THE KIND OF SOCIETY REQUIRED FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING:

A CRITICAL COMPARISON OF THE FORMATION OF ETHICAL
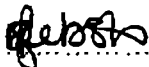
CHARACTER IN ARISTOTELIAN AND AFRICAN ETHICS.

by

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ABSTRACT

One thing that ethics attempts to determine is the right way to live in order to attain human flourishing. Both Aristotelian and African ethics give us communitarian accounts of how flourishing is attained by individuals who are brought up to have the right sorts of character. I argue that there are significant similarities between the accounts of the formation of ethical character in Aristotelian and African ethics. I aim to show that through a critical comparison of these two accounts, an account of the kind of society required from human flourishing can be developed. This can then be used to critique a dominant view of human flourishing: that of contemporary individualism.

First I set out the Aristotelian account showing how it depends on a certain conception of the nature of persons. Second, I explore the African account of ethics and ethical character and show how this account is based on a similar communitarian conception of the nature of persons. In both Aristotelian and African ethics, society and upbringing play a crucial role in the attainment of human flourishing. Thus, third, I examine in detail the kind of society required for the formation of ethical character according to Aristotelian and African ethics respectively. I argue that there are many fruitful structural similarities between the two accounts. Lastly, I use the work done in the third chapter, as well as the work of certain prominent communitarian theorists, to critique a contemporary individualist view of human flourishing.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics attempts to determine, among other things, the proper relation of one person to another, in order to determine what counts as well being of the individual and community. It attempts to determine for us the right way to live so that we can attain human flourishing. I aim to show that true flourishing depends on the flourishing of the whole community and that individuals can only flourish in the truest sense of the term when each and every one of the members of the community flourishes.

An individual who actively exercises reason properly achieves human flourishing, argues Aristotle. According to Aristotle, as essentially social beings, our capacity to reason can only be developed in society. Furthermore the proper exercise of reason, or human flourishing, can only be attained in the right kind of society, a society that encourages the virtuous life. The virtues are just those capacities that enable us to reason properly. These capacities to reason properly, or to live well, can only be realised if the individual is situated in a network of appropriate relationships. Aristotle argues that the virtues are acquired by teaching and habituation, or upbringing. I explore Aristotle's account in chapter one.

Like Aristotelian ethics, African ethics is based on a particular account of the nature of persons. According to African ethics, we are essentially social beings. The African person is defined in relation to other human beings around her. The African conception of a person is enshrined in this Xhosa proverb "Muntu ungumuntu ngabantu" meaning "a person is a person through persons". In chapter two I show

how according to African ethics, or Ubuntu, human flourishing is only realised in a community. Ubuntu is based on the values of humanness, caring, sharing, respect, love, kindness, and compassion. A person of good character in African ethics is the one who embodies and practices all the values of Ubuntu. As with the Aristotelian account, African ethics holds that good an individual can only achieve the kind of character suited for a flourishing life if she is situated in a particular network of social relationships.

The notion of the good life in Aristotle's ethics is structurally similar to the notion of the good life in traditional African society. The good life is lived and realised in the community. It is the community and family that are essential in the formation of ethical character that leads to human flourishing. In chapter three I explore the similarities between these two accounts with a particular focus on the kinds of relationships, and networks of relationships, required for the formation of ethical character and flourishing.

The communitarian view that I develop in chapter three goes against at least one view of human flourishing dominant in our society, a view that can be labelled postmodern individualism. According to this view, the individual is completely autonomous of any community. She has no necessary affiliation to any communal, or universal, values. Her membership of a given community is not a constitutive attachment that she ought to be responsible to, or that establishes the foundation of her own flourishing. According to this view, the individual is free to construct her own moral meanings independent of the community. The postmodern individual believes that our hopes, desires, language, community, our solidarity are all contingent products of

chance and time. As such, they are free to be discarded or picked up at will. Emman Duffy writing about postmodernism says:

> This flattening of traditional markers and measures of value by the market has been matched and facilitated by another set of collapse, the evacuation of belief in objective value, which sometimes called postmodernism. Sometimes posing as a form of liberation from imposed and oppressive hegemonies, the tyranny of other people's choices, postmodernism challenges the privileging one sort of experience over another... every thing is held to be as interesting (or uninteresting) as everything else, and even human nature itself is viewed as a contingent cultural artefact, to be shaped as we please and can. Indeed there is no such thing as innate human nature, no purpose to human activity other than purposes we our selves generate or devise, no objective criteria of right and wrong, no virtues necessarily pursued to ensure a proper human flourishing, no story underlying the myriad stories which make up the cacophony of human experience, but only autonomous self-defining choices...[1]

One major assumption behind the postmodern view is that persons are not essentially social. I hope to show that any ethic that does not honour the basic principle that we are always and necessarily creatures living amongst others must be radically flawed.

Radical, postmodern individualism has also crept in to the African community, a community originally and fundamentally known for its strong communitarianism. In the traditional African society, as mentioned above, a person is defined through her relationship to others. It is the communal values of Ubuntu that have always held African society together. Today, many Africans are attempting to live according to the ideals of western individualism at the expense of the values of Ubuntu.

I hope to show that living according to postmodern ideals of individualism can never lead to human flourishing. This is because, as I argue in chapter four, postmodern,

individualist society cannot provide the kinds of networks of relationships necessary for the formation of ethical character, which are in turn necessary for flourishing. This kind of individualism fails I argue, following the work of prominent communitarian theorists, because it is based on a flawed conception of the nature of persons.

I have chosen Aristotelian ethics as the starting point for investigating the kind of society required for human flourishing because, in contemporary philosophical debate, probably the most influential of any of these accounts is that of Aristotle. The Aristotelian approach puts human flourishing in the foreground in a way that other ethical approaches perhaps do not. More over, in recent years, Aristotelian ethics has generated many important contemporary debates and there has been a resurgence of interest in the virtue ethics, or character approach, to flourishing.

My overarching aim, however, is not to further contemporary Aristotelian debate but to contribute to the African Renaissance. I hope to contribute to the current growing body of scholarship in African ethics by showing how African values can be explicated and understood with reference to the ideas of one of the greatest philosophers that ever lived, without losing what is unique to African ethics. I aim to show that African ethics has similar kinds of depth and resources for critique of postmodern individualism. If my research is successful, I hope it will contribute towards a call for a renewal, in our society, of African values based on Ubuntu.

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[i] Emman Duffy, Talking about God, In Priests People, vol8/9, p.312

CHAPTER 1

Aristotle on Ethics and Ethical Character Formation.

1.1. Introduction.

In this chapter I will discuss the communitarian nature of Aristotle's ethics and how the formation of ethical character that leads to human flourishing is a communitarian activity. I intend not to critique Aristotle's account but to explore his notion of human flourishing, which is realised only in a certain kind of society. I will first discuss Aristotle's idea of ethics and the goal of ethics and human life, which is eudaimonia. I will then discuss Aristotle's idea of human nature that shows that we are naturally meant to live the eudaimon or flourishing life. Finally, I will discuss the formation of ethical character in Aristotle's ethics with the view to show that when an individual acquires the virtues she will be equipped to live the flourishing life that is meant for essentially rational and social beings.

1.2. Aristotle on Ethics.

Aristotle holds that the main aim of ethics is to give an account of happiness and to help human beings to understand the conditions and circumstances that are ideal for the attainment of happiness, or human flourishing. He argues that this is what human beings desire above all else. According to Aristotle, the desire for happiness is our primary desire. Thus, we study ethics in order to understand what it entails to live a good life and a good life for Aristotle is a happy life.

Aristotle's ethics is teleological in nature in the sense that it attempts to examine the *telos'* of human existence in order to determine how human beings ought to live to

realise their potentiality. Human actions, he argues, all aim at an ultimate goal - and this ultimate goal is the realisation of human flourishing. For Aristotle, we reach an ideal state of our being when we live a happy, flourishing life. The good life is the peak of our development as persons as it is our potentialities actualised. It is implicit, then, that all our intentional, chosen actions and every stage of our human development should aim at the good life or human flourishing. Thus, for Aristotle, fundamentally we are ethical or good for the sake of the attainment and realisation of our primary desire, the desire for happiness or living a good life. We are ethical, or good, because we want to flourish.

1.3. The Concept of Eudaimonia.

The good life for Aristotle is eudaimonia – a Greek word that is normally translated in English as total well-being, happiness or human flourishing. In discussing eudaimonia in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that every art, science, action and choice seems to aim at some good or end. As there are many actions, arts, and sciences so their ends are also many. For instance, health is the end of medicine, ships of shipbuilding, victory is the end of wars, and wealth of economy. He further states that some goods are desired for their own sake such as health of our bodies, and there are goods that are desired for the sake of higher goods such as money, which is desired for pleasure.

He argues that if there is no ultimate good, which we all desire, our list of desires will be endless, empty and vain so there must be an ultimate and chief good. This is not meant to be a knock down argument, however. Aristotle then claims that the opinions of the 'many and the wise' show that happiness is ultimate desire of all human beings,

although they disagree on what constitutes happiness. Eudaimonia is thus the ultimate goal of all human action.

