Ubuntu: A communitarian response to liberal individualism?

By

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Ubi Caritas et armor; Deus Ubi est! (Where there is charity and love is where God is found!)

Viva Cristo Rey!! Long Live Christ the King!!— (The first ubuntuist himself).

Abstract

Title: Ubuntu: A communitarian response to liberal individualism?

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This dissertation addresses a crucial question central to contemporary political philosophy: Does the priority of individual rights guarantee a genuine healthy communal life and democratic vision of politics? Alternatively, does a vision of moral and political philosophy that emphasizes primacy of rights of individuals undermine the significance of community with a concomitant negation of an ideal of the good life that is to be shared in common among individuals? This debate, otherwise termed the 'communitarian-liberal' debate, forms the background of this dissertation and my intention was to find resources in both Western communitarianism and *Ubuntu* philosophy that challenged the liberal project.

According to liberal thinkers, individual rights and autonomy are prioritized over the common good, which is to say that liberalism is predicated upon a doctrine of individualism, which states that the individual right is a primary reality whereas the community or the common good is a second-order or an artificial construct. This specific conception of what it is to be an individual is presupposed by liberal understandings of morality. Besides advocating an atomistic conception of what it is to be a subject, liberal thinkers also tend to advocate a universal – impartial – ethics and a politics that gives priority to individual rights and State neutrality over principles of communal harmony and responsibility. In this dissertation, I have explored an extended in-depth analysis of two alternatives to liberal individualism: Western communitarianism and *Ubuntu* Philosophy.

Communitarians challenge the primacy of the individual good and the picture of the free-choosing individual it embodies because it is premised on the mistaken form of individualism that views humans as individualized, solitary, 'atomistic' beings that exist prior to society and remain unencumbered by social identity or communal ethics. Western communitarians defend the view that we derive our identity through our participation in community. Communitarians argue that the basic principles embodied in liberal individualism lead to morally unsatisfactory consequences such as the impossibility of living a genuinely healthy communal life insofar as living a genuinely healthy communal life presupposes a certain degree of identification with one's community, and the identification in question is one that involves understanding that one's identity is constituted by the specific conduct in which one engages with one's community.

Ubuntu philosophy is derived from the African conception of the human person and his/her relationship with the community. In general terms, it embodies the ethics that defines Africans. Africans are social beings that are in constant communion with one another where a human being is a human being only through his or her relationships to other human beings (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*.) As a people-centred philosophy, *Ubuntu* states that the worth of the human person is dependent on social, cultural and spiritual criterion. It is a life dependent on the normative engagement with the community, a substantive appreciation of the common good and a constitutive engagement with one another in a rational ethical community. In this way, community and communality become central to the African identity. And, contrary to most African communitarian writers, common good in African value system is not achieved through consensus but through realist perspectivism. However, the extent that Ubuntu philosophical ethics remains a criterion that defines the African identity has been undermined by forces of liberal individualism. An appeal is made to virtue ethics for the moral reconstruction of Ubuntu philosophy in challenging liberal individualism.

Key words: common good, communitarianism, community, deontology, ethics, individualism, individuals, liberalism, rights, rationality, Ubuntu, utilitarianism, virtue ethics, consensus, realist perspectivism.

Abstrak

Titel: *Ubuntu: 'n* Gemeenskapsgerigte antwoord op liberale individualisme?
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Hierdie verhandeling ondersoek 'n kritiese vraagstuk in kontemporêre politieke filosofie: Verskaf die voorrang wat aan individuele regte toegeken word sowel 'n waaragtig gesonde gemeenskaplike lewe as 'n demokratiese politiek kyk? Andersyds ondermyn 'n morele en politieke filosofie wat die regte van die individu voorop stel, nie moontlik die belang van die maatskappy met 'n daarmee gepaardgaande ontkenning van 'n singewende gemeenskaplike interafhanklikheid nie? Teen die agtergrond van hierdie vraagstuk, ook bekend as die liberale gemeenskapsgerigte debat ("communitarian – liberal" debate), word die moontlikheid ondersoek om in die lig van beide Westerse gemeenskapsgerigte filosofiese benaderinge asook die *Ubuntu*-filosofie die liberale benadering onder ie loep te neem.

Volgens liberale denkers geniet die regte en outonomie van die individu voorrang bo die welsyn van die samelewing. Vervolgens word betoog dat die leerstellings van radikale individualisme (atomisme) die regte van die individu as 'n basiese reg bekou, terwyl die samelewing of gemene welsyn as ondergeskik daaraan beskou word – 'n sekondêre konstruk sonder integriteit. Op hierdie beskouing van die individu grondves die liberale denkers hul benadering tot die moraliteitskwessie. Afgesien van die verkondiging van 'n atomistiese benadering tot die subjek, hang liberale denkers ook 'n universele, onpartydige etiek aan wat die individu en die onpartydigheid van die staat belangriker ag as 'n vreedsame naasbestaan en gemeenskapsverantwoordelikheid. In hierdie verhandeling word twee ander moontlikhede as die liberale individualisme indringend ondersoek; te wete die Westerse gemeenskapsgerigte benadering en *Ubuntu.*

Gemeenskapsgerigte filosowe betwis sowel die voorrang van individuele regte, sowel as die voorveronderstelde konstruk van die ongebonde individu met die reg tot vrye wil omdat dit op die misvatting berus van die mens as 'n onafhanklike atomistiese wese wars van 'n gedeelde identiteit en verantwoordelikheid. Westerse gemeenskapsgerigte filosowe beweer dat iedereen 'n eie identiteit konstrueer op basis van die inbinding in breër gemeenskapsverband. Hulle glo die basiese aannames van die liberale individualisme het moreel onaanvaarbare gevolge soos die ontbeer van 'n gemeensakpsidentiteit in dié mate

waarin ’n identiteitsbesef ’n voorwaarde is vir ’n gesonde en vervulde lewe. Hierdie identifikasie met die gemeenskap behels ’n begrip van die belang van gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid .

Die *Ubuntu*-filosofie komt voort uit die verband tussen die individu en die breër gemeenskap binne Afrikakonteks. Breedweg kom dit neer op die etiek van wat ’n Afrikaan is. Die wyse waarop die Afrikaan gestalte gee aan sy menslikheid, is afhanklik van hoe hy hom as ’n *Ubuntu*-mens verwesenlik. Afrikane is sosiaal gerigte wesens intens betrokke by mekaar – jou menslikheid word in terme van jou sosiale betrokkenheid bepaal (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*). As ’n mens-gesentreerde filosofie definieer *Ubuntu* die belang van die persoon in samehang met van sosiale, kulturele en spirituele kriteria. Elke lewe berus op normatiewe betrokkenheid by die gemeenskap, ’n waardering van die algemene belang en ’n daadwerklike verbintenis tot mekaar. Só staan die gemeenskap en gemeenskaplikheid sentraal in die siening van wat identiteit vir ’n Afrikaan inhou. In teenstelling met die algemene oortuiging, word die welsyn van die gemeenskap nie bevorder deur konsensus nie, maar eerder deur ‘n weklikheids perspektiwisme. Hierdie siening waarvolgens die *Ubuntu*-benadering die Afrikaan se identiteit bepaal, word deur die liberale individualisme ondergrawe .

In hierdie studie word ’n appèl gerig dat die deugde-etiek ingespan moet word ten einde die morele rekonstruering die Afrika-ideniteit te verwerklik en die waarde van die liberale individualisme bevraagteken.

Sleutelwoorde: Atomisme, algemene welsyn ,gemeenskapsgerigtheid (communitarianism), gemeenskap, deontologie, etiek, individualisme, liberalisme, regte, Ubuntu, utilitarisme, deugde-etiek, realis perspektiwisme.

Table of contents

Chapter 1

> *A great democratic revolution is taking place in our midst; everybody sees it, but by no means everybody judges it in the same way. Some think it a new thing and, supposing it an accident, hope that they can still check; others think it irresistible, because it seems to them the most continuous, ancient, and permanent tendency known to history* (Alexis de Tocqueville*, Democracy in America [1835:2f])*

1:1. Introduction

One of the key debates in contemporary political philosophy has been that between the liberals and communitarians. Laying claim to the values of equality, freedom, and genuine openness to different models of human fulfilment, the central thesis of the liberal tradition is that a just society should not promote any particular ends, but should allow its citizens to pursue private ends, values or interests congruent with a similar liberty for others. Such society, if it is just, must govern by principles that do not presuppose any particular conception of the good. Thus, in liberal tradition, a society is just not by the virtue of the *telos*, end, or purpose to which it aims, but rather by the society's refusal to choose in advance amongst competing ends or purposes. Liberals claim that individual right is prior to the common good where priority of right means (i) that individual rights cannot be sacrificed for the sake of the general good (here contemporary liberalism represented by John Rawls opposes utilitarianism) and (ii) that the principles of justice that denote these rights cannot be founded on any particular conception of the good life (here it opposes teleology).

The challenge to the liberal perspective emerges from a tradition which proffers a single model of human fulfilment and places heavy emphasis on shared community values and civic virtue. This tradition has been labelled 'communitarianism' despite the fact that some members of its 'pantheon' oppose this description (Delaney, 1994: viii). In fact, in an open letter to *The Responsive Community* (summer 1991: 4) MacIntyre has this to say:

> In spite of rumours to the contrary, I am not and never have been communitarian. For my judgement is that the political, economic, and moral structures of advanced modernity in this country, as elsewhere, exclude the possibility of realizing any of the worthwhile types of political community which at various times in the past have been achieved, even if always in imperfect forms. And I also believe that attempts to remake modern societies in systematically communitarian ways will always be either ineffective or disastrous.

Nonetheless, reducing the liberal/communitarian debate in terms of a sharp divide between individualism and shared values is not only an oversimplification of the issue under discourse but also a misreading of the imperative of the debate. As a matter of fact, each tradition does attribute some status to the values that take centre stage in the competing tradition. The liberals acknowledge some common commitments and values necessary for a viable society. The liberals argue for a commitment to the liberal virtues of rights and obligations and to the support of institutions that will advance the developments of these liberal virtues (Delaney 1994: viii). The communitarians for their part do not propagate a wholly monolithic society where everyone has the same commitments, values, and interests; the communitarian tradition does give room for a dimension of individuality within a society 'informed by a common conception of the good' (Delaney 1994: viii). In fact a typical liberal argument could proceed this way: as an individual, each person possesses a unique identity defined by a conscious subjective orientation by which an individual initiates and carries out projects that unfolds in his/her life narrative. The individual holds the unassailable right to actualize his/her life plan while adopting universal principles of morality in his/her relationship with others (Daly 1994: viii). At the same time, a certain paradox emerges in that the same individual is a member of a community embedded in a network of family and social relationships. This membership defines the individual's identity as he/she seeks personal fulfilment by his/her engagement with the evolving social structures where he/she finds himself. The individual experiences personal liberty in an expanded self-development nourished through these activities from whence he appreciates and values a normative substantive commitment to the communal good (Daly 1994: xiv).

1:2. What is at stake?

What is wrong with liberalism? Communitarians reject liberal individualism (particularly with regards to the account of the human good), which they see at the heart of the liberal tradition. The liberals, in their

understandings of the plural models of human fulfilment, accentuate the value of autonomy and argue for a social union sufficiently inclusive to permit the development of these various models and an arrangement that provides the necessary conditions for this pluralism. Liberal individualists believe that the right is prior to the good since the common commitments do not pervade the overall good.

Both the liberal and communitarian traditions acknowledge that the human person is intrinsically social and needs the mutual supplementation and interdependence of the social order for genuine fulfilment. Therefore, it is their respective visions vis-à-vis the kind of social union optimal for genuine human fulfilment that divide the perspectives of the two traditions. While liberal ethical philosophy places emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy, the Western communitarian ethics places emphasis on the idea of community and argues that only a theory of society in which common good is at the core can proffer a validation or a coherent account of a viable social order (Delaney 1994: viii).

The term 'community' is very ambiguous with some scholars distinguishing almost ninety-four distinct meanings of the term (Hillery 1955:20). According to the Random House Dictionary of the English Language, the term 'community' is derived from the Latin word *commūnitas* (from *communis*) meaning fellowship, community of relations or feelings of a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government and have a common cultural and historical heritage. Nevertheless, the term community, as De-Shalit (1992: 1) would argue, is not new in political thought and can be dated back to the Milesians, through the works of Aristotle, through the writings of Cicero on the Roman law of community and common interests, St Augustine's community of emotional ties, Thomas Aquinas' idea of the community as a body politic and Edmund Burke's famous concept of community as a partnership not only between the living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.

However, despite the different interpretations, the term community inheres various forms of relationships. As Daly (1994: xv) would opine, a community consists of a limited set of people bound together in networks of relationships, whose members hold common beliefs and values. These relationships, according

to Daly, are usually personal, face-to-face and unmediated. These persons have a sense of friendship and of belonging—a sense of 'we-ness'- while the interests and identity of each member intimately depend on and form that of the whole as members demonstrate solidarity with one another.

Communitarian criticisms of liberalism stress the importance of a sense of community that would yield a substantive appreciation of the good in our society. A substantive appreciation of the good requires a meaningful sense of community without which we are unable to grasp the moral point of the significance of our commitment to the good. Liberal individualism is indifferent to concerns with community. In emphasizing a commitment to neutrality on the question of the appropriate modes of life people ought to pursue, liberals ignore the question of the communal ties we owe to one another as critical in determining the private decisions that each individual makes vis-à-vis the most appropriate and suitable mode of life to be chosen.

Communitarianism, therefore, is an ethics that views the community as the most optimal form of life for human beings, and any frustration of the basic human need for community may lead to alienation, depersonalisation, broken homes, etc. According to this perspective, the social and moral character of human beings cannot be realized in a fragmented society that does not institutionally manifest and foster the unique ideals of human flourishing. Such human realization can only be achieved in a community that is informed by a common conception of the human good as a necessity for human fulfilment (Delaney 1994: ix). Communitarian ethics advocates a community informed by active citizenry characterised by the customary morality of a community, which is refined by generations of intelligent members in view of arriving at a meaningful and enabling ethical standard. On this thesis, communitarians claim that it is only under the influence of a revitalized community that we may be able to live fulfilling lives, characterized, as it were, by a type of communitarianism that embraces metaphysics of, and ethics for, the human person, a concept of community, and a political philosophy (Daly 1994: xiv).

An African conception of community is closely tied in with an African metaphysical worldview. A traditional African community comprises the living, the unborn and the living-dead. A community is a place of

harmony between the living, the living-dead and the unborn. Within this harmony is the ontological fact of an African community such that the existence of both the individual and the community is not only characterised by interdependence but also by harmonisation of values and maintenance of balance within humanity. In this African worldview, formation of one's personhood takes place in community. The self-identity of an individual as a person is achieved through a processual incorporation into the community characterised by interaction and interconnection in specific cultural contexts. On this conception, being a member in specific historical communities becomes a necessary ontological catalyst in self-understanding and identity insofar as an inclusive communal set of ends is accepted as the starting point.

Personhood in an African worldview is a potency given at birth and determined by both the individual and the community. On this note, I will differ from African thinkers like Menkiti for positing that personhood in traditional African thought is absolutely determined by the community. Contrary to this view, I will argue that personhood in the African worldview is a social formation achieved through an inclusive social process of transformation that embodies an individual's proactive engagement with the community. And if the self is a social being, a being-in-community or a person-in-relation-to-others, a person becomes a person only after incorporation into a specific community. A person is constituted by a processual framework determined by constitutive social engagements.

In proposing Ubuntu as a viable response to liberal individualism, the philosophical tenets of Ubuntu are derived from the communitarian social arrangements of the African people. Ubuntu is better defined as a philosophy that describes the way of life of the African people. By African I mean the people of sub-Saharan African (c.f. Ch.3:2). It is this communitarian approach to life characterized by attitude of sharing, solidarity and magnanimity towards the other that informs Ubuntu philosophy. Here, the issue at stake is not what community is understood to be, but what form of community is best for a democratic vision of politics. My intention is to present a vision of politics that stresses the quality of relationships one could anticipate or desire for one's

community, relationships that do not put the individual right above the community nor prioritize the common good over the individual right – a holistic relationship.

In this dissertation, it is my hope to find resource in which an African political philosophy, namely Ubuntu, can supplement the current political order of neo-liberal individualism embraced by post-colonial African states. My argument is that the dominant political paradigms embraced by post-colonial African states are at best weak and warped by false ontological foundations insofar as they are systems characterized by liberal individualism. This individualism necessitated a shift 'from being to having', a situation bound phenomena whereby one's humanity is dependent upon what one has or has managed to acquire rather than who one is. Subsequently, I shall argue that the current political order is a betrayal of African value systems because the metaphysical foundation on which it is grounded does not reflect the African identity. On this basis, I propose that a retrieval of Ubuntu ethics is necessary to supplement the dominant political paradigm in most contemporary African States as well as offering a rich resource for the moral reconstruction of the African identity. I appeal to Ubuntu because it provides the appropriate metaphysical foundation that defines the African as a being or a person in relation to others; a communitarian personality which remains politically inclusive as opposed to the exclusive, individualistic order offered by neo-liberal individualism.

I begin in Chapter 2 with an analysis of the historical importance and core features of liberalism as well as a review of the central criticisms advanced in the 1980s. In particular, I shall present communitarian responses which claim that the individualism assumed by the liberal tradition offers us no concrete basis for ethics since it ignores the special commitments a person makes to particular others; it relies on intellectual judgment alone and as a consequence it neglects the significance of affectivity in ethical response by assuming that this intellectual judgment is of a higher ethical standard than the customs of a particular society. I will review the communitarian response to this tradition and the counter liberal rebuttal.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on my own argument embodied in Ubuntu philosophy, noting how that argument fits into (and moves beyond) the aforementioned debate. My contention in these chapters is not to

present Ubuntu philosophy as a substitute to the Western communitarian responses to liberal individualism. In line with the title of the dissertation (with a question mark?), my aim is to explore and analyze strategies in which Ubuntu philosophy can either shed more light on what is wrong with liberal individualism or shed more light on why a communitarian mode of life is a preferential option. I shall explore the possibility of Ubuntu philosophy in complementing Western communitarian responses to liberal individualism while accommodating some elements of liberal tradition. I say elements of liberal tradition because my aim is not an attack on liberalism as a theory, but a possible challenge to such individualism inherent in liberal tradition.

Chapter Two
The Liberal-Communitarian Debate

> *….Men, Women, and children are members of many communities—families; neighbourhoods; innumerable social, religious, ethnic, workplace and professional associations; and the body politic itself. Neither human existence nor individual liberty can be sustained for long outside the interdependent and overlapping communities to which we all belong. Nor can any community long survive unless its members dedicate some of their attention, energy, and resources to shared projects. The exclusive pursuit of private interest erodes the network of social environments on which we all depend, and is destructive to our shared experiment in democratic self-government. For these reasons, we hold that the rights of individuals cannot long be preserved without communitarian perspective. A communitarian perspective recognizes both individual and human dignity and the social dimension of human experience (MacIntyre, 1991)*[1]

2:0. Brief introduction

This chapter engages with issues central to the Western liberal-communitarian debate. It is a review of arguments advanced by the two different traditions. I will begin with the historical background to this debate, oscillating between J.S. Mill and Kant as laying the foundation for contemporary and modern liberal theory. I will review the contemporary reconstruction of liberal individualism as championed especially by John Rawls amongst others. Since communitarianism emerged as a response to liberal individualism, this chapter collates various western communitarian ideas as developed by a wide range of thinkers in challenging the idea of a free-floating individual ontologically independent of community. The communitarians question the theoretical foundation of liberal individualism, which gives primacy to an individual's right over the common good and that assumes state neutrality. I will engage in the historical background to the communitarian commitment, paying close attention to Aristotle and Hegel. This will be followed by a review of contemporary communitarian response to the theoretical foundation of liberal individualism. I hope that in the course of the narrative, I will find critical resource in communitarianism to enunciate the inconsistencies on which the theoretical foundation of liberal individualism is founded. Accordingly, this chapter is divided into three major sections. The first section (2:1) deals with the historical origin of liberal individualism as well as the contemporary defense of that tradition. The second part (2:2) of the chapter focuses on communitarian challenges to liberal individualism.

[1] From the Preamble to 'The Responsive Communitarian Platform: Rights and Responsibilities', in the *Responsive Community* (Winter 1991/2), 4, a new quarterly journal dedicated to exploring the relationship between individual rights and community obligations.

The final section (2:3) is a synthesis of both traditions: counter-liberal rebuttal (notice how liberals like Rawls shift their position, impinging on self-identity as metaphysical rather than sociological) and communitarians trying to refute these rebuttals by their insistence on the psycho-social nature of the human identity.

2:1. Historical background

Political philosophy has offered at least two moral foundations as the basis for liberalism: utilitarianism and Kantians or rights-theorists. The distinction is best understood in the defence of the values which liberals claim as their goals, i.e. freedom, equality, toleration and self-determination. The utilitarians defend these values instrumentally and the rights-theorists (Kantians) construe these values as fundamental to human beings, who must act as a matter of duty.

The historical background of the utilitarian liberal position is traced among others to J.S. Mill. In his moral philosophy Mill accepts the basic outlines of Bentham's ethical hedonism: the experience of pleasure and absence of pain becomes the only thing desirable in itself. The total sum of happiness or the greatest good of the greatest number is the criterion of morality. Mill's argument in defence of hedonism is quite simple: 'the only proof capable of being given that an object is visible is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible is that people hear it, and so other sources of our experience. In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable is that people do actually desire it' (Mill, 1859: U 4)[2]. According to Mill, one's happiness cannot be given any more weight than the happiness of another person since 'the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned…. Each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore a good to the aggregate of all persons' (Mill, 1U2; U4).

[2] Since there are so many readily available editions of Mill's works and because the chapters are relatively short, making passages easy to find, reference numbers refer to the chapter numbers where the quotations may be found. The following abbreviations refer to Mill's two major works: L – *On Liberty* and U – *Utilitarianism.*

In *On Liberty*, Mill argues that 'the sole end for which mankind [sic] are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their members, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightly exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his or her will is to prevent harm to others' (Mill, 1859: L.I). Mill's argument for liberty is an argument for individualism — let individuals pursue their happiness in their own way. The only ultimate value is the happiness of individuals, and individuals can best achieve their happiness in a civilized society when they are left free to pursue personal interests with their own talents. Underlying this understanding of individualism is the assumption that the primacy of individuality and individual development depends on the contributions that can be made only by individuals who think for themselves. Mill's theory of liberty requires that each individual and group of individuals, as well as the government and the mass of the people should refrain from interfering with the thought, expression, and action of any individual. Mill argues that the individual belongs to oneself and is sovereign over oneself. The thoughts of an individual are part of an individual and therefore the society should exert no control over them. According to Mill, even in the sphere of ideas, people should be free to express their thoughts and beliefs because truth is most quickly discovered when opportunity is given to the other to refute falsehoods. And even when ideas are false, dissenters from the ideological status quo make a contribution, for they prevent intellectual stagnation and force us to re-examine the grounds for the prevailing convictions. Unless this is done, a true opinion will become 'a dead dogma, not a living truth' (Mill, 1859: L.2). According to Mill, the only time that society may become sovereign over the acts of the individual is when the individual's action impinges on or harms others. And even then, the burden of proof lies on society to demonstrate that the individual's action is harmful, rather than on the individual to prove that it is harmless.

Mill's political and moral philosophy is based on the utilitarian conviction that individuals are the best judges of their own interests, but are not always the best judges of the interests of others. Though individuals do sometimes make choices which may not actually be the best for themselves, yet it is best to allow them this choice, simply because it is their own choice and they are autonomous individuals. He writes: 'the only part of

the conduct of anyone, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign' (L1).

Despite Mill's defence of political liberalism, the implications of Mill's ethics are problematic. Utilitarianism as propounded by Mill has been attacked for not respecting the distinction and plurality between persons; for its indifference to our different satisfactions and for treating persons as means rather than ends in themselves. Utilitarianism treats the society as one individual by trying to maximize the general welfare and thereby conflating our different and unique desires into a single unit (Sandel 1984:3). Furthermore, the liberal utilitarian position is bound to failure since there are times when the greatest happiness for the greatest number involves morally deleterious acts as evident in the following acute example by Alasdair MacIntyre (1967:238): '…if in a society of twelve people, ten are sadists who will get great pleasure from torturing the remaining two, does the principle of utility enjoin that the two should be tortured?' Now, if the greatest happiness is derived when the two are tortured then the torture according to the utilitarian calculation is justified and this is not only an inadequate foundation for any form of liberty but also contradicts the basic notion of individual rights. Sandel (1984:2) illustrates this inconsistency more powerfully: '…if enough cheering Romans pack the colosseum to watch the lion devour the Christian, the collective pleasure of the Romans will surely outweigh the pain of the Christian, intense though it be. Or if a big majority abhors a small religion and wants it banned, the balance of preferences will favour suppression, not toleration'. Utilitarianism, Sandel (1984:2) argues, strives to

> Defend individual rights on the ground that respecting them will serve utility in the long run. But this calculation is precarious and contingent. It hardly secures the liberal promise not to impose on some the values of others. As the majority will in an inadequate instrument of liberal politics, so the utilitarian philosophy is an inadequate foundation of liberal politics.

In the liberal camp, contemporary rights theorists reject utilitarianism as a theory for liberalism insofar as certain rights are so basic and fundamental that not even general welfare can override them. This is what Rawls (1971: 3ff) meant when he wrote that 'each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that

even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override…. the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests'.

The rights-theorists need a theory of rights that does not hinge on utilitarian principles nor on any particular conception of the good that assumes pre-eminence of one way of life over others. Moreover, only a justification or consideration that is neutral among competing or particular ends could sustain the liberal determination not to favour or choose any particular ends or impose its preferred way of life on its citizens. To find this justification, the rights-theorists made an appeal to Kantian ethics from whence the kind of liberal individualism they advocate was rooted and nurtured.

Kant's view is different from Mill's because the former did not think that morality was simply a matter of preventing harm to others. Kant maintained that even if you were isolated on an island you still had moral duties to yourself and that harming one's self is immoral. Writing a century earlier than Mill, Kant would have argued that empirical principles such as utility were unfit as a basis for moral law, while an instrumental defence of freedom and rights not only leaves rights vulnerable, but also does not respect the intrinsic worth and dignity of the human person insofar as utilitarianism treats people as a means to other people's happiness and not as an end in themselves. Kant in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* puts it categorically in his maxim, '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: 47).

Underlying Kantian ethics is the fact that a person has different desires and ends, and therefore any principles derived from them can only be contingent. However, since the moral law needs a *categorical* foundation and not a contingent one, even a universal desire, as in our desire for happiness, will not suffice. This is because as there are many people, so will there be different conceptions of happiness, and to impose any particular conception as 'regulative' would imply imposing some people's conception on others and thereby denying them the freedom and right to choose their own particular conception of happiness. But does this assumption hold? Sandel (1984b: 81-96) states that 'to govern ourselves in conformity with desires and

inclinations, given as they are by nature or circumstance, is not really to be self-governing at all. It is rather a refusal of freedom, a capitulation to determinations given outside us'.

Kant considers morality as superior to philosophy, action as superior to contemplation, practical reason as superior to theoretical reason. The superiority of morality over philosophy entails the equal worth of all persons. The superiority of action over contemplation entails the primacy of freedom over nature, while the superiority of practical reason grounds a critique of theoretical reason, which includes science and metaphysics. Practical reason awakens the human person from the slumber of ignorance since it gives equal access to truth. It helps people to purify their moral and political formulations through a continuous challenge of the empirical world (Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason* 1781: book 1, sect. 1).

According to Kant, the rights of the human persons are known 'a priori' (i.e. independent of experience). These rights have their source and content in the liberty associated with the essence of the rational being. The Kantian liberty is not dependent on the nature of the cosmos, the human person or of the society. This liberty is independent of the achievement of ends and cannot be employed in terms of determined or determining situations (Hassner 1987: 588). In other words, the critique of theoretical reason has opened a way for a radical liberation of the human person by eliminating everything that could impose laws on liberty outside of liberty itself. Kant echoes this sentiment in his *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals:* 'Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification except a good will' (Kant 1959: *FMM*: Sect.1)[3]. Virtues in themselves are not automatically good since a bad will can corrupt them. Morality in itself is not merely for the happiness of the human person or perfection thereof. The role of morality is to give value to both happiness and perfection (Hassner, 1987:588).

According to Kant (1959: *FMM*: Sect. 2), a symbiotic demand for respect and dignity exists between all people, for humanity itself is dignity. By this understanding, Kant means that one cannot be treated even by

[3] FMM will be used to refer to Immanuel Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals.*

oneself as a means, but always and only as an end. People have embedded within their persons intrinsic worth, rights and dignity, which must not be violated. The moral worth of an action emanates from the goodness of the will which animates that action and which can be extended to entail 'the purity of that will – the goodness of the will in its abstraction from every empirical end'. Purity of will entails purification of the will of any substantive intention. It implies animation of the will only in terms of its self-respect for the formal principle of the will which is the respect for the law for its sake. Thus, 'right' wholly emanates from the concept of freedom in the context of interpersonal human relationships and not derived from the end (i.e. the aim of achieving happiness) which all humans have by nature, or even the acclaimed means of realizing this end. Only if one is governed by principles that do not presuppose any particular end is one free to pursue one's end consistent with a similar freedom for all (Kant: FMM, 1793: 73, Sandel, 1984a: 84). But on what foundation is this freedom and individual right based since it is prior to and completely abstracted from every empirical end, even uninfluenced by Kant's 'special circumstances of human nature'? (Kant, Groundwork, 1785, [1956]: 92). Duty! Duty, Kant argues, is the necessity of performing an action out of respect for law; but on what basis can a moral person find what governs one's actions? What criterion could one use to recognize this duty? For Kant, the answer lies in the concept of universalization. At the point of acting, a person should ask himself or herself whether the rule governing his/her intended action could become the universal law of action for all persons without destroying the act itself. According to this imperative, I act only in conjunction with the maxim which enables me to will at the same time that it be a universal law. By this imperative, Kant dismisses as merely a hypothesis the dictates of the subjective ends and of the rational being striving for its particular purposes On the contrary, Kant proposes that 'the will orients itself upon the categorically valid ends-in-themselves' and the only possible ends-in-themselves imbued with an objective value are rational beings, i.e. subjects (Groundwork, 1964:70, *FMM*, 1785, 1959:39, Hassner, 1987: 591). According to Kant, a rational being is a member of the kingdom of ends. When prescribing universal laws to this kingdom of ends, he or she is also subject to those laws. However, he or she is a *ruler* in this kingdom of ends because in prescribing

those laws, he or she is not subject to foreign or alien will since in the kingdom of ends duty speaks not to the ruler but to each member in the same degree (FMM 1959:39). The subject invariably becomes the basis for moral law, and not the object of practical reason, but a subject capable of autonomous will, ' a subject of ends, namely a rational being himself, must be made the ground for all maxims of actions…[since it is only]…The subject of all possible ends himself [who] can give rise to the right of man' (Kant, FMM 1785:92). The subject enables the human person to rise above himself or herself and be able to 'participate in an ideal, unconditioned realm wholly independent of our social and psychological inclinations' (Sandel 1984b.84f). with this independence comes the necessary detachment which enables one to choose freely without any constraints or become 'unconditioned by the vagaries of circumstance' (Ibid).

