our main duty in this chapter is to formulate an African Christian ethics of responsibility in dialogue with William Schweiker's Christian ethics of responsibility. Because the end result of Schweiker's Christian ethics of responsibility is not particularistic but theocentric in nature,[49] we will begin this chapter by looking at the argument put forward by the universal ethicists in order to understand the reason behind Schweiker's universal, but theocentric imperative of responsibility. As stated above, Schweiker's imperative of responsibility is different from that of Hans Jonas because he included the name of God in his formulation. Our general criticism of Schweiker's Christian ethics of responsibility is that he, in an attempt to formulate an imperative of responsibility that is universal in nature fails to formulate a Christian imperative of responsibility that is Christocentric.

6.2   The nature of global ethics of responsibility

In an attempt to solve the problem of modern nihilism, and "after the waning of the so-called Enlightenment project and the current awareness of distinctive moral identities," (Schweiker 1998: 138) most modern moral philosophers or ethicists are searching for a universal ethics that will satisfy everyone, including non-religious

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[49] By "theocentric in nature" we mean even though God is at the center of Schweiker's imperative of responsibility, it is universal in the sense that his formulation could cover Islam, Judaism and other religions that believe in the existence of God. It is not particularistic because the name of Jesus is not the center of his imperative of responsibility; as such it fails to be called a Christian imperative of responsibility.

humanists and agnostics. Universalist ethicists argue that the subject matter of ethics must be universal in nature, and that the scope of the moral principles and judgments must be relevant to all people no matter their cultural background (see Ikuenobe 2006: 94). Therefore, a universal ethics aims at designing an ethics that covers everyone, regardless of their concept of the divine, their cultural and traditional background, and religious orientation.

Such formulators of universal ethics normally free it of any religious connotations, and consciously eliminate the name of God, or the names of founders of any of religious communities such as Christ, Buddha or Mohammed in their formulations. An example of a typical universal ethical principle is Immanuel Kant's *Categorical Imperative* in its various forms. One of the version states that, *Act so that you can will that the maxim of your action be made the principle of a universal law* (Jonas 1984: 10). Kant's aim for coming out with the *Categorical Imperative* is to produce an ethics from *pure reason* that will be acceptable universally. The main reason for developing the Categorical Imperative was to be neutral in the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Kant's days over who should be regarded the true custodian of the Church's ethics and to overcome the resultant stalemate (see Berkman & Cartwright 2001: 45). The universalist approach to ethics also applies to Wolfgang Huber who formulates his imperative of responsibility in the following words: "we can finally interpret the ethics of responsibility as the application of the Golden Rule on the level of principles: *respect the principles of others as much as you want others to respect your own"* (Huber 1993: 589). The same applies to the deist Jewish philosopher, Hans Jonas, whose imperative

of responsibility focuses on the future existence of humanity, but which seems to us to be a form of neo-Kantian ethics, and reads: *Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life,* or expressed negatively*: "Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life* (Jonas 1984: 11).

The Global Ethic Project, which began with the Parliament of the World Religions in Chicago in 1893, and later joined hands with the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical institutions, are calling for a global ethics but of a different kind. They are calling for a global ethics that will incorporate the ethics of the world religions, a sort of ethics that will bring people together to fight for world peace, and give humanity a sense of shared responsibility for our planet (Gebhardt 2000: 503-504). One of the key advocates of the Global ethic project is the Swiss Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Küng. According to the planetary ethics of Küng, which also expresses the sentiments of Hans Jonas, "societies will lose cohesion, and finally our divided and endangered planet will not survive, without a general consensus on a set of common human values, ethical standards and guidelines for behavior" (Gebhardt 2000: 504).

Following the Universalist idea, some Christian theologians, including feminist theologians, are also trying to find a global ethics of responsibility that, this time, is theocentric in nature, but which, nonetheless, deliberately excludes the name of Christ. Such so called global Christian ethics of responsibility centers around how humanity uses its new-found power to "respond to, create, and shape reality" (Schweiker 1998:

138). An example of such an ethics, as far as we are concerned, is the one also formulated by William Schweiker. His imperative of responsibility, aimed at modifying that of Hans Jonas, proceeds by adding the name of God: *in all actions and relations we are to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God* (Schweiker 1995: 125).

Schweiker disagrees with Jonas's ethics of responsibility because, as far as he is concerned, Jonas fails to adequately proof that the absence of God opens the door for human moral responsibility to be grounded in the *idea of Man*. What this rather means, Schweiker argues, is that if it is the self-limitation of God (i.e. the withdrawal of God from human experience) that created the space for human responsibility on earth as Jonas claims, then the moral space so created has its origin in God (Schweiker 1995: 205). It is wrong, therefore, for Jonas to conclude that human beings are the sole originators of morality and that the motive for the observance of the good life is the future of life, which eventually led him to state his imperative of responsibility the way he did.

In order to formulate his theocentric ethics of responsibility, Schweiker agrees, to a large extent, with the Christocentric ethics of responsibility put forward by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, but argues that it does not solve the problem of modern nihilism. According to Schweiker, the technological age is the impression of *power* onto space and time. It is an age in which the use of *power*, it is believed, brings *fulfillment and authenticity* to humanity. As a result of this, any authentic global ethics of responsibility should take three basic things into consideration; *power*, *value* and *reality*, with the aim of pursuing human well-being, dignity and freedom, which will lead to a viable future for life on earth

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(Schweiker 1998: 142). Any authentic ethics of responsibility, therefore, must be able to tackle the growing nature of *human power* over humanity and the biosphere (1998: 141).

According to Schweiker, in Bonhoeffer, "value is defined in terms of the divine power of self-revelation *in Jesus Christ*, since it is this power that constitutes, influences, and shapes reality" (1998: 149, italics mine). This means that the being of Christ unites power and value (1998: 149). In Bonhoeffer, therefore, Christ becomes the basis and the ground of *power* in all ethics of responsibility. According to Bonhoeffer, *power* should be wielded within, and patterned after the *deputyship* of Christ, where *deputyship* refers to the ability to act for and on behalf of others (Schweiker 1998: 146, 148, 149). This, according to Schweiker, is a form of Christological realism, which has a positive effect of replacing "the anthropocentrism of modern ethics with a personalistic view of reality," where Christ, who is the reality of God "enters into the reality of the world (1998: 150-151).

But Schweiker is not pleased with the *christocentric realism* that Bonhoeffer offers as a solution to the nihilism of modernity. For Schweiker, Bonhoeffer's ethics of responsibility is not universal enough since he concentrates power in Christ and, therefore, fails to address the anthropocentric nature of power. But more importantly, Bonhoeffer's christocentric solution grounded in the connection between God and humanity in Christ falls short of the reality of *power* towards *nonhuman life*. He argues that a *theocentric* ethics of responsibility offers a better chance of solving the problem by being able to

provide a global ethics of responsibility. Bonhoeffer's solution, he argues, fails to address the modern problem of the use of *power* in the technological world as exercise of *power* upon humanity as well as the biosphere. Schweiker, therefore, concludes that his own formulation of the imperative of responsibility which calls on humanity to *respect and enhance the integrity of life before God* is, therefore, more inclusive than the Christocentric nature of the ethics of responsibility offered by Bonhoeffer (Schweiker 1998: 153).