As J.L. Ackrill says, Aristotle argues that eudaimonia is not the result or outcome of lifetime's effort; it is not something to look forward to. It is a life, enjoyable and worthwhile all the way through[ii]. Eudaimonia is constituted by activities that are ends in themselves. Where there are many final ends (*telea*), eudaimonia is the most final, final without qualification. It is final and most sufficient. We value such things as pleasure and virtues for themselves; as ends in themselves, we also value them for the sake of eudaimonia where as nobody ever aims at eudaimonia for the sake of one of them. Eudaimonia is the most desirable sort of life, the life that contains all intrinsically worthwhile activities. Pedro Tabensky echoes the same point:

> ... the eudaimon principle, the principle that life is lived for
> the sake of eudaimonia and for the sake of nothing else, is the
> basic structural feature of lives of persons... it means that
> lives of persons are defined in relation to the ethical ideal of
> living for the sake of eudaimonia... eudaimonia is the *telos* -
> the goal or end of the lives of person.[iii]

Eudaimonia is not, Aristotle quickly shows, the life of pleasure or honour or wealth. Aristotle argues that wealth is a means to an end so it cannot be the ultimate good. The value of honour depends on those who bestow it than upon those who receive it, and the ultimate good cannot be secondary in this way. The life of pleasure cannot be the ultimate good for human being because beasts also share such a life. For Aristotle, eudaimonia is an activity that involves a whole human life. It is an activity, not a temporary state of feeling happy. To avoid the clouds over the meaning of eudaimonia as happiness some scholars have suggested that eudaimonia be translated as human flourishing.

1.4. Eudaimonia as Human Flourishing

Tabensky examines the meaning of eudaimonia as human flourishing or as well-being, as opposed to happiness[iv]. He says well-being is an appropriate translation of eudaimonia because the notion of well-being, like the notion of a good life, denotes a certain way of living and hence it implies a life in its totality. Thus the term well-being reflects the idea of happiness that Aristotle refers to as eudaimonia; happiness that touches all aspects of human life. He says, however, the term well-being is not the perfect translation of eudaimonia as it does not denote the fact that for Aristotle, happiness is a kind of complex human activity that is in conformity with virtue.

Analysing the term flourishing, Tabensky argues that it is an appropriate translation of eudaimonia because it brings out other central features of the word[v]. Flourishing is a botanical term that denotes not only activity, but also an activity in a particular direction. It denotes a development. A seed develops and matures into a healthy plant. Tabensky argues that flourishing denotes that there is a peak of development in a particular direction; this peak of development reflects what Aristotle refers as the *telos* of a developing thing. Moreover, a plant is flourishing when all parts of it grow and flourish as a whole, not at the expense of other parts. Human flourishing, like the flourishing of plant, should involve the complete manifestation and full exercise of the potentialities that characterise us as human beings. The flourishing of a human life does not mean flourishing of one aspect of the life; it is the flourishing of all aspects of a life including family, social, political, ethical, economical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects.

For a seed to grow and mature into a flourishing plant, the external conditions must be ideal, that is, conducive to growth. The elements that affect the seed's growth must be perfect for it to reach its potential. Similarly, the flourishing of a human being should not be separated from the external conditions that affect that human being's life. Hence, for a person to reach her *telos* of existence or peak of development, which is eudaimonia, external conditions must be appropriately conducive. For instance, a person needs, according to Aristotle, virtuous friendships in an ideal community, not just any type of friendship, in order to achieve the eudaimon life.

Tabensky concludes his analysis by saying that eudaimonia can be understood appropriately as happiness, well-being or flourishing depending on what aspects of eudaimonia one wants to stress extensively[vi]. I will use the term flourishing as the translation of eudaimonia. The reasons for my choice are two. The first comes from *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X where Aristotle claims that eudaimonia is an activity and not a state. "...Happiness is not a state; for if it were it might belong to someone who was asleep throughout his life, living the life of plant, or, again, to someone who was suffering the greatest misfortunes... we must rather class happiness as an activity...[vii]" It is an activity in the sense that it entails the individual working in a certain direction through her life; work that involves making rational choices and performing rational actions that lead to the realisation of the *telos* of her existence - the eudaimon life. The second reason for choosing flourishing as the appropriate translation of eudaimonia is reflected in the title of my thesis. I am interested in exploring the external factors essential for eudaimonia. This makes the botanical analogy appropriate and, thus, the translation of eudaimonia that is appropriate is flourishing.

1.5. Human Nature.

Aristotle bases his account of eudaimonia on an account of human nature. He argues that human beings have a function or essence (*ergon*). Aristotle argues that this function is rationality. Aristotle also argues that human beings are by nature social, or political, as well as rational.

He holds that the ultimate good for human being, flourishing, can be discovered by investigating the *ergon* or function of human beings. An *ergon* or function is not a task assigned to a human being from without. The function of a human being is that thing which, if it were lacking, would mean that that being would not be human. It is that which differentiates human beings from plants and animals. A human being is defined by her function as the sculptor is defined by her function of sculpting.[viii]

A human being has function but not in the instrumental sense as inanimate objects have a function. Inanimate objects have instrumental functions; which presupposes that they are good or useful for further ends or purposes. For instance, the purpose of knife is for cutting things. The function of human being, however, is that which is intrinsically or non-instrumentally beneficial for human being in virtue of her being a member of human species. Another way to understand this is to understand Aristotle as arguing that human beings have an essence.

What is the function or ergon of human being? What is her essence? Aristotle answers these questions as follows: We are looking for something that is distinctive to human

beings. Life belongs also to plants. Plants grow, feed and reproduce as do human beings. Could our essence be perception? Perhaps, but this is shared by the horse, the ox and every animal. We are seeking something that is unique to us. What else remains? The only thing that remains that distinguishes us from plants and animals is the active life of the element that has a rational principle. So the ergon or function of human beings, Aristotle concludes, is the activity of soul or psyche in accordance with reason. Aristotle holds, in other words, that the life activities that we share with animals and plants - nourishing ourselves, growing, reproducing and perceiving, are no part of the *essential* characteristic activity of human beings. We could have a distinctively human life without these of growth, reproduction, perception and nourishment, thus the good life for human beings could not necessarily involve these activities.

But just what is the link between our function and our living a good life? Aristotle holds that where a thing has a function a good member of that kind is one that performs that function well. Thus if the function of a sculptor is to sculpt statues, a good sculptor is not the one who sculpts statues anyhow but one who sculpts statues properly. As the function of human being is to actively exercise reason, an individual who actively exercises reason properly achieves eudaimonia. Thus, if an individual functions properly she lives the life that is appropriate for her, in other words, the flourishing life.

According to Aristotle, human beings differ from animals in their desire for the good, or eudaimonia. A desire for something good is a rational desire formed by rational reflection on the benefits of different options. It is the essential feature of the human

soul - the concept of the final good applies to rational beings' desires. Someone who can compare different options must have a conception of the final good, one that will be promoted by the pursuit of one over another. The desire for the final good is thus part of the human function: part of what it is to be an essentially rational being is to be the kind of being who desires to live a eudaimon, flourishing life.

Aristotle argues that human beings are teleologically oriented. Their existence is orientated towards a *telos*, or purpose. Another way to explain this, according to Aristotle, is that the final cause of a thing is what that thing is *for* - the end for which it exists. The final cause for Aristotle is what is good for that organism. The formal cause is that capacity which enables that thing to engage in that activity that is constitutive of its final end. The formal cause and the final cause are, in a sense, inter-defined. The set of capacities or characteristics peculiar to human beings that constitute human essence, or function, thus determine in a sense, what is good for human beings. The essence of a natural kind determines what is beneficial for members of that kind. As the exercise of some capacities such as photosynthesis is essential for a plant and its welfare so there is an exercise of set of capacities or characteristics that is essentially human and is essentially related to human flourishing.

Eudaimonia, our *telos* and our final cause, is thus simply the living well of essentially rational animals. Hence, human flourishing consists of a life that fully realises the potential to exercise reason.

The function of human being is living according to reason, or at least, Aristotle adds, not without reason. It is said this addition is significant in that although an excellent human life is a rational one, excellence is not limited to purely intellectual activities. There is part of the soul that pertains to political, physical and social aspects of our lives as well and these excellences that pertain to this part of our lives are called moral virtues. A moral virtue in the strict sense is the disposition to make excellent, in other words fully rational, choices. It is the practical rational activity that we engage in when we deal with ethical problems and think about how we should live. Contemplative rational activity is rational in the strict sense, that is, rational in itself. Thus, Eudaimonia in the primary sense is contemplative rational activity whereas in the secondary sense it is would be practical rational activity or practical wisdom. It is moral virtue or practical wisdom that is required in the political and social aspects of our lives.

It is Aristotle's claim that our rational nature can only be properly developed in a social context. Aristotle argues that human beings are by nature social and political animals[ix]. Society provides the individual with the environment to exercise her rationality through communication and the practice of virtue. I will be discussing this point fully in chapter three. Although Aristotle says that the eudaimon life is a self-sufficient life, he sees the term 'self-sufficient' to be communitarian in nature and this attests to the fact that human being is by nature a political animal: "By self sufficiency I mean not for the person himself leading a solitary life, but for the person along with parents and children and a wife and in general his friends and fellow citizens, since the human being is by nature a political animal.[x]" Ian Johnston interpreting Aristotle's idea of human being as a political animal says:

> Human beings, in other words, derive their identity, their sense of self and thus their moral purpose from their participation in an existing community, the world of parents, ancestors, friends, customs, institutions and laws. In a tradition that goes back at least as far as Homer, Aristotle has no room for the notion that there is an individual existence prior to and independent of the community. Thus whatever ethical inquiry involves, it must take into account the essential and political basis of human life[xi].