The Kantian subject is transcendental. However, I must presuppose this transcendence in order to view myself as a free moral agent, since if I were an empirical being I would not be capable of freedom because every exercise of will would necessarily be conditioned by the desire for some object. In a scenario of my being merely empirical, all choice will be heteronomous, governed as it were by the pursuit of some end. According to this understanding, 'My will could never be a first cause, only the effect of some prior cause, the instrument of one or another impulse or inclination' (Sandel 1984b: 86). Kant himself (Groundwork 1785, 1956: 92) elucidates: 'when we think of ourselves as free, we transfer ourselves into the intelligible world as members and recognize the autonomy of the will'. It is in this way that the categorical imperative provides a moral basis for the political doctrine for the rights and freedom of the human person since the subject is prior to and independent of experience – a cornerstone for liberal individualism.

Now, since the subject is prior to its ends, so right is also prior to the good (as opposed to teleological ethics or even consequentialism which claims that the goal or outcome of an action is what determines its moral value). According to this liberal individualistic image, a society is best ordered when it is administered by rules that do not guarantee any particular conception of the good, since any contrary arrangement would

undermine the freewill of the human person; it would treat people as object rather than subject, as means rather than ends in themselves (Sandel, 1984b, 86f).

Where utilitarianism conflates our many desires into a single unit, rights-based liberals (Kantians) emphasize distinctness, uniqueness and separateness of persons. While the utilitarian self is defined as the sum total of the aggregate of its desires, the Kantian self is a freely-choosing self, independent of its desires and unconditioned by vagaries of circumstance. This is what Rawls (1971: 560) means when he writes that 'the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it; even a dominant end must be chosen from among numerous possibilities'. It was thus that Kantian ethics was fertile ground in which contemporary liberalism took root, grew, matured and flourished.

2:2. Contemporary liberalism

A powerful contemporary defence of liberalism was made by Isaiah Berlin in his famous essay: 'The Two Concepts of Liberty'. Berlin tried to revitalize the liberal tradition by dismissing the prevalent ethics that pronounced justice, equality and the common good as constituting the core tenets of liberty. For Berlin, 'everything is what it is: liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture, or human happiness or a quiet conscience' (Berlin 1969: 18). Berlin made a distinction between what he calls negative and positive freedom. Negative freedom involves a state of not being interfered with. The sense of positive freedom entails an individual's desire to be his/her own master. It means that one's life is such that one is in control of the choices one makes without any external coercion. It means being one's own instrument, a subject rather than an object, moved by reason and conscious purposes derived from within rather than from without. Berlin dismisses the positive concept of liberty in favour of the negative concept. According to Berlin, positive freedom limits one's autonomy and freedom by treating people as a means to the people's goals no matter how noble these goals might be. Proponents of positive liberty limit our freedom with a mask of educating us to become rational. In the first place, they will claim to have known some ultimate truth. Secondly, they will try to

educate or even force other persons to accept this ultimate truth and consequently impose such a doctrine or value on other persons, and this scenario is no different from tyranny.

Political liberty within the context of negative freedom involves the extent to which one can act unobstructed. Underlying this concept of negative freedom is an awareness that one's choices are constrained by variables outside of one's context and a person cannot claim to be free unless he/she is in control of those variables that limit his/her choices. Liberalism in this context is a doctrine by which the state does not obstruct, frustrate or coerce the choice of the agent. Thus, individuals are free from the interference of others. This liberal vision is a condition enjoyed by a solitary individual, asocial and atomistic in a non-committal arrangement where one is perceived to exist independent of his/her society.

Contemporary liberalism is shaped by the Western Enlightenment culture with its characteristic individualism. John Rawls' theory of justice has been cast as a contemporary representative of that tradition by many communitarians. In fact, some communitarians like MacIntyre went as far as recasting Rawls' theory within the mould of a radically individualistic tradition. MacIntyre (1981: 232-233) writes:

> [f]or…Rawls a society is composed of individuals, each with his or her own interest, who then have to come together and formulate common rules of life…individuals are thus…primary and society secondary, and the identification of individual interest is prior to, and independent of, the construction of any moral or social bonds between them…it is….as though we had been shipwrecked on an uninhabited island with a group of other individuals, each of whom is a stranger to me and to all the others…Rawls…envisages entry into social life as – at least ideally – the voluntary act of at least potentially rational individuals with prior interests who have to ask the question 'What kind of social contract with others is it reasonable for me to enter into?'

In MacIntyre's view, as in that of many other communitarians, Rawls' liberal theory as an epoch of tradition is a culmination of liberal individualism. However, does Rawls' theory represent this sentiment? I will now briefly examine the place of John Rawls in the current discourse.

Most contemporary liberals situate their arguments within a Rawlsian theoretical framework. In his *Theory of Justice*, Rawls responds to the objections to liberal theory by systematically reformulating the liberal theory. The first objection was against utilitarianism. Rawls tries to respond to liberal critics by reformulating

liberalism on Kantian foundations. First, he defends liberal freedom such that it may not be overridden by the good of society. Secondly, he develops an account of individual right that it does not depend on any particular substantive vision of the human good, but rather circumscribes a sphere of self-determination. The insight is to base liberalism on capacities and responsibilities as a moral platform from which we can exercise our Kantian moral powers of shaping, pursuing and revising (if need be) our life-plans, and at the same time be aware of such need in other persons to exercise their self-determination. According to Rawls (1980a: 524-7), everyone possesses a 'highest order of interest' in exercising powers of self-determination, powers that may only be exercised in the context of political and civil freedom. These freedoms embody value since they enable individuals to exercise their powers of self-determination and not necessarily because they are maximizing social utility (Bell 1993: 3).

According to Sandel (1984b: 8), Rawls' method was a unique way of acknowledging a plurality of ends while affirming a regulative framework of liberties and rights. Rawls, unlike earlier liberals, aimed at deriving principles of justice that do not presuppose any particular conception of the good. Rawls shows how self-interested individuals constructing their social order would adopt principles of justice that establish the priority of individual liberty.

Employing a fiction of a hypothetical 'original position', Rawls shows how a group of rational persons capable of a sense of justice would desire to cultivate a just society. These participants in the original position will establish a society that is fair and just to all by making their deliberation behind a hypothetical 'veil of ignorance' – they are ignorant of what their social status would be, unaware of their talents, abilities, intelligence, strengths, and even a conception of the good. According to Rawls (1971: 12), this veil of ignorance makes it possible that no one is 'advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances'. This scenario creates a situation of equal liberty; the choice that people undertake is a fair bargain insofar as all of them are similarly situated and none of them, by virtue of the veil of ignorance, would formulate a principle that would favour a particular

situation or condition. The principles of justice thus formulated define the fundamental terms of the association of people in this original position, regulate all agreements, and determine the kind of social arrangement as well as the forms of government that may be established.

Since none of the participants in the original position is aware of their role in an actual society which would be governed by the principles they adopt, it is most likely that they would adopt principles that will be fair and just even to the most disadvantaged. According to Matthew Festenstein (1998: 21), since persons in the original position desire to minimize the risk of not doing so well when they emerge from the veil of ignorance into real social life, the deliberators would argue that 'since I don't know my social position, I will seek to arrange matters so that I do as well as possible, even if I turn out to be one of the least advantaged'. Subsequently, participants here would be rationally and mutually disinterested, leading to a state of autonomy, knowing that even their obligations are self-imposed.

According to Rawls (1971: 60), people in the original position would agree on two principles of justice:

1. *Every person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with similar liberty for others* (Kantian universalism).
2. *Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.*

Rawls (1971:61) makes a distinction between the aspects of the social system which 'define and secure the equal liberties of citizenship and those that specify and establish social and economic inequalities'. The first principle expresses the priority of liberty such that the attainment of equal liberty is priotized over broad economic and social benefit. The second principle involves the distribution of income and wealth. These principles (unlike utilitarianism) exclude utility on the basis of maximizing the good for the whole at the expense of the few. According to Rawls (1971:15), we are led to these principles of justice when there is a conception of justice that nullifies 'the accidents of natural endowments and the contingencies of social circumstance as counters in [the] quest for political and economic advantage'. This reveals the fundamental liberal premise at

the centre of Rawls' theory, viz.: '*each one of us has life to lead, and it is a more basic fact about us than our particular projects and goals*'. These principles enunciate the consequences of excluding what Rawls (1971:15) calls 'those aspects of a social world that seem arbitrary from a moral point of view'.

In establishing the priority of equal liberty and then of economic and social benefits, Rawls excluded excessive focus not only on facts about my wealth, talents, and so forth, but also on any particular conception of the good that I may have that makes life meaningful for me as well as for others. A conception of the good embodies various beliefs privatized by each individual. In Rawls thinking, the purpose of privatizing the good is to forestall the risk that any enshrinement of a single conception of the good in the real world would prompt me to be either too tenacious or too skeptical about it. One's hope is that the situation is arranged in such a way that no matter what the conception of good that one supports, one may always be able to re-evaluate it, change it or abandon it.

Arranging the social and economic benefits for equality of all, especially in view of the least advantaged, expresses Rawls's argument that the deliberators who do not know the position they will occupy in the real world will be very sensitive and meticulous to the least advantaged in their deliberations. They are scrupulous when deliberating on different propositions for the distribution of social and economic benefits just in case they turn out to become the least advantaged when transplanted to the real world (Rawls, 1971: 18f).

But while the content of this different conception of the good varies, Rawls argues that the principles can be tested through a process of reflective deliberation by which we can compare and contrast ethical judgments, making adjustments on both sides until they match. At this point, we would have arrived at a reflective equilibrium that would justify the process of adopting the principles. According to Rawls (1971:20, 92-95), with this equilibrium, our principles and judgments would coincide 'since we know to what principle our judgments conform and the premises of their derivation …[by]… forming, revising and rationally pursuing' some conception of the good. In Rawls' words (1993:19,30,104):

> Just as each person must decide by rational reflection what constitutes his good, that is, the system of ends which it is rational for him to pursue, so a group of persons must decide once and for all what is

> to count among them as just and unjust. The choice which rational men would make in this hypothetical situation of equal liberty, assuming for the present that this choice between has a solution, determines the principles of justice.

The implication of Rawls' theory is enormous and this includes the principle of official state neutrality. The principle of official state neutrality implies that the state should not seek to promote any conception of the good life since it is in this neutrality that the state can respect the equal freedom necessary for everyone in pursuing their freely chosen conceptions of the good life. The best the government can do is to provide a framework for individuals to pursue the good in their own way, but it is wrong and unjust for the state to dictate what is valuable in life since it would be restricting people's capacity for self-determination.

2:2:1. Communitarian criticism

Communitarian criticisms of liberal individualism emerge from the fact that liberalism as a moral or political theory does not give adequate consideration to the importance and significance of community as it concerns personal identity, moral and political thinking, and consideration of our well being in the contemporary world (Bell 1993: 4). Liberalism defends an extreme individualistic conception of the self while liberal justice is meant for rational individuals able to choose freely their own way of life; have a personal conception of the good insofar as they possess what Rawls (1971:20) calls 'highest-order interests' in making choices about their 'central projects and life-plans, regardless of what it is that is chosen'. J.S. Mill echoed this view when he wrote of persons who are incapable of choosing their own life plans as little more than apes. Mill (1859:73f) writes, 'the human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice…. He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation'. But does this liberal image reflect our actual self-understanding? In the writing of Michael Sandel (1981:179), we usually perceive ourselves 'as members of this family or community, or nation or people, as bearers of this history, as sons and daughters of that revolution, as citizens of this republic'. Thus, rational choice (if at all), has very minimal and

limited role in the social attachments that we pick up in the course of socialization or upbringing. For example, it was not a rational choice for me to love my parents, to love myself, to love my children (if I have any), and it would be absurd to imagine that I stopped to think and reflect and so on before I made those choices. In retrospect, the liberals might emphasize the necessity of choices in life (like choosing a life partner or a career) such that government's role is only to provide individuals with means and resources to make those choices. Nonetheless, the extent and the moral and political implication of this assumption is a subject of intense debates since, according to Bell (1993:6), 'people do not necessarily have a highest order interest in rationally choosing their career and marriage partner as opposed to following their instincts, striving for ends and goals set for them by family, friends, community etc'. The theoretical foundation of liberal individualism at best yields to the following scenario: Selfishness becomes an ethical code as individual's interest and good takes priority over the community's good. There is heightened demand for personal freedom as personal interest becomes a criterion for common good oblivious to any implications for the civic order. The role of community is relegated to an assumed irrelevance while the individual's interest is elevated to the pinnacle of supremacy. In the writing of Henry Tam, liberal individualism is like an infected cell: 'the ethos of putting the needs of oneself above the need of others spreads to every aspect of social life, and the ability of communities to rely on their member's readiness to give support to each other is gradually destroyed from within' (Tam 1988:4). These are very crucial issues, and to shed light on them I undertake a historical survey of the communitarian criticism of liberal individualism.

Within the communitarian tradition, the ideal of liberty has been identified with positive liberty, to employ Isaiah Berlin's term. Liberty here involves much more than non-interference as represented in the liberal tradition. According to Philip Pettit (1994: 189), liberty in the communitarian framework demands 'elements like the absence of internal obstacles – strength of will and the like – the presence of external powers, in particular the power of sharing in the governance of one's community, and even the realization of a

certain moral ideal.' Similarly, Charles Taylor (1975: 24) in his book, *Hegel,* gives a further account on this view of liberty:

> The standard Enlightenment view of freedom was that of independence of the self-defining subject in relation to outside control, principally that of state and religious authority. Now freedom is seen as consisting in authentic self-expression. It is threatened not only by external invasion but by all the distortions that expression is menaced by … Not every author will make freedom his privileged description of the goal, but it is always one available description.

The liberal image of the political agent, as we have seen, is distinctly an Enlightenment thinking, characterized as it were by a tendency to break wholes into parts and a vision of individuals as the parts whereby the society is constituted. For example, in Enlightenment thinking, if we imagine the ability to think as the most essential of all human capacity, this idea would have come naturally to people's minds in the wake of the Cartesian cogitation, when the mind became the *res cogitans*. This is because in the Enlightenment circle thought was viewed as a capacity of the individual, an activity one undergoes without any logical debt to others apart from the mere contingent necessity of causal requirement for training and stimulation. In this way, the Enlightenment tradition portrays individuals as 'logically self-sufficient thinkers whose association in this or that community is a contingent affair' (Pettit 1994: 181). Conversely, the communitarian image is characterized by the heterodoxy of Enlightenment such as the Romantic tradition, conceived in the mind of Aristotle, given impetus by Vico and Rousseau, but developed in Germany under the influence of Herder and Schiller and reaching its most dynamic and systemic expression in the work of Hegel (Pettit 1994: 181). A major contribution of this counter-enlightenment project was to provide reasons for thinking of individuals as normatively engaged with their communities and dependent on their social relations with one another. In criticizing the Enlightenment, the Romantic tradition accepts that while thought is obviously a capacity of the individual, it nonetheless 'depends constitutively on participation in a public language and in other means of expression …[for]… without language, no thought; without society, no language' (Pettit 1994: 182). Thus the counter-enlightenment presents the picture of the individual as a person whose humanity depends on mutual

involvement and communal belonging while the community is no longer a mere 'contingent association of freestanding individuals, like an amalgam of separable parts' (Pettit 1994: 183).

Contemporary communitarian critics of liberalism are profoundly influenced by Aristotle and Hegel. Many elements of contemporary communitarianism can be seen in following the central themes of Aristotle's and Hegel's philosophies: the social constitution of the self, a life of virtue and harmonization of interests between individuals and their community. Such themes further include realistic and historically developed ethics, a dependence on rational deliberation to counteract mere orthodoxy and the ossification of social norms, and a conviction that individual freedom can only be sustained and achieved within a rational ethical community.

In what follows, I undertake a historical survey of the communitarian criticism of liberal individualism because the root of a community-based philosophy as given expression in the contemporary communitarian philosophy is traced to the philosophy of Aristotle and Hegel. These thinkers (Aristotle and Hegel) have become an inspiration for contemporary communitarian thinkers. The first section (2:2:2) is an account of Aristotle's theory of human nature and social organization as structured in the Greek city-state. According to Aristotle, humans are political by nature and it is only in the *polis* that they find fulfilment and happiness. Human happiness, on the other hand, is obtained by the exercise of the virtues learned in this social organization (*polis*). I do not contest the limitedness of Aristotle's theory since it excluded women, slaves, foreigners and only male citizens formed a vision of politics that united freedom and equality in a community. Despite its shortcomings however, Aristotle's theory of life of virtue and conception of citizenship has inspired many communitarian writers.

The second section (2:2:3) will give an account of Hegel's philosophy as expressed in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel abandons the idea of a pre-social, asocial, individualistic and self-interested individual that voluntarily makes a contract with others to form a community or civil society. Hegel situated the individual in a network of social relationships located as it were in a historical tradition. Unlike Kant, Hegel did

not argue that morality is derived merely from rationality and has nothing to do with experience or association with others. Hegel showed how self-reflective and rational members of a community could adapt their customs to suit particular needs and embody universal moral principles. According to Hegel, it is only in a rational ethical community that an individual can achieve personal freedom. By locating personal freedom and rationality in community, Hegel's philosophy has become a colossal inspiration for contemporary communitarian thoughts.

2:2:2. Aristotle: a life of virtue

In his ethics, Aristotle argues that all human actions aim at some end, 'every art and inquiry, and similarly every action and intentional choice, is held to aim at some good' (Nicomachean Ethics[4] 1.2. 1094a28-b7). Now, some ends are merely instrumental. We pursue them only in view of other goals. For example, I work hard on my M.A. paper. I do so to obtain an M.A. degree. This goal has value as it enables me to become more enlightened as a philosopher in view of being more at home in the community of rational animals and more helpful to others. However, this instrumental goal is not infinite and all the instrumental goals must ultimately aim at some final good we desire for its own sake. The most important task in life, then, is to determine what the chief and final good might be. According to Aristotle, the answer to the final good of all human activity is happiness. The Greek term employed by Aristotle is *eudaimonia* and is best thought of as meaning 'well-being' or 'living well' or 'having a life worth living'. Aristotle identifies this good as 'happiness' (*eudaimonia*). The good of any species is the end toward which members of that species strive to attain their specific perfection. Thus, the rules for right action for rational beings are those rules to which intentional conformity is demanded for rational persons to attain their specific perfection. The content, character and authority of these rules are derived from the end which obedience to them serves. Obedience to these rules is the peculiar function of human beings since its completion leads to the supreme activity 'happiness' and

[4] From henceforth, N.E will be used to refer to Aristotle's major work in ethics, the Nicomachean Ethics

'makes a life of which it is the completion a happy life' (MacIntyre 1994: 1). To disobey these rules is to separate oneself from one's good since the end of every being is happiness. And when the person lacks knowledge of his/her good, that person is also deprived of the reason for right action (NE 1.7).

According to MacIntyre (1994:2), Aristotle does not imply that we are born imbued with the adequate knowledge of the good from whence we deduce the rules of right action, rather,

> Each of us learns how to articulate his or her own initial capacity for comprehending what the good is in the course of also learning from others about rules and about virtues, so that, through a dialectical process of questioning the ways in which rules, virtues, good and *the* good are interrelated, we gradually come to understand the unity of the deductive structures of practical reasoning. But what we thus come to understand is in part, to the extent to which what we take to be the case about the human good is false or confused, to that extent our understanding of the rules defining right action will also be apt to be false and confused, and that, to the extent to which we ignore or put out of mind or otherwise fail to take account of the distinctive character of the human good, to that extent we shall be unable to proved an adequately determinate or authoritative formulation of those same rules…[Therefore an]…adequate determinate knowledge of moral rules is inseparable from and cannot be had without genuine knowledge of the human good.

According to this Aristotelian view, any rational agreement on moral rules always presupposes rational agreement on the nature of the human good. Any society that possesses defensible moral rules will to that extent be committed to an adequately determinate and rationally justifiable conception of the human good.

As for the purpose of human life, Aristotle writes that 'we state the function of man [sic] to be a certain kind of life and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these' (NE 1.7). For the sake of emphasis, this quote suggests the following axioms: (i) that we do not *give* ourselves a purpose, the end of human life is something that is *given to us* by humanity. It distinguishes us from other animals, plants and things. (ii) The passage suggests that the purpose of human life is found in a sort of performance or activity that exhibits excellence. Happiness is not a passive state we achieve but characterizes what we do and how we do it. To this qualification, Aristotle adds: 'in a complete life, one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day or a short time make a man blessed and happy '(NE 1.7). Just as one game does not make an athlete a champion, so one noble act or one happy moment does not make a person's life excellent. (iii) The preceding description

of the purpose of human life also stresses that it entails a life lived according to a certain plan or strategy that is furnished by reason. Thus, the good life involves both thinking and doing. One must rationally judge what are the right principles to follow, and your appetites, feelings, and emotions must be disciplined to follow those rules. This further requires two kinds of human excellence, viz.: intellective virtue (or excellence of intelligence) and moral virtue (or excellence of character). A good life is impossible if either of these is neglected. Yet Aristotle does not anticipate the conclusion characteristic of modern liberal thought, that happiness (as distinct from the instruments or conditions of happiness) is fundamentally subjective or resultant from politically useful definition. Aristotle is satisfied that there is in fact a large measure of agreement as to the nature of happiness, and that the disagreements regarding it are non-arbitrary reflections of fundamental aspects of the human condition. The beginning of Aristotle's *Politics* parallels his beginning of the *Nichomachean Ethics*. He writes:

> Since we see that every city is some sort of partnership, and that every partnership is constituted for the sake of some good (for everyone does everything for the sake of what is held to be good), it is clear that all partnerships aim at some good, and that the partnership that is most authoritative of all and embraces all the others does so particularly, and aims at the most authoritative good of all. This is what is called the city or the political partnership (*Politics*, bk 3, chap. 4:1276b, line 17-1277b, line 15)[5].

The 'city' (*polis*) is a kind of partnership, association, or community (*koinonia*) that is a group of persons who share or hold certain things in common. The city is a political partnership that comes into being primarily for the sake of living well and secondarily for purposes of self-sufficiency. The human person is by nature a political animal, because he or she has the ability to communicate and to dialogue about justice and the good. The city is prior to the individual in importance because the individual apart from the city is not self-sufficient. Human beings have potential for great good, but without law and virtue can be the worst of all animals. Justice belongs primarily to the city.

In his politics as in his ethics, Aristotle emphasizes the element of purpose. The state, like a human being, is endowed by nature with a distinctive function: '…it is evident that the State is a creature of nature,

[5] From hence, reference to Aristotle's politics will be abbreviated with P.

and that man is by nature a political animal. …[And]…. he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself must be either a beast or a god' (P. Bk.: 3, chap. 4:1276b, line 17-1277b, line 16). Not only is the human being by nature destined to live in a state, but also the state, as every other community, is with in view of some good and therefore exists for some end. The family exists primarily to perpetuate life. The state comes into existence in the first instance to preserve life for families and villages, which in the long run are not self-sufficing. The city is a complete or perfect partnership that emerges from the union of several villages and is the first community to achieve self-sufficiency. Thus, since the primary institution of partnership is natural, it would seemingly appear that the city too is natural, and that the human person is by nature a political animal.

According to Lord Carnes (1987: 137), Aristotle's dictum that the human being is by nature a political animal ought to be understood in the larger context of his defence of the 'naturalness' of the city. A person is a political animal in the first instance in the sense that human beings, like certain kinds of animals everywhere, assemble in groups larger than the household, and accordingly, 'strive to live together even when they have no need of assistance from one another' (P. 3.6. 1278b 19-20). In another sense, the human person is much more a political animal than a cluster of bees or a herd of animals since the human person alone among all the species possesses speech or reason. Speech or reason, Aristotle argues in the *Politics*, 'serves to reveal the advantages and the harmful and hence also the just and unjust'; the human person alone among animals 'has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and other things of this sort; and partnership in these things is what makes a household and a city…[and]…. there is in everyone by nature an impulse toward this sort of partnership' (P.1.2.1253a 8-18; 29 – 37). It is therefore erroneous to view the *polis* as constituted merely by the sharing of external goods among its members since the city is a partnership constituted in the decisive respect by the sharing of a certain perception of the good or right way of life. A person is a political animal par excellence by virtue of being a moral and rational being. And as beings with *logos*, creatures that articulate our relation to ourselves, the world and one another in and through language, we share a sense of justice (Ibid).

Aristotle's view of *polis* cannot be fully grasped without an appreciation of his treatment of friendship. In the Aristotelian perspective, friendship encompasses a wide range of phenomenon such as attachment to friends, marital and parental love, and feelings of affections amongst persons in civic groups, associations or citizens of the same city. On friendship he writes:

> [Friendship] seems to hold cities together, and legislators seem to pay more serious attention to it than justice. For concord seems to be something similar to friendship, and this is what they particularly aim at, while attempting to drive out its enemy, factional conflict. And when men are friends they have no need of justice, but when they are just they need friendship in addition; and of just things what is particularly just is held to be something involving friendship (NE 8.1.1155a22-28)

The political implication of Aristotle's view of friendship consists in the fact that friendship assuages people's attachment to their private interest in favour of sharing of external goods with other persons. Accordingly, friendship in this Aristotelian perspective becomes a powerful catalyst in reinforcing community of interests – the nucleus of every human association. According to Aristotle, the highest and perfect form of friendship is the friendship of good persons based on virtue. This kind of friendship, which incorporates pleasure and utility, accomplishes the perfect harmonization and identification of one's own good with the good of friends and community. The true friend is one whose altruism is not for honour but for the sake of a friend (NE 4.3.1124b31-25a1). Since humans are political by nature and find fulfilment and happiness by the exercise of the virtues learned in the social organization (*polis*), friendship affords a person of virtue the satisfaction of his/her need for honour and community without compromising the person's attachment to virtue (Carnes 1987: 130).

Aristotle's view of the *polis* is in sharp contrast with an alternative view characteristic of modern liberalism. This understanding views the *polis* as a kind of alliance among its members for the purpose of preventing injustice and facilitating economic exchange, with law as 'compact' and '*a guarantor among one another of the just things'* (John Locke 1924:117). For Aristotle, It is only in the city that a person actualizes his/her potential for happiness understood as the life of action in accordance with virtue. And since the city is

essential to the fulfilment of a person's natural potential, the city is pre-eminently natural (P. 9.1280a24 – 81a6). I shall now examine another historical source of the communitarian tradition as replicated in the Hegelian political philosophy.

2:2:3. G. W. F. Hegel

In this section, I will be engaging with three central themes standing out in Hegel's political philosophy. In his political philosophy, Hegel argues that community remains the basis for every individual action. The place of community is, however, being undermined by the rise of individualistic morality. This is not inherently tragic, as Hegel reaffirms that an individual freedom can only be fully realized in a community. Nonetheless, the community does not oppose the individual's freedom, but maximizes such freedom. Accordingly, this section is divided into three parts :(2:2:3:1) – community as the basis for free individual action, (2:2:3:2) – the rise of individualistic morality and (2:2:3:3) – freedom and the individual.

2:2:3:1 Community as the basis for free individual action

In a previous section, (2:2:1) I have argued that the liberal image is partially informed by Enlightenment thinking. The free-floating individual independent of community and whose identity is formed by a solitary rational capacity characterizes this liberal individualistic image. Thus, the Enlightenment thinkers perceived the activity of thought to be solely the product of individual minds. But the German idealists such as Hegel conceived a social theory of the mind. According to Hegel, our thoughts do not just emerge spontaneously out of the isolated privacy of our minds. Rather, the way we think is a product of our culture and of the cumulative effects of many minds that preceded ours. When we do geometry or mathematics, we are participating in Archimedes' mental life, and when we think about the physical world, our thoughts are part of the conceptual ripples set in motion by Thales, Newton and Einstein. Thus, even in one's most creative moments, the spirit of one's civilization that is itself a cumulative product of many minds permeates one's

mental life. According to Hegel, we are not mere isolated mental threads, but are part of a larger socio-mental and spiritual fabric, which he calls the Absolute Spirit (Lawhead 1996:387f).

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* describes how a rationally self-conscious individual must interact with another individual to raise his/her subjective reason to a universal transpersonal level. Only then will individuals be able to act freely, since the spiritual essence, or substance of their common ethical life is the means by which they can escape mere conformity to custom and their own subjective prejudices (Daly 1994:36). For Hegel the concept of a solitary individual acting in isolated deliberation is unrealistic. Individualism creeps in when people stop identifying with the life of the community, when they view themselves most prominently as individuals with individual goals, ceasing to define their identity vis-à-vis the public experience of society and perceiving as exclusively private the most meaningful experience in their lives (Taylor 1975:4)

According to Hegel, the Enlightenment writers were wrong for acting as though ethical values can arise in a vacuum. They supposed that each autonomous individual in the privacy of a study could generate ethical norms on the basis of his/her own rational convictions. For Hegel, we are born into a community and become fully mature persons by being socialized. From the beginning we define our self-identity and form our concept of the overall scheme of things in terms of our communal life since the particular can only be understood in terms of the whole.

Hegel distinguishes between the German words *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität.* He uses the term *Sittlichkeit* when he refers to 'customary ethics' or 'community ethical life' (Sandel 1984:9f)) and *Moralität* to refer to abstract principles not yet realized in a community but 'available to us as individuals *qua* individuals standing in radical opposition to community' (Sandel 1984: 10). For Hegel, ethics is not just a set of moral commandments but consists of the whole social fabric. The ethical life of a community includes explicit rules as well as implicit attitudes, values, and forms of life. Ethical concerns are rooted in a community's total life including its practices, rituals, social roles, duties, manners, and relationships of intimacy, family life, leisure, work and

modes of ownership. At this point it would seem as though Hegel has reduced ethics to anthropology and, although he believes 'we cannot lift ourselves by our own bootstraps'[6] to escape our concrete moral traditions, he avers that a rational idea unfolding in them is moving toward a universal ethics.

In identifying *Sittlichkeit* as superior to *Moralität*, Hegel is identifying with Aristotle that 'society is the minimum self-sufficient human reality….[where] men had seen the collective life of their city as the essence and meaning of their own lives, had sought their glory in its public life, their rewards in power and reputation within it, and immortality in its memory' (Taylor 1975: 9). According to Taylor, three propositions can be drawn from Hegel's exaltation of *Sittlichkeit* viz.: (i) that the most important thing to the human person can only be achieved in one's relation 'to the public community, not in the private self-definition of the alienated individual'; (ii) that the large community is not a partial or private association whose lifespan is conditioned and monitored by a larger society, rather such community must be 'co-terminous with the minimum self-sufficient human reality, the state'; (iii) that the public life of the state must be crucial to the human person insofar as the norms and ideas it expresses are not merely human inventions (Taylor 1975: 9). Hegel looks back with admiration to ancient Greece. The Greek city-states such as Athens represented a model of the ethical community in which people find their identity, happiness and a sense of meaning by participating in the life of the society. However, Hegel believes that the community life of the ancient Greeks was limited in scope. In their world, the harmony individuals felt with the laws and customs of their society was based on 'immediacy'. They were simply immersed in their society without any sense of themselves as reflective, self-conscious individuals, while their values were uncritically accepted and presumed to be part of the fabric of the universe.