Our verdict is that Schweiker's imperative of responsibility is another example of a universal ethics purported to be Christian, but deliberately ignoring the use of the name Christ in the formulation of the Christian ethics of responsibility. As we argued in Chapter 4, even though Schweiker set out to formulate a Christian ethics of responsibility to correct the anthropocentric nature of the imperative of responsibility by Jonas, he fails to come out with a truly Christian imperative of responsibility. Concerning Schweiker's argument against Bonhoeffer above, we do not agree with him because we do not think that a universal ethics only has to be theocentric in order to contribute to solving the problem of nihilism in the modern world.

6.3.   Christ as the paradigm of responsibility

In this section, we will look at why the paradigm of Christ is at all necessary for an ethics of responsibility in this technological age, and why heeding to the example of Christ is likely to allay the fears Jonas and Schweiker have about the future existence of humanity in the face of the advancement of human power through technology.

Because of the *relational* nature of responsibility, the true nature of the concept of responsibility is dual in nature: who is responsible *for what*; and *to whom*? *To whom* in the Christian context refers to humanity's responsibility *to* God for intervening in the history of humanity through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to reconcile the world to Himself. At the time that humanity is estranged and living in sin, cut away from its Father and Creator of the world; at this time also that the world sees itself as a law unto itself, God, out of love,[50] took the initiative (and still calling humanity back into a relationship with him) to begin a *reconciliatory process* in the work of Christ for humanity; an initiative, as it where, to call his *prodigal* sons and daughters from a life of loneliness and frustration into a life of fellowship with Him, when the true nature of responsibility *for* the world and *to* God will be restored to humanity again. It is a *reconciliatory process* because even though the work of reconciliation has been completed in Christ, - "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."[51] God, with outstretched arms is still waiting for the whole of humanity to come back to have fellowship with Him. God is not removed from human history as suggested by Jonas, but He is still actively involved in the day to day lives of humanity and the biosphere.

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[50] See John 3:16

[51] Col. 1:21-22

The true nature of the fellowship and responsibility that we are supposed to have towards God and the biosphere were marred through the refusal of Adam and Eve, the first parents of humanity, to live in obedience to God. After God created the heavens and the earth and everything in it, He created humanity, represented by Adam and Eve, to look after His creation, but with two very important conditions – to live in *communion* with Him, and to live a life of *obedience* to Him. First, it is through that *communion* with God that, we believe, humanity will be able to have a responsible relationship with one another and with the biosphere. Through *communion* with God, humanity may have the wisdom to properly look after God's creation and be enabled and guided by God to manage the numerous scientific and technological discoveries that will take place in the history of humanity. Second, humanity was given a condition under which the relationship and fellowship is going to progress. That is, to live a life of *obedience* to God, a situation under which humanity is going to be guided by God to have a proper relationship with Him, and through that to be able to responsibly care for the land and live peacefully together.

After God created the first parents of humanity in His image,[52] He blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground"[53] Thus, God gave to humanity the responsibility over everything that He has created. This then, makes humanity stewards over God's creation. And this is the true

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[52] Gen. 1:27

[53] Gen. 1:28

source of humanity's responsibility *to* God. But through the Fall and subsequent human rebellion, humanity took charge of creation, making it his own, and in the process eliminating God in human history as could be found in modern nihilism. So the disobedience also comes with a *stolen* world, the *bona fide* property of God. Instead of being accountable to God, humanity took charge of its own destiny, making itself the subject of responsibility. This is the gist of the matter: God said to the parents of humanity, "… you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."[54] "Death" for us here refers to the lost relationship and fellowship that took place between God and humanity as a result of disobedience. "Death" in that context, also refers to the inability of humanity to properly look after God's creation because of the loss of guidance from the Creator of the world. In other words, because of disobedience to God, humanity lost the ability to effectively look after God's creation, and to be the responsible stewards that humanity is created to be. It seems to us that the numerous troubles, misunderstandings, extermination of humans by humans, the wrong use of human power and violence in the history of humanity have their root cause in this estrangement from the One who holds the key to a harmonious human life in His creation. The same applies to humanity's unwise use of power over the environment, resulting in the ecological disasters of today.

For us, the broken fellowship with God by the first representative of humanity and the subsequent atheistic humanism and nihilism constitute the beginning of the woes and confusion in human history. Through the disobedience of humanity and the subsequent

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[54] Gen. 2:17

estrangement, humanity lost God's counsel, and as such the wisdom to rule the world, and even to live peacefully with one another. Because of this, even though in the history of the world humanity seems to be saddled with scientific and technological advancement, and the subsequent gaining of power over nature, humanity is misapplying the new form of power through wars, misapplication of nuclear devices, misjudgments, quarrels, fighting, numerous broken relationships, apartheid and colonialism, slavery and the misapplication of power towards other human beings, suicides, over-stretching of the earth's resources and the subsequent ecological degradation, greediness and selfishness, the misuse of funds and the current economic recessions, the threat of nuclear wars, etc. All these are signs of a fallen world; the current state could be likened to a child who has lost his parents, and therefore lack guidance. Bongmba put it in another way: "The loss of ethics has brought in ultimate violence – war" (1996: 208). Bonhoeffer puts it more succinctly when he states that

> The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection… Already in the possibility of the knowledge of good and evil Christian ethics discerns a falling away from the origin. Man at his origin knows only one thing: God. It is only in the unity of his knowledge of God that he knows of other men, of things, and of himself. He knows all things only in God, and God in all things. The knowledge of good and evil shows that he is no longer at one with this origin (Bonhoeffer 1963: 3)

When God decided to choose the people of Israel as "light for the Gentiles,"[55] as light for humanity, and as it were, a starting point to His plan of reconciliation of humanity into fellowship with Himself again, He gave Israel three *conditions* to foster that relationship – *communion*, a life of *obedience* and the willingness to *repent* in the face of disobedience.[56] God then instituted sacrifices of sheep and of grains, and of doves, etc. to foster a continued relationship and communion between Him and humanity.[57] In the Old Testament, sacrifices were the only means to approach God and to restore relationship with Him. Between God and humanity, sin was so disruptive that it was important that for the relationship with Israel to continue, the High Priest has to sacrifice once a year on behalf of all the people.[58] From creation, God has taught humanity that sin or disobedience brings separation between Him and humanity, and that sin leads to death. So the institution of sacrifices is a way of restoring relationship with fallible and fallen humanity.