Aristotle's notion of human beings as essentially social comes into prominence in his idea of the structure of state. He holds that the family as an association of parents and children is the association that is naturally established for the supply of human beings' everyday needs. When several families come together they form a village, that is, the first society. And when several villages unite they form a community. However, if the community is big enough to be able to cater for its own needs, that is the needs of its people, then the state comes into existence for the sake of good life for its members. Aristotle concludes his argument by saying that it is then very clear that it is human nature that gives rise to state. Hence, man is by nature a political animal. Any human being without a state, through nature and not through luck, he argues, is either less than or greater than a human being. She cannot be human being like us for the fact she lacks relationships with and concern for others – these things are definitive of human life

Aristotle argues too that the fact that human being is endowed with the gift of speech shows that human beings are by nature social[xii]. The gift of speech denotes the relevance of the social in our lives for it shows the desire of a human being to be in communication. Thus human beings are naturally bound to exist in relationship to others, and our practices can only be purposeful within the context of sociability. It is natural that we should live with each other.

As Martha Nausbaum says, "Aristotle thinks and acknowledges that any search for the good life must go on inside a context of relatedness."[xiii] Crucially, Aristotle argues that, as essentially social beings, our capacity to reason can only be developed in society and we can only achieve human flourishing life as a communal effort.

Aristotle's stance on our essentially social nature is very explicit in his ideas about friendship. He argues that friendship is a necessary condition for a distinctively human life, and that a particular kind of friendship is a necessary condition for a good human life:

> For without friends no one would choose to live though he had all other goods; even rich men and those in possession of office and of dominating power are thought to need friends most of all; for what is the use of such property without the opportunity of beneficence, what is exercised chiefly and in its most laudable form towards friends? Or how can prosperity be guarded and preserved without friends.... And in poverty and in other misfortune men think friends are the only refuge... [xiv]

For Aristotle, friendship arises out of our human nature; it is natural to us human beings and it pervades all the categories of our human life:

> Parents seem by nature to feel it for offspring and offspring for parents, not only among men but among birds and among most animals; it is felt mutually by members of the same race... we may even see in our travels how near and dear every man is to every other. Friendship seems to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice... when men are friends they have no need of justice while when they are just they need friendship as well.[xv]

He holds that friendship, especially virtuous friendship, is a necessary condition for the attainment of eudaimonia. Virtuous friendship arises purely from a love and appreciation of another. It is not a relationship based on sexual pleasure or for the

material gain. It is love for the other for the sake of the other. That is to say that virtuous friendship is thus based upon a love of what is truly good. It accentuates the good in each person.

He argues that the good person needs friends because friendship enables happiness. As earlier stated, the happy, flourishing life is not a passive life. It is a life full of activity. Friendship enables the good man to exhibit social virtues such as generosity, friendliness and mildness of temper. And where two good people become friends, each becomes a mirror for the other and at the same time they learn good character traits from each other.

Martha C. Nussbaum in her article, *Aristotle on human nature and the foundations of ethics*[xvi], discusses certain thought experiments that aim to establish that human beings are essentially social and rational, in support of Aristotle's project. The first, which aims to show the sociability of human beings, is a discussion of the myth of the Cyclopes. Odysseus encounters Cyclopes, anthropomorphic creatures who live in isolation from any form of community. They have no social relationships. They do not meet together to discuss their affairs and make decisions. They do not have communal laws and rules that govern their interaction with one another, and they do not care about each other. They do not know that if you receive a guest in your house, you should not devour him. These creatures look like humans but they are not classified as humans.

Nussbaum asks that we attempt to imagine living the life of Cyclopes. She argues that we cannot coherently imagine living a human life without the element of sociability.

Indeed, the act of participating in the evaluative exercise is already an affirmation of the social nature of human beings. We would not, indeed could not, choose to live like the Cyclopes who have no social bonds with one another, for the choice would be self-defeating – we would cease to be human.

The second thought experiment, which Nussbaum takes from Plato, is focused on the role of practical reason in our life. The thought experiment takes the form of an argument between Socrates and the young Protarchus. Protarchus, a hedonist, strongly asserts that pleasure is the good for human beings while Socrates asserts that it is practical reason. However, the two both agree that the good life for human beings must be complete, sufficient and choice-worthy.

Socrates asks Protarchus to imagine that he is living a life full of pleasures, but altogether bereft of reason and intellect. Protarchus replies that he would be very happy with such a life even if reasoning and thinking are completely omitted. Socrates then reminds him that omitting reasoning entails omitting from his life such things as the belief that he is enjoying himself, the memory of pleasure, and the ability to calculate for future pleasure. Consequently, says Socrates, Protarchus would not be living a life of a human being, but rather the life of a jellyfish. Socrates then asks Protarchus 'A life of this kind isn't choice-worthy for us, is it?' Protarchus replies, 'Socrates, this argument has left me altogether speechless.' Nussbaum concludes that the claims of practical reason have been acknowledged. We cannot coherently choose a life without reason; such a choice would be self-defeating as it would cease to be a human life.

Human beings, as it has been seen, are essentially both rational and social. I will argue that a virtuous person cannot be virtuous or live virtuously unless she lives in a certain kind of relationship with and to others: it is only in a certain kind of network of relationships that rationality can be exercised properly. I will discuss the kind of society that is required for human flourishing in chapter three. Having discussed what it is to be a human being, we can now turn to what it is to be a good human being on Aristotle's account.

1.6. The Concept of a Virtuous Person

Virtues can be understood to be skills for living well. They are those capacities or dispositions of character that enable us to understand any situation we might find ourselves in and react rationally and positively in order to avoid extremes and excesses. In other words, the virtues are those capacities that enable us to live fully rationally.

Aristotle defines virtue as: "a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, that is, the mean relative to us; this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.[xvii]" By calling virtue a state of character he informs us that it is not a feeling nor mere tendency to behave in certain ways. Thus we are neither good nor bad, nor praised nor blamed, for the simple capacity of feeling an emotion or an impulse. Virtue is a settled condition where a person is able to choose and act rightly in relation to any situation.

The mean with which virtue is concerned is not the arithmetic type but one that is determined by reasoning in relation to the situation in order to avoid excess and deficiency. The virtuous person chooses and acts between two extremes, says Aristotle, in an appropriate, rational way. Aristotle's virtuous person chooses and acts appropriately for the particular set of circumstances. For instance, recklessness and cowardice are two vices or extremes of the virtue of courage. A reckless person does not think to consider the risks involved before embarking on any dangerous action. She feels too little fear. A coward shies away from any dangerous action or situation even if the situation is potentially gainful and this gain outweighs the risk involved. She feels too much fear. The virtuous person, however, is aware that certain situations call for caution, and that sometimes the potential gain can outweigh any risks, thus making the action desirable. She will always correctly assess any situation and feel the appropriate amount of fear.

Discussing what the particular virtues are, Tabensky says:

> Virtues are typically developed and called for in the context of our unique engagements with life. Of course, insofar as we are persons, there must be a substantial overlap between the different modes in which complete virtue is expressed, but making this claim is very different from claiming that there is such a thing as a list of virtues. What there is, instead, is a rational system of dispositions that constitutes our practical understanding of life, and this rational system is one that is adaptive – sensitive to the particularities of the unique circumstances within which our individual lives are played out[xviii].

However, there are generally accepted virtues such as generosity, justice, friendliness and temperance. These are states of character that are associated with relevant sets of rational beliefs and desires. The virtuous must to have true reasoning and correct desire if the choice of action is to be good. Every virtue is defined as such in relation

to a particular feeling and action, and each virtue is given by the mean in relation to that feeling and action. The virtuous individual will always choose the mean through appropriate practical reasoning, particularly the appropriate desires that come from having the correct, reasoned conception of the good.

Thus virtues help human beings to perform their function well, the function being rational activity. If human beings perform their rational activity well they become virtuous. A virtuous person is a morally good, excellent person who acts and feels as she should in every situation. By acting always with practical reason, the virtuous will live a happy life, since the life of the excellent exercise of reason is the flourishing life.

1.7.The Formation of Ethical Character.

It is worth noting that Aristotle's discussion of the formation of character is bound up with his discussion of the study of ethics. Nonetheless, emphasis here is on his account of the formation of ethical character.

Virtues do not arise by nature says Aristotle; they cannot come about unless others train the agent and the agent practices virtue. In other words, virtues are acquired by teaching and habituation. This attests to the communitarian nature of the individual and reflects the fact that human beings flourish in a community.

Aristotle's account of the acquisition of virtue involves several stages of training or habituation that a person must go through if she is to acquire virtue. He emphasizes the importance of beginnings and the gradual development of good habits of feeling.

Thus morality develops in a sequence of stages with both cognitive and emotional dimensions.

For Aristotle acquisition of virtues entails first grasping the *'that'* and then the *'why.'* These two stages can be further be explained and distinguished in the following way: A human being who knows by herself what to do, and why it is the right thing to do, is the person who has grasped the *why*. She is a person of practical wisdom endowed with the knowledge of what to do in the varied times and circumstances of life. The person who takes to heart sound advice learns the *that* and becomes the sort of person who can benefit wisely from Aristotle's teachings and lessons.