With a vision of the *Sittlichkeit* Hegel takes us beyond the liberal atomistic theory of natural law and the utilitarian vision of society as an instrument of happiness. Hegel thus rejects the Enlightenment utilitarian vision of the society as serving instrumental ends. He writes:

> The state is not there for the sake of the citizens; one could say, it is the goal and they are its instruments. But this relation of ends and means is quite inappropriate here. For the state is not

[6] I owe this expression to Rev. Fr. (Prof) Patrick Madigan SJ of the Jesuit School of philosophy, Harare, Zimbabwe.

> something abstract, standing over against the citizens; but rather they are moments as in organic life, where no member is end and none means. The essence of the state is ethical life [*die sittliche Lebendigkeit*] (VG, 112)[7].

Hegel argues that the community is both 'essence and final goal'. Individuals are what they are by virtue of being part of the community. He writes: 'Everything that man is he owes to the community'; only in it can he find his essence. 'All value that a man has, all spiritual reality, he has only through the State or community … [for] …no individual can step beyond [it]; he can separate himself certainly from other individuals, but not from the *Volksgeist'* (VG, 59-60, 111). In fact, as Taylor would put it, in Hegel's terms, 'the state or community has a higher life; its parts are related as the parts of an organism. Thus the individual is not serving an end separate from him, rather he is serving a larger goal which is the ground of his identity, for he only is the individual he is in this larger life' (Taylor 1975:12).

2:2:3:2. The rise of individualistic morality

In the last section, Hegel showed how our identity is socially constructed. In other words, *we are what we are by virtue of participating in the social lives of our community.* The community as the source of our identity is, however, being threatened by the rise of individualistic morality. According to Hegel, the Greek ethical world disintegrated when increased travel made people aware of the uniqueness of cultures in other societies. What followed was the desire to be freed from the society's norms, as each individual became 'his own living truth' (*Phenomenology of Spirit:* § 355)[8]. This new level of awareness of uniqueness in other cultures set the modern age in motion, an age in which 'the individual is sent out into the world by his own spirit to seek his happiness' (PS § 356). Although this new awareness represented an advance over the uncritical spirit of the early Greeks, it nevertheless ushered in a sense of alienation as people became

[7] V.G will be used to refer to *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*: the introductory session of Hegel's *Philosophy of History*. I am indebted to Fr. Alfred Kitsler of the Scheösstatt Fathers, Vallender, Germany for the corrections on the translation.
[8] Hereafter, P.S will be used to refer to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

disintegrated as a result of their public and private lives. Hegel reviewed various attempts to develop individualistic ethics. But all these attempts were dependent on concepts that can only be construed meaningfully within the shared practices of an ethical community. According to Hegel, Kantian ethics represents the most profound attempt to develop this individualistic ethics, and his treatment of Kant's theory profoundly shows what is wrong with Kantian ethics.

According to Hegel, Kantian ethics represents a *Moralität* (a one-sided morality) which can only be meaningful if completed with the concept of 'community ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit).* Kant tried to unite individual autonomy with the notion of a universal moral law, and consequently moral principles are laws that issue solely from reason. According to Taylor (1975:178), Hegel's critique of Kant emanates from the fact that 'Kant identifies ethical obligation with *Moralität*, and cannot get beyond this. For he presents an abstract, formal notion of moral obligations, which holds of man as individual, and which being defined in contrast to nature is in endless opposition to what is'. *Sittlichkeit* are laws that we give to ourselves as rational beings, laws that regulate our conduct insofar as we engage each other's rational nature; it is that morality that reaches its completion in the community. Kantian ethics leaves us with abstract moral principles that have no relationship to the community that gives content to our ethical concerns.

Furthermore, while Kant made a distinction between moral duty and desire, Hegel concurs with Aristotle that the virtuous person is one who not only does his/her duty but one who finds his/her deepest fulfilment in performing those duties. For Hegel, just as for Aristotle, the source of moral virtue, happiness and fulfilment, is rooted in ethical community:

> If men [sic] are to act, they must not only intend the good but must know whether this or that particular course is good. What special course of action is good or not, right or wrong, is determined, for the ordinary circumstances of private life by the laws and customs of a state. It is not too difficult to know them…. each individual has his position; he knows on the whole, what a lawful, and honourable course of conduct is (Hegel, *Reason in History:* 37)[9].

[9] Hereafter R.H will be used to refer to Hegel's work *Reason in History*

Although this view seems controversial, as Hegel appears to be championing social conformism without enough space for the dissenter, social reformer or the revolutionary, Hegel nevertheless is not asking for an uncritical acceptance of society's practices. Hegel is inclined to argue that we can find the guidance for our moral lives from the rationality working itself out within society. The point is that a society often imperfectly realizes its ethical ideal in its practice. The ideals of our society can stand in judgment on its own present condition. The great revolutionaries and social reformers like Jesus, Che Guevera, Gandhi, Mohammed and Mandela all criticized their society in the name of values they learnt from their societies. They did not preach values foreign to their society, but instituted reform by challenging the contradictions within their society.

2:2:3:4. Freedom and the individual

In the last two sections, I explored Hegel's review of various attempts at developing individualistic ethics of which Kant is the most important progenitor. This attempt, however, is unsuccessful if we realize that ethical concepts can only be construed meaningfully within the shared practices of an ethical community. However, community is not opposed to the individual's freedom and the purpose of this section is to show that community and the individual's freedom are not radically opposed; instead, community maximizes the individual's freedom.

According to Hegel, the distinction between personal ethics and political theory is artificial insofar as being an ethical person involves fulfilling one's duties in a state that is rationally organized since 'the state is the actuality of the ethical idea' (*Philosophy of Right:* § 257)[10]. From here, Hegel proposes the thesis that individuals' freedom can only be realized in the community. But how plausible is it that the community can be the source of our freedom since the state is usually conceived as a coercive institution that hinders our liberty? To understand Hegel's political philosophy, it is necessary to understand Hegel's conception of freedom. We tend to think of freedom, to use Isaiah Berlin's term, as a negative condition, the unimpeded capacity to do

[10] Hereafter P.R will be used to refer to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*

what we want. This view of freedom, according to Hegel, would be wholly abstract and inadequate. To illustrate with an example, a student may feel that if she were completely free she could stay away from school, miss tests and go to dance clubs. However, her guardians and teachers force her to go to school. Yet, ironically, by limiting her immediate choices, her guardians are actually maximizing her freedom by giving her the education that will enable her to pursue a career and make meaningful choices in the future. Similarly, we can attain self-actualization and become concretely free individuals only by transcending our personal impulses and serving universal and community ends personified in the rational organization of the State. Thus, for Hegel, freedom cannot be located within the individual person, but must be made concrete and realized in the context of a community. Unlike other Enlightenment thinkers, Hegel does not think that individuals are prior to community: 'Individuals are like the waves on the surface of the ocean. Waves are not something distinct and separate from the ocean, but they arise out of it and return to it and are simply a manifestation of the force at work in that great body of water' (RH 44). This is typical of my relationship to my society; for example, when in my personal undertaking I am pursuing my subjective, particular interests in terms of my educational choices, pursuit of a career, choice of a spouse, etc. The choices available to me are made possible by my society. Furthermore, friends, trends, public discourse, and values prevalent in my culture influence my desires. On the other hand, my decisions and those of the rest of my community shape the life of our nation.

Thus, an individual is not a mere organism of the community, but a being capable of feeling, loving and responding to love, relating to others, etc. The accomplishment of these undertakings implies a language to experience the world, and to interpret and understand relationships. And these capabilities are as a result of the individual's participation in the larger life of the society. This participation locates the individual within the identity of his/her cultural world. Taylor (1975: 183) writes:

> So the culture which lives in our society shapes our private experience and constitutes our public experience, which in turn interacts profoundly with the private. So that it is no extravagant proposition to say that *we are what we are in virtue of participating in the larger life of our society* – or at least, being immersed in it, if our relationship to it is unconscious and passive, as is often the case [my emphasis].

To recapitulate, philosophy derived from Aristotle's and Hegel's work has provided the most sustained dissent from liberal philosophy. Hegel's insight that individual freedom can only be attained in a rational ethical community has made him a significant precursor of contemporary communitarian philosophy. Hegel's philosophy has become a major source of critical challenge to other modern philosophers like Kant and Mill. Unlike Kant and Mill, Hegel did not think that our private experience is independent of public experience, nor that ethics is a result of solitary individual exercise. For Hegel, our identity is formed through social construction and any meaningful construction of ethical concepts can only take place in shared practices of an ethical community. Many communitarian philosophers like Taylor (1975), Sandel (1984b), MacIntyre (1967, 1981, 1988, 1994), and Bell (1994) have been inspired by both Aristotle and Hegel. These scholars amongst many others have appealed to Hegel and Aristotle in their criticism of liberal individualism. Most importantly, it would be impossible to grasp the full extent of Western contemporary communitarian philosophy without taking into account the implications of philosophy derived from those I call the 'godfathers' of Western contemporary communitarianism. By virtue of their contribution to the liberal-communitarian debate, I call them 'communitarians' and it is only an understanding of their political philosophy that will pave way for any discussion in contemporary communitarianism to which I now turn to.

2:3. Contemporary communitarianism

The focus of the next section is the philosophical discourse championed by contemporary Western communitarians which has brought community into the core of political discourse. This section explores contemporary communitarian philosophical responses to the challenges of liberal individualism. These challenges gravitate around the problem of individualism as it affects the quality of life experienced by individuals and the self-concept that is shaped by liberal individualism. The first section (2:3:1), 'The socially-embedded self', is a critique of modernity, Enlightenment and the post-enlightenment tradition as the source of such individualism as is inherent in liberalism. The first part of this section is an analysis of MacIntyre's

account of moral life within a tradition. He offers a perspective on the goods and traditions internal to the practices of a community. In his critique of the Enlightenment and modernistic tradition characterizing liberal individualism, MacIntyre describes how an individual forms his/her identity and becomes a moral agent by living in close association within a rational ethical community motivated by a set of social practices. The Enlightenment, which has provided fertile ground for contemporary liberal individualism, MacIntyre argues, gives a false promise because rationality is not independent of tradition or of the social practices of a community. MacIntyre proffers an invitation to revert to the Aristotelian/Hegelian paradigm (see 2:2:2) if we are to mitigate the threat of liberal individualism. He proposes a narrative conception of the self in place of an exclusively abstract and rule-governed ethic of modernity.

While MacIntyre is concerned with the historical origin of contemporary liberal individualism, Sandel continues the debate in the context of challenging the contemporary representatives of liberal individualism. While his focus of disenchantment with liberal individualism lies with Rawls' theory of justice, Sandel argues that Rawls' theory of the moral subject (see 2:2) does not only disregard the ethical social commitment we owe to one another, but undermines the substantive attachment and community ties that constitute an individual's identity. I will highlight Sandel's challenge to Rawls' theory by which Sandel maintains that Justice for the individual is not independent of the common good.

In the second section (2:3:2) 'the problem of pluralism', I will briefly explore Walzer's advocacy for a theory of justice that sustains a plurality of values, goals and goods without imposing this operation of justice in other spheres of life. In other words, goods are internal to practices of a particular sphere of life and remain the overriding paradigm of justice in that particular sphere of life. No particular sphere of life is supreme over other spheres and no particular sphere will adopt its own good as a principal model for any other sphere.

This section concludes with Taylor's disenchantment with Isaiah Berlin's idea of liberty which, according to Taylor, has eroded the quality of life in communities by treating individuals as mere collection of

persons. This veneration of liberty as the supreme good, Taylor argues, has undermined the very foundations of community.

The arguments of these scholars do not exhaust communitarian philosophy, although the present investigation limits me to them because of their immense contribution to the liberal-communitarian debate.

2:3:1. The socially- embedded self

In his work, *A Short History of Ethics*, Alasdair MacIntyre (1967: 1) rejects the belief of many philosophers that 'moral concepts were a timeless, limited, unchanging, determinate species of concept [that] can be examined and understood apart from their history'. This approach informs his more telling book *After Virtue* which is very dismissive of much analytic moral philosophy for its non-historicity and parochialism. MacIntyre is not only critical of some facades of modernity, but also the whole of modern and post-enlightenment moral philosophy, which in his view is in a complete crisis and failure. He writes, 'we still in spite of the efforts of three centuries of moral philosophy and one of sociology, lack any coherent rationally defensible statement of [the] liberal individualist viewpoint' that dominates the modern world (MacIntyre, 1981:241). And we have been, as Horton (1994:3) would comment, condemned to remain in this perilous state if we do not restore 'rationality and intelligibility' to our own moral attitudes and commitments, and 'this is impossible within paradigms of modern moral thoughts'.

In MacIntyre's view, the project of enlightenment that has dominated Western philosophy for the past three centuries promises a conception of rationality which is independent of any historical and social context as well as independent of any particular conception of human nature or purpose. In retrospect, this promise has not only been unfulfilled until now, but will also never be fulfilled insofar as the Enlightenment project is fundamentally flawed. The lesson of this failure is that the possibility of any rational enquiry should not depend on any Enlightenment conception of 'pure and abstract' rationality independent of time and place (See also 2:2:3:1). On the contrary, MacIntyre (1988:7) argues that 'what the enlightenment made us for the most part

blind to [is that] standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that same tradition'. As a result, moral and political philosophy are in a state of crisis and can only be salvaged if we revert to the Aristotelian paradigm with its characteristic teleology from whence we can construct an account of practical reason based on that characteristic. And the hope of salvaging moral philosophy in this state of crisis in large part depends on situating and historicizing our moral concepts in a way that does not do away with rationality and moral progress insofar as rationality is tradition-dependent (Horton 1994:4). MacIntyre (1981:118) elucidates: 'If a pre-modern view of morals and politics is to be vindicated against modernity, it will be in something like Aristotelian terms or not at all.'

As already indicated, in MacIntyre's view the whole of modern moral philosophy is fundamentally flawed. To arrive at this conclusion he compares the modern moral conception of morality with the morality dominant in the ancient Greek *polis* as evident in the work of Aristotle. As we have already seen in the section on Aristotle, a good life for Aristotle is a life lived in accordance with virtue (*arête)* where virtue is perceived within the context of a teleological conception of a person, a conception that points to the particular nature of human persons that is in harmony with their aims and goals. This virtue is excellence of character such that it facilitates the attainment of one's goal (*telos*) as well as being an essential part of that attainment (Horton 1994:6).

The post-enlightenment project abandoned the Aristotelian conception of morality with a concomitant rejection of teleology and a denial that we have any particular purpose or goal other than that which we choose. Conversely, while Aristotle perceived the human person as a creature capable of specific functions which may be actualized or denied, the modern morality views the human person as a rational agent without any true or definable purpose independent of the person's will. The Aristotelian view of the human person has enormous consequences for morality. In having recourse to *telos*, it was possible for Aristotle to make a distinction between the way we are and the way we ought to be. By implication, the conception of a human

person endowed with teleology came with the possibility that we may sometimes act in ways that may contradict or even negate our purpose; we are fallible even regarding our ideals. In abandoning the Aristotelian paradigm came 'the rejection of any such distinction between what we are and what we should be' with the implication that our moral language degenerated into a confused labyrinth of rules lacking in teleological background from whence they had derived their meaning and a standard with which to measure any rival conception of morality (Horton 1994:6). Subsequently, the post-enlightenment individual was viewed as one ruled or governed not by *telos* external to him, but by the dictates of the individual's inner reason. Horton (1994:7) explicates, 'The abandonment of an Aristotelian conception of the good has not only left us without standards by which to evaluate our moral arguments, it has also cast us adrift in the moral world….'. This is so because in the Aristotelian paradigm, the conception of the good for the human person has a societal dimension. The virtue, which all persons seek, is not permanently fixed but is linked to one's society, which in turn limits the ability of individuals to form a coherent conception of the good. This conception of the good makes it possible for us to situate and place ourselves within a community. This conception of the good is a condition that has been lost in the 'anomic' and alienating conditions set by modernity insofar as we are unable to perceive our good as socially constituted by our community and in the particular circumstances in which we are situated (Horton, 1994: 7).

In reacting to liberal individualism, MacIntyre argues that rationality is independent of neither tradition nor conception of the good. In fact, the liberal promise of a neutral framework of rational principles within which different conceptions of the good can flourish is a promise which cannot be fulfilled. MacIntyre objects to the liberal conception of the self with the far-reaching implication that moral value is determined by individual choice or decisions. He objects to the liberal's denial of *telos* to the human person with the consequent results that we are unable to make a distinction between what we actually are and what we should be. He also objects to the liberal's disregard of social context by which liberalism does not acknowledge the role of the 'given' in ethical life (Horton 1994: 8). Against this background of the Enlightenment and liberal theory,

MacIntyre proposes a narrative conception of the self; he supplants an exclusively abstract and rule-governed ethic of modernity with an ethical conception that has virtue at its centre; and in place of an atomist and asocial individualism, he appeals to tradition.

Although the Enlightenment project is flawed, that aspiration of maintaining a neutral framework is still active and sustained in liberal political thinking, constituting what MacIntyre (1988:335) calls 'the project of modern liberal, individualist society'. By constructing a political organization independent of any particular conception of the good (as opposed to forming a common ethical foundation, a common rationally compelling account of what is good for human beings), liberalism hopes to secure the possibility of neutrality. This mode of thought, according to MacIntyre, reveals the atomistic nature of liberalism as necessarily an Enlightenment tradition with its characteristic vision of state neutrality and atomistic assumptions. Political agents are viewed as persons whose membership in any particular society is a mere coincidence. Membership in such society is incidental insofar as such membership is not an absolute criterion on the considerations of moral agents (Pettite 1994:180). For instance, the fact that someone belongs to any community does not necessarily entail that he or she is bound by the normative engagement of that community since the only thing that weighs against the person is a free consideration to do what the person individually happens to desire. MacIntyre (1988:338) explores this point further:

> In Aristotelian practical reasoning it is the individual *qua* citizen who reasons; in Thomistic practical reasoning it is the individual *qua* enquirer into his or her good and the good of his or her community; in Humean practical reasoning it is the individual *qua* propertied or unpropertied participant in a society of a popular kind of mutuality and reciprocity; but in the practical reasoning of liberal modernity it is the individual qua individual who reasons.

According to MacIntyre, the liberal desire to actualize the enlightenment ambition of neutral foundation for politics remains fundamentally flawed. First, 'its toleration of rival conception of the good in the public arena is severely limited' and 'the overriding good of liberalism is no more and no less than the continued sustenance of the liberal social and political order' (1988: 336; 345). Moreover, liberalism has failed in establishing a social system that could challenge people to develop the right virtues and give them a chance to flourish; it offers a

culture in which virtue is replaced by technical expertise, offering no compelling arguments in favour of its conception of the human good (MacIntyre 1981:345). What liberalism offers, MacIntyre argues, is that the self is required, perhaps impossibly, to order and know its own wants and the good of the overall liberal order: and the self is required, unrealistically, to pledge to a common good a stronger allegiance than what would be pledged to the sectarian and conflict-generating goods to which different groups are attached (MacIntyre, 1988:346ff).

The modern self is now a self impoverished with an understanding of the good independent of its own choices and decisions, a self that parades itself as '*I am what I myself choose to be. I can always, if I wish to, put in questions that are taken to be merely the contingent social features of my existence'* (Horton et al., 1994:8). In contrast to this understanding of the self, MacIntyre (1988:339) gives an Aristotelian blueprint in which 'it is the individual *qua* citizen who reasons'. The individual perceives as given his/her membership in some community; he/she takes as given concepts that not only give sense to what people do, but that help to identify what he/she should do within the practices whereby he/she is a participant. These are the concepts of the good generated into these practices. Accordingly, the individual would not reason from a premise, valid for him/her, characterizing only his/her desires but would reason from premises that would be appealing to all those who are participants in the same practices. The individual belongs to his/her community in the same intimate and constitutive way that one belongs to his/her physical body. The life of the individual is a narrative within the narratives of others constructed in a particular cultural group and scripted by the stories and myths of a tradition. MacIntyre (1981: 203-5) writes:

> Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal…the key questions for men are not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'what am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part'? We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters – roles into which we have been drafted ….I am someone's son or daughter, someone's else cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this or that clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations, and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my life its own moral particularity.

My life's narrative is to be understood in a wider social context within which I find myself and this wider social context is sustained within a tradition which furnishes me with the necessary resources with which to pursue my quest for the good. By the virtue of a tradition, I mould myself as a character in the life of my community and adopt a plan of life. But I am not just a subject, character or actor of my story or narrative, I am also a character in the narratives of other persons. Morality emerges from the accountability to which we hold each other in these narratives. MacIntyre (1981:201) elucidates:

> I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story, as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives. Moreover, this asking for and giving of accounts itself plays an important part in constituting narratives. Asking you what you did and why, saying what I did and why, pondering the differences between your account of what I did and my account of what I did, and vice versa, these essential constituents of all but the very simplest and barest of narratives could not occur; and without that same accountability narratives would lack that continuity required to make both them and the actions that constitute them intelligible.

In MacIntyre's view, each person forms an identity and becomes a moral agent by living in intimate association with a particular group of people who are guided by a set of social practices. A person is only wholly human within a coherent tradition insofar as it is only through a tradition and social practices that an individual gains self-understanding and achieves a meaningful life. Morality is a function of this self-understanding and social practices; a person is no longer a mere chooser or decider but a person with an identity partly given in advance of any decisions or choices that one makes.

While liberalism advocates individual rights and freedom, it ignores the importance of community and social context for their theory to be applicable. This kind of liberal individualism, according to MacIntyre (1988:3), expects us to 'abstract ourselves from all those particularities of social relationship in terms of which we have been accustomed to understand our responsibilities and interests in order to arrive at a genuinely neutral, impartial, and, in this way, a universal point of view, freed from the partisanship and the partiality and one-sidedness that otherwise affects us'. Rawls (1971:17f) famously applies this method by arguing that his principles of justice would have been adopted by hypothetical individuals in what he calls the 'original position'

– a position whose special merit is that it enables us to view the situation of humanity from 'the perspective of eternity' vis-à-vis all social and temporal points of view (see 2:2).

The major challenge to contemporary liberalism came from Sandel, whose critique of Rawls' theory has highlighted certain paucity and inconsistencies embedded in Rawls' theory. Influenced by the Aristotelian/Hegelian tradition and taking his cue from MacIntyre, Sandel argues that Rawls' theory of a moral subject ignores the social commitments and community ties which largely constitute a person. Justice for the individual is not independent of the common good.

Rawls (1971:560), in his *Theory of Justice*, asserts that 'the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it…[and]…the concept of right is prior to that of the good', by which he means that subjects are independent from each other and are constituted neither by their values nor by their goals (ends). By implication, Rawls' thesis avers that a society, which comprises a plurality of persons (each with their personal conception of the good), should be organized in such a way that it does not favour any of those conceptions. For Sandel, the deontological liberalism enunciated in Rawls' theory of justice is too narrow a view of the good society because it undermines the fact of our individual values as shaped by our social commitments and attachments. According to Sandel (1982:57), Rawls' claim that the self is prior to whatever values that self may have cannot support the liberal claim that justice is the first virtue of any good society. This view of the moral subject according to Sandel does not acknowledge the fact of embeddedness of persons, i.e. that people are constituted by the social bonds within which they live, the ideals they follow, the traditions and cultures which form their consciousness and habits. A model of a good society must therefore start with a fully constituted moral subject.

Now, if we follow Rawls' theory that justice is the first virtue, then we must be related to humanity in a certain way at a certain distance from our circumstance either as transcendental subjects, as in the case of Kant, or as unencumbered subjects of possession, as in the case of Rawls. Whichever way, we view ourselves as independent persons --- independent from the interests and attachments that we have at any point in time.

We are not recognized by these attachments or aims, but are capable of standing back to reflect, critique, survey and re-evaluate these aims and interests. This notion of an independent self, according to Sandel (1982:57), is how Rawls situates the self.

Sandel argues that the idea of the self as a subject of possession is evident in the assumption of mutual disinterestedness characteristic of the original position. This claim is in fact not a psychological assumption, as Rawls would make one believe, but an epistemological claim – a claim about the forms of knowledge of which we are capable. Sandel argues that Rawls was able to sustain the assumption that mutual disinterest is 'the main motivational condition of the original position' but at the same time 'involves no particular theory of human motivations' (Sandel, 1982:54). This assumption is not an assumption about the content or nature of what motivates people, but about the subject of motivation, i.e. the self, the subject of interest and ends. Rawls himself writes:

> Although the interests advanced by these plans are not assumed to be interests *in the self,* they are interests *of a self* that regards its conception of the good as worthy of recognition and that advances claims in its behalf as deserving satisfaction. (Justice 1971:127). […] I make no restrictive assumptions about the parties' conception of the good except that they are rational long-term plans. While these plans determine the aims and interests *of a self*, the aims and interest are not presumed to be egoistic or selfish. Whether this is the case depends upon the kinds of ends which a person pursues. If wealth, position, and influence, and the accolades of social prestige, are a person's final purposes, then surely his conception of the good is egoistic. His dominant interests are *in himself*, not merely, *as they must always be,* interests *of a self* [emphasis added] (1971:129)[11].

This assumption of mutual disinterest according to Sandel (1982:54) reveals the nature of the self or subject to whom justice is a primary value, a subject of possession, 'an antecedently individuated subject, the bounds of whose self are fixed by experience'. This is the image of a deontological self, a subject whose identity is given independently of the things he/she has, independent in terms of interest, ends and relation with other persons.

The world of deontological ethics is a world without meaning, characterized by *disenchantment*, devoid of an objective moral order since it is a world devoid of *telos.* But can one envisage a subject that is separate

[11] On this point, Rawls referred us to W.T. Stace, *The Concept of Morals* (London: Macmillan, 1937), pp 221-223.

from and precedes its aims and ends? Sandel (1982:56) asks. It is 'only a world ungoverned by a purposive order that leaves principles of justice open to human construction and conceptions of the good to individual choice'. But this self devoid of aims and attachments, according to Sandel (1982:56), is not without purpose or incapable of choice, the implication rather is that our values, relations, aims and purpose are all products of choice, 'the possessions of a self given prior to its ends ...[and]...where subject is regarded as prior to its ends, self-knowledge is not a possibility in this sense, for the bounds it would define are taken as given in advance, unreflectively, by the principle of antecedent individuation'. Sandel (1984a: 169) affirms that although this deontological view denies the possibility of an objective moral order and upholds a world empty of meaning, this view nevertheless does not construe a world totally ungoverned by regulative principle, but 'a moral universe inhabited by subjects capable of constituting meaning on their own – as agents of construction in the case of the right, as agents of choice in the case of the good'. As participants in the original position, we as individual selves derive the principles of justice in order to arrive at the conceptions of the good. The principles we formulate as participants in the original position limit the aims and purposes we opt for as individuals. This, according to Sandel (1984a: 170), reflects the priority of the right over the good. He writes:

> Freed from the dictates of nature and the sanction of social roles, the deontological subject is installed as sovereign, cast as the author of the only moral meanings there are. As inhabitants of a world without *telos*, we are free to construct principles of justice- unconstrained by an order of value antecedently given. Although the principles of justice are not strictly speaking a matter of choice, the society they define 'comes as close as a society can to being a voluntary scheme' [Rawls, 1976:13], for they arise from a pure will or act of construction not answerable to a prior moral order. And as independent slaves, we are free to choose our purposes and ends unconstrained by such an order, or by custom or tradition or inherited status.

As independent selves, we are now free to make choices between our purposes and ends unconstrained by an order, status, custom or tradition. Insofar as these choices are not unjust, our conceptions of the good significantly carry weight only by virtue of the fact that we have made those choices ourselves. We are therefore, according to Rawls (1980:543), 'self-originating sources of valid claims'.

However, this deontological image of the self, according to Sandel (1984a: 170), is at best problematic and at worst flawed and inconsistent with praxis as an adequate account of our ethical life. As supposedly

agents of both construction and choice, we neither construct nor choose. Behind the veil of ignorance we are not involved in any certain form of agreement or contract, but in a process of discovery characterized by preferential choice in which there is no choice of ends rather than a 'matching of pre-existing desires, undifferentiated as to worth, with the best available means of satisfying them' (Sandel 1984a: 171). Thus, for participants in the original position as well as in the ordinary deliberative rationality, the salvific moment expires even before its arrival and the autonomous subject, in the words of Sandel (1984a:171), is left in confusion in the circumstances it was supposed to command. By inviting us to a life whose identity is distinct from its aims, purpose and attachments, the deontological ethic has failed in giving an adequate account of our ethical life. In addition, presupposing our ethical authority to invent, adjust, and rationally commit to a conception of the good deontological ethics easily but superficially guarantees the continuity of our identity since no such revision in my aims and attachments can call to task my identity (ibid).

A life lived independently of its aims and attachments undermines the basic structure of my identity emanating from those loyalties and convictions whose moral force binds me by virtue of the fact that living by them is inextricable from the understanding of myself as 'who I am' as a member of this family, nation, community, as a bearer of this tradition or history, as children of that revolution or as citizens of this republic (Sandel, 1984a: 172). These allegiances transcend the aims and values one possesses or adopts at any moment. Sandel (1984a: 172) writes:

> They [allegiances] go beyond the obligations I voluntarily incur and the 'natural duties' I owe to human beings as such. They allow that some I owe more than justice requires or even permits, not by reason of agreements I have made but instead in virtue of those more or less enduring attachments and commitments which taken together partly define the person I am.

The point Sandel makes is that to conceive of a person incapable of constitutive attachments is to conceive of a shackled, irrational agent devoid of character, self-knowledge or moral worth. Possessing a character involves my awareness that I participate in a history beyond me, but which impacts immensely on the choices or conduct I espouse at any given time. As a reflective rational person, I can reflect on my history

by standing at a distance from it, but my distance is not permanent rather it is 'precarious and provisional' since the point of my reflection is not secured outside of history itself (Sandel 1984a: 172). A subject character is aware of his implication in history even as he/she sits back to reflect upon and evaluate the moral significance of what he/she knows.

2:3:2. The problem of pluralism

A major criticism of Kantian ethics deals with the question of universalism of ethics whereby a moral rule or ethical principle is endorsed to apply to all persons, despite any vagaries of circumstance. Nonetheless, a question would be: how plausible is it for individuals living in specific times and places to arrive at a political morality conceived for idealized free and equal persons? This kind of universalism is bound to failure. A South African under Apartheid is not as free or equal as a Tanzanian under Nyerere. One has to understand and take into consideration the particular history and special circumstances of a people. Thus, moral principles cannot be derived merely from a universal or objective perspective. Michael Walzer (1983:xiv) in his book *Spheres of Justice* puts it more succinctly, saying that we should not derive our moral principles merely from either objective or universal viewpoints, but should rather remain rooted in our traditions, 'interpreting to one's fellow citizens the world of meanings that we share'. Walzer calls this system of justice 'complex equality' since no particular sphere of life will dominate other spheres by attempting to adopt its own good as a principal model for other spheres. Walzer's thinking is based on the notion that political thinking involves the interpretation of shared understandings bearing on the political life of one's community in contrast to those who would derive universally applicable political principles starting from a mere abstract specification of individuals and their needs, interests, and moral claims. People will be inspired by ideas and values that emanate from the self-understandings and lived experience of the community in which they are normatively situated. Therefore, moral and political philosophers should situate their theories in 'historically contingent social norms' rather than searching for eternal principles of justice (Bell, 1993:7).