The sacrifices, according to the writer of Hebrews, is supposed to be an interim practice until the day Christ dies once and for all for the sins of humanity in order to restore and reconcile humanity to God.[59] According to St. Paul,

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[55] Isa. 42:6-7

[56] The Sinai Covenant with Israel is a case in point. See Ex. 34

[57] The first seven books of Leviticus describe these sacrifices and how they were to be applied.

[58] Lev. 7:1-25

[59] Heb. 7:25-28

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive… For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous[60]

This means that what humanity lost in their first parents, they now gain in Christ; it is *perfection in the likeness of God* that is not going to be gained fully until the work of salvation is completed at the Second Coming of Christ when we will be given the resurrection body. Paul puts it this way, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are *being saved* it is the power of God."[61] *Being saved* is a key clause in that verse. It means that our transformation into perfection is a continuous affair. Paul also said to the Philippian Church, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."[62] So *to whom* refers to the responsibility we have towards God.

Now, '*for what*' in responsibility, firstly refers to humanity's obligation towards other humans and the ecological environment, what Bonhoeffer refers to as *deputyship* (cf. Von Lukpe 2009: 467). As argued above, it is our conviction that the right use of God's

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[60] I Cor. 15:21-22; Rom. 5:19

[61] I Cor. 1:18

[62] Phil. 2: 12-13

creation could be restored only in Jesus Christ. It is only in Jesus Christ that the right relationship between human beings and with God could be achieved. Christ is, therefore, the subject, as well as the object of our responsibility. In other words, he is the ultimate reference to our responsibility. True responsibility can be found in the paradigm of the sacrificial work of Christ. Responsibility, in other words, is supposed to be christocentric; Christ is the source of human responsibility. Responsibility is not autonomous as the Enlightenment professes (its theme is *Sapere aude*! – a Latin phrase meaning *Dare to know*!). Nor is responsibility heteronymous as false human power desires; it is not also anthropocentric, but theocentric. Christian responsibility is defined in the context of the exemplary life of Christ for humanity; a selfless giving of himself for the salvation of the world at large. Responsibility in Christ is, therefore the willingness to live a selfless life on behalf of others.

Following from our discussion on the dual nature of the ethics of responsibility above, there is a way by which the answer to the question, '*for what*' becomes complete: it is found in the text, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"[63] So the '*for what'* of our responsibility only becomes complete when our responsibility for the created world comes into play; we are responsible for the *wellbeing of humanity,*[64] and responsible for the proper use of our power gained from the advance of technology.[65] This means that

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[63] Gen. 1:28

[64] Mat. 25:31-46

[65]65 Gen. 1:28

our responsibility '*for what'* and '*to whom'* is intrinsically and indispensably linked together – we are at the same time *responsible to* God and *responsible for* the welfare of humanity and the biosphere. The 'f*or what'* and *'for whom'* of our responsibility, therefore, conglomerates in our responsibility to God. This is the meaning of theocentric responsibility: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."[66]. As Johannes von Lükpe put it, "Without a judging authority before which humans must disclose their deeds, the concept of responsibility is unthinkable" (Von Lüpke 2009: 467). The 'judging authority' (*for whom*) and the 'disclosing their deeds' (*for what*), are the key contents for the ethics of responsibility. So the forensic question of the ethics of responsibility – what is the scope of responsibility? – is answered theologically in the '*for whom*' and the '*for what*.' As Von Lüpke aptly reiterates, "The concept of responsibility actually functions as the hallmark of ethics. By it is shown what ethics should be. And because this is the case, one will scarcely find an ethics which can do without it as a central concept" (Von Lüpke 2009: 462).

In addition to failing to make Christ the center of his imperative of responsiblity, Schweiker also fails to emphasize and elaborate on the important work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian in his ethics of responsibility. It is clear from Scripture that without the Holy Spirit, it is very difficult to live a true Christian life. It is through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit that a life of righteousness can be lived in Jesus Christ. This means that the life of *deputyship* can only be lived as the Holy Spirit enables the believer to do so. Without the Holy Spirit in one's life, it is almost impossible

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[66] Mat. 25:40

to live a true Christian life.[67] Our lives as Christians are controlled by the Holy Spirit – "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit."[68] It is not our emotions that direct our life with God in Christ Jesus, but it is the Holy Spirit as He leads the way from within in our walk with God. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives as a *helper* to enable our walk with God.[69] According to Scripture, the love of Christ that transforms humanity in Christ comes with the Holy Spirit living in us: "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."[70] So the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in the lives of all those who come to God in Christ Jesus. Bonhoeffer did very well to place Christ at the center of the history of humanity, but it seems to us that not emphasizing the important role of the Holy Spirit in enabling *deputyship* is a very serious omission. A responsible life of *deputyship* could only be lived in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives when we recognize the death and resurrection of Christ for humanity and take upon ourselves the life of Christ.[71] Responsibility in the context of Christianity can only be practiced effectively when humanity is led by the Spirit of God in Christ.

 The ethics that we are called to formulate is one that calls the world into responsible living, one that yields up one's whole life in service to God through service to humanity and the biosphere. God's action in Christ Jesus is to all humanity and there is no

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[67] See John 16:13-end; John 14:26

[68] Rom. 8:9; Eph. 1:13-14

[69] John 16:7-8; John 14:16-17; Rom. 8:26-27

[70] Rom. 5:5

[71] John 16:13- end

dichotomy between the secular life and the religious life. Any creation of a dualism of Church and state results in "the paralysis of decision, lack of seriousness, frustration of action, and refusal to criticize or condemn" (Jonsen 1968: 121). But when one sees Christ's action as affecting all facets of life, one addresses the whole of life in the paradigm of Christ's atoning death and the resultant reconciliation of the world unto Himself. This means that Christ's paradigm must be used to address all life since Christ died for the world and not for a particular group of people. In so doing, one will incur the displeasure of evil governments. But to live, speak and die for Christ is the whole essence of the gospel. Every facet of life is our responsibility. John Wesley puts it in another way when he rightly asserts that the world is God's parish.[72] It is in acting for and on behalf of others that ethics is consummated (Bonhoeffer 1963: 238). So, ethics lies not in abstract propositions, but in service to others. The responsible man is the one who answers to the needs of others and is very sensitive to the plight of others and the proper engagement with the biosphere.

For us, the theological approach of Bonhoeffer is the kind of ethics that is needed to effectively combat the nihilism of modernity. Where the Church stays aloof and interprets theology in the context of "we" and "them," it will be very difficult for Christians to penetrate the world with the fact about the existence of God and the true gospel. It seems to us that interpreting the death of Christ holistically and universally in the way Bonhoeffer does it, is the answer to the search for a universal ethics of responsibility.

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[72] Journal (11 June 1739).