These lessons are designed and ordained to give her a reasoned understanding of the *why* which explains and justifies the *that* which she already has or can get hold of[xix]. For someone who is acquiring virtue must begin from what is familiar. This is the reason why one should have been well brought up in good habits if one is going to listen to lectures about things noble and just, in general about social affairs.

The That.

There are at least two stages that the young person must go through in order to acquire the *that*. Firstly, the young person must learn that a certain type of behaviour is required in particular circumstances. This is learned from the parents, teachers and the others. For instance, I tell my son it is good to visit the sick because it gives them comfort. To have the knowledge of the *that* in this sense is merely to have requisite information. This knowledge of the *that* includes knowing what to do, when to do it, where to do it and how to do it, and why it should be done. The why is not in the

sense 'the why'. Here, it simply means having intellectual knowledge of the act or action should be done in the abstract sense. Or what might be called 'book knowledge'.

The next stage of knowing the that is knowing in the strong sense. This occurs when the agent enjoys the act properly - she enjoys the required act by doing it or putting it into practice by herself as opposed to doing it because others instruct her. She enjoys the act e.g. visiting the sick, because she appreciates what is in the act that is truly enjoyable. This later stage involves habituation or practice: practising the activity and coming to enjoy it. She is now true lover of noble and just action because she has acquired a taste for, or a capacity to enjoy things that are noble and just for their own sake. She has learned that they are noble and enjoyable for their own sake; however, she does not fully understand why they are so. She does not have a good man's unqualified knowledge or practical wisdom. She does however have the that which is the important starting point for acquiring practical wisdom and full virtue. She is someone who already wants and enjoys virtuous actions and wants to see this aspect of her life in a deeper perspective.

The Why

This last stage of the that which is appreciation of what it is about the action that is properly enjoyable is closely related to a further stage in the development and acquisition of virtue namely the stage at which it is grasped why the action is virtuous. This is the understanding of *why* she enjoys it. This involves both practical wisdom and intellectual knowledge.

The stage of habituation initially is to enable the young to grasp the *that* regarding to virtue. Once the stage is attained, the second stage becomes possible. The stage of the grasp of *why* as regard to virtue is necessary if the person is to have a reasoned understanding of virtuous action. This may involve both a full appreciation of why a particular act is required as virtuous in the relevant circumstances, and an ability to understand fully the relation between practical virtue and other concepts such as eudaimonia[xx]. This is further highlighted in the fact that by *the why* of virtuous actions the person understands what makes actions noble, just, or courageous for example, and how they fit into a scheme of the good life.

Aristotle makes it a condition of virtue that a virtuous action be chosen for its own sake. Choice, which is reached by deliberation from a conception of the good, includes a desire for the objects of virtuous action as good in themselves as well as noble and pleasant. The choice of virtuous actions should proceed from a firm and unchangeable character. Taking pleasure in doing virtuous acts is a sign that the virtuous dispositions have been acquired.

A person becomes virtuous, then, by following Aristotle's two stage acquisition processes. Thus, training, habituation and practical reasoning are essential to becoming virtuous. Since moral virtue is about desiring the appropriate things, that is, feeling pleasure and pain appropriately, a person ought to have been brought up in a particular way so as to delight in and to be pained by the things she ought to be. For Aristotle, a virtuous person tends to do what is best with regard to pleasure and pains, and the vicious person does the contrary. Individuals are taught to feel pleasure and pain appropriately though upbringing and habituation. Thus, a person becomes

virtuous by doing virtuous actions. For the person who has acquired the virtues of temperance and courage, nothing will tempt her so much as the temperate or brave action itself; nothing else will seem as pleasurable.

Having considered the communitarian nature of Aristotle ethics and its formation of ethical character that is a communitarian process, I shall consider in the next chapter the communitarian structure of African ethics and its communitarian approach to the formation of ethical character.

ENDNOTES.

[i] The Greek word *telos* is translated as goal, or purpose

[ii] J. L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia" in A.O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, (London: University of California Press, 1980), p.19

[iii] Pedro Tabensky, *Happiness, Personhood, Community, purpose*, (USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), p.7

[iv] Pedro Tabensky, Happiness, Personhood, Purpose and Community (USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003)

[v] . However, he does have some reservations about the term flourishing as it does not lay emphasis on the role pleasure plays in an eudaimon life but he maintains that it is a very useful term in the sense that it stresses much about the developmental and contextual aspects of eudaimonia.

[vi] Ibid, pp.13 – 14.

[vii] Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*. Translated by D. Ross (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925), 1176a, p.261

[viii] C. Megone, "Aristotelian Ethics" in R. Chadwick (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Applied Ethics*, (New York: Academic Press, 1998,), p.218

[ix] Martha C. Nausbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics" in J.E.J Atltham and R.Harrison (eds.), *World, Mind, Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.103

[x] Aristotle, *Op.cit.*, 1097b, p.12

[xi] Ian Johnston, 'LBST 301: Lectures on Aristotle ethics' (http://www.mala.bc.ca/-johnston/introser/aristot.htm) 1997, p.2

[xii] M. C. Nusbaum, *Op.cit*, p.108

[xiii] Ibid p.108

[xiv] Aristotle, *Op.cit.*, 1155a, p.192

[xv] Ibid.

[xvi] M.C. Nussbaum, *Op.cit.*, pp.97 – 99

[xvii] Aristotle, *Op.cit.*, 1097b, p.39

[xviii] Tabensky, Op.cit., p.141

[xix] Ibid.

[xx] C. Megone, *Op.cit.*, p.221

CHAPTER 2

Ubuntu: The Communitarian Nature of African Ethics.

2.1. Introduction.

In this chapter I will discuss the communitarian nature of African ethics, commonly called Ubuntu. This is a conception of ethics founded on African metaphysics, particularly the African conception of the nature of persons. I will also discuss here the concept of a good person in African ethics and how an individual is trained to become a good person in African society. I do not intend to critique African ethics or its metaphysical foundations but rather to explore its communitarian, or social, nature. It is worth noting here that by African ethics I mean the ethics of traditional African society.

Africa is a vast continent with many different cultures, and institutions like religion and politics differ from one culture to another. However, when I say Africa, I mean sub-Saharan Africa. No matter what the political, religious and economic differences might be, it is generally agreed that the sub-Saharan African communities share the concept of life called Ubuntu - a life lived in a community: a life of sharing, friendliness and generosity whereby values such as truthfulness and respect for elders are upheld and encouraged. Ubuntu is founded on the notion that there is a fundamental connection between the welfare of the individual and the welfare of the group.

Before I discuss African ethics in detail, I examine the metaphysics upon which African ethics is based. I discuss the Yoruba, Akan, and Bantu's conceptions of the person, and I hope to show that although the details of the philosophical view of the person may differ from one culture to another, they have one thing in common which is that the person is defined by her context of relatedness to others. This, I hope, will give insight into the communitarian nature of African ethics.

2.2. African Metaphysics.

African metaphysics, like western metaphysics, deals with fundamental questions of existence and reality; questions about, for example, the universe, God, the person, and space and time. The dominant view of reality in African metaphysics is that it is dualist in nature. That is to say, reality is consists of both invisible and visible aspects, or immaterial and material aspects. These two aspects interact together and are interdependent. Barnabas C. Okolo in his article *Self As A Problem*[i] maintains that this view of reality can be likened to that of the Platonic tradition in western philosophy.

Unlike the instantiated world in Plato's theory of reality, however, in African metaphysics the experienced world is viewed as real, and not as a mere shadow of the true world. According to African ontology, God, the ancestors and spirits dwell in the invisible or immaterial universe while human beings, animals, plants and non-living things dwell in the material, or experienced, universe.

For the Bantu people, for example, there is a hierarchy of beings called forces. God comes first in this hierarchy, followed by the first fathers of men, then the dead,

addressed today as the living dead. In the visible universe a hierarchy is also in place. Human beings come first followed by animals, vegetables and minerals. However, the two orders of the universe or existences relate to and interact with each other. There is interrelationship between God, the dead, the living and nature. As Okolo notes, the living dead, or the ancestors, are part and parcel of physically living families and often invited to family meals. They are believed and felt to be still present, protecting and guiding the household, directly concerned in all the affairs of the family and property, giving abundant harvests and fertility. Thus it is to be noted that 'dynamic' rather than 'static' is a primary concept useful for understanding and appreciating the African view of the relation between visible and invisible reality.

Okolo believes that African metaphysics differs greatly from that of Aristotle, in that Aristotle upholds that there are individuated, discrete existences: substances existing in and by themselves. African metaphysics is also obviously different from naturalistic metaphysics, which maintains only one kind of reality in nature, namely, the experienced nature. Nature for them is monistic, without any radical divisions. By contrast, the African ontology maintains the existence of both the spirit world and the material universe, both interacting with the other.

J. M. Nyassa attests to the interrelationship between the invisible world and the visible world of the African persons whereby the ancestors are constantly watching over the living:

> ...Their world is characterised by an extended psychosomatic relationship whereby the body (the living) must interact with the 'non-living' (the spirits of the ancestors). Thus life seems to be interpreted monistirically and in a manner according to which reality (the being with life force) is continuously rendered dynamic and self-regenerating and whereby it

generates gratuitous values of mutual concern, mutual
sustenance and mutual harmony[ii].