In laying heavy emphasis on universalism of ethics, liberalism ignores the negative and psychological consequences related to the atomistic individualism of our contemporary society, which undermines social obligations and the community. From one perspective, liberal theory permits excessive government intervention with legitimizing policies that have undermined and continue to undermine social obligations and communal attachments. The Rawlsian liberals argue that no matter the consequences, the state should intervene to protect civil and political rights and to ensure a fair distribution of economic goods. But in our contemporary world characterized by 'flattened lives and widespread social malaise' Taylor (1991:244) asks whether we need to rely on the state 'to rectify any deviation from the strict principles of justice, no matter what the cost in such goods as community spirit, friendship, or traditional identity'. The adverse effects of even the slightest approximation of Rawls' view would not only erode a society's economic competitiveness, but also family and social ties (Bell: 1993: 8).

Another prominent critic of liberalism is Charles Taylor (1985). In his essay 'The Liberal-Communitarian Debate' Taylor affirms Sandel's contention that it is very relevant to discuss the issues of identity and community alongside the issue of justice. Taylor (1987: 197f) acknowledges that the tradition which he calls 'procedural' liberalism is atomistic by viewing society as a mere collection of individuals each with his/her conception of the good or a worthwhile life with a corresponding plan of life. The role of society for such a tradition is to facilitate this plan of life with certain principles of equality that exclude discrimination. Proponents of this tradition argue that insofar as there is a wide range of views as to what comprises a good life in our modern society, any adoption of one particular conception of the good life would amount to a breach of the principle of liberty, equality and non-discrimination. A major proponent of such a tradition is Sir Isaiah Berlin in his famous essay, 'The Two Concepts of Liberty' (1969).

In dismissing the idea of positive liberty, Berlin justifies negative liberty with a defence of pluralism of values. Pluralism of values is a belief that those ideas and aspirations endearing to us are in a state of continuous conflict; it is a belief in the divergence of ultimate ends that are in a state of constant conflict with

each other. The problem with positive freedom, Berlin argues, is that it rests on philosophical monism, i.e. a belief that moral political problems can be solved by one method or with equivalent precision as science in technical problems or by assuming one conception of the good. For Berlin, to believe that there is one single truth or conception of good that can be known is another mask of tyranny. Thus, liberals maintain that no society should be founded on any particular conception of the good since right is prior to the good.

2:4. Liberalism reconsidered

With the wave of criticisms from the communitarians on the overly individualistic theory of the human person on which liberalism is premised, liberals like Rawls deny that liberal justice appeals to an individualistic conception of the human person or to any other metaphysical conception of human nature. According to Rawls (1985:224-5), 'Justice as fairness' is intended as a political conception [framed to apply to] society's main political, social, and economic institutions, and how they fit together into one unified system of cooperation'. This conception of justice, Rawls continues, is not dependent on philosophical innuendos like claims to universal truth, or claims about the essence and nature of human identity. In this way, Rawls makes some concessions to the communitarians and unequivocally rejects the Kantian ideal of self-determination for his political position. Thus, what we have now is a liberal political programme devoid of substantive foundation.

Nonetheless, many liberals are unhappy with Rawls' concession. In the first place, 'if people's private self-understandings conflict with what they are to do in the political sphere according to Rawls's principle of justice, how can they be motivated to subordinate what is important to them in their everyday lives to what they should do *qua* participants in the political arena?' (Bell 1993: 9). In my view, if we adopt Rawls' thesis, during the 'veiled' discussion behind the veil of ignorance in the 'original position', (see 2:2), if we were rational enough we would have exhausted all possible areas of conflict; we can say: if any individual suffers from conflicts, let him/her do nothing for society will not punish him/her. In addition, even the communitarian objections to the choosing self can be refuted. In contrast to Rawls, liberals like Kymlicka (1989:52) reiterate

that the core issue of liberalism does not merely lie in choosing our life-plans, or viewing ourselves as persons unhindered by any normative engagement with the common good or normative attachment to the community. Rather, liberalism should be understood in the context of the values of self-determination enabling us to re-evaluate and re-examine our goals or *telos* such that none of our goals or ends will be exempt from possible re-evaluation. Thus, it may be true that we have developed and value certain social engagements and attachments without necessarily having to exercise the process of choice, and we may not separate ourselves from the process of socialization, nevertheless, we can still engage in autonomous deliberations.

The liberal response would be very tenable and even appropriate if we were left with the choice between a picture of an individual completely immersed in a social world incapable of any critical distance whatsoever and another picture of an individual partially immersed but able to distance him-/herself from any one particular attachment he/she chooses to focus on. But is there no other alternative? asks Bell (1993:10). An alternative that will in a more coherent way capture the way we perceive ourselves and our substantive commitments? Surely, it is both necessary and possible that we re-examine some attachments, but there are some attachments so constitutive and fundamental to our identity that an attempt to re-examine them will yield unsatisfactory or 'irreparable psychological damage'. For example, how plausible is it for me to shed my attachment to my family or children and parents? These are constitutive features of my identity and this identity binds us within what Bell (1993:10) calls 'constitutive communities'. A constitutive community is *necessarily* part of us however free or rational we might be, and these constitutive communities being distinguished from contingent attachments present a problem for liberalism such that they deny constitutive ends. Furthermore, the insistence on the state's neutrality unnecessarily constrains the legitimate sphere of governmental action, excluding from consideration any meaningful decision on policies that could enhance coherent understanding of community (Bell 1993: 8).

In responding to the communitarian objection that liberal justice is devoid of relevance and significance for real people living in specific times in particular communities, Rawls admittedly played down the

role and significance of the original position as well as his earlier claim that his principles of justice are universally valid since the principles would have been accepted by all rational agents in pre-social state oblivious of their life plans, vocations or ambitions (Bell 1993:10). In retrospect, Rawls (1980:518f) now argues that the role of political philosophy is to comprehend and make obvious the common beliefs and principles that were hitherto taken for granted. According to Rawls, the principles of justice he articulates derive their validity from their 'congruence with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our aspirations'. Rawls now concedes that even though the liberal conception (the type he advocates) might not be relevant for all societies despite particular social or historical circumstances, nevertheless, this conception of justice seems to be the most suitable political morality; a political morality that would most likely gain legitimacy in constitutional democracies (Bell 1993:10).

Meanwhile, the major respondents to the communitarian challenges come from scholars like Amy Gutmann, David Gauthier and Will Kymlicka. Amy Gutmann champions the liberal rebuttal to the communitarian criticism in her 'The Communitarian Critics of Liberalism'. She argues that communitarianism does not have a defined position, but rather a tendency of thought characterized, as it were, by the view that liberalism exaggerates the role of the individual at the expense of the community.

Gutmann's first attack comes against the position of Michael Sandel, whom she accuses of attributing some doubtful metaphysics to liberalism instead of responding to real issues in the contemporary pluralistic society. According to Sandel, Rawls' theory of justice involves meta-ethical claims because Rawls' foundations of justice are independent of all social and historical contingencies without being transcendental. This according to Sandel is what Rawls meant when he holds that *Justice is the primary virtue of all social institutions.* Gutmann explores a certain inherent contradiction in the communitarian platform that reveals a certain inconsistency in communitarian criticism of liberalism. If our identity, she argues, is shaped by the values inherent in our communities, then that identity will also include a commitment to liberal justice. In her defence of Rawls, Gutmann (1985:309f) argues that even if Rawls was wrong about our firmest beliefs or

realistic convictions, Sandel did not set himself to prove this, but rather argues that Rawls should have shown that any claim to justice is independent of any historical particularities or vagaries of circumstance. According to Gutmann (1985:310f), if this is what constitutes what Sandel calls deontological metaphysics, then this is a metaphysics that Rawls unambiguously and constantly denies. Rawls' liberalism, Gutmann (1985:311) argues, does not presuppose metaphysics but is rather aimed at finding principles suitable for a society where people disagree over fundamental issues such as the metaphysical questions of personal identity. Liberalism, Gutmann (1985:311f) claims, does not proffer a holistic view on morality; 'it regulates our social institutions, not out entire lives. It makes claims on us 'not because it expresses our deepest self-understandings,' but because it represents the fairest possible *modus vivendi* for a pluralistic society. According to Gutmann (1985:313) Sandel's critique of Rawls falters insofar as Rawls need not claim that 'justice is the first virtue of social institutions' in every society to demonstrate the priority of justice in societies where people disagree about the conception of the good and view their freedom to choose a good life as an important good. Rawls also need not claim that 'human identity is *ever* totally independent of ends and relations' to arrive at the conclusion that justice ought always to demand our moral allegiance except when rendered unnecessary by love and benevolence (Gutmann 1985:313). Accordingly, deontological justice, Gutmann (1985:314) argues, would recognize the priority of justice without assuming 'deontological metaethics' or 'collapsing into teleology'. So Sandel's critique collapses by failing to show that the foundations of rights may be faulty.

The second attack which Gutmann makes comes against Alasdair MacIntyre's (1981: 117,119) argument that our ethical beliefs once made sense when they were grounded in societies typified by the Greek *polis*, where everyone has a prescribed function and status in an organized system of roles and statuses, and this function and roles defined the person's identity and any person who tries to disengage from his/her given position is embarking on a project of self-disappearance. Gutmann argues, however, that our contemporary society is different from the ancient Greek *polis* (women had no place). According to Gutmann, insofar as our moral beliefs are dependent on supporting social practices to gain their validity, then there are grounds to

assume that the liberal politics of right is less feasible than the Aristotelian politics would suggest. Considering the various roles one plays in our contemporary society, Gutmann dismisses MacIntyre's method of arriving at the common good by inquiring into the social meaning of roles that one plays. According to Gutmann (1985: 316), 'even if there is a single good attached to some social roles we cannot accurately say that our roles determine our good without adding that we often choose our roles because of the good that is attached to them'. Thus, for Gutmann, neither MacIntyre nor Sandel have presented distinct accounts of their foundations nor have they presented a convincing argument against liberalism.

However, Gutmann concedes that despite the failures of communitarian critics, communitarianism does in fact have huge potential to help us discover politics that integrates community with a commitment to basic liberal values. The fact that communitarianism is unable to undermine liberalism only shows that at best it supplements liberalism rather than supplanting basic liberal values. Gutmann (1985: 319f) has this to say:

> The potential of communitarianism lies, I think, in indicating the ways in which we can strive to realize not only justice but community through the many social unions of which the liberal state is the super social union…[and]…. although the political implications of the communitarian criticisms of liberalism are conservative, the constructive potential of communitarian values is not.

Another face of counter-communitarianism is pictured in David Gauthier's typical contractarian position. Gauthier (1992: 151) avers that the liberal individualist self is one facet of a 'non-communitarian community,' a community characterized by co-operation for mutual advantage. Social behaviour is a process of co-operation in which people seek to find mutual advantage. People value participants in social process insofar as they consider such participation as instrumental to some end. They value moral constraints emanating from such participation as conditions of mutually beneficial co-operation.

Gauthier pictures a liberal individual with a private conception of the good. Following Isaiah Berlin, Gauthier argues that since we have conflicting interests, the good of each person reflects his preference. 'This liberal individual,' Gauthier (1992:154) writes, 'must have the capacity to reflect on her preferences, and to alter them in the light of this reflection; …this capacity makes her autonomous'. The liberal individual is

rational insofar as his/her rationality embraces autonomy with a capacity to choose among inviting alternatives on the basis of the individual's conception of the good as determined by the individual's reflective preferences. Through the reflective process, the individual's preferences are modified by virtue of the individual's own experience and understanding.

In defence of the priority of right to the common good and the community, Gauthier (1992:155) maintains that self-consciousness is necessary for a being to have a genuine self-conception and this self-consciousness forms a basis such that the grounds for acting must be self-based. In this way, the social practices and norms stand only to the individuals as an embodiment of ethics and norms in need of justification by the individual. The individual is autonomous in the sense of the 'individual's capacity to alter given preferences by a rational self-critical, reflective procedure, not a capacity to produce preferences with no prior basis' (Gauthier, 1992:155).

According to Gauthier, a just society is one that is neutral insofar as it ensures the individual's autonomy to change preferences through rational reflection. Gauthier acknowledges that the individual is in part constituted by initial sets of preferences beyond the individual's control, preferences given to the individual by an arbitrary socialization as a result of which the individual as a being with determinate capacity and preferences came into being. Nevertheless, the role of a just society is to ensure that this arbitrariness should not affect the individual's equitable fulfilment. Thus, despite the individual's preferences, which emerge as a result of reflection, the role of a just society is to enable the individual to 'realize a fair and optimal outcome' (Gauthier 1992: 159).

Will Kymlicka has taken the largest step towards reconsidering the liberal position. Kymlicka (2002: 210) admits that the concept of community ought not be foreign to liberalism because the idea does not contradict the primacy of right, although right remains the only means by which even the goals of communitarianism can be attained. Kymlicka's defence of liberalism is that the liberal politics of neutrality are not excessively individualistic. Kymlicka (2002:213) first made a strong defence of Rawls' liberal individualism

and then accused communitarians of arguing that Rawls' theory had endorsed 'consequential neutrality' by which governmental action ought to have neutral consequences or that the state ought to facilitate or hinder life-plans to an equal degree. Kymlicka affirms that this interpretation is a misreading of Rawls. Such values as respect for civil liberties, freedom of association and speech will have non-neutral consequences because insofar as 'individuals are free to choose between competing visions of good life…. they create a marketplace of ideas, and how well a way of life does in this market depends on the kind of goods it can offer to prospective adherents' (Kymlicka 1989: 884). Thus, what Rawls endorses (as opposed to consequential neutrality) is 'justificatory neutrality'. Justificatory neutrality, according to Kymlicka (1989: 885), requires that the state does not take a stand on which ways of life are most worth living, and the 'desire to help one way over another is precluded as a justification of government action'. Governmental neutrality in the reading of Rawls must be understood as a governmental neutrality between different conceptions of the good and 'not in the sense that there is an agreed public measure of intrinsic value or satisfaction with respect to which all these conceptions come out as equal, but in the sense that they are not evaluated at all from a social standpoint' (Rawls, 1971: 329). According to Kymlicka (1989: 887) this kind of neutrality advocated by Rawls is highly consistent with 'the legitimate non-neutral consequences of cultural competition and individual responsibility'. In fact, Kymlicka is not alone in his ideas; another prominent defender of liberalism, Ronald Dworkin, had earlier taken the same route. According to Dworkin (1989: 480) the liberal theory of equality is one that supposes that political decisions must be, as far as possible, independent of any particular conception of the good life, or of what gives value to life. Since the citizens of a society differ in their conceptions, the government does not treat them as equals if it prefers one conception to another, either because the officials believe that one is intrinsically superior, or because one is held by the more numerous or more powerful group.

Rawls' liberalism is criticized for generating excessive individualism as a result of Rawls' emphasis on the capacity for autonomous choice and for creating a context for flourishing of that autonomy. Hence, Rawlsian neutrality is thought to undermine the need for a shared cultural structure, which ushers in

meaningful options for individuals as well as a shared forum in which to evaluate these options. According to Kymlicka, liberal neutrality as understood above involves mere erroneous conjectures put forward by communitarians, and it is only a misreading of liberal neutrality. First, the value of autonomous choice does not depend on any viable or flourishing culture. According to Kymlicka, this criticism advanced by the communitarians is for the atomist route that 'accepts the utterly facile moral psychology of traditional empiricism according to which an individual's capacity for meaningful choice is self-sufficient outside of society and culture' (Kymlicka 1989: 888f). This route, according to Kymlicka, is obviously inadequate and insofar as our dependence on the cultural structure for worthwhile ways of life is undeniable, and few if any liberals have ever been 'concerned purely with individual choices…. to the neglect of the matrix in which such choice can be open or closed, rich or meagre' (1989: 888).

According to Kymlicka (1989: 888), when communitarians like MacIntyre and Sandel make charges against the privatization of the good, they imply that the state (if true, as I think) should not only guarantee the adequate range of options for those who have not formed their aims in life, but should intervene to promote particular conceptions of the good. Kymlicka reiterates, however, that even if we should accept this position as to why one policy must be promoted over another, there is yet to be given any reason for such preference. Nonetheless, Kymlicka strongly differs from other liberals who hold that isolated individuals, whose autonomy is ensured by protecting them from social pressures, should make judgments about the good. According to Kymlicka, these liberals erroneously perceive autonomy as being promoted when judgments about the good are separated from the realm of politics. But this thinking is wrong since individual judgments and conceptions of the good depend on mutual sharing of experience and collective deliberation. However, the communitarian position is not merely restricted to collective deliberation as to how the state becomes the proper arena in which those deliberations, visions and conception of the good are pursued. The good of the individual not only requires collective interaction and inquiry, but such good cannot be pursued or even known pre-socially. A prominent communitarian, W. Sullivan (1982: 158,173), has this to say:

> Self-fulfilment and even the working out of personal identity and a sense of orientation in the world depend upon a communal enterprise. This shared process is the civic life, and its root is involvement with others: other generations, other sorts of persons whose differences are significant because they contribute to the whole upon which our particular sense of self depends. Thus mutual dependency is the foundational notion of citizenship …outside a linguistic community of shared practices, there would be biological *homo sapiens* as logical abstraction, but there could not be human beings. This is the meaning of the Greek and medieval dictum that the political community is ontologically prior to the individual. The polis is, literally, that which makes man, as human being, possible.

According to Kymlicka, liberalism does not, and ought not to, deny the communitarian proposal relating to a communal deliberation as described above. However, applying this proposal to Rawls' claim that 'deliberative equilibrium' should not be a public concern is a complete misreading of Rawls. The liberal neutrality in Rawls' theory does not limit or restrict the collective activities of individuals and groups. These ideals do in fact form a core for an informed liberal thesis, and as such they have an important place in human affairs. Thus, Rawls' argument on the priority of liberty and state neutrality is grounded partly on the significance of this social union with others. He does not contradict or undermine the effectiveness of communitarian deliberations since he (1971:543) holds that collective activity and shared experiences vis-à-vis the conception of the good form the core of 'free internal life of the various communities of interests in which persons and groups seek to achieve, in modes of social union consistent with equal liberty, the ends and excellences to which they are drawn'. Rather, what Rawls (1971: 328f) is against is 'the coercive apparatus of the State' as the appropriate arena for those shared experiences and deliberations. He writes:

> While justice as fairness allows that in a well-ordered society the values of excellence are recognized, the human perfections are to be pursued within the limits of the principles of free association …[persons] do not use the coercive apparatus of the state to win for themselves a greater liberty or larger distributive shares on the grounds that their activities are of more intrinsic value (Rawls, 1971:328f).

Kymlicka (1989:893) argues that although liberalism acknowledges that participation in shared linguistic and cultural practices enables individuals to arrive at intelligent decisions about the good life, nonetheless the core issue at stake is why such participation should be organized, facilitated and promoted by the organ of the State rather than through a free voluntary association of individuals. According to Crowely,

Kymlicka's argument enunciates the importance of creating opportunities for people to actualize the potencies they have discovered about themselves, an opportunity which is not absent in the liberal vision of politics (Crowley, 1987:295). Hence, the issue of liberal neutrality, according to Kymlicka, has nothing to do with individualism: Rawls does not emphasize State neutrality to undermine the importance of a social world. The issue is not whether autonomy and values of an individual may be situated in social relations; rather, the issue ought to be 'whether the relevant relations are necessarily or desirably political ones' (Ibid).

At this point, the dividing line between Rawls' approach to political philosophy and the communitarian approach begins to converge since both are concerned with interpreting the community's shared understandings and the dispute between the two approaches focuses on the approach that provides a better account of the community's shared understanding. At this juncture, one might perchance argue that not many liberals are happy with Rawls' concession to the communitarians. In general, the liberals argue that empirical evidence has shown apparent contradictions in Rawls' claim that his theory of re-distributive justice best provides an accurate account of our beliefs. Of this evidence, David Miller (1992:580) writes:

> The evidence surveyed throughout this article [a review of the empirical literature on distributive justice] highlights popular attachment to desert as a major criterion for income distribution and suggests that a distribution based on this criterion is potentially more stable than one that aims to raise the position of the worst off group regardless of considerations of desert and need.

In general, the core of liberal individualistic reconsideration has been the dismissal of communitarian criticism as embracing conservatism while endorsing moral relativism. They argue that if justice is defined or conceived with a view of a community's deepest understanding, does it mean that I am not able to criticize or am forbidden from criticizing what is approved in my community or other communities no matter how abhorrent the practice and justification for it, such as the killing of twins in Eastern Nigeria in the early part of the 20th century or the caste system in India or the infanticide among the Eskimos.

2:5. Counter-liberal rebuttal

Despite their objections, liberals in general ignore the communitarian concerns such as loneliness, divorce, deracination, political apathy and other factors contributing to the breakdown of community in our society today. They fail to consider the imperative of modifying liberal traditional institutions and practices in order to incorporate community values. Communitarians such as Stephen Macedo would think that even the liberal vision of the good community is not applicable in practice since it would imply a narcissistic kind of life, rooted in an artificial world and devoid of persistent commitment. He writes:

> [Liberal society] would probably pay for this diversity, tolerance, and experimentation with a degree of superficiality, the consequence of a lack of depth or persistence in commitments. There might be a certain amount of feigned or affected eccentricity. And with all the self-critical, self-shaping introspection, perhaps also a degree of self-absorption or even narcissism… … Liberalism holds out the promise, or the threat, of making all the world like California. By encouraging tolerance or even sympathy for a wide array of lifestyles and eccentricities, liberalism creates a community in which it is possible to decide next week I might quit my career in banking, leave my wife and children, and join a Buddhist cult (1990:278).

And Amy Gutmann, reiterating the consequences of liberalism on the value of the community, asks us to imagine a community where people do nothing else than respect the liberal rights of others. She writes:

> People do not form ties of love and friendship (or they do only in so far as necessary to developing the kind of character that respects liberal rights). They do not join neighbourhood associations, political parties, trade unions, civic groups, synagogues, or churches. This might be a perfectly liberal, arguably even a just society, but it is certainly not the best society to which we can aspire (1985:320).

Gutmann contends that such a society as she describes is a tragedy and so we must in all things encourage other people to join and participate in the various forms of community that give meaning to our lives.

On the question of neutrality, the liberals argue that even though the state may be aware of our 'flattened lives' and social malaise such as loneliness and deracination, the government's involvement in issues such as these would be stifling people's capacity for autonomous lives since they made the choices by

which they live. This liberal neutrality proscribes the state from interfering in the question of values and claims that the individual rights emanating from this neutrality of the state to a large extent facilitate genuinely communal ways of life. Allen Buchanan (1989:858) claims that such human rights as freedom of association, expression, and religion enable individuals to engage proactively in the common good by protecting existing communities from undue influence and interference and empowering individuals with the choice of living with other like-minded rational moral agents to create new communities. However, despite the seemingly peculiar response in contemporary Western societies, Bell notes that 'atomistic tendencies seem to be getting stronger as well, communal relationships not coming about as a happy by-product of individual rights any more than socially desirable results have inevitably come about as a result of the (now largely lost) liberal faith in the unhampered workings of the free market' (1993:13). This problem informs the rational of the next section. I shall explore this major issue that is often neglected in the communitarian-liberal debate, i.e., the problem of Multiculturalism

2:6. Multiculturalism

As we have seen in (2:2), Rawls' (1971) resurrection of liberalism and the justification for his principle of justice is premised on the asocial and 'atomistic' nature of the choosing moral subject behind the veil of ignorance. Communitarians like Sandel (1982), Taylor (1975, 1985), MacIntyre (1981, 1994) critiqued this conception of the human person for being overly atomistic since it is premised on the presupposition that a person can be detached from all the contingents aspects of personality offered by culture, history, community, family and still able to choose his/her ends and ascribe to rules that would govern his/her interactions with others. The communitarian critique is based on the social thesis: a presupposition that the human person is socially constituted - persons become persons in a social context and are not individuated pre-socially. Concerned with the categorical principles and procedures, liberals misconstrue the moral point of those procedures by misapprehending our practical experience in the context of which we become significant and

just to one another. However, the communitarian attempt to resolve this problem excludes any universal aspiration for justice. Sandel for example, in attempting a resolution proposes a civic-republican ideal of community informed by the shared understandings of a self-governing republic as a common good. Sandel argues that it is only by being a member of a community in a way that my identity is constituted by my relationship with the other members that I am able to develop any sense of justice. It is only to the extent that I perceive myself as a father of these children, citizen of this nation or that republic, that my sense of membership gains importance. I understand my life as enfolded with the good of this family, this republic or this nation. The others are significant only if they participate and support our communal good.

Although this vision of community necessarily fosters a sense of justice by virtue of our substantive commitment to significant others who share and participate in the good we share, this sense of justice nevertheless excludes those persons or strangers who do not participate or share in the common good of our republic or community. Sandel (1996: 343) himself recognizing the implication of his thesis writes, 'At their best, local solidarities gesture beyond themselves toward broader horizons of moral concern, including the horizon of our common humanity'. But the only solution that Sandel proffers is the remark that 'in practice, it is the savage in his poor hut who welcomes the stranger' (ibid).

By implication, Sandel's thesis avers that my sense of justice or constitutive commitment is only restricted to the members of my community. What about the stranger or those who do not form part of my ethical community? How do we structure our political theory in a way that does not exclude the stranger or in a way that is inclusive of group differences, upholds equality of all persons, shuns discrimination and accords recognition and status to beliefs and practices derived from different cultural groups?

Societies have more than one culture in the public sphere. Claims of these multi-cultures in a society may conflict and members of one culture may find their culture being absolved or dominated by other cultures. Multiculturalism is based on the idea that social groups and communities provide contexts in which our identities are formed and subsequently shapes individual endeavours at self-understanding. According to Kelly

(2002:6), identity is a complete social construction which occurs in complex overlapping contexts. In other words, people are not merely homogenized into a single social group from whence they derive their identity; rather, their identity is constituted by membership in overlapping groups, none of which has precedence over the other. In this complex overlapping context, one can simultaneously be a member of different social groups, cultures and subcultures. For example, I belong to a subculture (the Jesuits) of a culture (Catholicism), of a wider subculture (Christianity) and a broader culture (religion). At the same time, I am also a member of a tennis club, a communist, etc. My identity is constituted by membership in these overlapping contexts. Thus, if my identity is shaped by my culture, an attack on my culture is an attack on my identity while a denial of my culture is a denial of my identity. As a bearer of my culture, my identity is shaped and inseparable from my culture. According to Bhikhu Parekh (2000:3) however, multiculturalism is not restricted to difference and identity but is concerned with cultural diversity and culturally embedded difference. Multiculturalism is about the relationship that exists between members of cultural communities in which cultures are contingently equal[12]. Equality here implies that no culture is superior or inferior to other cultures. There is no 'ideal' culture from where other cultures draw moral claim and validity. But, does the fact that your culture is a source of moral claim and value for you imply the same for me?

Liberalism attempted to avert this problem by emphasizing a political conception of community characterized by constitutional patriotism. In maintaining a sense of neutrality to modes of life that would flourish outside the political sphere, liberalism attempted a universalistic political model that protects individual autonomy and uniqueness. It is only in understanding our sense of community as constituted by endorsement to universal principles of justice, principles that guarantee our rights without excluding the right of others outside of our political domain, can it be possible for 'our local solidarities' to begin to gesture beyond themselves since they are constituted by principles of justice that do not exclude the stranger. But, the non-recognition of group difference in order to foster equality of all persons by a universal principle is intrinsically

[12] Parekh in this context defined culture as a body of beliefs and practices that shapes endeavors at self-understanding from which people's lives get organized.

contradictory because it supports inequality by denying groups of their uniqueness, status and the necessary recognition emanating from their cultural practices and beliefs. This approach is not different from the classical liberalism of Mill, except that this time, it is not our desires that are being conflated into one but our different identities as embedded in our culture.

Neither universalism nor neutrality as advanced by liberalism can resolve this problem. Although people are unique self-creating/creative individuals, they are simultaneously bearers of cultures which form their identity. This uniqueness is not to be understood as 'atomistic' individuals pre-socially individuated. Uniqueness at this juncture is derived from the various levels in which people integrate, reflect, and modify their cultural legacy and of others that they encounter. Thus, human identity is constructed dialogically by virtue of our relations and dialogue with others. And if our identity is dialogically constituted, then there is a need for a public dialogue on those aspects of our identity that we share with other members of our community. A public dialogue involves a collective deliberation that would create a prospect of what Taylor (1992:25) calls a 'politics of recognition'. Politics of recognition involves respect for the uniqueness of individual's identities as well as the cultural particularities that informs their outlook and shapes their identity. For example, prior to the arrival of European missionaries in the late part of the 19th century, killing of twins in the eastern part of Nigeria was a celebrated tradition. Amongst the Ibo people, this in fact represented the ethical consciousness of the Ibo community from whence they derive their identity. Encounters with the missionaries brought a radical change that altered this ethical consciousness[13]. Such acts today are viewed as not only barbaric but against the ethical consciousness and culture of the Ibo community.

2:7. A brief overview

This chapter has not in any way exhausted the complexity of the issues in the liberal-communitarian debate. I have tried to explore the communitarian's account of the human good, which animates their criticism

[13] I acknowledge the controversy of possible negative implications of such encounters with the white missionaries. My purpose here is to highlight how a culture and subsequently our identity can mutate through various encounters.

of liberal individualism. It is only a theory that puts common good on centre stage that can provide a justification or explanation of a coherent and viable social order. The following points remain the central focus of communitarian criticism of classical liberalism:

- Universalistic ethics does not respect the substantive and normative commitments we owe to significant others. Ethics of universal principles undermine the constitutive engagement we owe to one another and subsequently erode the foundations that constitute a community.
- An ethics of universal principles as championed by Kant is overly dependent on intellectual judgment and therefore ignores the significance of emotion, feelings and any substantive commitment in ethical response.
- Communitarians argue that ethics or morality, which is universalistic, is ineffective insofar as the moral agent is inspired by rules and categorical imperatives rather than a well-developed ethics within a rational ethical community.

In the face of the above criticisms, Rawls tried to present a contemporary defence of liberal individualism by which he commits to the priority of right and official state neutrality. Rawls shows how individuals, in attempting to construct their social order, would adapt principles of justice that endorse priority of individual liberty to the common good. Each individual is embodied with the right to choose his life plans and goals independent of any normative attachment to the community. In response, communitarians like Sandel and MacIntyre laid emphasis on the embeddedness thesis and the importance of shared meanings. In the first section of their response, MacIntyre launches an attack on the Enlightenment tradition, which he perceives as the cultural architect of contemporary liberal individualism. Sandel, in challenging Rawls, reiterated that the identity of persons is constituted by their membership of a community. According to Sandel, Rawls is unable to acknowledge the thesis of the necessity of this embeddedness. With the priority of the right to the common good, Rawls' theory of justice only accommodates, albeit on political level, a community of autonomous individuals whose ideal or sense of moral obligation is animated by voluntary agreements and not by the

common good. Liberals respond by arguing that the communitarians' assumption that Rawls' theory neglects the embeddedness thesis came to the fore because communitarians like Sandel speciously assume that the veil of ignorance embodies a denial of the role of a person's ends in shaping one's psychological personality. Liberals reiterate that Rawls' position does in fact embody a vision of autonomous choice of ends essential in shaping any person's moral personality.