As a result of the work done for humanity in Christ Jesus, humanity owes God responsibility. This is the responsibility to recognize the sacrificial nature of the work done by God for humanity in history, and, as Karl Barth admonished, to reciprocate that gesture by honoring Him with our lives. Christ became the paradigm of responsibility when He laid down his life for the sins of humanity. Humanity's responsibility therefore lies in the action of Christ. In other words, as a result of the work of Jesus Christ, humanity is called to lay down its life in such a way that the future existence of humanity and the biosphere becomes the focus for the sacrificial action. Henceforth, the sacrifice of Christ becomes the yardstick to measure the ethics of responsibility for the technological age. Laying down one's life for others, we believe, cuts across every religion and culture. Consequently, the action of Christ could be universally embraced by humanity all over the world. It is only in this sense that Christian ethics could be taken in a universal sense. But, as we have emphasized earlier on, for an imperative of responsibility to be Christian, the name of Christ and His sacrificial action must be included in the formulation, and the inclusion of the name of Christ alone particularizes the imperative of responsibility so formulated. In our formulation of a Christian ethics of responsibility, we are calling on the world to imitate the action of Christ, that is, the sacrificial and altruistic nature of the work of Christ for humanity.

6.4   An African Christian ethics of responsibility for the technological age

Now that we have discussed the foundation for a Christian ethics of responsibility, let us now proceed to formulate an African Christian ethics of responsibility for the technological world. As the objective of this thesis is to formulate an *Ubuntu* Christian

ethics of responsibility in dialogue with the Christian ethics of responsibility expounded by Schweiker, we will provide a brief summary of Schweiker's ethics of responsibility before proceeding to formulate the African Christian ethics of responsibility.

6.4.1 A summary of Schweiker's Christian ethics of responsibility

Theologians, according to Schweiker, argue that the message of Jesus is a proclamation calling for a response to God. It is a "call-response" relationship. And the Christian's responsibility lies in his/her response to that call. His/her identity lies in Jesus' call to the disciples to follow Him (cf. MK 1:17-18; Mat. 4:18-20). According to Schweiker, "The life of faith is defined by one's response in total obedience to that summons" (1995: 63). For him, the identity of a person is realized by answering others and acting for others. Schweiker, however, argues that to be responsible is to promote the wellbeing of life before God. He observes that living a responsible life before God fulfills the Biblical injunction that we should "lose ourselves" in order to gain ourselves (Mat. 10:39; LK 17:33). So for him, living a responsible Christian life entails gaining one's identity in a community by serving that community. Schweiker notes that 'the 'self' appears in the activity of answering and responding to *the needs of* others' (1995: 56; cf. H Richard Niebuhr 1963: 56. Italics mine).

In the search for an ethics of responsibility to tackle the growing power of humanity in the face of technological advancement, he observes that if traditional Christian ethics could make any contribution at all, it must not dwell too much on the individual relation with God and his fellow human beings, but should go beyond that to include respect for

the future of human life and the ecological environment. In other words, Christian ethics should desist from only concentrating on individual salvation in Christ, but also see how humanity could leave a legacy that will improve the life of posterity. This means that Christian moral philosophers and theologians should also reflect on the implications of scientific and technological developments for the future of human life (see 1995: 221-222).

But, according to Schweiker, any Christian ethics worth its while should emphasize the theocentric nature of Christian ethics. He avers that "Christian ethics contends that human beings live, move, and have their being in God. Our most basic relationship to the universe is a relation to the divine" (1995: 214). It is in the divine that we understand ourselves, which means that knowledge of the divine and knowledge of ourselves are functionally linked together. Schweiker further made it clear that for an ethics to be called Christian ethics, it must explore "the inner possibility for the exercise of power," which can be found in "the symbol of creation, the idea of covenant, and beliefs about Christ's self-giving love" (1995: 215). It is important to note that in Christian ethics "God has acted and is acting in history," Schweiker emphasizes (1995: 223). Christian ethics, he reiterates, is expected to make an explicit assertion about the moral life, which is that life in Christ brings about a higher, fuller form of life. To substantiate his point, he quotes from Mat. 10:39 in which Jesus said that "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (see Schweiker 1995: 215). In Christian ethics, therefore, moral responsibility is deep-seated in God as the source of power, in Christ

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who pours out Himself and took the form of a servant, and in the Holy Spirit who authorizes people to be responsible agents (1995: 216; cf. Phil 2: 1-11).

For Jonas, responsibility is about power, where power refers to the rapid control humanity is gaining over nature as a result of the advancement of modern technology (2009: 489). Jonas argues that ethics cannot be taken out of the life of humanity since our power to act is regulated by ethics, and the more our ability to make decisions grow, the more our ethics should grow. Schweiker pays attention to this growing power of humanity reiterated by Jonas by emphasizing that Christian ethics must interpret the moral life in such a way that power is directed into respecting and enhancing the integrity of life. In loving God and loving ourselves, we are called upon also to love our neighbors' worth and dignity and use that to transform human power in order to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God. According him, the imperative of responsibility is an answer to the notorious problem of how to direct power; that power finds its expression in the ability to serve and respect others and the world around us. He argues that at a time when the secular world seeks to increase its power over nature, when the secular world has equated power with value, and also when the culture of fulfillment and authenticity seems to be the accepted norm of the Western world, Christian ethics should emphasize the goodness of power in humanity, and redirect the world to the source of all power – the divine – and seek to interpret human life in the context of the care, respect and the enhancing of the integrity of life before God. He further argues that human life is degraded when it fails to connect with God, and that our relationship with God must be seen in the relationship we have with others.

This, according to him, is the central theme of Christianity (cf. I John 4:20). For Schweiker, respecting and enhancing the integrity of life before God is the meaning of responsibility. In other words, to be responsible is to promote the wellbeing of life before God.

In Christian terms, the imperative of responsibility enumerates the unique features of Christian ethics in modern terms. It emphasizes the biblical injunction that we are to promote justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before God.   Christians are, therefore, called upon, and in fact, enabled to enhance the integrity of life in all their dealings with humanity and the world around them. This means that Christians have the duty to mitigate human suffering, provide the means of education in order to build up the mental, creative, and cultural capabilities of persons in the communities in which they find themselves (see 1995: 128). Furthermore, in Schweiker estimation, Christians are also expected to uphold social values and fight for the just treatment of all persons, as well as the integrity of non-human life (1995: 128). In a nutshell, the imperative encourages Christians to contribute to the richness of life. Living a responsible life means one respects and enhances the integrity of life before God.