It is worth noting that in African philosophy it is not easy to separate or
compartmentalize metaphysics from social theory or morality as they are
interconnected. A metaphysical discourse may appear as a political or moral
discourse. According to L .J. Teffo: "African metaphysical thinking (is) social in
nature... It is difficult to distinguish metaphysics, social theory or morality in African
thinking because all philosophising is communitarian in nature[iii]". Indeed, as we shall
see later, full personhood is only reached in a community by following the ethical
norms of that community.

W. Abraham seems to support this view when he says:

> According to the Akan's metaphysical view, the world is
> rationalist philosophical. Relations between ideas take on
> body and flesh in the relations between things in nature.
> According to such view, true metaphysics must be deductive
> system. And morality, politics, medicine, all is made to flow
> from metaphysics[iv].

Having considered briefly the African view of reality, I now discuss the African
concept of a person. African ethics is based on a particular account of the nature of
persons. In this discussion we can see more clearly the relation between metaphysics
and ethics in African philosophy.

2.3. The African Concept of a Person.

I noted above that the dominant African view of reality that it is a composite of two
parts namely the visible and invisible, or material and immaterial worlds. Similarly,
the metaphysical concept of the nature of persons is dualist. On this view, a person is

made up of two principal substances, one spiritual and the other physical. Moreover, these two substances are not separate or distinct. As with the African view of reality, these two substances are interdependent and interact with each other. Teffo et.al write:

> Although there are differences with reference to the constituting parts of a person, there is agreement that the person consists basically of a material aspect and a 'spiritual' aspect or aspects... (But) these spiritual entities have material qualities; there is no radical or categorical difference between the spiritual and the material[v].

This can be observed in the Yoruba conception of a person. Segun Gbadegesin, a Yoruba from South West Nigeria in his book *African philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*, enumerates four principal components of *Eniyan*, the person, as Ara (body), Okan (heart), Emi (spirit) and Ori (head). He writes:

> These components may be grouped into two: physico-material and mental-spiritual. *Ara* belongs to the first, *emi* to the second, and O*ri* and *Okan* have physical and mental aspects. Second, a mentalistic conception of *Okan* is postulated to account for the phenomenon of thought... Third, ori is also postulated as a spiritual entity (in addition to its meaning as physical head) to account for the phenomenon of destiny. Even when *Okan* is postulated to account for the phenomenon thought, what ever, it has to do with this and with to emotional state of a person cannot be separated from the *Ori* as the bearer of her destiny. Therefore, *Okan*, as source of conscious thought and emotions, could be regarded as a subsequent (post-natal) expression of destiny/portion pre-natally in the *Ori*...*Okan* as the source of the post-natal consciousness and emotions, therefore only reflects that which had been encased in *Ori* originally ...[vi]

The indistinctness and interrelationship of the constituting parts in the Yoruba conception of persons can also be observed in the Akan conception. The Akan are a populous Ghanaian tribe. Kwame Gyekye says in his book *An Essay on African*

Philosophy Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme[vii], that in Akan thought a person is composed of immaterial (spiritual) and material substances namely Okra (soul), sensum (spirit) and honam (body), but the Akanians sometimes speak as if the relation between the soul and the body is so close that they compose an indissoluble, indivisible unity, and that consequently a person is a homogeneous entity. He maintains too that Akan thinkers take an interactionist view of the relation between soul and body. They hold that not only does the body have a casual influence on the soul but also that the soul has a casual influence on the body. What happens to the soul takes effect or reflects on the condition of the body, and vice versa. This interactional relationship between different components of a person, especially between the soul and body, is also found between the visible and invisible worlds, as noted above.

The concept of person might differ in detail from one particular sub-Saharan culture to another but there is a strong underlying similarity in the view of the way the individual is defined by her capacity to relate and interact with others in the visible and invisible world external to her. In the Bantu view, unlike the dualist Yoruba and Akan views, the person is neither material nor immaterial. Thus the conception of the person in Bantu philosophy denies the principle of dualism of soul and body. However, Bantu philosophy does not deny dualism of reality. Pascal Tempels writes:

> If were to start from our psychological standpoint to study the Bantu, we should be almost totally frustrated. Anyone, who, for instance, were to try to find words which correspond in Bantu dialects with our notions of soul, mind, will, sentiments, etc. would be assuming that the Bantu divide man, as we do into soul and body, and that they distinguish as we do the different faculties of the Bantu[viii].

Tempels holds that Bantu psychology is based on three notions namely vital force, increase of force and vital influence. The 'muntu' (person), according to the Bantu, is a living force; the force or being that possesses full life. Man dominates plants and animals and minerals. Man is the supreme force. Temples notes that we might be tempted to enquire in what the Bantu might find the higher force to consist in, but he thinks such a question would be similar to the question of exactly what the vital element we call the soul is. For the Bantu, the muntu is a being in a relation. She is a being in relation with other forces:

> The living 'muntu' is in a relation of being to being with God, with his clan brethren, with his family and with his descendants. He is in a similar ontological relationship with his patrimony, his land, with all that it contains and produces, with all that grows or lives on it [ix]

Thus the one thing that is common and essential to these different conceptions of the person, whether Yoruba or Akan or Bantu metaphysics, is the conception of relationship and interaction. The spiritual and physical aspects of the Akan and Yoruba relate and interact with each other. So does the Akan or Yoruba person relate and interact with visible and invisible worlds. The Bantu person is a being in relation with both the visible and invisible world. It is through the living person that both the visible and invisible worlds actively exist. Okolo makes this point in the following way:

> The two orders of existence in the African worldviews relate to and interact with each other. (Thus) the universe or nature for the African is a series of interaction and interconnection. To exist is more than just being there. It means standing in a particular relationship with all there is both visible and invisible. The interaction and interconnection between the visible created order and invisible world of God, spirits and ancestors are possible only through human beings; ontological mean between beings acting above and below [x].

Dirk J. Louw writing about the ancestors in his article *Ubuntu and the Challenges of Multiculturalism in Post-apartheid South Africa*[xi], says that the ancestors are extended family. The living must not only care for and share with each other, but the living and the dead depend on each other. He says that this is in accord with the daily experience of many traditional Africans. For instance, at *calabash*, which is an African ritual that involves the drinking of beer, a little of beer is often poured on the ground for the consumption of ancestors. Many Africans also believe in God through the mediation of ancestors. Louw holds that in African society there seems to be an inextricable bond between man, ancestors and God. He says that becoming 'a person through other persons' entails passing through various community prescribed stages and being involved in certain ceremonies and initiation rituals, and these rituals establish a link between the initiated and the community of the ancestors. Through circumcision and clitoridectomy blood is spilled onto the soil, a sacrifice is made which binds the initiated person to the land and to the departed members of the community. Thus there is a social relationship between the invisible and the visible worlds. The ancestors and human beings love and care for each other. There is a mutual cooperation between the two worlds, as the African persons believe that the dead who inhabit the invisible world are the members of their community. Okolo says:

> ...Hence when one dies, one is believed to have gone to one's family in the spirit world. Consequently, in the African universe and in accord with people's beliefs, there are repeated interactions, communications, and even local permutations between the dead and the living spirits and human beings[xii].

Thus the African worldview, which consists in a series of interactions, provides us with a relational criterion for understanding African concept of personhood. Teffo

et.al maintain the same point: " In Western philosophy, the starting point for the account of personhood is usually epistemological and psychological... in the African thinking the starting point is social relations – selfhood is seen and accounted from this relational perspective[xiii]". Augustine Shutte explains the difference between the European or Western conception of persons and the African conception thus:

> ... In the European philosophy of whatever kind, the self is always envisaged as something "inside" a person, or at least as a kind of container of mental properties and powers. In African thought, it is seen as "outside" subsisting in relationship. In fact the sharp distinction between self and world, a self that controls and changes the world and is in some sense "above" it, this distinction so characteristic of European philosophy, disappears. Self and world are united and intermingle in a world of reciprocal relation[xiv].

Didier Kaphagawani shares the same view, "... the Western notions of personhood and selfhood can be referred to as being more egocentric than African ones which tend to be more sociocentric"[xv].

Today, the conception of the person is African philosophy is enshrined in this Xhosa proverb 'Muntu ungumuntu ngababntu' meaning 'a person is a person through persons'. John Mbiti (in Godwin Sogolo) explains the meaning of the proverb when he says:

> Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people. When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate groups, when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and relatives whether dead or living. When he gets married, he is not alone; neither does the wife "belong" to him alone, so also the children belong to corporate body of kinsmen, even if they bear only their father's name. What happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to 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 a cardinal
>   point in the understanding of the African view of man[xvi].

We can see from the above that in African philosophy a person is neither essentially biological nor essentially psychological, but is essentially a social being. Given the discussion of Aristotle above, and his conception of the essentially social nature of human beings, it may appear that there is little that is unique to the African view. This would be mistaken. Nyassa says:

>   The African, like everybody else is a social animal except that
>   this sociality is both unique and transcendental. In the African
>   mythical world, it is conceivable that the first Africans that
>   ever were and ever lived in a social setting have not actually
>   passed out of existence. They are here, so to speak, with us as
>   invisible spirits strongly involved and always influencing us in
>   setting to confirm to the traditions that they themselves forged
>   and inherited[xvii]

In the same vein Okolo says that the 'self' in African philosophy, as in the naturalistic metaphysics of John Dewey, for instance, is essentially social, the person is a person only in relationship to others. The notable distinction is that the interconnections and relationship between self and others in African philosophy extend to the spirit world, to the ancestors, or the 'living dead'.