2:7:1. Why Rawls?

Communitarian criticism of Rawls is derived from the metaphysical implications of Rawls' assignment of absolute priority of justice and priority to the good – an assignment that is obviously a moral issue and not a psychological matter. For the communitarians, the significance of the veil of ignorance does not lie on the merit of its adoption, but in the fact that it cannot be penetrated as evidence in Rawls' conjecture that a person's ability for autonomous choices of ends is not merely a significant aspect of the person's personality but the most critical aspect that shapes the essence of the person's identity. In the foregoing, liberals argue that Sandel presents Rawls as if Rawls is committed to a picture of the self that allows no space for an individual's identity to be partially constituted by the individual's end. In my view, this is a misreading of Sandel. Surely our normative relation to our ends does in fact play such a constitutive role. Sandel need not claim that everyone's identity is constituted by normative attachment to communal set of ends. What Sandel wishes to argue is that our substantive commitment to the common good and our community ties partly constitutes our identity and Rawls' theory neglects and suppresses this vision. The problem with Rawls' theory, according to Sandel, is that the assumptions in the original position ignore or repress a wide range of moral experience. This situation has made Rawls incapable of appreciating and accommodating those conceptions of the good critical to such moral experience as well as the values enshrined in those moral experiences. This situation considerably weakened Rawls' theory of neutrality amongst competing conceptions of the good.

In an age characterized by alienation, indifference, absence of shared meanings and projects, we will need plausible and justifiable political measures that can deal with issues and problems, which measures may in the words of Bell (1993:14) offer a colossal challenge to the absurdity of liberal individualism with its characteristic erosion of our substantive commitment to the good and shared meanings. Accordingly, this chapter as the first objective of this dissertation forms a critical part of the whole dissertation – moving from its mediations on Hegel's critique of Kant to the reconsideration of the liberal programme. The aim of this chapter is an attempt to crystallize an important discussion of a possible alternative to Western communitarianism. Thus, the genuine need to articulate a theory that would offer a response to this statement and it is here that I would turn to the second objective of this dissertation – to present and defend Ubuntu philosophy as (i) a strand of overall communitarian theory by which Ubuntu philosophy might be read as communitarianism or as (II) an alternative to other communitarian theories, one which could in a more decisive way offer a way forward in defence of communitarianism without compromising individual freedom or liberty. The title of this dissertation (with a question mark?) gives further possibilities concerning the success of the next chapter in achieving this goal as to whether Ubuntu philosophy can truly mediate an African communitarian response to liberal individualism.

Chapter Three

Ubuntu Philosophy: Communitarianism, Consensus or Conformity?

No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the Sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a manor of thy Friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for who the bell tolls; it tolls for thee (John Donne, Meditations, XVII).

3:1. Brief introduction

Whereas the debate between Western communitarianism and Western liberalism goes to the extent of concentrating on a sharp divide between moral personality and psychological personality on the one hand and of metaphysical personality and sociological personality on the other, the Ubuntu philosophy I advocate

integrates moral, psychological, metaphysical and sociological aspects of the human identity. It is holistic rather than fragmentary (cf. 2:3).

Ubuntu is both a philosophy and culture. It is a philosophy insofar as it provides a basic theoretical foundation for a vision of democratic polity suitable for the socio-ethical reconstruction of the contemporary African community. As a culture, Ubuntu is not merely restricted to intellectual judgment; on the basis of its practical application Ubuntu provides insight into the understanding of human nature and the ontological necessity of human co-existence. As a culture, Ubuntu is not divorced from the practical experiences of the African people.

3:1:1. What is at stake?

This chapter analyzes traditional African ethical consciousness with regard to the existence of the individual as an irreplaceable and unique being in a community. I shall argue that this uniqueness is not synonymous with the kind of autonomy characterizing the pluralism of liberalism since the individual is necessarily a communitarian personality. This individual's uniqueness is vital for the flourishing of the community. While liberal individualists claim that individual right is prior to the common good since the common commitments do not pervade the overall good, in this chapter, I hope to put forward that Ubuntu philosophy is a guarantor of individual rights insofar as the central aim of communities is to facilitate the happiness of all, even if it means protecting the individual from him-/herself since the community cannot survive without the individual and vice versa. Contrary to liberal individualism, individual right is not prior to the community. And, contrary to some African thinkers like Menkiti (see 3:3:2), I would like to posit that the community is not prior to the individual either. To argue that individual right is prior to the community is to claim that one can survive without the society. This is self-defeating in as much as the social and moral character of human beings cannot be realized in a fragmented society that fails institutionally to manifest and foster each unique individuality in view of human flourishing. A 'person' in view of any definition is necessarily a

communitarian personality insofar as a person's identity is constructed in view of his/her social relationship (see. 2:2:1). On the other hand, to argue that the community is prior to the individual right is to argue that a community can exist without human persons or that it existed before the human person. This later position is also contradictory since community by virtue of its definition is a community of people without which the term 'community' cannot apply. Contrary to these perspectives, I hope to establish that the individual and the community are not radically opposed in the sense of priority, rather that this relationship is mutually inclusive.

Furthermore, the politics of common good characteristic of Ubuntu philosophy need not replicate a consensual democracy. Most contemporary African communitarians have adapted 'consensus' in attempting to explain the politics of common good and the socio-ethical communal ethos inherent in African traditional value systems (cf. 3:4). Contrary to most contemporary African communitarians, I would like to propose another alternative to consensus, namely, realist perspectivism. My contention is that consensus is an inadequate model and cannot accommodate the praxis of common good inherent in Ubuntu philosophy. I will argue that consensus does not accommodate but absorbs multiple viewpoints through a consensual conformity and uniformity. It is, to use Lyotard's term, a form of 'terrorism' (Lyotard: 1984:63). My disenchantment with consensus is that it does not give adequate account of individuals in ethical relationships. Realist perspectivism on the other hand does not depend on the elusive prospects of a consensual platform. As a model, I shall argue that realist perspectivism fits better in describing the theoretical foundation of Ubuntu since it does not strive for conformity but conversion of beliefs through experience, understanding and judgment. I hope to formulate a critical synthesis on why realist perspectivism should become a paradigm for the kind of inclusive community we should strive for. If our communal ethos should be explained with Western philosophical paradigm, then it must be a realist perspectivism and not consensus.

The present investigation has as its central goal to show how the rich and complex philosophy and culture of Ubuntu proffers an inclusive communitarian philosophy in preference to the sort of individualism inherent in liberalism. Can one posit Ubuntu as a communitarian response to such individualism inherent in

liberalism? Ubuntu philosophy need not challenge liberalism as a theory rather than aspects of liberalism that accentuates individual autonomy to the detriment of the community or that wholly prioritizes the individual right over the common good. My response in dealing with these issues is derived from the practical experiences of the African people from whence I derive the socio-political character of African communitarianism.

Accordingly, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section is an overview of the ontological base of Ubuntu philosophy. I will explore this foundation which encapsulates the ethical, political and communitarian ethos in the African value system. The second section is a discourse on the relationship between an individual and community which, according to my persuasion, is holistic. I will argue that this relationship is of mutual enrichment insofar as an individual's happiness is fashioned by a responsibility to the community and the community's flourishing is dependent on an individual's wellbeing. The third section is a discussion on the politics of common good. Some Ubuntu enthusiasts, in their attempt to highlight the unity and co-existence characterizing Ubuntu philosophical ethics, have sometimes introduced an exaggerated view of a union of mind and hearts in which the subject is both suppressed and possessed by the other. This contradicts Ubuntu philosophy and the focus of the fourth section is to tease out such misreading. I will draw insights from my findings to review and expose the dangers inherent in such misreading.

3:2. Ubuntu ontology

In defining 'Ubuntu', Ramose makes claims that are very pertinent to this chapter and it would be detracting a great deal from it should I try to paraphrase the opening paragraph of his chapter three in African philosophy Through Ubuntu. For this reason therefore, I go ahead to quote this paragraph:

> Ubuntu is the root of African philosophy. The be-ing of an African in the Universe is inseparably anchored upon Ubuntu. Similarly, the African tree of knowledge stems from Ubuntu with which it is connected indivisibly. Ubuntu then is the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology. If these latter are the bases of philosophy, then African philosophy has long been established in and through Ubuntu. Our point of departure is that Ubuntu may be seen as the basis of African philosophy…[And]….a persuasive philosophical argument can be made that there is a 'family atmosphere', that is, a kind of philosophical affinitiy and kinship among and between the indigenous people of Africa. No doubt there will be variations within this broad philosophical 'family atmosphere'.

> But the blood circulating through the 'family' members is the same in its basics. In this sense Ubuntu is the basis of African philosophy' (Ramose, 1999:49)

Ubuntu is at once a philosophy and a culture of a people. This is what Ramose means when he writes that Ubuntu is both the foundation and basis of African philosophy (Ramose, 1999:49). Geographically speaking, the term 'Ubuntu' comes from among the people's of southern, central and eastern Africa – what we call the Bantu languages – deriving from the vernacular modes of referring to a person. The Shona call a 'person' in the singular munhu and the plural vanhu. The Zulu, Xhosa, and Isindebele call a 'person' umuntu in the singular and abantu in the plural. The Sotho and Tswana refer to the same as muthu and bathu respectively. It is from this broad similarity that the term Ubuntu evolves. (S. Samkange and T. M. Samkange, 1980:33-40). The term 'person' as used in this context contrasts the rationalist Western conception of a person whereby rationalism is a criterion for personhood. Traditional Africans do not deny rationality to an individual, but 'a person' in Ubuntu context is used to denote one who is in constant relationship. According to this understanding, one's humanity is dependent on the appreciation, preservation and affirmation of other person's humanity – a person is one who is in a perpetual encounter or relationship with the other. To do otherwise is to deny oneself of humanity. In relating with others, the unconditional self-regard and attention we give to them in form of kindness, courtesy, consideration, and friendliness reflects a code of behaviour, and appropriate attitude on the basis of which Ubuntu philosophy gravitates (S. Samkange and T.M. Samkange, 1980, 33-40)

The term 'Ubuntu philosophy' refers not only to the philosophy associated with the Bantu-speaking peoples who use the word 'Ubuntu' or its equivalent but also to the philosophy of other ethnic groups of sub-Saharan Africa. Among the peoples original to sub-Saharan Africa, the ideals embodied in Ubuntu philosophy are shared[14]. The reason for this broad understanding of Ubuntu philosophy is based on the notion that among all indigenous African peoples there is interrelatedness of cultural affinity and kinship (Ramose, 1999:14). The

[14] It is in this understanding that my qualification of the term 'African people' or 'African value system', refers to peoples of sub-Saharan Africa

author of this dissertation does not deny that there are significant cultural variations among the peoples of Africa. According to Ramose, quoting De Tejada, the area in question is delimited 'From the Nubian Desert to the Cape of Good Hope and from Senegal to Zanzibar' (Ramose, 1999.14).

Relationship in the context of community is key in understanding the human person and community in African traditional thought. To become a person involves a proactive participation and engagement of individuals in realizing their potentials and maximizing the community's good. There is no room for passivity. Participation must be understood as essential aspect of the human identity.

The meaning of Ubuntu is not only grounded in the human world with its ethico-political character but involves an ontology that defines how an African is situated and related with the rest of the universe. This relationship is characterized by the interaction of different beings or what is known as *ntu* in the Bantu languages. In the writing of Alexis Kagame, *ntu* is defined by considering its experience in acting and interacting with and amongst other beings. *Mu-ntu* denotes a being that acts by intelligence. *Ha-ntu* refers to spatiality, time place or temporality and indicates the localizing being. *Ki-ntu* refers to inanimate beings or beings that interact without the use of intelligence. *Ku-ntu* which is the modal being designates the way things are or should be as in position, quality, quantity and relation. These categories refer to Ntu which means being. Yet, this 'being' is only a copula and does not translate to the Cartesian cogito or existence. When I invoke muntu, kintu, hantu, etc, I am denoting an essence or something which is *non-existent*. Kagame (1971:602f) writes,

> When essence (*ntu*) is perfected by the degree of existing, it becomes part of *the existing. The existing* cannot be used as a synonym of *being there,* since in Bantu language, the verb *to be* cannot signify to *exist*. The opposite of the existing is *nothing*. In analyzing the cultural elements, one must conclude that the *nothing* exists and it is the entity which is at the basis of the *multiple*. One being is distinct from another, because there is the *nothing* between them (cited in Mudimbe, 1988:147)

Mulago V (1965:153) substantiates Kagame. For Mulago, *ntu* signifies a generic similitude. It is a spark of human life which is at the same time an attestation to their unique individuality and their assimilation in the interaction of forces (In Mudimbe, 1988:147). Accordingly, *Ntu* embodies unity and differentiates these

vital forces in a peculiar web of relationship that exhibits the inequality and difference between beings. The human person is inserted into the universe of these interactions and movements of beings from whence the concept of community is derived. This also indicates the understanding of a person in traditional African society as one in constant relation i.e. to be is to be in communion with others.

The African worldview I have tried to describe is not dualistic. Reality in this African worldview is a field of interacting forces where everyone is a centre of shifting forces, existing as it were as part of the different relationships that connect the whole of humanity. But in this movement and interaction of forces, the individual is not a mere pawn in the chess of life, manipulated by forces or beings; he or she is invested with freedom for a proactive engagement. Freedom and community are not mutually exclusive, they are mutually inclusive since the individual is not like a machine and its parts; rather, the individual is both self-determining and dependent. According to Augustine Shutte (2001:21) this worldview is:

> not composed of things that interact with other things. It is seen rather as a world of forces interacting with other forces, a universal field of force. Everything that exists, stones and plants and animals, and persons as well, is the focus and expression of interacting forces. These forces are not seen, as in the materialist view, as simply physical. They are also present in our emotions and ideas. But nor are they simply spiritual either. They are also present in our muscles and our blood…the human person is like a live electric wire, which is ever exuding force or energy in all directions. The force that is thus exuded is called *seriti*. It is like an aura around the human person, an invisible shadow or cloud or mist forming something like a magnetic or radar field. It gives forth into the traffic or weltering pool of life in community the uniqueness of each person and each object. While physical it seat is understood to be inside the human body, in the blood, its source is beyond and outside of the human physical body….

3:3:1. A communitarian perspective?

The defence of communitarianism goes beyond a mere anthropological necessity of human co-existence. By ‘anthropological’ I mean the ensemble of what constitutes the human person with his or her basic needs for communion in the framework of the community life. The empirical evidence of the basic necessity of our co-existence need not be the core issue in the liberal-communitarian debate. Recent literature in liberal individualism has shown significant shift from the so-called liberal atomism (the view that individuals

are ontologically independent of community) to what I consider a moderate liberal individualism (cf. 2:4). Liberals no longer argue and need not argue that individuals are ontologically independent of the community as Kant and Mill tried to advance in classical liberalism (cf. 2:1).

Empirical evidence has shown the incompatibility of liberal atomism with the socio-psychological fact of the human identity. Such evidence is premised on the need for the community and/or for other persons whom we encounter as this need is evident in everyday external activities. I take a taxi to school, stop over at MacDonald's, go to the bank, buy some groceries, buy a pen with which I am writing now, and perform other activities. No one would doubt that we need some chain of relationships for such relatively external tasks to be accomplished. Fundamental to the anthropological rootedness of human co-existence and, hence, underlying our everyday activities are binding factors manifested in any kind of choice that we make. If I chose to go to Wimpy instead of Macdonald's it is still a fact that I will be encountering other persons who offer their services to me in order to earn a living and from whose service I benefit. We humans act interdependently. Even the clothes I am wearing and the soap I use are evidence of this interdependence, and the role of the society here is to enhance a network of useful relationships. If we agree that we need other persons in our activities, then we agree that we are a community. I am a part of the community and the community influences me. This form of interdependence is helpful not just for survival but for the maintenance of peace, progress and prosperity since the human person is by nature a political animal, who is able to communicate and to dialogue in order to realise justice in society in a framework of valued goods. Human beings have potential for much good, but without others can act like beasts. The community therefore is a prerequisite for the flourishing of the individual because the individual's acts apart from a society are not self-sufficient (P. 3. 4.1276b 15).

From the foregoing, to propose the fact of empirical encounters as a defence of communitarianism is relatively superficial for it takes place on a level of activities. Mere empirical encounters ignore the ontological aspect of human identity with its indifference to individual's ethical response. Communitarian disenchantment with liberal individualism is not to be misunderstood in this perspective.

More profound is an ontological defence of communitarianism. I say ontological insofar as the nature of my being is meaningful and attainable by virtue of a community of beings. The ontological defence is informed by Ubuntu philosophical ethics. According to this understanding, the nature of my being is such that by virtue of being a person I have embodied in my humanity *other* persons or beings that form part of my humanity (see 3:2). In other words, I embody in my person the whole of humanity in their differences and uniqueness. This notion of embodiment is lived out and expressed in the African proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (I am a person through other persons). In the same light, Mbiti writes:

> In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes this existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group…whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say "I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am". This is the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man (1969:108-109)

Mbiti's claim is comparable to Aristotle's assertion in the *Politics* that that by nature, the human person is destined to be part of the human society (P. Bk.: 3, chap. 4:1276b, line 17-1277b, line 15) and Hegel seem to concur in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* where he argues that the Enlightenment thinkers were wholly wrong for assuming that ethical values can arise in a vacuum as in the privacy of their study.

In accord with my position on the holistic relationship between the individual and community, to Mbiti's famous expression I add Dzobo's (1992) non-tautological, more precise, more complete and more powerful expression: *'we are, therefore I am, and since I am, therefore we are.'* By this assumption, in advancing the good of the community, the individual's good is concomitantly advanced insofar as the good of the community and that of the individual are intricately connected and not radically opposed. The community is a guarantor of my right, freedom, humanity and liberty whereas I am a guarantor of the survival of the community by advancing its good and sustenance knowing that if the community hurts, it is the individual that hurts. Thus an Igbo proverb goes, '*when the mouth cries, the eyes and nose follows.*' This is also depicted in the story motif my grandfather once told me about the organs of the body: *Once upon a time, the different organs of the body*

(the community) revolted against one another in view of who is the most significant or prior in their community. They went on a general strike. The brain went blank. The eyes became blind. The hand became paralysed. The mouth became dumb. The legs became crippled and so on. No sooner had this happened, however, than the enemy (hunger), struck and the whole body (the community) began to crumble in the absence of a formidable defence…. they realized how much they needed support from one another. Each part is significant, none is more significant while their relationship is mutually inclusive and must be so…. The relationship between the individual and the community is holistic in this sense. African communitarian scholars like Dzobo, Gyekye and Mbiti amongst others advocate what Gyekye calls 'moderate communitarianism' as distinguished from Menkiti's 'radical communitarianism' that they think totalitarian leaders can abuse. The communitarianism of which I write is the moderate one and the focus of the next section is to shed more light on the present discourse.

3:3:2. Individual and community

Ubuntu philosophy is both a social ethic and metaphysics. It is a social ethic insofar as it represents a factual description of life and a rule of conduct for African peoples. As metaphysics, ''Ubuntu', Ramose writes, comprises 'three levels of human existence' embedded in the 'onto-triadic structure' of Ubuntu, viz.: the living (*umuntu*) who stand in-between those who have passed away but remain present as the living-dead, (*abaphansi*) or ancestors, and those human beings who are 'yet-to-be-born'. This structure presupposes a hierarchical ontology of beings (Ramose, 1999:62-63). As far as the structure is concerned, it is believed in traditional African thought that it is 'possible and real to communicate with dead, departed, desensitised and formless invisible beings. If we do not hold such beings to exist then it is nonsense to claim that we can communicate with non-existent beings' (Ramose, 1999:68). The community therefore comprises the living, the living-dead and the unborn: 'the greater environing wholeness in the sense of both the encompassing physical and the metaphysical universe, together with the human universe in the sense of the community, are the

ontological as well as the epistemological foundation of human individuality. The human individual is inextricably linked to the all-encompassing universe' (Ramose, 1999:80). The living asks for intercession from the living-dead; they pray for rain, for good harvest, for longevity and for protection of the unborn. On this summation, human individuality in the writing of Ramose (1999:81) becomes a necessary but not a sufficient condition for being a person'. The individual (the living-now) is linked both to the living-dead (ancestors) and the unborn.

The indubitable character of this link between the living and the living-dead is further illustrated in an African approach to illness. Illness in traditional African thought is explained and treated on the basis of 'a correlation between the bodily illness and the disturbance of harmony and balance in the relation between the living and the living-dead (ancestors)' (Ramose, 1999:97ff). Illness occurs as a result of disharmony, and it is only when this harmony is restored that the *dibia* (traditional doctor) will proceed with 'the prescription of specific herbs for the healing of the body'. Both the doctor and the ill person share a common belief that 'healing powers flow' through the healer from a 'supernatural or unknown source'. According to Ramose, the community has an obligation to provide treatment for the sick person. This obligation, according to Ramose, (1999:99) means that no human being is wholly useless such that even the demented still have a purpose in life, 'otherwise the ancestors would have provided for their passage out of this world'. The aforementioned metaphysical world defines the communal and individual lives of the African people.

A closer look at the network of relations of the African peoples will reveal a communitarian approach to life as the core element of Ubuntu philosophy. The aim of the community is the happiness of the individual and the sustenance of the community in view of achieving this singular aim. Communitarianism understood in this context is not a mere collection of individuals but is concerned with a nexus of relationships in which the survival and happiness of the individual is intricately interwoven with the survival and happiness of the community to which the individual belongs. In other words, my happiness and survival is dependent on the

survival and happiness of the community as expressed in Dzobo's (1992) powerful aphorism: '*we are therefore I am, and since I am, therefore we are'.*

The relationship between the individual and the community denotes the social nature of an African as embedded in Ubuntu ontology – this is the critical thesis of this chapter. Linked with this thesis is another thesis, one which holds that as far as an African system of values is concerned, the community is not necessarily prior to the individual, this relationship in my view, is rather is holistic or contemporaneous. Thus understood, the individual is not just an entity wholly determined by the community, but only partially determined insofar as the individual is imbued with self-determination. I now pause awhile to examine the relationship between the individual and the community from whence the individual derives his/her identity.

3:3:2:1. Community as the source of the individual's identity

As I have already enunciated, the individual in African traditional thought is conceived in terms of relation to the community. This relationship is not a mere empirical relationship but a relationship deeply rooted in Ubuntu ontology. To conceive of the relationship between the individual and the community in African traditional thought in any other metaphysical basis is a betrayal of an African system of values since one cannot understand the interface between the individual and the community without reflecting on its critical foundations. Thus, the socio-ethical and communitarian character of the African is rooted in Ubuntu ontology. This understanding has been expressed in various proverbs and aphorisms, which encapsulate the ethical and social character of Ubuntu philosophy.

Motho ke motho ka batho; umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (A person is a person through other persons)

Feta Kgomo o tshware motho (Life is greater than wealth) (Ramose, 1999:99)

Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho ('the sovereignty of the King derives from and belongs to its subjects' (Ramose, 1999:120)

Motho gase mphshe ga a tshewe sesotlho ('no single human be thoroughly and completely useless') (Ramose, 1999:99).

Much of the theoretical foundation of Ubuntu philosophical ethics is extrapolated in these proverbs. According to Ramose, the first aphorism means that to be human is to 'affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish respectful human relations with them' (Ramose, 1999:52, 194). The second aphorism means that if and when one is confronted with a critical choice between wealth and preservation of human life, one must choose the latter. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, names such as *Ndukaku* (life is greater than wealth) or *Nwakaego* (a child is greater than wealth) enunciate this ethical character. The third aphorism is a modal principle ingratiated within the socio-political and cultural system of the African world according to which 'the king owed his status, including all the powers associated with it to the will of the people under him. Kinship rested upon and remained dependent upon the consent of the King's subjects. The people or the King's subjects were the ultimate source of the King's authority to rule' (Ramose, 1999151). The foregoing proverbs articulate the African basic ontology of respect and compassion for others, sometimes translated as African humanism.

The aphorism 'becoming a person through other persons' involves meeting the challenge of the community and being involved in certain ceremonies and initiation rituals. Before one is incorporated fully into the body of persons through this channel of initiation, although one's individuality remains undiminished, the status of the individual in the community is greatly enhanced by the communal values so acquired during the process.

During this processes of social transformation and of incorporation, the community plays a vital role as both a guarantor and custodian of ends. Personhood is a potential, which the community fully actualizes, and the degree to which it is attained is dependent on the intensity to which the individual pro-actively engages in communal life by discharge of those duties that accords with his/her status.

The initiation ceremony is a rite of passage into adulthood. During the initiation ceremony, the 'initiate' or ritual subject is officially schooled in the ethical traditions of the community. Among the Ndebele, girls initiation is referred to as *ukuthombisa* derived from the infinitive 'to grow or to germinate' in Ndebele language[15]. This symbolic expression *ukuthombisa* is derived from the process of germination of seeds. Sprouts of seeds in the same language is known as *umthombo* literally meaning 'to cause to grow' or 'to raise a child *ukuhulisa; umndwana* to become a woman'. 'To cause to grow' is an ontological transformation in which the rituals and abstruse education during the initiation are more critical as the core of the whole process rather than the actual physical mutilation. Thus, the initiation is a form of human transfiguration, insofar as it is the knowledge that is acquired during this process that transforms the 'initiate' into a full human being (Turner, 1967:102). During the initiation ceremonies, the neophytes receive various instructions that include revelation of reality masked by secrecy and mythology. For example, young female initiates are taught things ranging from the biological aspects of their lives to how to become a good mother and a wife. Young men on the other hand are stimulated by virtue of the ritual processes to think in inimitable ways about their existence and the cosmos. The whole process is designed to startle the neophytes into thinking about objects, persons, relationships, and features of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted (Turner 1967:105).

Incorporation through initiation is not enough. As a member of the community, the individual is urged and expected to preserve and maintain the community's values and socio-ethical character. That a person is a person through other persons implies that one is in a continuous process of becoming a person through the person's interaction with others such that the resource for one's fuller personhood is greatly enhanced by the community. One is therefore encouraged to exercise one's unique rights through a free participation in the community affairs, and it is given that individuality is enhanced only with the affirmation of community.

The community enhances and acts as a custodian to the individual's identity and personhood. The community in this context does not act as a generator of ends but furnishes and does not prescribe those

[15] I am indebted to Khayalethu Ntushelo of the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, for confirming this translation from Ndebele language.

values that will enhance human identity. It is in this context that I disagree with African communitarians like Ifeanyi Menkiti who argues that the processual view of the human person in African traditional thought is not an automatic quality given at birth but something to be achieved. If Menkiti is right, without incorporation or initiation into a community, a person remains an 'it' and cannot be ascribed as a person. According to this point of view, personhood is something to be achieved and the community is both the catalyst and prescriber of human identity for without the community, the individual is no person (Menkiti, 1984:172).

Menkiti accords radical primacy of the community over the individual. The primacy of the community over the individual indicates that the individual indeed is dependent on the community to attain subjectivity:

> As far as Africans are concerned, *the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of the individual life histories, whatever these may be* . it is the community which defines the person as a person not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory. Personhood is something which has to be achieved, and Is not given simply because one is born of human seed…As far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which individuals could fail. (Menkiti, 1984:171,ff, cited in Gyyekye, 1998:318f; My emphasis)

Menkiti and the author of this dissertation come from the same ethnic group, and members of our group believe that the relationship between the individual and the community is holistic; neither has primacy over the other insofar as the human person is simultaneously, a metaphysical and a social being. Writing on Igbo metaphysics, Richard C. Onwuanibe reinforces this claim, 'the traditional African philosophy of the human person is more existential and practical than theoretical. It is based on the conviction that the metaphysical sphere is not abstractly divorced from concrete experience; for the physical and metaphysical are aspects of reality, and the transition from one to the other is natural' (Onwuanibe, 1975:184). The crucial question remains: if in fact I come from the same ethnic and cultural group as Menkiti and Onwuanibe, how do we account for the divergence in the philosophical account that we are all describing? It is not within the scope of this dissertation to explore in detail possible reasons for such divergence. Briefly, however, one might consider that unlike many other ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Igbo people do not have a common ancestry and hence cannot trace their origin to a common source. The linguistic variance of the 'Igbo Language' further amplifies this divergence among the people of Igboland. And, unlike the Yoruba or the Benin people, the Igbo people

culturally do not practice a centralized system of leadership. Nevertheless, a closer look at the network of relations of the Igbo people will reveal the core element of Igbo philosophy of life – a communitarian approach to life that sustains a contemporaneous relationship between the community and the individual. One might trace this lack of agreement to the perennial controversy that has plagued the existence of African philosophy or with the generalization and projection of particular cultural way of life as representative of the whole of Africa (see footnote 14 and 17).

African statesmen like L. S. Senghor, Julius Nyerere and K. Kaunda tried to live up to this expectation. Thus, the African system of values urges developing a communion of souls rather than merely an aggregate of individuals; it is concerned with human beings in their relationships with one another in the community. Senghor's political philosophy is a humanistic universalism that depends on the ultimate 'blossoming of all men and the whole man in each of them' (1961:12). The subject, the human person is the necessarily the point of departure: 'man remains our first consideration' for 'he constitutes our measure' (Senghor, 1961:100). Since the human person is the necessary point of departure, the basis for national construction is dependent on the individual's contribution to the State. The State is the grand *telos* of which the individual must aspire to. Hence, the State which absorbs and channels the creative energy of the individual must remain pre-eminence over the individual. According to Senghor, the individual's potential can only be fully realized when he is enabled by a viable economy to devote his energies to his ultimate objective – culture. Senghor (1960:68) writes:

> Culture is the goal of all policy deserving that name. For what use would be the standard of living of our masses if it were not accompanied by that of the cultural level. What use would be the increase of the purchasing power if it were only for the comfort of stomachs and buttocks? To buy parasols and colored glasses, even to buy automobiles, refrigerators, washing machines and I know not what else? For what purpose, if not for furnishing our leisure for the creation of works of art which shall be the spiritual food of our assembled peoples.

Writing on Zambian humanism, Kaunda for his part, has this to say:

> Zambia can say with pride that its humanism is originally based very much on the importance of man. In this case the state cares for man, the person. He, in return, as an individual will, or at least is expected to, care for his neighbour, thereby caring for the state (Kaunda, 1976, cited in Ntibagirirwa, 2003).

Thus the individual is not simply swallowed by the state; the relation is of mutual influence and enrichment. The individual becomes a vital force that remains an ontological part of the community. Each individual is a unique gift to the community and the role of this individual remains fundamental for the dynamic nature on which the community thrives if the community is going to escape the dogmatic forces of stagnation. The relationship between the individual and the community here is not merely ontological but also metaphysical in the sense that the individual depends on the community to be 'individuals' and the community on the other hand depends on the individual to be 'community'. It is a relationship of mutual enrichment, each forms the other and none is prior. This influence and enrichment is also embodied in Dzobo's expansion of Mbiti: by living creatively the individual is also contributing to the life and quality of his community and so can say 'we are, therefore I am, and since I am, therefore we are' (Dzobo, 1992:132). Kaunda Continues:

> Our ancestors worked collectively and cooperatively from start to finish. One might say this was a communist way of doing things and yet these gardens remained strongly the property of individuals. One might say there that this was capitalism. Collectively and cooperatively they harvested but when it came to storing and selling their produce they become strongly individualistic. When it came to sharing fruits of their labour like meals, for instance, they shared communally (Kaunda, 1976:13, cited in Ntibagirirwa, 2003).