6.4.2 Christ as the Supreme Being

If Christ died for the world, then He died also for Africans. Even though there is a suggestion that Christology should be developed along the line of the African ancestor, we are of the view that Christ and the ancestor have different natures. Our suggestion is that for Christology to take root in African theology and reality, Christ should be uniquely

introduced into the African community as the incarnate Supreme Being. It should not be about replacing Christ with the ancestor, but a situation where the gospel is presented with a clear narration of the incarnation, life and death of Jesus Christ, the Supreme Being.[73] Christ should be introduced as the Supreme Being Himself who incarnates into the African community in the life, death and the resurrection of Christ. That the Supreme Being is no more a remote or distant Being like the Deistic God, or the Athenian "unknown God,"[74] but is now active in their midst. His mission is to save the whole world, including Africans. Christ should not be introduced into the African community to function like the ancestor and assume the role of the ancestor. The ancestor is a creature and representative of the Supreme Being on behalf of the people. Christ is not a creature, but at once the Son of God and one with God: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."[75] That is why, to us, replacing Christ with the ancestor is not a meaningful and logical enterprise. Since the ancestors are regarded as the living dead, it means that when one dies as a Christian, as an ancestor, he/she falls within the category of the saints who are regarded as the unseen witnesses in the affairs of the living Christians.[76] Within Christianity, God is the upholder of morality, not the living dead – Christ is not a living dead because He died and rose again that the world, through Him, may have life. The ancestors did not die for the world; they die as humans and play the role of messengers for God. Christ is God incarnate. Even though

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[73] If anything at all, the ancestor should be used to throw some light on the mission of Christ, which in any case, goes far beyond that of the ancestor. For instance, Christ died for the sins of the world, but is not the role of the ancestor to die for the sins of the African community!

[74] Acts 17:22-23

[75] Colossians 2:9; cf. John 1:1, 14

[76] Hebrews 12:1

we pray through Christ, Christ is "the full Stop" of our prayers since He is the Second Person of the trinity – one God in three persons; one God functioning as God the creator (the Father), God the redeemer (the Son) and God the sanctifier (the Holy Spirit).

Even though Africans believe in the Supreme Being and regard Him as the creator of everything on earth, Christ is a missing link in African communalism. This is not to say that African communal living is not theocentric in nature since even though God is remote in their thinking, He is represented by the gods and ancestors. For the Christian, the flaw within the African communal system is the relegation of God or the Supreme Being to the periphery. In an African Christian ethics, the African should be called upon to inter-act in a personal way with the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being should now be seen as the direct custodian and giver of morality, as well as the source of power. Human power gained from the advance of technology should consequently be exercised in and through an imitation of the African Christ ethic of Ubuntu, where the selflessness of Christ becomes the basis upon which human power is exercised. For us, like any human culture, the personality that should bind the African community together, and, through the Holy Spirit, enable the African community to live a responsible and harmonious life is Jesus Christ and the paradigm love He pours out from the cross to all humanity.

From the context of the estrangement of humanity from God as a result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the first parents of humanity, including Africans,

Africans must be made to understand the reason for the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; that Christ is a historical figure who in reality died for the sins of the world, including Africans; that Africans, as part of the Gentile community, are being invited by the Supreme Being into a relationship with Him through Christ; that the death of Christ also reconciled the African unto God; that God, with outstretched arms is also waiting for all Africans to come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. For as St. Paul emphasized, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame. For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"[77]

Through the work of missionaries who carried the Gospel to Africa, many Africans have given their lives to Christ. Today, it is a historical fact that the center of Christianity has shifted from the Global North to the Global South (Africa, Asia and Latin America).[78] It is vital that in trying to come out with an African Christian ethics, African ethics should be reflected on in the light of the revelation in Christ. Christ should now play a pivotal role in African communalism. It is when Christ is put in His proper place in the lives of the people that the history of the African experience within reality will become a history in Christ.

6.4.3 Holism and African Christian ethics of responsibility

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[77] Rom. 10:11-13

[78]http://www.africanexecutive.com/modules/magazine/articles.php?article=2726

Everyone in the African community is expected to live in such a way that the unity and wellbeing of the community is not jeopardized in any way. Special taboos are to be kept strictly so as not to endanger the very existence of the community as a result of the wrath of the gods and ancestors. For instance, sex in the bush is a taboo because it desecrates the land and causes the goddess[79] of the land to withdraw her blessings from the land. When is happens, severe famine may ensue. This may result in the death of many people in the community. It takes special sacrifices to the goddess of the land before the disaster is reversed. Otherwise, it has the propensity to cause the annihilation of the whole community. In African holism, therefore, the wellbeing of the community is the responsibility of all its members. This is the reason behind the saying that "One person gives birth, but not one person disciplines and trains the child." The uniqueness of the African holistic community is that it extends into the ancestral world and covers even the yet to be born. This means that the African holistic community is prospective in nature as it includes that existence of the future generations.

From the above on holism, African Christian ethics of responsibility will entail imitating Christ's sacrificial life prospectively to include the preservation of the lives of the unborn in such a way that the future existence of mankind is not threatened in any way. This will result in the use of technological power to protect the lives of the unborn, thus ensuring that there will be humans in the future.

6.4.4 The Ubuntu nature of Christ

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[79] In Akan, she is called Asaase Yaa, which literally means *mother of the land*.

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Within the African community, the identity of a person is linked to his/her relationship with the whole of the community, including the gods, ancestors, the living and the unborn, who are the constituents of an African community. For the African, the responsible person is the one who lives according to the tenets of the society in order to promote the wellbeing of the community. Gyekye asserts the African communal living in the context of responsibility more clearly when he states that

> A common social life is seen also as prescribing the ethic of responsibility, which enjoins each member of the society to show concern for the needs and interests of the others. Responsibility is thus considered the supreme moral principle – the highest good. The ethics of altruistic responsibility does not ignore individual rights, nor does it insist on their priority (1996: 70).

In other words, for Gyekye, an African ethics of responsibility represents an African ethics of Ubuntu in which care and concern for the needs of others as well as the wellbeing of the whole community is of prime importance. We did not, however, agree with Gyekye that responsibility is "considered the supreme moral principle," since "responsibility" is a second order activity; it describes morality but it is not morality in itself. Ubuntu is rather the summum bonum (the supreme good) since it is a moral activity in itself.

Like Christ, the African is also called upon to live a selfless life through the help of the Holy Spirit. At the heart of the African Christian ethics of responsibility is the concept of *Ubuntu*, which is a life of caring, sharing and service to others. This is what we have termed the *Ubuntu nature of Christ*. This is a life of selfless giving of one's life to others.

The selfless and altruistic nature of *Ubuntu* is very important if African Christians, and for that matter, the global community is to live in the paradigm of Christ. The responsible Christian is, therefore, supposed to actively and concretely live a life of Ubuntu with other people in the world. For the Christian, a life of *Ubuntu* is not a self-seeking life, but a selfless life lived in perpetual sacrifice on behalf of others. That is the mandate, and therefore the responsibility we have in the global community. In this, we have been called into a concrete relationship with the whole of humanity. It is a life of *Ubuntu* that is lived within the full glare of the grace of God, the love of Christ, and the judgment of God. The African Christian ethics of responsibility is, therefore, one that has at its heart the Ubuntu nature of Christ. A responsible Christian life is one that is lived in complete obedience to God, and *a surrender of self* (*Ubuntu*) to the service of humanity in imitation of Christ.