The social, or relational, nature of the African self in the living world can be illustrated as follows: Gbadegesin traces how the individual comes to be a member of the community. He says that a new baby is welcomed into the waiting hands of the elders of the household. The experienced elderly wives in the household serve as midwives. It is their job to see that the mother has a safe delivery and to introduce the newly born baby into the family with cheerful songs, praises and prayers. The mother has the fundamental responsibility of breastfeeding the baby while the other needs of

the baby are taken care of by others: co-wives, the husband's mother and stepmothers, senior sisters, nieces, and cousins. All these efforts and concerns of the members of the family instil into the child the consciousness of being a member of the family and immediately she starts to assimilate and internalise the family's norms and values. Gbadegesin says that the structure of the family's compound makes the process easy in that all the members of the extended household of several related extended family belonging to common ancestors live together in a large compound. The children play together monitored by the elders and any older member of the household may punish any of them who misbehave. If misunderstanding arises among the co-wives, the elderly male and female members intervene. If they fail in settling the issue at hand, it is taken to the head of the family In this kind of environment, he argues, growing children see themselves as a part of household and not as individuated, fixed selves.

It follows that children, through socialization and the love and concern shown to them by the household and community, cannot but see themselves as members of that community. Moreover, they cannot but define themselves in relation to the community and their place in it: they cannot be a self in isolation from others. The members of the family and community take special interest in the children's success, as they are their own blood. Thus there is feeling of solidarity among the members. This communitarianism is never forced on any individual, Gbadegesein says, rather it develops naturally due to the experience of love and concern that the growing child has been exposed to[xviii].

The coming to be of the child into an existing community marks the child as a communitarian being by nature. Kwame Gyekye gives the communitarian conception of the person as follows:

> 1. That a human person does not voluntarily choose to enter into human community, that is, community life is not optional for any individual person. 2. That a human person is at once a cultural being. 3. That the human person cannot - perhaps must not – live in isolation from other persons. 4. That the human person is naturally oriented towards other persons and must have relationships with them. 5. That social relationships are not contingent but necessary[xix].

Thus outside this network of relationships, an African person would cease to exist as person, and would thus not be able to realise her full personhood: a person is a person through others (umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu).

Having described African metaphysics, particularly the African concept of the person I now turn to African ethics.

2.4. African Ethics.

It has been noted extensively above that Africans have a strong sense of community. They live in communities as members of communities rather than individuals and interdependence is highly regarded and practised. There is always a set of approved and accepted ways of living and doing things in the community. These are rules and norms that make living together or community life possible, fulfilling and enjoyable. Without these rules and norms, things would fall apart and there would be a lawless society. Ethics is at the centre of community life.

Since African society is communitarian by nature it is implied that every ethical principle is geared towards the well-being of the family and the community. One might be tempted to conclude that the individual lives and acts only for the community; some thinkers have indeed said that the individual is crushed under the community. This is not a true reflection of African traditional thought. What the individual has with the community is a type of symbiotic relationship. Each member of the community stands in relationship to other members and they are united by one common goal, that is, the progress of the community and the human flourishing of each other. Gbadegesin says:

> A high premium is placed on the practical demonstrations of oneness and solidarity among the members of a community. Every member is expected to consider him/herself as an integral part of the whole and to play an appropriate role towards the good of all. Cooperation is voluntarily given and is institutionalised in several ways. Wives of the family (co-wives, wives of brothers, wives of cousins, etc.) know that they are expected to cooperate in raising their children as full members of the family. They are free to borrow household items from one another, they are free to baby sit for one another...[xx]

To illustrate further there is another kind of mutual cooperation exhibited in farming and agriculture. "A member may call upon the group to help him to harvest or plant or clear weeds. He only has to feed the participants and later he may also be called upon to help... it is clear that the individual is helped by the community...[xxi]"

Thus the individual is given every encouragement to thrive and be what she wants to be. The sky is her limit in realising her potentialities. And a good community is the one that allows its members to express their talents and potentialities. The individual's responsibility is always to try not to bring disgrace to her community.

She is expected to contribute to the progress and welfare of the community in her endeavours.

Every individual is expected to learn and abide by the rules and norms of the community. It is by keeping the rules and laws of the community that the individual is recognised and accorded the title of personhood in the community. In African society personhood is normally achieved or attained; it is not inherited by birth. Ifeanyi Menkiti says:

> For personhood is something which has to be achieved, is not given simply because one is born of human seeds. Thus it is not enough to have before us the biological organism, with certain rudimentary psychological characteristics are seen as attaching it, we must also conceive of the organism as going through a long process of social and ritual transformations until it attains the full compliment of excellencies seen as truly definition of man. And during this long process of attainment, the community plays a vital role as a catalyst and as a prescriber of norms[xxii].

And, for Menkiti, traditional African society emphasised the rituals of in cooperation and the importance of learning the social rules and norms of the community so that the human being would come to attain social selfhood, that is, become a person with all the attendant qualities. This is similar to Aristotle's view of personhood. I discuss the similarities between the African view of personhood and Aristotle's view of personhood in chapter three.

In African society, personhood is the peak or *telos* of the individual's development as a human being. To achieve personhood is to live a life that is flourishing and fulfilling, and this is not separate from the ethics of the community. Ethics is fundamental to the constitution of a person in African society. Personhood is achieved by adhering to the moral or ethical principles of a given community. Thus

personhood or moral personality is a potentiality that is achieved in due course. In African society, ethics is built around the concept of Ubuntu.

2.5. Ubuntu.

Ubuntu is considered to be the organising principle of African ethics. Ubuntu concerns human solidarity and it is enshrined in the words of Xhosa proverbs discussed above: umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu. Thus it is strongly premised upon the African communitarian conception of the person.

The African worldview tells us that a person is a social being by nature and that she can only succeed and survive in a community. Ubuntu is by definition only lived and realised in a society. This society is influenced by and in relation to the invisible world of the ancestors and the gods. This also shows a kind of social relationship between the living human beings and the invisible world of the ancestors. Christopher Ejizu (in N. Barney Pityana) says:

> ...The gods and cosmic forces may be invisible. But they are very powerful, often times aggressive and keenly interested in the activities of men... Moral norms and the customary code of conduct are hallowed and explained as ordinances of the gods and founding ancestors. Human behaviour is so crucial in the maintenance of the delicately balanced equilibrium existing between the spirit world and the human world. Any grave misconduct or infringement of the accepted code would upset the balance and thereby imperil the fortunes of men.[xxiii]

There is no place for radical individualism in African ethics and the traditional African worldview. An individual cannot exist independently and separately from the rest of the society:

> ... But be it noted, the individuality, which Ubuntu respects, is not of Cartesian making. On the contrary, Ubuntu directly contradicts the Cartesian conception of individuality in terms of which the individual or self can be conceived without necessarily conceiving the other. The Cartesian individual exists prior to, or separately and independently from the rest of the community or society. The rest of the society is nothing but an added extra to a pre-existent and self-sufficient being... By contrast, Ubuntu defines the individual in terms of his/her relationship with others... Being an individual by definition being with others. 'With – others'... is not an added extra 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. [xxiv]

Johann Broodryk, in his book *Ubuntu: Life Lessons From Africa*[xxv] says that Ubuntu can be defined as a comprehensive ancient African world view based on the values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative community life in a spirit of family. Values, for Broodryk, are the basic foundation of each person's view of how life is supposed to be and lived. These values influence choices, attitudes as well as goals in life. Since they are accompanied by strong feelings, it is proposed that they be regarded as the assegais of a person in cultural and general life. Broodryk goes on to mention the principal values and associated values of Ubuntu as:

Core Values	Associated Values.
Humanness	Warmth, tolerance, understanding, Peace, Humanity.
Caring	Empathy, sympathy, helpfulness, Charitable, Friendliness.
Sharing	Giving (unconditionally) redistribution. Open-handedness.

Respect	Commitment, dignity, obedience,
	Order, normative.
Compassion	Love, cohesion, informality, forgiving,
	Spontaneity

The good life in African society consists in living out the values of Ubuntu. When the individual lives out these values to their practical fullness, she actualises the potentialities of her human existence thereby attaining personhood, which is to live a happy or flourishing life. Thus the basic values of humanness like caring, sharing, respect, and compassion are cardinal to live and enjoy life cemented in true, real and selfless happiness says Broodryk.

Ubuntu embodies those qualities that define the essence of being human. It also embodies the potential of being a flourishing human. The concept of Ubuntu is similar to the concept of the function of human beings in Aristotle's ethics, serving to link and to define what it is to be a person and what it is to be a good person. By the values of Ubuntu the individual is constantly challenged by others to achieve self-fulfilment in order to live a happy or flourishing life.

Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene, discussing in his article *Mutumin Kirki: The concept of the good man in Hausa*[xxvi], a people of the Northern part of Nigeria, says that the hero need not simultaneously be a good person but the good person will always be the hero of her community. According to Kirk-Greene, the 'title' of good person is awarded to an individual only in the context of her relationship with her fellow human beings for the qualities of *mutumin kirki* such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, and patience.