This view, popularly known as Zambian humanism projects an image of an African community of sharing; in which the community finds its end and purpose in preserving the individual's individuality. It seems to me that unlike Senghor, Kaunda proposes a modest attempt to strike a balancing act between the individual and community. Kaunda does seem to recognize the crucial point of individuality. Sharing this understanding amongst others were African scholars like Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye.

According to Wiredu, moral beliefs and practices are always the beliefs and practices of some cultural group and the justification of such moral beliefs take place within the context of the community and its structured scope for individuality. What this implies is that an individual's self-identity is dependent largely on interactions and interconnections in specific cultural contexts. How individuals perceive themselves is rooted in how they understand themselves vis-à-vis specific social structures, as constituted by the very relations to

which their position in the structures are connected. In accord with this notion, scope of individuality in specific historical communities shapes noetic attitudes about self-understanding as well as self-identity insofar as communal sets of ends are accepted as a starting point. However, this position seems to have been contradicted by Wiredu himself when he writes that 'the concept of a person is a social concept before it is anything else…personhood is not an automatic quality of the human individual; it is something to be achieved' (Wiredu, 1996:15). By arguing this position, Wiredu ascribes radical primacy to the community. This need not be the case, since in African traditional thought, the essence of being a person is in participation and encounter with other persons. Gabriel Setiloane confirms this understanding,

> This manner of understanding human personality explains the interplay, which takes place when people come into contact or live together. The essence of being is 'participation' in which humans are always interlocked with one another. The human being is not only 'vital force', but more: vital force in participation (Setiloane, 1986:14).

An African idea of community is not a mere collection of individuals as in a crowd, for each member of the community gets his or her character and identity largely from the community. The point of my discussion so far is that the community is a basis for an individual's identity and this identity in turn informs the community's identity. In other words, my membership in a community is affirmed by fact of my being a *mu-ntu* in a world of *ba-ntu* while my participation and engagement with the community defines my identity (see, Ntibagirirwa, 2003). As Gyekye (1998:318) argues, 'the sense of the community that characterizes relations among individuals is a direct consequence of communitarian social arrangements'. Thus the relationship between the individual and the community in an African context is of mutual enrichment insofar as it is the community that constitutes the socio-cultural matrix in which one realizes oneself and it is the individual that constitutes the community. However, I differ with Gyekye to the extent that he goes further to argue that the cultural community has primacy over the individual, a thesis which is sustained insofar as the cultural community remains the ultimate 'medium in which the individual person works out and chooses goals and life plans – activities through which the person ultimately becomes what he/she wants to be and acquires the sort of status

he/she desires – the cultural community must be held as prior to the individual' (Gyekye, 1998:321f). The place and feature of an African identity[16] can be represented in form of an overall account with which I shall try to articulate my findings so far. This account merely represents the idealism underlying Ubuntu philosophy and an approximation to a possible synthesis.

i) We (Africans) acknowledge the uniqueness and individuality of every person or thing. This is largely why our life is centred on the harmonization of all things that are. This uniqueness is appreciated and must be preserved since it cannot be replaced. No two persons are the same.

ii) In our uniqueness, we become aware of our limitations as persons. This is evident in the following Igbo proverbs and sayings that reveal this *incompleteness* of the human condition. Such proverbs include these: *A herbalist that refuses to ask a layman what leaves he is looking for in the bush must have difficulties getting what he wants, for the bird that remembers its mates never misses the way* (against individualism); *If a child shoots an arrow that attains the top of a tall palm tree, then it must be that an elderly person carved the arrow for him* (necessity of solidarity); *It is an unthinking man who achieves prosperity and then finds with time that his body can no longer pass through the door* (against selfishness*); When a kola nut is presented with love, it carries with it more value than might otherwise be associated with a whole pod of several kola nuts* (love and sharing); *The man who remembers others remembers also his creator* (unity of beings). In this understanding, one is meant to realize that his/her personhood develops incrementally from experience and different encounters.

iii) Consequently, since we are not completely autonomous in the sense that we do not have everything embedded in our persons to make life most flourishing, we need other persons to

[16] I am familiar with the controversy surrounding the projection of the thoughts of a particular cultural community and generalizing such thoughts to adopt unanimity of African philosophy. For the sake of argument, the term as employed here is an umbrella term referring to the philosophies of the people of sub-Saharan Africa (see 3:2). This controversy is not my main concern for the present purposes rather than finding a justification that when I use the term 'Africa' I am making an attempt to approximate the philosophies of the people of this region. As a matter of fact, what we have today as Western philosophy is a culmination of British Empiricism, German idealism, French existentialism, Greek philosophy, Hellenistic and Roman philosophy to mention a few.

complement us. We need the community to achieve full personhood. We need the gifts in other persons exhibited in that uniqueness characteristic of an individual. And to receive these gifts we should strive to preserve the goodness and happiness of other persons such that we become aware that as they flourish their gifts for us increase simultaneously. We no longer see them as 'they' but as a part of 'we'. We participate in the 'WE', which is only sustained by harmonization of goals and ends—this synthesis brings happiness for all.

3:3:2:2. The community as a custodian and guarantor of individuality

The African view of humanity described so far is not materialistic in the sense that a human being is not merely an object understood by science and technology, and neither is it dualistic in the sense that has pervaded some of the west. Rather, this view of humanity is holistic such that spirit and matter, body and soul remain contingent aspects of a vital force that perpetually nourishes and fashions the human person. This African worldview is irreducible to liberal individualism; neither is it like communism, wherein the individual becomes a number in an aggregate of persons. The African communitarian worldview I am advocating as embedded in Ubuntu philosophy is one whose view of persons values a person's humanity, dignity and worth in the framework of other persons. This framework does not deny the individual's freedom, as the community is not opposed to the individual's freedom but urges – invites and does not coerce – each individual to choose according to its values. Each individual is a unique centre of shared life, values and goals. Therefore, for the community to flourish, the individual must flourish, and vice versa.

A typical example of an individual's responsibility to the community is the care and respect for the elderly. An Akan proverb goes, 'if your mother nurses you to grow your teeth, you nurse her to lose hers'. To disrespect an elder is a taboo and frowned upon in an African traditional society. In fact, in some cases the individual who disregards the elder may be disowned or ostracized, in which case the person would have lost his or her status as a person. The older a person becomes, the more he or she becomes integrated into the

community. At a certain point in time, the individual transcends being a father or mother of a particular family to become a father of all. Respect for elders is manifested in various ways. In Yoruba culture, one is expected to lie prostrate while talking to or greeting an elder. For the Igbo, it is rude to stare at or look them in the face while speaking to them. Furthermore, when a person gets old, regardless of the status of the person as childless or with children, the old person is the responsibility of all. If one becomes too old to do something for oneself, such as cultivating the field, one does not worry because the field will be cultivated anyway by members of the extended family. The idea of homes for the elderly is new in African thought and severely discouraged. In fact, anyone who takes his or her parent to a home for the elderly is considered to be out of his/her mind, and there are relatively few cases. In old age one is treated with the utmost respect, love and care. Since the elderly are considered as a source of blessing or curse, one takes care of them with hope of infinite blessings from the ancestors.

The cultural practices enunciated above embody the communitarian ethos of the indigenous African people encoded as it were in their ethical conducts. And even in morality, as Hard and Smith (1995:8) observe, the 'ethics and moral reflection' of the indigenous African people 'tend to focus much more on collective structures than on individual decision-making.' For example, the etymology of the word sin – *bone* in Akan is from *bon – bad scent*[17]. Since a scent is usually not felt by one person, Akans, therefore, mean that when one sins or does something wrong, one does that not only against oneself, but also against the community as a whole.

Another significant communitarian tenet of Ubuntu philosophy is the extended family system. Among indigenous African peoples, the extended family system is highly valued. A person's social or ethical life does not rest merely on the nuclear family system; one is obliged to relate to the members of one's extended family as part of one's immediate family. It is for this reason that in a traditional African thought like the Ibos, only such words like brother, sister, mother or father exists when it patterns to family or kinship relations. Such

[17] I am indebted to Rev. Kojo Antobam SJ of Wits University for this insight.

words as cousin, nephew, niece, etc are foreign and alien in African traditional thought. The bond of relationships is very strong, and sometimes one is lost in trying to trace how one is actually related to another. Any child born into this extended family system is not only the responsibility of one's immediate nuclear family, but the responsibility of all. Since many believe in reincarnation, it is believed that the child may be one of our departed ancestors, and sometimes a particular elder may recognize a particular child as his/her departed father or mother. If a family is unable to have a child or loses a child by misfortune, this family is not strictly considered childless since they form part of the larger extended family system.

Furthermore, when a young woman becomes a widow, she is not left to fend for herself; a brother or relative of the deceased husband has the mandate to support her. The relative who cares for her automatically assumes the responsibility of the children of the deceased relative. Understandably, this aspect of the indigenous African culture has been very significant in the spread of HIV/AIDS pandemic. Unfortunate as it may be, one needs to appreciate the thinking behind this cultural stance, and this includes the need amongst others to accommodate, to be inclusive in one's relationship and to share. This understanding is well enunciated in the following Swahili proverb, 'one cannot sit down alone to plan for prosperity because a person who lives alone is either always overworked or always overfed since a single person cannot build a house and he/she who eats alone dies alone'. This proverb exemplifies what it means to be a person through other persons.

The extended family system has sustained the indigenous African people over the millennia. During disasters such as drought or famine sharing and solidarity are heightened. And even today, how the African people respond to the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic reveals this level of interdependence and solidarity. Although this pandemic has strained the extended family system, there is strong evidence that the coping strategy has been sustained primarily by the extended family system. With many orphans to be taken care of as a result of the disease, most of these children are taken in by the relatives of the deceased parents, including some by the grandparents. Orphanages continue to be a source of challenge to the African

traditional togetherness. A child belongs to all the members of the extended family system. Among the Igbo, when children are left as orphans, the first thing the extended family does, even before the burial of their parents, is discuss the welfare of the children left behind, and each member of the extended family unit is obliged to make a pledge of responsibility. For example, one will pledge to take care of school fees, another will pledge for books, clothes, housing or feeding. In this way, the child is well taken care of and, even if one fails in one's pledges, others will usually make up for the failure. The extended family system is a core feature of African communitarianism sustained, as it were, by a politics of common good. The politics of common good is the focus of the next section.

3:4. Ubuntu and politics of common good: consensus or conformity?

Ubuntu philosophy advocates a politics of the common good according to which collective pursuit of ends as shared by members of a community is the primary political goal. In this context, individually chosen ends may not veto or undermine the common good[18]. Common good does not annihilate or absorb the uniqueness of individuals. In fact, individually chosen ends would not run in opposition to shared ends insofar as the members of the community are bound by affective ties and are aware that common good enhances individual's flourishing. Politics of the common good is not an identity of interest such as in consensus or collectivism as is found in communism, but of symbiotic encounter of psycho-social enrichment.

The politics of common good characteristic of Ubuntu philosophy, contrary to what many African writers have argued, is not arrived at through consensus. Most African communitarians writers endorse consensus as the sole normative paradigm through which common good, resolution of crises and management of conflicts are obtained in traditional African value system. But the implications thereof as well as the constitutive validity of such a claim are largely taken for granted.

[18] I got this insight from my lecture note (tutorial letter), UNISA, 2001 (Student number: 33248400) and I am indebted to my philosophy lecturers for this insight.

If Ramose is right, 'the communal ethos of African culture emphasizes a great value on solidarity, which in turn necessitates the pursuit of unanimity or consensus on all levels of political decisions' (Ramose, 1999:139). 'Opposition', although not just 'for the sake of opposition', is embodied in the process of finding a consensus (Ramose, 1999:139f). According to this understanding, Ubuntu ethics underscores the importance of consensus in African traditional culture, there is a perpetual quest for consensus and reconciliation (Teffo, 1994a.4).

These writers maintain that consensual democracy ensures that there is no domination by preventing any single group from monopolizing political power and by ensuring that even the smallest minority will represent its point of view. This form of consensus they argue is different from the tyranny of the majority characteristic of western democracy. Consensus is arrived at in form of a (sometimes extremely lengthy) discussion or *Indaba*. In Wiredu's words, 'The elders sit under the big trees, and talk until they agree to disagree' (Wiredu, 1998:374).

Consensus at this juncture serves as ideal potential for agreement insofar as the *interests of the members remain the same*. Wiredu expresses this point as follows:

> This thought [of agreement] is given expression in an art motif depicting a crocodile with one stomach and two heads locked in struggle over food. If they could but see that the food was, in any case, destined for the same stomach, the irrationality of the conflict [the disagreement over who gets what share] would be manifest to them. But is there a chance of it? …. Yes human beings have the ability eventually to cut through their differences to rock bottom *identity of interests'* (1998:377) [My emphasis]

Wiredu's argument for a consensual democracy claims to draw on the strengths of traditional indigenous political institutions; it does not '…place any one group of persons consistently in the position of a minority' but it strives to ensure that the points of view of all individual citizens are considered. (Wiredu, 1998:375). According to Ramose, this kind of consensual democracy is different from the kind of democracy practices in the West if one is cognizant of the fact that the 'adversarial multi-party systems of Western democratic cultures' has undermined the principle of solidarity in traditional African political culture.

Consensus, these African writers claim, accommodates the opposition since 'once cannot speak of consensus where there is no opposition at all' (Ramose, 1999:141).

In striving to arrive at a common good or reach any crucial political decision, Wiredu opines that the way forward in consensus is to keep the dialogue open in such a way that it will accommodate even the minority opinion. The object of an open dialogue is to achieve a 'suspension of disagreement' insofar as the object of consensus is 'willing suspension of disagreement, making possible agreed actions without necessarily agreed notions'. This means that the elders at some point will agree to disagree in consensus (Wiredu, 1998:374).

Scholars like Dirk J. Louw, have tried to diffuse the implications of consensual tyranny by arguing that this mode of agreement or consensus should not be confused with outmoded and suspect cravings for (an oppressive) universal sameness, often associated with so-called teleological or 'modernistic' attempts at the final resolution of differences (Lowu, 1999b:2). Although Louw is right to argue that Ubuntu philosophy thrives on plurality and that while Ubuntu constitutes personhood *through other persons,* it recognizes that ' *"other persons"* are so called precisely because we can ultimately never quite "stand in their shoes" or completely "see through their eyes"'. However, Louw, it seems to me, does not succeed in highlighting the critical danger of assuming a consensual platform. Rather he goes on to argue that 'when the Ubuntuist reads "solidarity" or "consensus", s/he therefore also reads "alterity", "autonomy", and "co-operation" (note: not "co-optation"). (Dirk J. Louw, 1999b:4; 1999a). Louw does not recognize the contradiction in trying to maintain 'alterity' and 'autonomy' while still advocating consensus. Consensus neither accommodates nor promotes autonomy and alterity, but suppresses these core values of human identity'. The critical question has been whether consensus is a viable option that best depicts the ethical consciousness underlying African value systems? The dominant responses from writers (as we have seen) have been conjectures of basic anthropology. We have such conjectures delineating the prescriptive role of consensus in sustaining uniformity, deontological justice and interest-driven political order. Where context control and domination is perceived as better than

their absence, performative criterion of consensus eschews dogmatic adherence to a metaphysical discourse. It demands the renunciation of fables and requires 'clear minds and cold wills'. Consensus substitutes the 'definition of essences' with the calculation of interactions while empowering the actors to become responsible not only for the statements they propose, but also for the guidelines they have set to make those statements legitimate (Lyotard: 1979:62). These conjectures need not be the point I dispute; rather they can be the starting point for a quest for adopting an alternative paradigm that will yield a phenomenal understanding of conflict management and resolution in traditional African value system. I say 'phenomenal' insofar as consensus as a paradigm neither yields a substantive understanding of community nor appreciates any normative engagement with a differential other.

3:4:1. Why (not) consensus?

If the politics of common good in the traditional African system is sustained solely by consensus, then this is in fact a critical question mark against the theoretical foundation on which Ubuntu is premised. If I subscribe to this dominant opinion, the following scenario emerges: (i) I cannot coherently posit Ubuntu philosophy as a strand of communitarianism. (ii) Consensus contradicts the theoretical foundation on which Ubuntu philosophical ethics is premised. Considering (i) and (ii), Ubuntu might not, as a philosophy, proffer critical response to the threat of liberal individualism.

None of the African writers of communitarianism who have adopted the term consensus has given any substantive definition or account of the term or their application thereof. Their usage of the term, however, concurs with its application in academic literatures as explained, for example, in the Random House College dictionary where the term implies harmony, general agreement or majority of opinion. African writers like Wiredu (1998:374), for example, write of consensus as 'suspension of disagreement, making possible agreed actions'. What Wiredu does was to give a descriptive application of consensus and how it is used among the

Akans. Wiredu does not give any definition and the analysis he gives is on the merit of the prescriptive role of consensus. On this point, Wiredu (1998:380) continues,

> consensus is not just an optional bonus…it is essential for securing substantive, or what might also be called decisional representation for representatives and, through them, for the citizens at large….consensus as a political decision-making procedure requires in principle that each representative should be persuaded, if not of the optimality of each decision, at least of its practical necessity, all things considered.

Ramose (1999:139) for his part, speaks of 'unanimity' as equivalent to consensus. This understanding of the term (as employed by these writers) also informs Habermas's usage of the term. Since none of the African writers gave a substantive definition of the term rather than its adoption as an ethical-political imperative, I will appeal to Habermas on whose account the term 'consensus' acquired a normative import.

I shall now give a basic outline of consensus as well as the concomitant implication of adopting such a model as one that best espouses a method of resolution, management of crises, and sustenance of common good in the traditional African value system. In the preceding pages, I will argue that an appeal to consensus is to perpetuate and polish the relic of liberal individualism. I shall now explore how Habermas's 'communicative action' will help us in understanding the implications of consensus. I use Habermas because the theory of consensus as a democratic imperative has by and large been developed by Habermas's account.

3:4:2. What is consensus?

According to discourse ethics, the universality of admissible norms is obtained through a rational discourse. Through a co-operative process of interpretation, rational and free individuals accept as valid any claim they make insofar as reasons for such a claim would have been offered via a rational discourse. For a claim to be true or valid, it has to be subjected to a consensual platform via rational discourse. Consensus is a 'stamp of approval' for any claim to gain legitimacy or validity. In post-modern theory, consensus is a component of a system as manipulated by that system to sustain and enhance its performance. In this context, consensus becomes an object of administrative procedure and its only test for validity rests on its performance

as an instrument of achieving the goal of the system which is what legitimates the system – power (Lyotard, 2000:45).

Consensus receives validity through legitimation. Legitimation is an attempt to validate or authenticate a claim to legitimacy by a given state with proof of an ability to realize and preserve those norms and values ontologically necessary to the continued sustenance of the society's identity. In other words, the ability of corresponding institutions to demonstrate the validity of why they should be granted political power vis-à-vis a superior capacity for the actualisation of fundamental values for the institution of society in question necessarily constitutes the legitimation of the said institutions. On this point, an institution can legitimate itself by assuming the capacity of securing 'the best possible satisfaction of generalizable interests' (Howe, 2000: 46) (– a utilitarian influence insofar as what is right or the condition of rightness must spell the maximum benefit. i.e., what is legitimate must agree with general interests). What we have, therefore, is a consensus of 'action' without a consensus of 'opinion'. The former is obtainable in society where legitimacy is forcibly obtained, as in dictatorships or military regimes, and yet the populace are of a different opinion.

To argue that consensus is the '*telos*' for the politics of common good in the African value system is to subscribe to meta-ethical theories at the core of liberal individualism. Consensus isolates the 'other' (in their otherness) that does not form or belong to my consensual scheme. Consensus does not guarantee the ethical consciousness manifest in Ubuntu philosophy; at best consensus guarantees personal interest as opposed to common good. In consensus what is good for me or interests me in this situation is key as opposed to who I am as a moral agent. This procedural understanding of ethics highlights the shortcomings of consensus in giving account to our substantive commitment to the common good. Since there is no substantive conception of the good, what matters is 'what is right' or 'acceptable' independent of any substantive conception of the good. To conceive ethics in society on procedural terms is key in Habermas's attempt to adopt an impartial point of view with regards to our normative commitments. This approach undermines what Talyor calls 'the point of those procedures, the substantive good that is at stake in adopting such impartial procedures'

(Hendley, 2000:x). This raises the question, why be moral? We are dumb insofar as we cannot understand the significance of adopting a moral point of view in life if we are unable to appreciate the substantive good these procedures serve.

The procedural understanding of ethics informs the liberal individualistic commitment to the good. According to this approach, in a pluralistic world where we have to confront and deal with heterogeneous and divergent ethical points of view, the most efficacious way of attaining or achieving common good which would necessarily be accepted by everyone on equal terms would be a consensus that is grounded on fair procedures: 'a consensus on the right rather than the good' (Hendley, 2000: x).

As we have seen from the discourse so far, consensus neither entails moral right nor guarantees legitimacy. The fact that consensus does not guarantee legitimacy blurs the possibility of any necessary connection between consensus on the one hand and the common good insofar as common good can only be ascertained by a substantive commitment to the common good on the other. In other words, the relationship between rationality and consensus (bearing in mind, Habermas's attempt to make consensus the outcome of rational procedures) is suspect since 'true' legitimacy need not provide rational motivation (justified support) and support/consensus may be found to be 'false'. Furthermore, reason or rationality as grounds for justification is not satisfactory considering that reason can be rational or irrational, illogical, bad or even wrong (Howe, 2000:42). Thus, one needs also to subject *reason* to reason since reason for the sake of itself is not adequate; it must not only be valid but also relevant and contextual. Therefore the presuppositions of rational discourse does not necessarily guarantee moral rightness and advocating for consensus may not facilitate the search for truth since in some cases, it is more meritorious to abandon consensus in order to attain a universal truth (Lyotard, 1984:63). An example is Galileo's shift from the traditional geocentrism to heliocentrism. In this way, Galileo tends to be deviating from Habermas's consensual framework and one can say that his quest for the common good facilitated a substantive commitment to the good, whereas the collective interest or

'consensus' (to ensure the domination of certain hierarchy) conversely hindered his commitment to the common good.

The possibility of rational discourse entails a universalized morality which is superior to particularized morality of different communities, writes Habermas (1979:179). Universalized morality guarantees a possibility of a discourse that is independent of any empirical factor. Like Rawls' veil of ignorance, since rational discourse is free from any psychological factor, it becomes the only criterion for the normative validity for any consensus on morality. And like Kant, Habermas maintains the principle of universalization as the only principle in which practical reason expresses itself (Hendley, 2000:11). By insistence on rationality, Habermas assumes a Kantian element. Rationality is independent of community, I have it embodied in my person, so to speak, and I bring my *naturally* endowed rationality to the community of inquirers. The community is only secondary, and my participation as an agent in a consensus is only to perpetuate my personal interests and not the common good.

Apart from the Kantian feature of rationality, the discourse ethics reinvents the problem of universalization of ethics associated with Kantian ethics and at the heart of the theoretical foundation of contemporary liberal individualism. The principle of universality guarantees the normative validity of norms after it has been contested in a moral practical discourse. In Kant, the categorical imperative is universal, and in the discourse ethics, the universal rule is that the legitimacy of any moral norm is dependent on its being rationally contested.

Furthermore, the discourse ethics is formalistic since it does not presuppose any substantive moral conduct or commitment to the good independent of practical reason rather than a procedural imperative that must be satisfied by all norms to gain moral legitimacy. In this sense, the discourse ethics becomes deontological in two senses: (I) it adopts the Kantian principle by assuming the priority of rights over good. By assuming this position, it accentuates the liberal individualistic image whereby ethics or moral principles are structured in ways that do not presuppose any particular conception of the good life because this would

undermine the liberal commitment 'to a plurality of conceptions of the good life' (Baynes, 1998). (ii) the discourse ethics, like the Kantian ethics, posits morality to consist of categorical imperatives insofar as norms are morally binding on the basis of their relationship with processes of social interaction and communication (Baynes, 1998).

As seen in chapter 2, Kantian ethics embodies a two-world metaphysics, i.e. the *noumenal* and *phenomenal* world. This dualism enabled Kant to equate what an individual can rationally and consistently will with what everyone would consistently and rationally will to agree. This is Kant's kingdom of ends, and harmony between what the individual wills and that of the collective rational will is achieved by setting interests, desires and inclinations against the backdrop of reason as well as purging these from the kingdom of ends (Baynes, 1998). This is not the case with discourse ethics. In the latter, the simulated thought experiment is substituted by practical discourses and here is the rub! In the first place, the possibility of any actual discourse is severely limited by time and space and this undermines their normative validity. Secondly, even if dialogues or discourse are carried out by a few representatives on behalf of the others, it is still not a sufficient substitute. It is for this among other reasons that consensus as a criterion of validation of morality or ethics becomes severely inadequate (Baynes, 1998, Lyotard 1994:65, Hendley, 2000:11f).

It is in the aforementioned sense of inadequacy that critics of consensual advocacy label consensus as a form of terrorism. It is terrorism insofar as difference or divergence is suspect while a single meta-narrative is celebrated. It is terrorism insofar as unanimity or conformity is the building block and any voice of dissent is repressed to conform, as evident in instances where scientists have had their discoveries stifled or repressed since it disturbed the accepted status quo (cf Galileo). And this Lyotard writes, 'is because the stronger the "move" the more likely it is to be denied the minimum consensus, precisely because it changes the rules of the game upon which consensus had been based' (Lyotard, 1984:63). This form of terrorism ensures that participants in rational moral discourse can be threatened or eliminated from the language game. The person is silenced and made to consent not on the basis of weak argument but because if the person

wants to remain a participant then he or she must follow the terror slogan 'adapt your aspirations to our ends or else' (Ibid). This attitude of terrorism is an attempt to hide behind the tyranny of a consensual platform to suppress the other viewpoints different from ours.

I do not dispute the necessity of unity. But an insistence on consensus as the only regulative ideal is only a step towards some form of totalitarianism. In as much as unity is an ideal to be pursued, uniformity of judgment evident in consensus need not be the only way forward. Unity need not proceed from uniformity if we imagine for example the human organism. The body and all its parts are not the same, but the body is integrated effectively and functions very well despite the fact that the parts are not uniform. This unity of the body does not imply uniformity. Similarly, a social group can be unified without being uniform. From the foregoing, I contest that consensus adequately accounts for the anthropological dimension of Ubuntu where my *humanity* is fashioned by virtue of other person's unique humanity (a person is a person through another person). In consensus, my being *a person through another person* excludes non-members of my community who do not form part of my consensual framework. Hence, I argue that common good in the African value system need not be attained through consensus. Consensus merely represents a state of discussion and not the *telos*. The goal of any discourse ought to be a model that eschews terrorism, represents minority viewpoints and that accommodates the other viewpoints in the absence of conformity or uniformity. This model I am going to propose is realist perspectivism.

3:4:3. What is realist perspectivism?

This section is divided into two parts. The first part is a synopsis of realist perspectivism. Following this is a refinement of realist perspectivism couched in my own argument from whence I hope to tease out a possibility for a viable realistic perspectivism that would reflect Ubuntu philosophical ethics. In my refinement of realist perspectivism, analogies will be drawn from the philosophy of science to shed more light on the current discourse.

Realism developed to counteract idealism (a philosophical tradition according to which whatever exists is dependent on our knowledge of consciousness of them). According to idealism, our knowledge is limited to groups of sensations in the mind such that all cognition becomes judgment. Every cognition is judgment insofar as all objects that we know are wholly derived from the workings of the mind. Material or physical objects cannot exist independently of the mind since whatever is known is relative to the mind that appropriates it.

In contrast, realism is a philosophical position according to which (i) there is a world independent of the mind and (ii) our intellect can learn and describe something from this world. According to realist perspectivism, sensible qualities are not merely possessed by the object *simpliciter*. These qualities are relative to a perspectival point of view. In other words, every time we perceive sensible or material qualities, we do it in a context of a perspective, be it spatial or temporal. The properties or qualities of the object being perceived are possessed and localized by the object, but its being perceived is dependent on a viewpoint or a perspective (Hirst, 1967).

3:4:3:1. Conditions for holding viable realist perspectivism

The realist perspectivism that I advocate illustrates in a more coherent way, more than consensus, how common good is arrived at in the African traditional system. This kind of perspectivism shuns unanimity but seeks for the understanding of the other before arriving at judgment. It is humanistic insofar as the focus is the human person and in understanding the other's perspective which is different from ours and seeking ways to reconcile and accommodate these different perspectives in such a way that does not oppress or possess.

Realist perspectivism is not dependent on solitary intellectual exercise or judgment as evident in deontology or consensus, but focuses in understanding and experiencing the other in his/her context before any judgment. Following this line of thought, Wittgenstein on the use of language argues that if we only have

private experiences, then these private experiences cannot be communicated since we cannot describe or speak of it to anyone or even to ourselves since the use of language implies rules that are communal; rules that need to be established and measured with respect to external objects (Hirst, 1967).

At this juncture, I will briefly draw analogies from philosophy of science to examine further critical processes of holding a viable realistic perspectivism. Science is believed to be based on facts. Its theories are believed to be directly derived from facts through simple induction. However, if we analyse what facts are, how they are accessed and how theories are derived from them, we will find out that this belief about science and facts is not tenable. The facts are considered to be directly given to careful, unprejudiced observers. They are also taken to be prior to and independent of theory and to constitute a firm and reliable foundation of science. These views are problematic in many ways. We find that different people looking at the same thing will have different experiences, even if they are careful and unprejudiced. There are also theories about how to observe things. Professionals are guided by certain theories in their observation of things. A botanist observation of a tree is different from an ordinary carpenter. The need for a theory is not only in the realm of professional, even ordinary people need a theory in their observations. These facts have to be formulated in some form of language, and language will involve a bit of theory. To say the sun rises in the morning is not a pure observation of a fact, but it involves a certain theory: I am interpreting certain observations. Thus the assertion that facts are simply given and that they are independent of theory is untenable (Chalmers, 1982: 22-36). We always refer to facts within a certain framework. Thus we realise that we end up with an initial assertion that there are no brute facts. All facts are interpreted. What we have are descriptions of facts. These descriptions are not as firm and fixed as we think. At one time everyone believed that the world was flat and stationary, but that was proved otherwise. Thus, science realised that what we call facts are fallible. Hence it tries to make them objective by submitting them to public scrutiny. Our facts ought to be tested in various ways until we reach enduring results that can hold for all. That is why science relies heavily on

experiment to test its theories. In its attempt to objectify facts science is using contradictions to test the credibility of its theories to see whether they are really based on facts.

i) For the sake of argument, let us assume that T= theory and O = Observation.

ii) T → O = My theory makes me derive a conclusion or observation.

iii) If the other's viewpoint or perspective is 'O' then there is no confrontation since the other's viewpoint accords with mine. However if the other's viewpoint is ~O (where ~O stands for *not my observation)* then there is confrontation.

iv) Now, if [(T → O) and (~O)] (if my theory gives me the conclusion of an observation but the other's viewpoint gives me ~O, then my theory is false). So which perspective should I take since we cannot have (T→ O) and (~O) because (~O = ~T)[19].