Within the African community, the self-identity of the person is derived from his/her obedience and responsibility to the community. In Christianity, the identity of humanity is defined by humanity's participation in the paradigm of Christ. The self-identity of the Christian is derived from his/her identity with Christ. Unlike the African community, the Christian community does not define the norms of the community; the norms are

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defined by the work, death and resurrection of Christ. So instead of the community or the traditions of the gods and ancestors dictating the pace in African communalism, Christ is the heart of a Christian community, and therefore should be the center of an African Christian community, and ultimately to the global community. If the *Ubuntu nature of Christ* is practiced in the global community, then *selflessness* will be at the heart of such a community, and this will create the way for Jonas's vision to be realized, i.e. humanity will exist in the future in the face of the growing power of humanity as a result of the advancement of technology.

6.4.5 The Holy Spirit as *umuntu* in African communalism

In all of these, the Holy Spirit should be introduced to the world, especially to Africans as the enabler in the whole Christian life. It is in the Holy Spirit that true responsibility could be practiced in Jesus Christ. It is in the life of the Holy Spirit that the African Christian ethics of responsibility could be successfully practiced. One concept in African communal living that could be used to throw light on the work of the Holy Spirit in the African Christian ethics of responsibility is the concept of *umuntu*. According to Ramose, *Ubuntu* is "linked epistemologically to *umuntu*," *umuntu* representing "the be-ing which renders the coincidence between ontology and epistemology meaningful" (2002:325). He further explains that when practicing *Ubuntu*, a person experiences his/her true nature, but ironically, that true nature is a *be-ing* that is in flux towards perfection, the enabler being *umuntu*. This means that the *umuntu* is acting as the 'one' who enables *being* to practice *Ubuntu*. It is that which moves *being* into action to attain the *summum bonum* of *Ubuntu*. "Whatever is perceived as a whole is always a whole-ness in the

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sense that it ex-ists and per-sists towards that which it is yet to be," Ramose explains (2002: 324). He indicates that *umuntu* is an ongoing process which is unstoppable until motion itself stops. The 'one' that enables the continuous growth of compassion, fellow-feeling, sharing and caring in being is *umuntu*. So the ultimate essence of *ubu-ntu* is *umuntu*, rendering *ubu-ntu* active. It means that at the heart of every human be-ing is the activity of the *umuntu*, making it possible for every individual to show *Ubuntu* towards each other. Humanity is, therefore, intrinsically a responsive *being*. So the work of the Holy Spirit as the enabler and a sanctifier is replicated in the African concept of *umuntu*. In this wise, the Holy Spirit enables the practice of *Ubuntu* in the believer's life, and it is the Holy Spirit that enables the Christian to grow into maturity. But at the same time, every Christian is called to "be as perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."[80] In other words, like the life of *Ubuntu*, we are daily growing into perfection in Christ Jesus through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The *Ubuntu nature of Christ* represents *the selfless nature of Christ* for the world; it represents *the sacrificial nature of Christ* to the world, and *the service Christ's death and resurrection renders to the estranged world.*

6.4.6 African Christian ethics of responsibility and the biosphere

It is, however, important to note here as discussed in Chapter five, that for the African, responsibility is complete when it is practiced holistically; that is, when life is seen in direct relationship with the spiritual, the living and the ecological environment. For the African, the future of humanity is preserved when the community identifies with the

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[80] Mat. 5:48

forces of nature. In other words, the future of the community can only be preserved if the community is in accord with the whole of life around and within it. Bujo states it more emphatically when he writes that "All beings – organic and inorganic, living and inanimate, personal and impersonal, visible and invisible – act together to manifest the universal solidarity of creation" (2009: 282). The power that holds all these forces together is the Supreme Being, who is the only one who has power to overcome death (Bujo 2009: 284). The community is therefore seen as a microcosm in the macrocosm of nature, which includes the forest, animals and even herbs. It is believed that human existence could easily break down if the biosphere is neglected. Africans will never burn the forest around them because their very existence depends on the forest and nature around them. It is from the forest around them that they have meat to eat, herbs that sustain their health, and most importantly, where photosynthesis takes place to provide oxygen for life. According to the Zimbabwean Shona concept of Ukama, "a person can only be a person, in, with and through not just other people but also in, with and through the natural environment" (Murove 1999: 10ff. See Prozesky 2009: 302). This means that the biosphere is also highly respected in the African communalism. In the context of the ethic of Ukama, Murove rightly suggests that

> Distrusting contemporary western ethics, which has failed to halt pollution
>
> in technologically advanced countries, Africa yet possesses in its own
>
> traditional culture the roots of an ethical paradigm to solve the current
>
> environmental crisis. This is an ethics of interdependence of individuals
>
> within the larger society to which they belong and to the environment on

which they all depend. This ethics is based on the concept of Ukama and Ubuntu (Murove 2009: 315).

This means that for the formulation of an African ethics of responsibility to be complete, it must incorporate the care for the biosphere. Within the African Christian ethics of responsibility, therefore, humanity is called to live a life of Ubuntu, and to increase in fellow-feeling in the world. An African Christian ethics of responsibility, therefore, includes a life of selfless caring, sharing, compassion, empathy and service to others, and also cares for the biosphere. The African Christian ethics of responsibility is, therefore, a life lived in complete obedience to Christ in the life of *Ubuntu*, but it is a life that is enabled by *umuntu*, *the Holy Spirit*. We believe that when humanity lives this way, it will make a big difference in our use of the power we are continually gaining as a result of the advancement of science and technology, and therefore, that the continued existence of humanity and the biosphere may be protected. This is because, instead of being a law unto ourselves, we will make African Christian ethics of responsibility the center of our lives.

We believe that when humanity responds to the work of Christ for humanity and allows Christ into every aspect of its life, the estranged relationship between humanity and God that was broken as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve will be restored. In that case, we will be counseled and guided by God once again, this time through the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives. When we allow Christ to be at the center of our lives, we believe that our attitude to life may change. The fear of Hans Jonas and William Schweiker and

others may, therefore drastically diminish. Mclaren expressed the same sentiments in his book, *Christian Ethics: Foundations and practice* (1994), when he states that

> One of the most important contributions of the Church to individuals and to society as a whole is to provide a setting in which we learn to trust and depend on each other. This is no small achievement in a world where people and nations spend untold billions of dollars on weapons of war, simply because they do not trust each other enough to be mutually dependent.