These are tested only in the situations of human relationship and interaction. It is by the way a person treats her fellow human beings, regardless of their situation in society, that the Hausa will evaluate her according to the criteria of being ethically good, and deciding whether or not she fulfils their concept of Mutumin Kirki. As Broodryk says, the ideal person according to Ubuntu possesses all the virtues of Ubuntu: she is kind, generous, living in harmony with others, friendly, modest, helpful, humble and happy[xxvii].

2.6. The Formation of Ethical Character.

In the traditional African society, the extended family system that includes several generations of relatives dwelling in a compound, or near to each other, constitute the family. In the African family, the mother has the primary responsibility for her child's upbringing and social developments. However this responsibility is also shared among all the members of the family and community. They stipulate social roles and moral norms for the child with the sole aim of preparing her for adulthood. Consequently, the African child learns from her earliest years to be a respectful, responsible, and supportive member of the family and community.

In the larger community or society, which is made up of many families, the child comes to learn from others about the virtues of communal life and how to be a committed member, and to work for her welfare and the welfare of the community. Through others the child learns, among other things, how farm work and other commercial enterprises are carried out:

> Within countries in sub Saharan Africa, children are highly valued; they are 'a gift of God'. Children are the perpetuators of the family and society. Because of this it is the responsibility of the community to see that children are raised

appropriately, and it is expected that as they grow into adulthood they will provide for older members of the community. Their view of children influences how their needs are met. Within traditional cultures, childrearing practices are based on a culturally bound understanding of what the children's needs are and what they are expected to become[xxviii].

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The aim of childrearing in African society is to help the child to become a fully-grown person, umuntu, that is, for her to reach full personhood. Thus, in the process of growing up, the family and the community help the child to undergo a series of social and ritual developments that link and integrate the child with the community, including the ancestors. The ritual developments and initiations also aim at educating the child in the community values and norms so that the child becomes a fully fulfilled and actualised person. If this is successful, she achieves all the values of Ubuntu that define her as having achieved full personhood in the community. Nhlanhlan Mkize says:

> The communal way of life saw childrearing as the collective responsibility of the community. Rites of passage were organised to mark the various stages of personhood. It is important to emphasise that these rites were a collective responsibility of the community. Not only did they endow the growing person with a sense of identity and meaning in life, they also played an essential role in inculcating the value of Ubuntu thought to be essential for harmonious societal functioning[xxix].

Kanyike makes the same point:

> The society that comes to meet him or her with jubilation at the end of his/her initiation into adulthood has just given him/her an education, which is a means to an end and not an end in itself. Social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, spiritual and moral values are all important aspects of African education and society wants to see in them in the life of the new adult. His action is the place where society realises itself[xxx].

When the individual embodies and practices all the values of Ubuntu in her community, for her well-being and that of her community, she becomes a fulfilled or flourishing person. Importantly, when the individual fails to attain personhood, it is not the individual that is blamed but the community, which is seen as failing to educate and socialise the individual appropriately. Failure of an individual to achieve flourishing means that the community has failed in instilling the values of Ubuntu.

Having now discussed the communitarian nature of both Aristotelian and African ethics, in the next chapter I discuss the kind of society required for human flourishing, implicit in both Aristotelian and African ethics. I argue that Aristotelian and African ethics considered together can provide us with an account of the kind of society required for human flourishing.

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CHAPTER 3

The **Kind of Society Required for Human Flourishing.**

3.1. Introduction.

In this chapter, I consider, out of a comparison of Aristotelian and African ethics, the kind of society that is required for human flourishing. In both Aristotelian and African ethics, the kind of society required for human flourishing concerns the structure and kinds of relationship that must exist between individuals, and groups of individuals, in order to promote and achieve the formation of ethical character and thus human flourishing.

In the first section, I consider the Aristotelian ideal society, using the ideas of Aristotle and Aristotelians such as Pedro Tabensky and Martha C. Nussbaum[i]. In the second section, I consider the type of society, or networks of relationships, that African ethics advocates for human flourishing, making particular use of Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*. In the third section, I compare and contrast these two accounts of the formation of ethical character that equip the individual with the capabilities for living a flourishing life. My aim in this chapter is not to critique either account but to show that Aristotelian ethics is sufficiently similar to African ethics to enrich our understanding of the kind of society required for human flourishing in African ethics. At the same time, the depth of similarity helps to bring into sharp relief that which is truly unique to the African ethical account.

Aristotelian and African ethics hold that good life depends on sharing with others. Individual flourishing is only possible in a good community where the individual shares and participates in the life of the community and the community in turn shares and participates in the life of the individual. There is a flourishing of both the individual and the community when there is a symbiotic relationship between them. Both Aristotelian and African ethics discount the possibility of a life that is radically autonomous, that is, a life that is lived independently of others, because this goes against our essentially social and rational nature. In brief, the individual flourishes when she is able to realise her potential, and society is good or flourishing when it offers its members the social conditions necessary for achieving this potential that is the eudaimonia life, or the life of full personhood.

3.2. The Kind of Society Required for Human Flourishing and the Formation of Ethical Character in Aristotle's Ethics.

It has been shown above that we are essentially, according to Aristotle, both rational and social. It is by living with others that a person can become good or virtuous and express her goodness to others through rational activities and choices. Thus a good person, or a virtuous person, cannot be virtuous and live the flourishing life unless she lives in a certain kind of relationship to and with others. Tabensky says:

> A person is defined as a creature whose *telos* is eudaimonia. Moreover, since persons are necessary social, it follows that only social creatures can achieve eudaimonia. The fact that we are, by nature, social creature, helps us visualise the importance social being has to play in formation of our lives... because the formation is closely tied up with specific settings, then it must be the case that flourishing is only possible if the settings are appropriate... the possibility of achieving eudaimonia is intimately tied in with particular types of settings that provide the conditions for the

> possibility of achieving eudaimonia. The good life, ...can
> only flourish in what could be characterised as a good
> society[ii].

Tabensky in his book, *Happiness. Personhood, Community, Purpose*, makes prominent the kind of society, or network of relationships, that is required for human flourishing in Aristotelian ethics. He claims that analysing these social conditions will assist us to understand the nature and structure of eudaimonia; that it is only in appropriate relationships that an individual can stay active in ways that are constitutive of the eudaimonia ideal. He holds that the particular ways in which an individual relates to and with others, the choices she makes and specific projects she undertakes with others in her social environment say a great deal about what it means to live as a eudaimon individual. and the external conditions[iii] that are necessary for eudaimon life.

Aristotle argues that we cannot achieve human flourishing or eudaimonia outside society. And society, for Aristotle, is constituted by different networks of friendship (*philia*). For Aristotle, the fundamental conditions for the existence of social relationships are relationships of friendship. Friendships hold states together. As Tabensky says, friendship involves bonds of care and concern, or reciprocal bonds of love[iv]. Not all types of friendships, however, are capable of providing the individual with the social conditions necessary for living a eudaimon life. There are three kinds of friendship, according to Aristotle. First is friendship based on mutual usefulness or utility. In this kind of friendship, the people love each other for the sake of the advantages they can get from each other. They do not love each other for the sake of the other. Second is the kind of friendship that is based on mutual pleasure. Here too, the people do not love each other for the sake of the other. For instance, those in a

sexual relationship love each other for the pleasure they can get from each other. This kind of friendship normally comes to an end when there is no longer pleasure involved. The third kind of friendship Aristotle identifies is that based on mutual goodness and mutual willing of good for the other. It is true love of the other for her own sake. Here, the good of the other is the object of the friendship and not some external advantage or pleasure. This is the true or virtuous friendship, as its goal is nothing but the good living or human flourishing of the other. Carolyn Ray, quoting Aristotle, says:

> The friendship, which has the good as its object, is based on the character of each partner, rather than on utility or pleasure. A friendship based on utility might occur between two business partners, such friendship would dissolve if the business were to fold. (NE 1157a15-16). A friendship based on pleasure might exist between two people who find each other physically attractive and end when the initial thrill wears off. (NE 1157a7-10). But virtuous character (friendship) is more stable (1156 b12) (in most cases), and is hence more durable. Furthermore, this is the most complete, because such friendships involve love of each person in himself for who he is. (1156a 10- 14)[v].

Following Aristotle, Tabensky argues that the virtuous friendship is a sort of relationship in which an individual is able to express her goodness. Moreover, it gives the individual the opportunity to learn how to act in accord with the complete virtue that is eudaimonia. As the individual fundamentally lives for eudaimonia, thus the best or truest friendship is meant to help the individual to attain eudaimon life, human flourishing, the *telos* of every human organisation or association.

> Virtue friendship based on the ideal of complete virtue is desirable to virtuous subjects because virtuous subjects have a practical understanding of the role played by this friendship in a eudaimon life. Virtuous subjects have an appreciation of the character of their companion, and because of this appreciation they find sharing time with their companions enjoyable, or at any rate desirable[vi]

Aristotle's reasons for thinking that the good individual can only hope to achieve

eudaimonia within the context of virtuous friendships or relationships are enumerated

in the *Nichomachean Ethics* 1169b8-1170b25:

> Human beings are political, and it is better to live with
> friends than with strangers whose character is unknown.
> We need to observe the actions of virtuous friends, since we
> can watch others better than we watch ourselves, and it is
> pleasant to watch virtuous actions.
> *Eudaimonia* is a continuous activity, not a possession and it
> is easier to be active with friends than alone.
> Friends cultivate each other's virtue. Friends help each other
> live to the fullest extent by prompting them to exercise their
> understanding (and it is pleasant to perceive that one is
> engaging in the most important human activity). Friends are
> related to each other as they are to themselves and thus a
> friend's life is choice worthy to his friend. A friend is
> someone to talk to and being choice worthy by nature, must
> be had because without them a person is not self-sufficient
> but deficient[vii].