This kind of system does not give room for choice; it is an either/ or situation. This system can also be called falsification, but naïve falsification by Lakatos. According to Lakatos, it is simplistic to consider a theory in this way insofar as whatever theory we have is necessarily incremental and not isolated. Theories are built on others. Therefore, one needs to adopt what Lakatos calls a sophisticated falsification to arrive at a more realistic perspectivism.

Popper notices the problems in interpretations and advocated the use of contradictions to help in determining what is there. He introduced the falsification theory, whereby theories have to be challenged in order to prove that they are true. According to Popper this would be the criterion for what is scientific. It is a criterion for arriving at reality. A statement has to be falsifiable or challengeable if it is to lead us to the truth. One cannot falsify a statement that it rains some Wednesdays; thus it is not scientific. But if one says it rains every Wednesday, we can falsify it and it is scientific. For Popper, knowledge begins in theory and move to facts. He says there is the context of discovery where we formulate theories. In this context there is no

[19] I owe this insight to Prof. Jameson Kurasha of the department of philosophy, University of Zimbabwe.

method, anything goes. This lack of methodology is like the Eureka experience[20]. Then there is the context of justification where we try to justify our Eureka experience, and this is done through falsification (Chalmers, 38-75).

There are some problems in Popper's theory of falsification. One of them is the difficulty in identifying the problem. Is the problem in the theory or in the observation? As earlier indicated, our observation can be flawed. So we would not know whether the problem is in the theory or in the observation. However we can use the theory of non-contradiction in a wider sense. Falsifications 'concentrate on the relationship between theories and individual observation statement or sets of them. They fail to take account of the complexity of major scientific theories' (Chalmers, 1982: 77). Thus, neither falsification nor the principle of non contradiction gives account of all the complexities of theories. There is therefore a need to articulate a more realistic perspectivism.

Willard Van Oram Quine in his book *Word and Object* outlined basic rules for radical translation. Quine invites us to imagine a jungle linguist trying to comprehend a completely foreign tongue and trying to translate this language. Is it a possibility? According to Quine (1960: 26, 29, 73ff), this is possible based on a certain condition. The condition involves attributing charity, meaning, rationality and truth to the other person's beliefs or utterances. The linguist would necessarily have to recognize certain modes of behaviour apparent in the lifestyle of the indigenous people and gain their confidence and cooperation to a large extent. This process of translation is identified by Quine as the *principle of charity*. The principle of charity involves an 'ontic commitment' in translation of a language foreign to us by recognizing and applying the modes of behaviour of the natives in their specific context (Harman, 1969: 15f). There are two versions of the principle of charity, viz.: The strong version and the Principle of Humanity.

(i) The strong version of the Principle of Charity: this version involves interpreting the other's language in a way that makes his or her belief true. It involves inserting ourselves wholly into the

[20] Like Archimedes' insight in the pool of Syracuse

narrative of others different from us in order to understand them. The problem with this version is that it leads to over-generosity since we are all fallible human beings. And so the necessity to adopt another model.

(ii) The Principle of Humanity: This model takes into account that we are fallible sometimes, our perception can be erroneous and judgment may be biased. The Principle of Humanity interprets the other in a way that makes all his or her belief intelligible (even though some of them may be false). The principle involves the application of observation and context as well as the preservation of meaning in interpreting the other's language.

The application of the principle of humanity enables me to encounter the other's viewpoint not with the intention of arriving at unanimity, consensus or conformity, but with the intention of experiencing, judging and understanding the 'other' such that it will enable me to make an ontic commitment to the common good. The principle can be represented in the following logical formulations:

Instead of considering only T and O, we now have to consider T and C (where C stands for context) = other theories and philosophical positions. At this juncture, [(T and C) → O)] = theory and context give me observation. But what happens when [(T and C)→ O)] is put together with (~O)? i.e. [(T and C)→ O)] confronts [~O] – other's viewpoint confronting mine . Since our 'O' has been proved problematic, our proposition will run like this [(T&C)→O]&(~O)→~(T&C.) ~O implies ~(T&C) which will eventually make my theory either

i) ~T or C (false theory or valid context)

ii) ~T & ~C (false theory and invalid context)

iii) ~C & T (invalid context and valid theory)

This process eventually leads to re-examination of my position and subsequently to conversion. Conversion inheres a complete change of attitude. It is a disposition in which the subject focuses on becoming open minded and less dogmatic and ethical agent. The focus is not on duty as in Kant but on who I am. 'Who

am I?' is significantly a different question from 'what duty is right or wrong?'[21] Since the focus is on the self as a moral agent, I am aware of the need to re-examine my background beliefs (conversion). In re-examination, we are edifying each other until such a time that we have arrived at a platitude of awareness.

The principle of humanity accords with Ubuntu philosophical ethics. Both philosophies recognize the unique and intrinsic value in other persons and treat them as such. They do not seek for uniformity or identity of interest but seek to understand and accommodate the other in their otherness. Unlike consensus, the principle of humanity does not rely on intellectual judgment alone, but exhibits an empathy that aims at conversion rather than uniformity, unanimity or conformity. The process of encounter with the other helps me to shed any misgivings about the other and at the same time brings me to an understanding. This approach does not take the position of the 'other' for granted; rather, I am invited into the world of the other, to experience and to encounter the other in his/her very unique context. Through the principle of humanity, I am inserted into the universe of the other and I experience the other as he/she truly is. This encounter or experience with the other informs and enriches my own perspective and frees me from dogma in judgment. My judgment and understanding is not merely informed by any pre-existent rational motivation as Kant and Rawls tries to argue. My judgment is inferred as a result of an experiential encounter with the other. I experience the other, I understand him and I judge him not in any other context or experience rather than his own.

Among the Igbo, the principle of humanity is evident when the elders in the course of any crucial discourse would break at intervals to meet in small groups, otherwise known as *Igbaizu.* For the Igbo's especially, conversion or insight involves the use of *Uche*, (the will and mind and conscience), which embodies all the human faculties. For every claim one makes, one is expected to have thought of it thoroughly. *Uche Oha* is the general will of the community where *Oha* means the community. *Uche Oha* is not static or definitively fixed, but dynamic, embracing both resilient principles and change. As an embodiment of the wills

[21] See 4:3:1 for a more detailed analysis on the difference between the moral agent and the dutiful agent.

and claims (even philosophies) of all the members of the community, the living and the living-dead, it is challenged from diverse angles. *Itu Uche*, the dialogue that involves contribution of opinion, is a collective task; this is because *onweghi onye so ya bu akpa uche* – (nobody alone is an embodiment of wisdom). In the process of *Itu Uche,* the opinion of the young and the minority is accommodated and respected – *nwata kwozie aka ya, osoro ndi okenye rie nri*, (if a child washed his hands well, he eats with the elders). Conversion/insight is achieved through corporate thinking. There is an interaction of the *Uche* of every member of a community in the process of achieving an insight/conversion. A major sign that an ethical decision could fall short of *Uche Oha* is when a person objects to it. Such a dissenting voice is never ignored or dismissed because it represents the opinions of both the living and the living dead. Often, such a last moment insight grasps the *Uche Oha*, thereby saving the community the consequences of a wrong judgement. This insight does not belong to any one member, and there is no *a priori* general claim on *Uche Oha*; neither is our decision made *a priori* for the details of the decisions taken are emergent events.

Uche Oha is not static; it can be challenged and subsequently modified in respect to relevant data and the welfare of the community. *Uche Oha*, is not consensus but a communal disposition aimed at providing a platform for the actualization of the individuals goals and hopes and the sustenance of the community. *Uche Oha* is a metaphor of sensitivity and responsiveness to the community's needs. It is a model based on attitudes of communal sharing as distinct from individual adversarial consumption. Through *Uche Oha*, many transformations have occurred among the African Igbo such as the shift from the rejection and killing of twins to great love for them.

Some scholars critical of Ubuntu philosophy have argued that because of its emphasis on community and solidarity, Ubuntu in fact endorses 'constrictive nature' or 'tyrannical communalism' in its 'totalitarian communalism' that '...frowns upon elevating one beyond the community' (Themba Sono, 1994:xiii, xv). According to Themba Sono, the role of the group in African consciousness becomes:

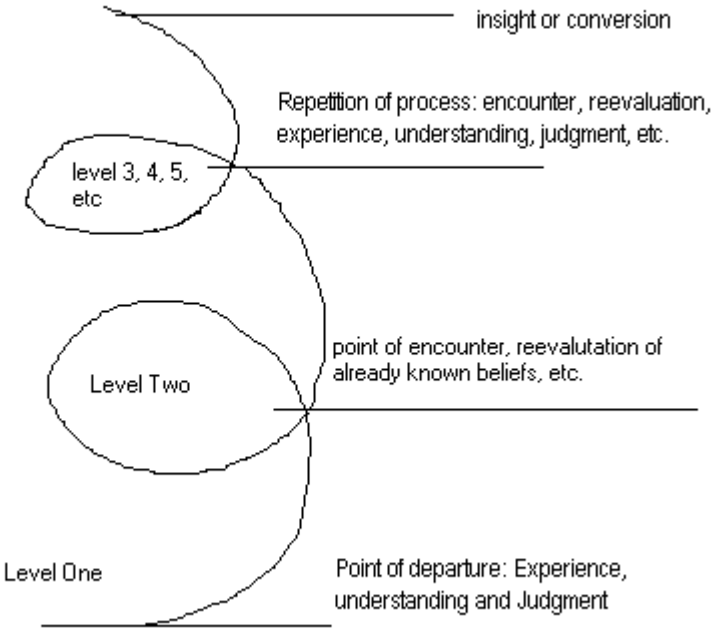
> ...Overwhelming, totalistic, even totalitarian. Group psychology, though parochially and narrowly based... nonetheless pretends universality. This mentality, this psychology is

> stronger on belief than on reason; on sameness than on difference. Discursive rationality is overwhelmed by emotional identity, by the obsession to identify with and by the longing to conform to. To agree is more important than to disagree; conformity is cherished more than innovation. Tradition is venerated, continuity revered, change feared and difference shunned. Heresies [i.e. the innovative creations of intellectual African individuals, or refusal to participate in communalism] are not tolerated in such communities' (1994:7).

These concerns would be legitimate if one adopted consensus as a normative criterion for Ubuntu philosophical foundations. Since this is not the case, in spite of these concerns, the liberating vision is that understanding, insight or conversion is not arrived at in a linear fashion but rather in a spiral form. It is spiral in the sense that negotiation remains fundamental in arriving at a point of objectivity. Nevertheless, Ubuntu moves beyond objectivism, consensus, conformity, tyranny and relativism. Thus, one recognizes Kuhn's advice: 'Make sense of what at first seemed absurd, then come back for a second look at what seemed clear', helps us to understand event more clearly (Bernstein, 1991: 31). Consequently, the process of arriving at conversion accords with a hermeneutical spiral. The hermeneutic spiral does not aim at unanimity or conformity. We allow our interpretation of one event to help us interpret other events, including decisions we may have passed already but to which we return in a spiral fashion. The process of arriving at conversion is analogous to Lonergan's epistemology where interpretation (understanding) is the key operation within a human knowing process. Operations of experiencing, understanding, judging (and deciding) recur again and again in accord with a hermeneutic spiral. According to Bernstein, the hermeneutic spiral is not vicious. It is a dialogical process of discovery or confirmation, not logical deduction (Bernstein, 1991: 134).

In striving for conversion, the other is not annihilated. The uniqueness of the other is maintained and protected. Conversion is arrived at in a spiral form. There is always room for improvement. When we dialogue, we encounter the other whose opinions inform and enrich our already known beliefs. We go back to revaluate what we have known before (*Igbaizu*): we make changes and concessions if necessary, and then we meet the other on a different platform, on a different level. The same procedure applies to all kind of decision making

processes. This process of the encounter re-occurs intermittently until such a time when we have arrived at insight or agreement even to disagree. This method of dialogue can be schematically[22] represented thus:



By being a person through another person, the individual is present to the world and to other persons. As a person, one is 'constituted' by (as one contributes to others' lives) the presence of others; this mutual constitution has interpretation (as quest for understanding) as its hermeneutic thrust. Such understanding is both epistemological, concerned with knowing what already is, and also ontological; it influences what comes to be. As you interpret reality, you make yourself – particularly your attitudes – present to the other (Bernstein, 1991:34). The hermeneutic spiral is exemplified as a hope-filled event of being in the world:

1. You interpret an event as promising.
2. This element of meaning as a promise makes you more hopeful.

[22] Although Bernstein did mention the dialogical process, the ideas expressed in this diagram are not from Bernstein. I do not give credit to Bernstein for this insight and I am not familiar with any work of Bernstein that expressed a similar point of view. I owe this insight to a former associate, Jesuit Father (Prof.) Louis Caruana of the Jesuit Gregorian University Rome. The ideas as developed in this diagram are mine nonetheless with insight from the Jesuit Father Lonergan.

3. The more hopeful you are, the more you interpret some other event as more promising than you had considered it before (Bernstein, 1991: 35)

In conversation with persons different from us, we notice and develop strengths that might otherwise remain hidden and undeveloped. As Bernstein writes:

> It is precisely in and through an understanding of alien cultures that we can come to a more sensitive and critical understanding of our own culture and of those prejudices that may lie hidden from us. We will see that this theme, which Gadamer relates to dialogue, questioning, and conversation, stands at the very centre of Gadamer's philosophic hermeneutics. For him this is the type of practical wisdom that is characteristic of the ongoing interpretation of our own tradition (Bernstein, 1991: 36).

The point of Bernstein is that one must recognize that our capacity to know (reason) is influenced by personal history, tradition, prejudice and authority. We should take this influence into account to arrive at decisions. In interpreting a situation that calls us to make a moral choice, we recognize that our overall becoming as feeling and acting persons influences our knowing and our knowing influences our overall becoming: competence in understanding, explaining (interpreting for others), and applying—these involve one another (Bernstein, 1991: 37).

Attempting to imitate science, an objectivistic ethics centres too much on universal ethical principles. What if several conflicting principles apply to the same decision? A relativistic ethics centres too much on individualized emotions (non-cognitive). A conformist ethics such as consensus undermines uniqueness and individuality, while a tyrannical ethics is superficial. How can one educate emotions so that they take a sufficient account of other persons and of the future? These extremes are avoided by the hermeneutic process evident in Ubuntu philosophy. It demands a careful reflection that takes into account both the future consequences of present acts and also the existing variety of different individual persons. This is an important concern of philosophical hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is a method of understanding that informs and guides all

knowing. It offers a method: spirals, theories of truth,[23] diverse community of inquiry, solidarity, freedom, participation, play of dialogue, incommensurability, analogy, practical wisdom, prejudgment, historical-effective consciousness, and fusion of horizons (Bernstein, 1991: 168ff). This kind of understanding is what Shutte has in mind when he warns us not to take Ubuntu to mean:

> Merely that we recognise that every person is human and treat them with the same standards as we treat ourselves…it means something different from - and more than - that … [C]ommunity is only created when I know and affirm… [the other person] as I know and affirm myself! [Ubuntu] is not just the knowledge that we are both human and as such equally valuable and so to be equally affirmed. The knowledge I have of myself is not this sort of commonsense or even theoretical knowledge. It is knowledge by contact or familiarity with the unique person that is me. This is the primary self-knowledge that I affirm when I affirm myself…and this is the knowledge and affirmation I extend to [the other person]… (1998a: 38-39; cf. also 1998a: 78).

In Ubuntu philosophy, the necessity of harmony of the physical and spiritual world is as a result of the principle of humanity at the core of Ubuntu philosophy. We interact with the world in order to approximate to the truth. And so to the question, Ubuntu: a Communitarian Response to liberal individualism? Deducing from the argument presented thus far, it is evident that such individualistic attitudes as evidenced in Kant, Mill and Descartes or even in contemporary liberalism are absent. The philosophy of Ubuntu shuns and rejects solitary intellectual exercises and replaces them with a community of inquirers. Instead of the Cartesian cogito ergo sum, the Ubuntuist will say, we think, we participate and therefore we are and since we are, you definitely are. Ubuntu rejects the suspicion of the everyday beliefs that characterize idealism. In Ubuntu philosophy, the focus is on the individual in an ethical rational community. The relationship between the individual and the community remains co-original by virtue of the inclusive and dialogic processes underlying Ubuntu philosophical ethics. Our respect for inanimate things which has provoked many writers to label the African as a sorcerer or a magician is only because the philosophical foundation on which Ubuntu is grounded

[23] These theories are perspectives on how to validate judgments: CORRESPONDENCE – the judgment conforms to what is, as when we know immediately with sense experience; COHERENCE – the judgment is consistent with other judgments, as when we know mediately through logical reasoning; COMMUNICATIVE – the judgment can reasonably be argued for in conversation with other knowers. Communicative perspective is the broadest of the three understandings. It includes the other two. The argument may use sense experience, insight, intuition, interpretation, logical reasoning, reliable witnesses, and reasonable values – whatever is relevant to the judgment to be communicated. (Bernstein, 1991: 168)

approximates reality even from the crude material experience. Thus, instead of the rationalist style of starting from pre-conceived ideas, we begin from experience, we have to interact with experience and the other person different from us if we want to understand reality or know who the other truly is. However, experience at this juncture is not exclusively independent of pre-conceived ideas. Preconceived ideas on the other hand are not independent of experience insofar as the mind is simulated by vagaries of experience by virtue of which the relationship between experience and preconceived ideas is mutually exclusive. As Bernstein (1991:37f) would argue, we must recognize that our capacity to know (reason) is influenced by personal history, tradition, prejudice and authority. We should take this influence into account; failure to notice allows it to function erratically. In interpreting literature as in interpreting a situation that calls us to make a moral choice, we recognize (more readily than in mathematics and natural science) that our overall becoming as feeling and acting persons influences our knowing and our knowing influences our overall becoming: competence in understanding, explaining (interpreting for others), and applying - these involve one another. Nonetheless, -- and this is a crucial qualification – this interaction or experiential encounter is not to be confused with the everyday slogan or clichés on Ubuntu such as *Simunye (we are one)* (Broodryk, 1997a:5, 7, 9). Such slogans indicate the fusion of the subject and the object into one. This is a misreading of the imperative of the debate and the concern of the next section.

3:5: Ubuntu: individuality or simunye (we are one?)

The communitarian philosophy of Ubuntu does not accommodate the fusion of subjects into a single entity. The phrases usually associated with Ubuntu philosophy such as '*Simunye'* (we are one') insofar as 'an injury to one is an injury to all' is a misreading of Ubuntu philosophical tenets. On one level 'an injury to one is an injury to all' can be validated on the basis of the recognition of the different gifts associated with the uniqueness of other people different from us; a gift which can only flourish when the other flourishes. But this clause need not be placed on a par with the first part of the phraseology 'Simunye' where Ubuntu

communitarian ethos is interpreted to infer uniformity, identity of interests and conflation of our different worldviews into a single unit. Of course, union of minds and hearts is at the heart of Ubuntu philosophy, but this does not imply that we simply become a photocopy image of the 'other'. To view the other in this way brings in the element of fusion of subject into a single unit. This fusion of the subject suppresses the other whose uniqueness informs, educates, and enriches me.

The attitude of suppressing the other to become another me is a form of terrorism. In suppressing the other, I have annihilated the other such that the other is now an object to be possessed by me. In other words I am saying to the other, *it is only when you are like me that you are human*. This thinking is not different from the philosophies at the base of liberal individualism. Like utilitarianism, this thinking conflates our different uniqueness into a single unit. Ubuntu philosophy need not take this position insofar as we need to tap into the richness emanating from the uniqueness of other people that we encounter everyday. It is in this uniqueness that our humanity flourishes and this is what it means to say that 'I am a person through another person'. In this section, I will examine how an individual can maintain a relation and distance and at the same time be part of a community which does not communicate *Simunye.*

Respect for individuality and the particularities of the beliefs and practices of others, is especially emphasized by an extended version of umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu. In this context, ununtu ngumuntu ngabantu is translated: 'To be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others in its infinite variety of content and form…[by which]…A human being is a human being through the otherness of other human beings' (Van der Merwe, 1996.1; Ramose, 199:193)[24]. The respect for the particularity of the other in Ubuntu philosophy is embedded in the appreciation of the individuality of the other. However, this individuality is not the sort of individualism evident in the Cartesian cogito or characterizing liberal individualism.

[24] I am not sure to whom to give credit to this idea. Ramose 1999:193 or Alistar Sparks, in Chapter 1 of *The Mind of South Africa* or Van Der Merwe 1996:1, or Louw 1999. These writers used this phrase in its current formulation without quotes or acknowledgment.

In the Cartesian thinking, the individual exists prior to or separately and independently from the community or society. The rest of society is nothing but an added extra to a 'pre-existent and self-sufficient being' (Shutte, 1993:47f). This mode of conceiving the human person as ready-made lies at the heart of liberal individualism, exaggerating the seemingly solitary aspects of human existence to the detriment of the common good. On the contrary, individuals in Ubuntu philosophy are conceived in terms of their relationship with one another such that 'I think, therefore I am', is replaced by 'I participate, therefore I am' (Shutte, 1993:47f). According to this understanding, the individuals exist only in relation to the others. However, this relationship is not to be confused with 'being-with-others' as many scholars tend to do. Macquarrie argues that an individual be definition means 'being-with-others'. 'With others' here, according to Macquarrie, '…is not added on to a pre-existent and self-sufficient being; rather, both this being (the self) and the others find themselves in a whole wherein they are already related' (MAcquarrie 1972:104 – My emphasis). If Macquarrie is right, Louw would have been right to argue that Ubuntu 'unites the self and the world in a peculiar web of reciprocal relations in *which subject and object become indistinguishable'*. In this understanding, the subject is possessed and consummated (Louw, 1999a: My emphasis).

Similarly, Augustine Shutte despite his brilliant exposé of Ubuntu philosophy seems to have fallen into the same problem when he argued that in Ubuntu philosophy:

> Each individual of the community sees the community as themselves, as one with them in character and identity. *Each individual sees every other individual member as another self.* Thus there is no room for a separation between the individual and the community, and all the relationships and transactions between individual members and the community as a whole remain fully personal [my emphasis] (Shutte 2001:27)

This understanding of Ubuntu as enunciated above is problematic. Louw and Shutte seem dangerously close to an apparent aloneness characterizing liberal individualism. In fact, there was a similar problem with the Cartesian *cogito* and the Platonic *anamnesis*. For instance, the Platonic epistemology as *anamnesis* (recollection) asserts that one already knows what one seeks to know insofar as knowledge is already contained within oneself. This reading of Ubuntu philosophy underlies the misappropriation of Ubuntu

philosophy as *Simunye* in which the 'I' and the 'Other' becomes one rather than being in a relationship. If I were the same with the 'other', then I cannot really learn anything from the other which I do not know or already posses. In fact, the idea of communal engagement or striving for common good is wholly defeated because if we are unanimously united in a peculiar way, then there is neither constitutive engagement with the other nor is there a need for a substantive commitment to the common good. This description of the self is like the Leibnizian monad. The Leibnizian monad is self-contained and isolated from other monads, which have no windows through which anything can enter or depart. But, – and this is a crucial qualification – each monad mirrors all the others (Leibniz, 1960: 248)[25]. Although one cannot see or touch the monadic Ego of the other, by implication, its nature as a monad means that it is similar to my own Ego. Thus, the other is known as a subject of possession since he/she is already part of me, part of my existence. In this scenario, I remain the model for others, a measure for who becomes human. Since I possess the other in his/her entirety, the other is a mere reflection of myself since I have given no space for the other. Like Descartes, the subject in this kind of thinking remains the first apodictic certainty and therefore a model for others and a measure for other's humanity.

To view the other as my photocopy is an attempt to possess and objectify the other. I acknowledge the other only to possess it in an expanding circle of sameness. The subject is truncated; it receives nothing and learns nothing, which it does not know, or already posses. In Western philosophy, Martin Buber's I-Thou philosophy corroborates such dangers associated with *Simunye*. Buber in his classic *I and Thou* makes a distinction between two basic relations, viz.: 'I-Thou' and 'I-It'. I-Thou is a relation of reciprocity and mutuality involving two subjects while the I-it is a relation between subject and passive object. According to Buber, the self is not an object of possession or a substance but rather a relation existing solely as an 'I' addressing itself to a 'Thou' (Hand, 1989:58). The 'I-Thou' has priority over the 'I-It' insofar as the former is an absolute

[25]: 'Each simple substance has relations which express all the others, and, consequently, [. . .] it is a perpetual living mirror of the universe.'

condition of intentionality for the latter. The 'It' is characterized by everything that I encounter each day in objective and practical experience.

The sphere of the 'It' is perceived to represent our mental acts whether willed or felt insofar as they are directed to an object. According to Buber, when I perceive, sense, think or conceptualise something for myself, this objective conceptualisation constitutes the sphere of the *It*. Human persons when referred to as 'he', 'she, 'they' belong to the sphere of *It*. The 'I' experiences these, but only superficially insofar as the 'I' explores only their surface 'without committing its whole being and its experiences do not extend beyond itself' (Hand 1989:63). The 'It' remains neutral and as a neuter gender, it suggests that in the 'It', 'individuals do not enter into the type of unifying relation in which their otherness is distinctive, where they are, so to speak, other than the others' (Hand 1989:63f).

The I-Thou relation involves encountering a being external to oneself, a being that is radically other, and in recognizing it as such. This confrontation is not a mere *idea* of otherness otherwise it will be appropriated to an I-It relation. The recognition here involves confronting the other and saying Thou to it. It is at once a real access to the other characterized as it were by an immediate contact that does not posit an object, but in which I speak *to* him/her rather than *of* him/her. In this way, the self is no longer an isolated subject but extends beyond the boundaries of the self (Hand, 1989: 64).

In *Simunye*, the subject closes upon itself and at once the metaphysical source of both the self and the world is held in abstraction. The implication at this juncture is either that (i) the object constitutes the subject and the relationship rests in the power of the object or (ii) the object is constituted by the subject and the relationship remains in the power of the subject. Ubuntu philosophy, however, shows that this is not the case. In Ubuntu philosophy, there is a relationship which neither assimilates not possesses the other. There is a relationship and it is in this relationship that the identity of the subject is constituted.

In Ubuntu philosophical ethics, persons are treated as subjects rather than objects. The human person may not be reduced to a quantifiable datum. To treat one like an object is to deny one one's humanity. A

certain respectful attitude is manifested in the form of everyday rituals such as greetings, sharing, etc.; for example, among the Igbo of eastern Nigeria, they do not count people, they count only chickens! It is presumed that to count people is a tendency to objectify them. In the same manner, it is offensive not to be greeted. One is obliged to say 'hello' to anyone one encounters as one performs one's daily activities. Not to greet someone is considered rude since you are meant to recognize the presence of the other person as a subject since failure to do so is seen as an objectification of the person. The communitarianism evident in this African worldview is not an encounter with the other as an object of possession but rather as a subject. To treat one as an object is to view one as an 'it' rather than a 'thou' to use Buber's terminology. The structure of relationship evident in African traditional thought corroborates this fact. Accordingly, I concur with Louw that Ubuntu incorporates dialogue as it does incorporate both relation and distance. It preserves the other in his or her otherness or uniqueness without letting him or her fade into the distance. (Shutte, 1993:49, 51; Louw 1999a). According to this understanding, an Ubuntu perception of the other is 'never fixed or rigidly closed, but adjustable or open-ended. It allows the other to be, to become. It acknowledges the irreducibility of the other, i.e. it does not reduce the other to any specific characteristic, conduct or function' (Louw, 1999a). This understanding is in concurrence with the grammar at the heart of Ubuntu Philosophy which represents both a state of 'being and of becoming', an understanding which acts as a catalyst to 'a process of self-realization through others from whence it enhances the self-realization *of* others' (Ramose, 199:45ff, Louw 1999a; Broodryk, 1997a:5-7). Ubuntu respects the dynamic nature of the 'other' characterized as it were by mutual exposure. The subject and the other do not dissolve into one; rather, there is constant contact and interaction such that other's uniqueness enriches me. Ndaba writes:

> The collective consciousness evident in the African culture does not mean that the African subject wallows in a formless, shapeless, or rudimentary collectivity…[it] simply means that the African subjectivity develops and thrives in a relational setting provided by ongoing contact and interaction with others (Ndaba, 1994:14, cited in Louw, 1994).

Ubuntu inspires us to expose ourselves to others, to dialogue and encounter the difference of their humanness so as to inform and enrich our own (Louw, 1994b). To be a person is not to be the same as the

other but to be in harmony with all that is. There is a distance and relation where the 'I' and the 'We' are engaged in a perpetual encounter with the other. By this, one who commits a crime against another person is meant to realize that he/she is not only hurting or harming humanity but themselves as well. One who commits heinous crimes against the other depreciates oneself as a person since he/she remains part of that humanity which constitutes his/her identity. In idealistic terms, humanity is a family, a big family where everyone is different in the sense of their individuality within the same framework of common humanity. My humanity becomes real when I confront the humanity in others, viewing them in terms of Buber's terminology, in an I-Thou relationship rather than an 'I-It' relationship.

3:6. Brief overview

It will be utopian and ridiculous to claim that the mode of relationship, sharing and caring characterizing Ubuntu philosophical ethics is exclusively African. These values can be found in other philosophies. However, Ubuntu remains distinctly African on the basis of its intense expression by Africans. In this chapter, I meant to draw from the practical experiences of the African people to reflect a communitarian approach to life. Such a communitarian approach debunks such individualism as is inherent in liberalism, but does not oppose liberalism as a theory. According to this understanding, to be a person is to be a communitarian personality. Being a communitarian personality on the other hand does not put the community over and above the individual, but rather in a holistic relationship.

As I have tried to show, the practical experiences of the African people informs a communitarian approach that does not merely hinge on intellectual judgment. The holistic dimension of Ubuntu is a harmonious co-existence and balance between the community and the individual. This dimension debunks consensus insofar as the latter stifles self-realization and uniqueness of individuals by adherence to conformity and uniformity. As I have pointed out, Ubuntu fits well with realist perspectivism which constitutes its

approximation to common good and sustenance of a unity in diversity. This is the communitarian ethos that Ubuntu can lend to the world.

The crucial question at this juncture is: if Ubuntu is the bedrock of the African system of values, how do we account for the rabid violence and ethnic and political conflicts in Africa? How do we account for the poverty, tribal wars, corruption, religious conflict, and a whole catalogue of contretemps plaguing the whole of the African continent? How do we reconcile these with Ubuntu philosophical ethics? These concerns inform the rationale for the preceding chapter and conclusion.

Chapter Four

'From Being to Having'[26] and from Having to Becoming

'The politician looks to the next election, the statesmen to the next generation, and philosophy to the indefinite future'. (John Rawls, 1987)

4:1. Introduction

The African socio-ethical life is in a morass. Colonialism has always been the first scapegoat of these crises, while other scholars (Ramose, 1999) have made a case for the crises on the basis of a new dispensation emanating through a struggle for reason. Basil Davidson (1992) for example would locate the misdemeanor of crippling African states to the insinuation of an adapted borrowed socio-political system alien to Africa's traditional past. In contemporary Africanist discourse, the view is that people were coerced into supplanting their value system characterized by Ubuntu ethics with a value system characterized by liberal politics and its possessive individualism. By extension, the failure of the nation state in Africa for example, would be attributed to this paradigm shift in values for it opened a cankerworm of identity crisis in which a person's identity is constitutive of what he or she has in contrast to who he or she is (See, Ramose, 199:129f, Jahn, 1961, 17ff, Davidson 1992, Mudimbe 1988, 1994, Rodney 1981).