In conclusion, African Christian ethics of responsibility is therefore a life lived in selfless sharing and caring for the needs of others and the biosphere. From the African Christian perspective, *Christian ethics of responsibility* is the imitation of the *Ubuntu nature of Christ* that enabled Him to selflessly (*Ubuntu-like*) come down to suffer in order to die to save a sinful world. We, therefore, invite everyone to imitate the altruistic love of Christ, under girded by the African concept of community, in order for them to be able to save the future of the world in the face of the technological threat. The African Christian imperative of responsibility in this case may be formulated thus: *In all your communal relations and actions, let the Ubuntu nature of Christ for the global community be the guiding principle for the continued well-being and future existence of humanity and the biosphere*. Expressed negatively: *In all your communal relations and actions, let not the imitation of the Ubuntu nature of Christ elude you in your*

attempt to foster the continued well-being and future existence of humanity and the biosphere.

Summary and conclusions

Chapter one of this thesis looked at the reasons why it is expedient to research into an area that compares Christian ethics of responsibility with that of African ethics and to come out with an African (*ubuntu*) Christian ethics of responsibility for the technological age that focuses on the concept of *Ubuntu* within the context of the Christ's paradigmatic altruistic death for humanity. The works of Hans Jonas and William Schweiker on the ethics of responsibility were to be used as focus for this thesis. The objectives of the thesis were to find out how Hans Jonas originally conceptualize the ethics of responsibility; to discuss which shortcomings in Jonas's ethics of responsibility have the debate on his ethics exposed; to examine how successful William Schweiker's attempt to develop a Christian or theological ethics of responsibility in close proximity to Jonas's ethics of responsibility is? Has he been able to overcome the weaknesses of Jonas's ethics of responsibility and does he, with his Christian version, overcome Jonas's doubt about the adequacy of religious ethics in tackling problems relating to the future? Our objective, therefore, is to investigate whether Schweiker has been able to prove Jonas wrong by showing that current religious ethics is capable of tackling problems relating to the future. Another objective is to assess the prospects of an African Christian ethics of responsibility for the technological age; to see whether Kwame Gyekye's "ethics of altruistic responsibility" (see Gyekye 1996: 70) can be used as the point of departure in the formulation of an African Christian ethics of responsibility? The final objective is to suggest a framework for an African (*Ubuntu*) Christian ethics of responsibility for the technological age that emphases an ethics of altruistic responsibility - something that has not been done before.

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In Chapter two, we looked at the work of Hans Jonas. According to Jonas,

technology has several advantages, but the growing fear is that the power of human beings over nature through technology is growing in an alarming rate so that, if not checked with a new ethics of responsibility, we may be heading to the destruction of nature and the annihilation of humanity. In response to this fear, Hans Jonas sets a whole new debate into motion, both in Germany and America, when he argues (in his book entitled, *The imperative of responsibility: In search of ethics for the technological age of* 1984) that the existing approaches to philosophical ethics, including theological ethics, are inadequate since they do not tackle the serious issues produced by the rapid expansion of modern technology. He then asserts that we must make a concerted effort to develop a theory of responsibility, so that humanity could be salvaged from future extinction. Consequently, he suggests that a solution to this problem would only be found when humanity is guided by an imperative of responsibility which states: *Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life,* or expressed negatively*: Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life* (Jonas 1984: 11). In the formulation of his ethics of responsibility, he denies that traditional ethics, including Christian ethics, is able to tackle the problems associated with the growing human power over nature and the future of the world, in the face of the technological advance.

In Chapter three, we looked at the work of William Schweiker in the context of the work of Hans Jonas. Whereas Jonas denies that religion could form the basis of a universal

ethics of responsibility, Schweiker strives to prove him wrong by producing a Christian version of an ethics of responsibility from that of Jonas. The answer to the question as to whether Schweiker has been able to come out with a Christian ethics of responsibility that transcends the work of Jonas is in the affirmative. As could be seen above, he was able to articulate very clearly what is meant by a Christian ethics of responsibility. According to him, the core of a Christian ethics of responsibility is an affirmation that God is the center of morality and that in the true spirit of the love Christ exhibited in the sacrifice of Himself for the world, Christians should impress on people to respect and promote a healthy human life and ecological environment today that will translate into the continued existence of humanity and the biosphere.

In Chapter four, we looked at a comparative study and analysis of the works of Jonas and Schweiker. In this chapter, we also looked at the improvement Schweiker made on Jonas's imperative of responsibility. We also set ourselves the task to evaluate their views of an ethics of responsibility. According to Schweiker a truly universal theological imperative of responsibility that is likely to be accepted by all is: *in all actions and relations we are to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God* (1995: 2,125). Our criticism is that he did not fully conform to what we will describe as a Christian imperative of responsibility. This is because it rhymes with theistic religions like Judaism, Islam, etc., and does not have a distinctive Christian character, even though Schweiker indicates that he is dealing with the symbol of "God" in Christianity. This, we believe, is an attempt to fulfill his desire to formulate a universal Christian ethics of responsibility. Because of the particularistic nature of Christianity, we do not think that it

can fall within the universalistic confines of ethics. As far as we are concerned, a Christian imperative of responsibility that improves on that of Schweiker may be formulated this way: *in all actions and relations we are to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God as portrayed in the altruistic death of Christ for humanity.*

In spite of the fact that Schweiker agrees with Jonas that traditional ethics has failed us, it was concluded in this chapter that theological ethics has not failed us. When one tries to live according to the tenets of Christ, that is, to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself,"[81] it will be very difficult for one to deliberately use the power gained from technological advancement to the detriment of the human race and subsequent future human existence. Anyone truly in Christ who desires to follow the teachings of Christ may use power in the context of the *action of Christ*[82] for the world, or act in *deputyship for Christ*[83] in this world. Christ Himself made it very clear that power should be reduced to service to humankind.[84] This means that, within the Christian context, this new-found power of humanity as a result of the development of technology referred to by Jonas as a source of worry for the future of humanity may not be a problem when used in the service of humankind. Anyone who takes God's promises seriously may live responsibly in such a way that the future existence of

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[81] Luke 10:27

[82] To use the phrase of Hauerwas, which refers to the sacrificial work of Christ for the world.

[83] To use the phrase of Bonhoeffer, which tells us to do as Christ did for humankind.

[84] Luke 22:26

mankind may not be a problem. Our conclusion in this chapter is that the Christian religion is retrospective as well as prospective in nature.

This researcher is of the view that Jonas's warning is relevant if, and only if, humanity fails to respond to the clarion call of God to come back into fellowship with Him through the death and resurrection of Christ and love one another. This is not to say that if the world is made of only Christians, then Jonas's warning is unfounded. We believe that whether Christians or not, the world is still made up of fallible human beings. The problem is that Jonas underestimates the power of God in Christ to change the world. The conclusion here is that, Jonas stood against the nihilism of the West and yet failed to ground the answer to the problem in a theological context.

In Chapter five, we discussed African communalism in the context of African ethics to try to come out with an African ethics of responsibility to contribute to the debate set into motion by Hans Jonas (which was theocentricized by William Schweiker) about the ethics of responsibility for the technological age. We noted that the African community falls within the social theory of responsibility. In this community, every member is expected to work towards the well-being of every individual. Not to do so is regarded as inimical to the continued existence of the community. Children are trained right from the beginning through proverbs, folklore, maxims, etc., to inculcate the habit of recognizing the needs of others, and to work for the welfare and well-being of every member of the community. It is a community in which there is individual and corporate responsibility as the fault of one person can bring disaster upon himself or the community as a whole.

Training children to grow responsibly in the community therefore is the corporate responsibility of every adult in the community. The main features of the African social community are cooperation, mutual aid, interdependence, solidarity, mutual help, collective responsibility, reciprocal obligations, altruism, and the like. It is observed that among Africans, togetherness is prided over separateness. In other words, harmony and interdependence is at the center of African life. This harmony is also extended to the gods and ancestors, who are the custodians of the people and the continued existence of the community. Community for the African involves the people, the gods, the ancestors and even the unborn.

Furthermore, we also observed that the continued existence of humanity can only come when the community identifies with the forces of nature. In other words, the community may continue to exist if it is in accord with the whole of life around and within it. The community is therefore seen as a microcosm in a macrocosm of nature, which includes the forest, animals and even herbs. It is further believed that human existence could easily break down if the biosphere was neglected. We concluded here that even though the African is supposed to live in harmony with the biosphere, modern day practices of the indiscriminate falling of tress for timber, the deplorable conditions in which certain animals are reared and the bad treatment of communities by mining institutions need much to be desired.

Another highlight of chapter five is the criticism of Africans by Nicolas Sarkozy, the former prime minister of France. He advised Africans to take responsibility for their

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destiny by looking into the future rather than looking back and always using the past to justify the present. He referred to the blame syndrome of Africans as one most important obstacle to the development of Africa. Even though within the social theory of responsibility the practice of blame is the means by which society assigns responsibility to the individual or to a group of people, it seems to have gone overboard within the African society. If Africans, in this day and age, therefore could move away from the culture of blame and take responsibility for the future development of the continent, much could be achieved, he stressed.

We also assert in this chapter that *Ubuntu* refers to the mutual caring and sharing within the African community. In other words, *Ubuntu* is one's responsibility of caring, sharing and service to the *other*, where the *other* refers to your fellow human beings. Humaneness, compassion and fellow feeling further explain what *Ubuntu* means. *Ubuntu* ethics of responsibility could therefore refer to the selfless caring for another person without expecting a reward, an altruistic kind of sharing. The selfless way by which strangers were welcomed and cared for is also an example of *Ubuntu* ethics of responsibility. A life of *Ubuntu* is, therefore, the *summum bonum par excellence* that Africans are bringing on the plate for the search for an ethics of responsibility that will be the antidote for the dangers that accompany the advance of science and technology in our world (cf. Murove 2009a: 30). It is, therefore concluded that the *Ubuntu* ethics of responsibility is retrospective as well as prospective in nature, and therefore qualifies for a future-oriented ethics of responsibility. What Jonas formulates as the maxim of his ethical imperative – *Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the*

permanence of genuine human life; or expressed negatively: *Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life* (Jonas 1984:11) – it was observed, may as well apply to the African moral situation. This is because when you look at some of the examples of the values that are upheld by the African community, like for example, compassion, concern for others, upholding of human dignity and justice, one has no qualms but to conclude that in addition to being retrospective in nature, African morality is also prospectively incline.

How can *Ubuntu* ethics of responsibility support a positive use of technological instruments within African communities? It is important to note that science produces the knowledge which technology uses for the benefit of humanity. The advancement of technology poses danger to the future existence of humanity when technology is misapplied, even in Africa. It was observed that within the African community, for instance, cutlass is a very good farm instrument, but when wrongly used, the same cutlass could be very deadly. We recollect what happened in Sierra Leone in recent history when cutlasses and other technological instruments were used to cut the hands of innocent civilians and the use of technological instruments in civil wars by Africans to destroy themselves. So Jonas's warning is timely as it tells the African who has gained power as a result of holding a cutlass or a gun in his hands to be careful lest the future existence of humanity could be at risk.

It was also observed in this chapter that the concept of time in the African community affects the African's attitude to time, especially in the cities where the precise Western

conception of time has been borrowed by the African city dwellers. This means that because of the African concept of time, most Africans have no sense of responsibility towards precise time. Time and again, African workers abroad, and in some occasions in Africa itself, have had their employment terminated because of their attitude to time. This is still happening in this globalized world because most Africans still have a "hang-over" of the African cultural time consciousness. In fact, most Africans of today whether in North America or in Europe or in Africa, can be described as notorious late-comers. We noticed that the "African time" in this globalized world is prevalent in Africa and places where Africans are populated, whether in Europe or in North America. Responsibility entails that when you agree to work for a certain period of time, you do exactly that, unless you have the permission to do otherwise. Responsibility calls for fairness, whether in Africa or any part of the world. When we say that the *Ubuntu* ethics of responsibility calls for us to share with and care for our neighbors, it means also that when we make promises or contracts, we have to obey them to the letter.

In Chapter six, we took the debate to another level by engaging the Christian ethics of responsibility produced by Schweiker with African ethics to come out with an African Christian ethics of responsibility as an alternative to the solution of the problem. At the heart of the *Ubuntu nature of Christ* is the selfless sharing and caring that humanity is supposed to exhibit towards one another in the context of the paradigm of Christ's altruistic death for humanity in order to restore estranged humanity back to God. Power

in *Ubuntu nature of Christ* is supposed to be geared towards selflessly sharing and caring for humanity and the biosphere in the context of the altruistic work of Christ.

But suffice it to say that in most African communities of today, animals and the ecological environment are not very well cared for. In most African countries, depletion of the forest, especially for timber is being done with impunity, thus exposing the people to environmental hazards. Dogs and cattle are all over the community eating from the rubbish piles around and drinking from the gutters. Chiefs have given lands to miners who are digging all over the land of communities without regard to soil erosion and the dangers that such open spaces cause to the people living in the communities through landslides. In addition to that, farm lands have been allocated to such miners without recourse to the needs of the people, thus depriving the people of their daily livelihood, and consequently, increasing poverty within the communities. Moreover, the little technology that we have in terms of machetes, guns, spears and the like, are being used in civil wars and the killing of innocent children and women. Governments of African are using huge sums of money to import ammunitions of war, monies that could be used to better the lot of the poor in the community. If African communities want to be taken seriously by the Western communities, they must take as their paradigm the *Ubuntu nature of Christ* where the people and the biosphere alike could be cared for. It is only then that Africans would be able to confidently sell the life of *Ubuntu* to the world and be taken seriously.

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