4:2. What is at stake?

The purpose of this chapter includes the following: (i) a critical evaluation of the different manners through which indigenous societies in Africa have made a shift away from their so-called African

[26] I am indebted to Symphorien Ntibagirirwa for this insight, especially his very insightful and brilliant essay, '[A] wrong Way: From Being to Having in the African Value system'. Mr. Ntibagirirwa attempted to link the crisis in Modern Africa to a shift in African value system. I will follow his insight in this respect but will proceed further to develop a more nuanced position on the complexities of this crises as it affects the 'individual-community' debate in contemporary Africanist discourse. However, my emphasis is on the fact of liberal individualism as both a product of modernist liberal political theory, a project that isolates context in dealing with the crises of contemporary Africa – a mediator if you like of this crisis. The Semiotics, 'From being to having' a term I borrowed from Mr. Ntibagirirwa is indicative of this moral dilemma of contemporary African societies. Appeal to virtue ethics is made in continuity to chapter two and further insights from Mr. Ntibagirirwa. Most significantly however, I do not follow nor circumscribe to Mr. Ntibagirirwa's position as many other Africanist scholars on the primacy of the community over the individual. The role of virtue ethics is not and need not be to locate the individual as a pawn within the community, rather, it is to re-present the individual as a subject who remains an active agent within the community. The individual's subjectivity is in a constant dialogue; the community is not prior to the individual and vice versa. To argue otherwise as I highlighted in chapter three threatens the individual's subjectivity to a vanishing point, it is simply to deny the individual a *presence*. Hereafter, further reference to this online essay will be Ntibagirirwa (2003).

communitarianism; (ii) what implications are involved in this shift for the African society? (iii) An appeal to virtue ethics to relocate the individual in the African society for healthy individuality. My aim is to explore the viability of virtue ethics in salvaging the African image as plagued by the morass of liberal and possessive individualism. I appeal to virtue ethics since it is an ethics of being that thrives in a community and which focuses on the character and constancy of the individual in relationship. My aim in this reflection is to demonstrate a substantive relationship as well as procedural implications of these crises in the contemporary African setting. Following an already established contrast of Symphorien Ntibagirirwa (2003), I shall develop a more nuanced thesis on how virtue ethics might become a resource to deal with the pervading crises and restore the subjectivity of the African subject. For my purpose, the role of 'virtue ethics' would be (i) to locate the individual as living meaningfully within the practices inherent in their society and by extension (ii) incorporates socio-cultural values that accords with the common good of that society. These practices and goods are not external, but internal to the community. And in this kind of society, one cannot be defined by virtue of what one has acquired or status characteristic of the present order in African society, but by a communitarian ethos consistent with the reverence for *being* and the practice of *becoming* a person. In chapter three, I have argued that at the core of Ubuntu philosophical ethics is the individual in his relationship to other individuals in a community of mutual understanding, sharing, solidarity and magnanimity towards the other – a person is a person through other persons. This person-oriented order of relationship is no longer the case in contemporary African society, which has been undermined by a radical and hurtful shift from *being* to *having*[27]. If Ramose (1999:164) is right, the aftermath of abandoning their own metaphysical foundation is precisely what introduced the crises in the indigenous societies. It seems therefore that the core communitarian value of the traditional society that accounts for the stability of these societies appear to have eluded even the traditional African metaphysical framework with the uncritical adoption of individualistic ethics characterized by the forces

[27] *Being* represents the African subjectivity in all its totality, but a subject that has become truncated with the quest for having, characterized as it was by radical individualism and its socio-cultural effect.

of capitalism and consumerism. This scenario effectively plunged African society into decadence and crises as warped by the socio-economic forces of liberal individualism.

While the principles that gird African value systems have been compromised by naïve liberal individualism, this compromise has ushered in certain contradictions within African value systems. Consider the following moral scenarios: If African identity is construed on the basis of Ubuntu, why would someone intentionally and knowingly infect his or her partner with life-threatening diseases such as HIV/AIDS? How do we account for the persistent civil wars, genocide, religious conflicts and the abysmal collapse of the moral system in indigenous African society? Why is Africa controversially notorious for corruption? What could account for the recent ethnic cleansing in Burundi and Rwanda (people of the same faith – Catholics)? Underlying these moral crises is the fact that the African society has moved away from a familiar metaphysical foundation characterized by Ubuntu humanity[28] to embrace the metaphysical foundation underlying liberal individualism. This individualism has warped African value systems to the extent that my identity no longer emanates from my being a person but from what I have or have managed to achieve or attain. The question 'who are you?' characteristic of indigenous African systems is now supplanted by 'what are you' and it is the latter that defines my identity. The ontology defining my identity no longer depends on the recognition and appreciation of other person's humanity that in turn defines me; rather, my identity is now defined by 'having'. In other words, to the question 'who am I?' I would respond: I am a doctor, a lawyer; I am the person who drives a 4x4, etc (note: my identity is no longer defined by my relationship with you but constituted by what I have).

A rather profound example of this moral crisis necessitated by individualism is the idea of *lobola* (bride price). The idea of *lobola* as practiced today in indigenous African societies is a betrayal of traditional African value systems. Among indigenous African people, the idea of *lobola* is more symbolic than material. When two families are brought together in marriage, this union is not just between the two individuals but involves the

[28] By humanity, I mean the appreciation and recognition of the intrinsic value of other persons as subjects and not as objects

participation of the living, the living-dead (ancestors) and the unborn. This union would not be restricted to the realm of the living; it also includes the not-yet-born and the living-dead. It is believed that this will increase harmony on different levels of the onto-triadic[29] metaphysical system of African people. On one level, harmony is established between the two families engaged in marriage, on another level, there is harmony between the living and the living-dead, and finally on yet another level harmony is established between the unborn of the families uniting marriage. Marriage is thus a sacred venture involving the living, the living-dead and the unborn. The material aspect of *lobola* is evident in the token bride price given. The token bride price, insofar as it is offered, is not meant to enrich the family of the bride (who in this case would be receiving the bride price), rather, it remains a symbolic normative and an affirmation that the person to whom the daughter is being given in marriage is capable of taking care of the bride. In some cases, when the prospective husband cannot afford the token fee, he is invited to a live-in experience with the in-laws. He is given a field to cultivate or he is entrusted with cattle to shepherd; his ability to perform this given task well corroborates his capacity to take care of his future wife. When the probation is over, he is given some cattle as a send-off along with his wife. This understanding of *lobola* as an ingredient of community-building in traditional Africa has been undermined such that instead of being a source of harmony and bond in the community, it has become a source of alienation and deprivation. In many contemporary African societies, *lobola* is no longer a token gift but as a source of income for the family such that a 'price tag' is put on the prospective bride as determined by the girl's level of education and so on. The *lobola* system enunciates such a quest for consumerism that one may not initiate serious marriage proposals if the prices are not settled.

The shift in the metaphysical foundation of African value systems did not occur in a vacuum. I concur with Ntibagirirwa (2003) that modernism played a crucial role in determining the factors that influenced this shift in metaphysical values. A product of the enlightenment with its ideology, modernism is an apotheosis of reliance on abstract reason; this apotheosis conditioned the growth of science and scientific consciousness,

[29] The unborn, the living and the living-dead.

secularisation and instrumental rationality. As a mode of life, modernism was based on the growth of the industrial society, social mobility, market economy, literacy, bureaucratisation and consolidation of the nation-state. Modernism fostered the conception of the person as free as it celebrates the autonomy of the subject, a subject that is self-controlled and independent of community. According to Bauman (1991:2), modernism is better defined as 'the consciousness of a universal order that allows no place within the boundaries of the nation-state for strangers, diversity and tolerance'. As in the Enlightenment, modernism advocates a single description of the world with rationality as the only means to get at this description. In an era of modernism, by implication, any difference or divergence is held suspect. Abstract reason is held neutral, sovereign and a criterion for humanity; the quest for knowledge becomes an individual venture and any claim to knowledge is subjected to the altar of such reason as evidenced in Descartes' mounting of the whole edifice of knowledge on one basic foundation– the cogito: *I think therefore I am.* Thinking rationally is a yardstick for being human.

If abstract rationality alone is a bulwark for modernism, then such reason rules the world and has precedence over other ways of acquiring knowledge such that any civilization or people with no recourse to reason as conceived in these modernistic terms are essentially made up of non-humans since abstract rationality is a criterion for the identity of our humanity. According to Ramose, (1999: 1-17), the struggle for reason is indicative of the Western Enlightenment project with its denial of rationality to non Westerners – a philosophical racism. For Hegel, the concept of rationality is exclusive to Europe. In his *Philosophy Of History,* Hegel unequivocally argues that he would not include Africa in his philosophical analysis of history because Africa is still innocent, a *tabula rasa* with no history, philosophy or serious thought patterns. He writes: 'what we properly understand by Africa is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented only as on the threshold of the world's history' (Hegel, 1956:99). In the writing of Hegel, insofar as abstract reason has governed will govern the world, and the African is anchored on the subjective level he has no capacity to conceptualise a higher Being and by extension cannot be predicated with humanity. I shall content myself with quoting Hegel at length:

> Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained – for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world – shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself – the land of childhood, which lying beyond the days of self-consciousness history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of night…The negro as already observed exhibits the natural man in his completely wild an untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all that we call feeing – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character….At this point we leave Africa never to mention it again. For it is not historical part of the world; it has no movement of development to exhibit. Historical movement in it – that is in its northern part – belongs to the Asiatic or European World…What we properly understand as Africa, is the Unhistorical, undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's history…The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia is the beginning…

With its glorification and celebration of autonomy and reason as bulwark for humanity, modernism seems to have threatened the so-called communitarian ethos on which the African value system is said to be founded upon. In its wake, modernism expressed itself largely through globalising colonialism. In the following section, I shall highlight how modernism continues to make its impact on African value systems. Modernism will transmute its doctrine by way of universalistic discourse. Subsequently, modernism is not merely a historical product; it is characterized as uncompleted philosophy which can still play a very creative role in present-day societies. It is openness towards a determinate future characterized by material progress, social stability and self-realization. Our planetary civilization is still passing through the movement of globalisation. It is a civilization that is characterized by the domination of one part of the globe, the rich North, making up barely 20% of the world's population yet consuming 80% of its resources. According to Ramose, global capitalism is at the base of this initiative of globalisation, the process has introduced 'economic fundamentalism' as well as 'relentless pursuit of profit' to the detriment of the community's values and in opposition to other legitimate and valid forms of life, which are geared towards 'the preservation of human life through sharing' (Ramose, 1999: 164).

Colonisation of the African continent was largely inspired by economic fundamentalism and exploitation of resources. This was, however, veiled by a theory of humanity, justified in the West by advancing a theory that Africans were savages with no culture, religion, history, or civilization: Therefore the Africans needed to be civilised in order for them to attain humanity. In other words, humanity is distributed by Europe

based on the criteria of abstract rational engagement. Colonialism subsequently becomes a pre-ordered engagement to destroy a well functioning pre-colonial society through colonial violence (Ramose, 1999:35f). In common parlance, colonialism means exploitation by a foreign agent of a dependent territory. Colonialism brought about a mode of cultural mutation since cultural imperialism was its defining feature. According to D.K Fieldhouse (1981:7), conformity with the norms and cultures of the colonising agents was necessary to the process of subordination, at once 'assisting control and demonstrating its effectiveness''[30]. The notion of cultural transformation describes the ways in which colonized societies have taken dominant discourses, transformed them and used them for self-empowerment. A central strategy in transformations of colonial culture is the seizing of self-representation. Representation, according to Bill Ashcroft (2001:2), is the process of giving concrete form to ideological concepts, and its significance in political projects of self-determination cannot be over-estimated since it involves the entire fabric of cultural life and the sense of identity that is inextricably woven into that fabric. Thus understood, the project of colonialism need not be restricted material exploitation, it was a project that left the indigenous people morally and intellectually disoriented as Frantz Fanon (1963:169) had written in his now classic, *The Wretched of the Earth*:

> Perhaps we have not sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it'. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.

Colonialism left in its wake, a noticeable impact on African memory evident from the transition from a We-consciousness characteristic of indigenous African society to an I-consciousness characteristic of a liberal dispensation offered by colonialism. With the destruction of the communitarian character came identity crises, which ushered in a new phase of moral crises. According to Ramose (1999:129ff), the fact of unjust conquest

[30] A typical example of such radical cultural transformation is noticeable in the French colonial policies of assimilation where indigenous Africans were made to become French citizens by adopting French culture, norms, values etc. This practice was however restricted to certain sections of the colonies. In French west Africa, only persons from such colonies like Dakar, St. Louis, Rufisique and Goree were allowed to become French while citizens from the rest were admitted to become subjects via another policy; that of association. This policy was also true of Portuguese colonies like Angola and Mozambique.

of the indigenous African people is a starting point of the crisis with its dispossession of African values, and in its place an imposed alien culture.

The era into which indigenous African society has entered since colonization is modernism with its free-floating, autonomous individual anchored on the subjective drive for self-development. The idea of modernising civilization or modernity is now anchored on the embrace of such liberal individualism and its characteristic universalism (MacPherson 1973:173). In most of the post-colonial African States, the post-colonial African people were ushered into this modernist society modelled after the neo-liberal Western condition and ideology. This was the thrust of Basil Davidson (1992) *Black Man's Burden* in which he locates the modernist crises in Africa as partly due to lack of sufficient reflection on what the communitarian character of African value systems can offer and the emphasis on economic and political liberalization focused on the material survival of the African people at the expense of their communitarian ethos. This situation radically undermined the principle of solidarity and caring for others. In embracing liberal political democracy *in toto*, the aspects of our humanity such as caring and solidarity were subtly supplanted with a new dispensation grounded in liberal individualism.

Thus far, post-colonial African society is seemingly grounded in a different metaphysical foundation: that of political liberalism, characterized by liberal individualism. Accordingly, we live in a society which unwittingly assimilated the socio-cultural tenets of liberalism, but tenets that are in contradiction to the goods internal to the practices of African societies. Policy developments are anchored in the name of liberal economy, but policies that do not strike a balance between the individual and the society. The democratic dispensation as a matter of fact becomes a terrain of civil strife: In elections, the winner takes it all, in the economy; clientelism is the order, and so forth. It is no wonder that 'commodification' of values and of human beings, a process that ushered in an era of material and spiritual alienation where persons become *persons* by virtue of their capacity as a means of production. According to this theory, my humanity is dependent on what I can produce in terms of material acquisition. I am merely a means of production while market expansion and

economic profitability become an end in themselves rather than a means to an end, namely human happiness. This transition so described is well enunciated by Ntibagirirwa (2003); it echoes a sentiment in which the human person is not defined by what he is, but by what he or she has acquired. Thus, *I am* because *you are* is replaced by *I am* because *I have*. *A person is a person through other persons* is substituted with *a person is a person through what he or she has got or manages to acquire* – I am what I have. The human worth can be bought, sold and resold insofar as economic fundamentalism is a criterion for humanity. The adoption of liberal political theory, by implication means we have supplanted our due reverence for 'being' with our quest for 'having' such that my identity is no longer constitutive of *who* I am as opposed to *that, what, it,* which I have become or will become. In other words, '*what do I have*?' takes precedence over *'who am I*?' It is only through a reconstruction of this lost appreciation of the human person that we grasp the luminous human existence.

In the face of this loss, I will develop an earlier thesis proposed by Ntibagirirwa (2003) that Virtue ethics might offer resource to reconstruct this African identity in terms of acquiring normative validity through Ubuntu philosophy. An appeal to virtue ethics can help in educating and relocating the African as embedded in Ubuntu ontology and offer this revitalized self as a gift to the world in which he or she lives. Virtue ethics does not focus on acts or rules but on the individual as a moral agent.

4:3. A retrieval of Ubuntu ethics through virtue ethics: the way forward

From the discussion so far, the collapse of African value systems was given impetus by a shift from the metaphysical foundation in which African value systems are grounded. This section gives a brief synopsis of virtue ethics in opposition to the dominant normative theories of utilitarianism and Kantianism (cf. 2:1). I will explore the viability of virtue ethics as a critical resource for the moral reconstruction of the individual in an African community. My hope is to find critical resources by which virtue ethics can strike a balance on how an individual's freedom is fashioned by a responsibility to the community. A freedom that eschews individualism in favour of contemporaneity; a freedom in balance with responsibility to the common good.

4:3:1. What is virtue Ethics?

Virtue ethics is a theory of morality in which virtues play a central role. Virtue ethics rejects the picture of rationalism as an accurate representation and final vocabulary of morality as in Kant. It rejects absolute universal principles, distinctions, and categories that are thought to be categorically binding for all times, peoples and places as evident in Kantian ethics. Virtue ethics is ambivalent of this postulated universality and homogeneity of ethics that is perhaps best demonstrated by deontology and utilitarianism.

Virtue ethics beckons a critique of the neutrality and sovereignty of abstract reason where reason becomes a criterion for morality[31]; it advocates dissolution of a free-floating solitary and autonomous subject and proposes a moral virtuous agent; it is suspicious and ambivalent against the Enlightenment and its ideology for casting reason as the ultimate and final vocabulary. While liberal individualism was given credence by the Enlightenment, virtue ethics is an attack on both liberalism and the Enlightenment for being 'soulless' and indifferent to individual difference, uniqueness and cultural diversity.

Virtue ethics is defined its own features: no to act-based ethics but appropriates virtue-based ethics. It advocates an institutionalized pluralism in which diversity and contingency are critical for the validity of any moral claim. This pluralism of authority and autonomy of the agent allows for the exercise of ethical choices such that the agent reasserts his or her emotional dignity and becomes a moral subject.

In contemporary moral philosophy, virtue ethics is traced to G.E.M. Anscombe's (1958) famous essay 'Modern Moral Philosophy'. Prof. Anscombe (1958:26) would adopt a new approach to philosophy that was to revolutionize normative ethics and eschews disillusionment with the dominant political theories of deontology and utilitarianism:

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[31] As we have seen in the previous chapters, (cf. 2:1) Kantian ethics emphasizes duties, motives, the dignity and worth of persons. These categorical laws are absolute and unchanging. We have an *a priori* conception of moral perfection since we are rational beings. And since we are rational beings, ethical principles are not derived from mere empirical facts as in anthropology or more so in Ubuntu. And if ethical principles cannot be derived from experience then the mind will bring its rational principles to experience. This is the basis of Kantian morality where acting morally is akin to acting rationally and acting immorally parallel to acting irrationality insofar as rationality remains the criterion for morality.

> I begin by stating three theses I present in this paper. The first is that it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking. The second is that the concepts of obligation, and duty—*Moral* obligation and *moral* duty, that is to say—and of what is *morally* right and wrong, and of the *moral* sense 'ought', ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it. My third thesis is that the differences between the well-Known English writers on moral philosophy from Sidgwick to the present day are of little importance

Deontology and utilitarianism advocate universally applicable principles as a rule for all moral situations such that moral reasons being universals become independent of the agents peculiar circumstances. (cf. ch. 2). This impersonal and impartial approach to ethics violates the right of the moral agent since its theory of virtue is universalistic, autonomous and independent of the agent's desire. I perform x because it is a duty, not because it is 'who I could become '. Virtue ethics is not concerned with who I am, but with who I can become. Imagine a daughter thanking her mother for buying her lunch and the mother responds: oh, it was nothing, it was obvious that morality required me to buy you lunch! But the question 'how should I live?' cannot only be answered well by abstract moral considerations. Considerations other than abstract moral ones are relevant to the question insofar as any conception of ethics must encompass a wide range of emotions that enlarges the agent's sphere of concerns such as character, virtue, human flourishing, moral education etc. Virtue ethics is concerned not *only* with isolated actions or events, but with the character of the agent. Any theory of virtue ought to be grounded in a living tradition and not merely an eclecticism of ideas left over from moribund traditions. As MacIntyre (1967:11) argues, goods are internal to practices and not accessible from some external perspective. According to Nafsika (2004):

> Each account of virtue requires a prior account of social and moral features in order to be understood. Thus, in order to understand Homeric virtue you need to look for its social role in Greek society. Virtues, then, are exercised within practices that are coherent, social forms of activity and seek to realize goods internal to the activity. The virtues enable us to achieve these goods. There is an end (or telos) that transcends all particular practices and it constitutes the good of a whole life. That end is the virtue of integrity or constancy' (www.utm.edu/research/iep/v/virtue/htm#top. To retrieve, www.utm.edu/research/iep/v/ and click 'virtue ethics. Hereafter as Nafiska, 2004)

From the discourse so far—the transition from duty and/ or 'moral ought' to a comprehensive appreciation of ethics and focus on a 'unifying tradition of practices that generate virtues' (Ibid) – virtue ethics arguably is an ethics of being in contrast to utilitarian or deontological ethics of doing. An ethics of duty does not pay sufficient attention to the inner life: the dutiful agent is not intense but merely concerned with the right or wrong action. Morality is grounded in objective and abstract principles of reason with an emphasis on individual acts with crucial questions being which act is right or wrong. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, changes the kind of question one asks about ethics with focus on the person with crucial question being what kind of person is desirable? What act is right or wrong is differs considerably from the question on how to live. The first question is concerned with particular dilemmas, isolated events and problematic instances; the second question is concerned with an entire life. Unlike the first question, where the issue lies in asking what I ought to do to get it right now, or a rule that can be applicable at all times; in virtue ethics, the focus is on the individual as a moral agent, how to be right at all times (Nafsika, 2004).

Subsequently, any judgment of virtue becomes a judgment of character and of the whole sequence of life and not just a judgment of one isolated action. In utilitarianism and deontology, one rule or principle is applied and generalized in all situations and circumstances. But, since these rules are rigid and inflexible, they do not accommodate the complexity or the sensitivity inherent in different moral situations that we encounter. Should I tell a lie to protect a thief from an angry mob? Should I abort a baby conceived by rape, etc? All these hypothetical situations are distinct from one another and the question remains how one can find a solution to all these issues with one rule? In so far as our situations remain diverse, from each other, then it is not plausible to expect an answer in rule that is both dogmatic and rigid; a rule that allows not exceptions. This irreducibility of ethics in the writing of Nafsika (2004) is referred to as the *uncodifiability* of ethics thesis, according to which 'ethics is too diverse and imprecise to be captured in a rigid code, so we must approach morality with a theory that is flexible and situation-responsive as the subject matter itself' (Nafsika, 2004)

As an ethics of being, virtue ethics relocates the individual within the community. The individual is a person in community is not an annihilated individual swallowed by the community, but an individual whose individuality or uniqueness stands out. This individuality of the person need not be opposed to the communitarian values nor should the community deprive the individual of freedom and responsibility. Virtue ethics speaks on behalf of constancy of character, which at the same time is an informed and educated character. It is a character that acts with the same disposition at all times and places. It is a character that accommodates and recognizes the 'other' in their otherness.

The point of my discussion is to find a way in which an individual's freedom may become an act of responsibility to the community and how such relationship between the individual and the community could be made a core of the moral values. In promoting such virtues embedded in Ubuntu so described in terms of those practices internal to the African societies, the African society is arguably informing a person on how to become responsible within his community in such manner that does not isolate nor contradict, but correlate with the community's values and ends. Employing those goods internal to the practices of his community, the African begins to conceive his subjectivity only in terms of his relationship to other members; he is aware that the community at large cannot be conceived apart from him. When freedom and responsibility become the core of moral virtue, the virtuous subject employs the principle of humanity in living his or her life by which he or she engages in a process of deliberation, weighs the choices at hand, examines his or her background beliefs, appreciates both the context and the relevance of those beliefs and choices from whence he/she adopts a plan of action for the common good. This synthesis brings happiness for all. The individual is not a mere robot stimulated by categorical or utilitarian laws. The moral subject, a subject whose uniqueness and individuality is essential for the overall good of the community, evaluates each situation or circumstance that he or she encounters as unique, he/she is averse to individualism, knowing that whatever good comes from their decision pervades the network of the community.

The process of locating the individual in the community is indicative that the individual perceives his subjectivity not in isolation but in dialogue to the community. He is a being who lives in harmony and solidarity with others. As I argued in chapter three, harmony, solidarity and encounter are central to Ubuntu ontology and form the metaphysical foundation for the understanding of *being* in African value systems. This reconstruction is an appeal to those value systems that define our human identity and aims at educating the individual to become a communitarian personality adaptable and responsible to every situation and not just to one universal law for every moral situation. A communitarian personality is one whose life's narrative is grounded in the narrative of others, stimulated by self-constancy and adaptable moral character. It is a personality that incorporates the communal ethos of the African society characterized by sharing, solidarity, and harmony. If the ontology defining African value systems is the harmony of beings, solidarity and togetherness, then the idea of a free-floating liberal self characterized by radical individualism can be overturned. The individual comes to the knowledge that one's goals or ends in life cannot be defined without a reference to one's community (Gyekye, 1997:38). The individual comes to the appreciation that although his/her uniqueness is irreplaceable in the community, nevertheless, his /her full development as a person is dependent on the harmonious encounter with other persons and beings in the community. This is what J.S. Mbiti (see P82) meant when he wrote that ' I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am"(1969: 108-109).

In the light of the present discussion, I contend that the quest for material survival should not negate the communitarian ethos of African people, i.e. that which defines them and makes them who they are. Thus, an African should not lose his or her identity in the quest for survival; rather, one's identity should set the rules for the quest of material survival. As Ntibagirirwa (1999, 2003) rightly argued, the fact that we are in an era of economic and political universalism grounded in neo-liberal individualism need not inhibit us from redefining ourselves in terms of our metaphysical context. It is only a retrieval of African socio-ethical value systems by redefinition of African identity that Africa can make a significant contribution to the world. This uniqueness of African identity ought not to be annihilated but should be offered to the world.

4:4. Conclusion

This chapter does not in any way exhaust the role of virtue ethics in political philosophy. And it would be audacious to claim that virtue ethics is the ultimate prescription with which to resolve the moral crises that have pervaded much of contemporary African societies. An appeal to virtue ethics is necessary to chart ways in which the values enshrined in Ubuntu philosophy can be revitalized. Virtue ethics accords with the realist perspectivism that I advocate. In realist perspectivism, the focus is on the individual in an ethical community. Realist perspectivism is not a categorical law, but a disposition, an outlook and an attitude aimed at understanding the other who is different from us. The dialogical process of arriving at this disposition inheres a hermeneutic spiral of encounters on different levels of discourse. The principle of humanity inherent in realist perspectivism and as evident in Ubuntu philosophy helps us to interpret the other's perspective in a realistic way by attributing meaning, context, charity and truth to other's perspective. Like virtue ethics, the question in realist perspectivism is, 'who can I become' as an individual in an ethical community. Virtue ethics focuses on the individual rather than on individual's acts; similarly, Ubuntu philosophy focuses on the individual in his relationship. It will not be too daring therefore to claim that Ubuntu is in fact a *philosophy of relationship* with/in community.

But, to what extent can one present and defend Ubuntu philosophy as a response to liberal individualism? The answer lies in the fact that the prospect of such a venture is dependent on the retrieval of Ubuntu ethics with the aid of virtue ethics. Like virtue ethics, Ubuntu philosophy functions as both prescriptive ethics and a guide for conduct. Yet at the same time, the individual's good is not prior to the community and neither is the individual's subjectivity threatened to annihilation by the common good. The purpose is to maintain a constant balance between the individual's good and that of the community where both goods are in constant dialogue. As a prescriptive ethics, Ubuntu prescribes what Ntibagirirwa (2003) describes as 'being-with-others [umuntu-mu-bantu]' involves; and as a guide for conduct, it sets the guidelines for what 'being-

with-self [umuntu-w'-ubuntu]'[32] should involve. Ubuntu is therefore, a philosophy that articulates solidarity and compassion and simultaneously communicates basic respect for other person's subjectivity. It is significant to note, however, that the common clichés used in everyday application of Ubuntu such as '*simunye'* (we are one), do not communicate the communitarian consciousness of Ubuntu. However, insofar as Ubuntu presupposes that 'an injury to one is an injury to all', it need not articulate a philosophy that annihilates the individuality of its members. Thus, humanity or humanism in this localized sense means an unconditional recognition of other person's humanity in their uniqueness, diversity and difference. '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu'* can also mean that *'a person is a person through the otherness (difference, uniqueness) of other persons or human beings*.' Ubuntu is an invitation to open ourselves to others since it is only in the encounter with the other that we can learn of ourselves and vice versa. This encounter was the ethics behind the decision-making processes as practiced among the indigenous people of Africa. Through discussions, disagreements and agreements, we learn more of ourselves and of others from whence we build a sense of community consciousness and purpose. Finally, one can say that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual, my humanity is embedded in you and in me; humanity is a gift we owe to each other. We create each other and we need each other to sustain this creation. Rather than 'I think therefore I am', one can say that 'we belong (to each other), we participate (in our creations); therefore you are and since you are, I am'. 'I am' is neither solitary nor static but dependent on the inclusiveness of the other and as the relationship

[32] Ntibagirirwa (2003) in his very brilliant essay pointed above, enunciated the concept of 'Being-with-self' and 'Being-with-self' which he compared with Ricoeur's notion of Idem (sameness) and Ipse, loosely translated by Ntibagirirwa as 'the self, of the self, by oneself'. Idem would refer to constancy 'in time' which is dependent on a rigid 'core of sameness'. According to Ntibagirirwa, Ipse on the other hand entails a self that remains dynamic and open to change. This 'self' Ntibagirirwa agues is necessarily constitutive of a relationship with an 'other'. Therefore in the Ricoeurian project, 'Idem and Ipse overlap in the phenomenon of character as the lasting disposition by which a person is recognized'. This view according to Ntibagirirwa is what Ricoueur meant by self-constancy and on this self-constancy, he cites Ricoeur (1992:165)
Self-constancy is for each person that manner of conducting himself or herself so that other count on that person. Because someone is counting on me, I am accountable fro my actions before another. The term 'responsibility' unites both meanings: counting on/being accountable for. It unites them, adding to them the idea of a response to the question "where are you?" asked by another who needs me. This response is the following: here I am! A statement that is a statement of self-constancy' (Ricoeur, 1992.165, cited in Ntibagirirwa , 2003. For more nuanced discussion, see especially, Ntibagirirwa S. 1999. *A Retrieval of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics in African Social and Political Humanism: A Communitarian Perspective.* Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.)

changes so does 'I am'. 'I am' is constituted by its relationship with the other not as an act of *sameness* but of one in relationship. John Donne complements this fact in his sermon *No man is an Island*. We need the group to survive; the 'I', cannot survive without the whole for the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. When the parts unite together, they become one and whole; their strength becomes formidable and they are able to redefine a new vision with a purpose. The developed consciousness would be of great value in contemporary African society. A transition from an I-consciousness to a We-consciousness will go a long way in combating the corruption, nepotism and crime prevalent in contemporary African society. The We-consciousness that will enable one to relocate the source of one's humanity and replace a 'what is in it for me?' approach with 'what can I do for my society or community?' This work, like the owl of Minerva, merely announces the beginning of that process of redefinition and relocation.

'Individualism is and always was the doctrine of successful thieves from the community.'
(MacIntyre, 1976: 181)

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