Tabensky discussing Aristotle's reasons for the need of virtuous friendships says that

for an individual to have a good life, she must not only be continuously active but

continuously active in the right manner. And this right manner can only be had in the

context of virtuous friendships. With good friends one is able to be active in the ways

that are expressive of complete virtue. Tabensky explains that virtuous friendship

helps people to form intimate reciprocal bonds of care and concern which are

necessary for living a good life. In the company of true friends an individual learns

how to act and live well in accordance with the eudaimon principle. And she

understands that her living eudaimon life affects and incorporates the eudaimon life of

her friends.

In Book 1 of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that the eudaimon life must

be self- sufficient. For Aristotelians, a self-sufficient life is a life that is complete; it is

not a life that is radically autonomous. Self-sufficiency is attained in the company of others, which confirms our nature as social creatures. The manner in which we relate to each other determines our ideal self-sufficiency. Hence, virtuous friendships are, for Aristotle, one fundamental sort of interaction that constitutes a self-sufficient life.

> ...That the good life is an active one ... to have an active life one must be in the right circumstances for being active in the relevant ways. The ways that are relevant ... involve being active among and towards one philoi... it is for reasons such as that establishing bonds of philia are constitutive of the possibility of being eudaimon individual[viii].

Tabensky raises a very important question at this point: will intimate friendship not separate the circle of friends from the larger community, leading to the exclusion of wider community from our sphere of concerns? He responds by pointing out that the intimate friends are members of the large community, and as the members of the large community who make use of other services, such as medical and transport facilities provided by the community at large, so they understand how their life is dependent on the whole community. Hence a virtuous person will appreciate and understand the role her community plays in her good living, and see her community and other members of her community as part of her self, thereby making her also to care for the large community.

j   It is clear that caring for oneself in a way that reflect a proper practical understanding of human flourishing entails a care for those conditions that makes one's flourishing possible, and these conditions are among other things, constituted by the community at large, says Tabensky. He claims that it is in sharing with intimate friends that an individual also automatically learns about human joy and suffering, she learns to understand how circumstances (internal and external) influence the quality of our

lives. Moreover, sharing with friends is the best way to learn about virtues and become virtuous in all her dealings with her intimates and other members of the community. She learns too that others who are not members of her intimate friendships are like her and in this manner she comes to empathize and care for others. Maj Charles A. Paff seems to support this point:

> In the virtue approach to human flourishing, something is good if it contributes to creating the conditions for the good life for everyone. Since every one enjoys this good life, agents do not need to choose between what is good for them and what is good for others. In this approach, the agent's action benefits themselves as well as others[ix].

Aristotle holds that by being in virtuous friendships, an individual cultivates a good character in relation to her intimate friends as they influence each other. To be a eudaimon individual is an on-going process, thus it is by staying in continuous virtuous relationships that one can learn and develop further the habit of acting virtuously.

Aristotle argues further that the nature of *philia* is very much like the nature of self-love. Thus the individual is able to commune with someone if she is able to recognise someone as another self. By recognising someone as another self, she is able to compare their character, decisions, actions, intentions and goals with hers, and by this comparison, they form a shared or common ethic that will allow them to weave their life together in a communion of friendship. This contributes to the good of each *philoi*. Tabensky says:

> A crucial factor that differentiates friendships from other sorts of ethical engagement is that, ideally, when one engages with a close friend, one engages with an individual not just for this or that reason but in ways that summon the mutual expression of our character. One engages with someone's whole life. It is by engaging in these sorts of dialogical engagement that one

> is able to recognise one's humanity in the fullest sense - one
> is able to recognise one is relevantly like those one is sharing
> with. And in this manner one is able to inform one's action
> towards others (not just friends but to persons in general) in a
> way that reflects sensitivities of the human spirit.[x]

In the Aristotelian framework, the ethical ideal that determines our interactions and emotional responses with our community is communal justice. According to Aristotle "We see that all men mean by justice, that kind of state of character which makes people disposed to do what is just; and similarly by injustice that state which makes them act unjustly and wish for what is unjust".[xi] Commenting on Aristotle's definition of justice, Tabensky says that for Aristotle, justice is a state of character, which a just individual possesses, and which makes her act justly. He conceives justice as a complete virtue 'but not absolutely'. It is not complete virtue absolutely because it is complete virtue only in relation to others rather than being virtue both in relation to others and oneself. For Aristotle, a given action would count as just if it is the sort of action a person of good character would direct towards others and which reflects her goodness. According to Aristotle, and Tabensky, an individual could only become a good person if her intimate relationships are good, and more particularly, only if she surrounds herself with virtuous friends. Thus in an Aristotelian sense, having virtuous friends, is a prerequisite for being ideally just, as complete virtue is cultivated amongst virtuous relationships. The purpose of justice is to help the individual achieve the *telos* of her life that is eudaimonia. In their circle of intimate friends, she learns how to act justly towards each other for the sake of eudaimonia.

Just acts of a just person are not only performed towards that individual's circle of friends, they also extend to other members of the community. This is because the just

individual understands that her *telos*, which is the eudaimon life, is implicated in the *telos* of each member of her community. She is aware that her circle of friends is one of the networks of friendships that exist in her community; that the members of her circle of friends might belong to other intimate friendships in which she is not involved. So for her life to flourish, the whole community must be a flourishing one. Thus from the just individual's circle of love, she learn how to love and care for the whole community:

> ...Thus the love cultivated in one zone of our social fabrics flows the delicate fibres that link us all into one community, such that one cannot properly consider the well-being of those closest to oneself without at the same time taking into account the general framework of interlocking dialogical relationship which constitute a (global) community within which one web of love is embedded.[xii]

According to Tabensky then, it is not easy to separate the self-concern and our concern for our closest friends from the concern we ought to have for our community at large. It is not that we are expected to love every person in our community, rather we must care for our community at large because our eudaimonia is implicated in the well-being of our global community. If our global community flourishes, our life will also be a flourishing one since it yields the conditions for our continued eudaimon existence. It yields these conditions by providing us with friends, services such as communication, transportation, and other infrastructural facilities that contribute to our living well.

However, it is from the association of her intimate friends that an individual can acquire the virtues that will help her care for herself and friends, and also care and love those outside her circle of love because her life is interconnected with theirs. There is a relationship of mutual constitution of love between the quality of the web

of love that constitutes the social and the quality of the social a whole, says Tabensky.

He holds that that to a large extent, the responsibility for constructing an ideal society

rest not so much on our leaders but on the manner in which we relate to those we love

because from the basis of the love we have for our closest friend we learn how to

relate to our community at large. Maurice Cornforth supports this point:

> It is possible, by "political means" to remove the causes of
> poverty and war, and to provide everyone with the material
> means for useful work, education, leisure, comfort and the
> protection of health. Even that, of course, would still not
> suffice to establish happiness (human flourishing), for
> whether individuals are happy or not still depend on how
> they relate to each other and how each behaves in personal
> life...[xiii]

As Tabensky notes, individuals have different histories, interests, and dispositions,

and these variations can cause conflict in the community. However a eudaimon

subject can get over this conflict because she understands that the overall pattern of

her good life is enmeshed in a larger community and the concessions she makes in

regard to the conflicts are for the overall good of her life - a good that involves the

lives of other people. For instance, there might be a conflict in the community due to

differences of opinion. In this kind situation, a eudaimon subject may reason that the

proponents of differing opinion are not like her, and they might have come to

entertain such opinion due to their family and educational backgrounds. So instead of

allowing such a situation to disrupt her happiness and that of the community she will

make effort to accommodate their differences and even when necessary make

corrections in a constructive and amicable way for the sake of every person's

eudaimonia or flourishing.

Note, however, the perfect society being advocated by Tabensky is not one of perfect harmony. He believes a perfect harmony could only be achieved in a homogeneous society where all people are the same with no difference in character or dispositions. However, such environment cannot foster the development of a good character, he argues. According to Tabensky, the uniqueness of our individual histories makes each of us special. He argues that dwelling in a world of difference helps the individual better understand and appreciate where one is coming from. That the other person does and sees things differently from her is an invitation for her to reconsider the way in which she does and sees things.

> Multiple perspectives held by persons in dialogue clearly enrich the understandings of the ethical dimensions of the world. This last claim follows quite naturally from the fact having to relate to a large variety of different persons places a moral demand on us that would not exist were we to live in a world that was radically under-populated by communicators (Creatures who engage in social engagements because of their thinking capacity)[xiv]

The world of difference assists the development of character in that the individual's knowledge of her differences enables her to appreciate the other person's differences. Insofar as the individual would like others to respect her differences, she respects their differences. Training herself to respect and uphold the interests of others is a virtue that should be encouraged because it contributes to the individual and to the community's flourishing. Tabensky says:

> Moreover, in sharing with virtue friends, one most perfectly learns about virtue, and hence one is in the best possible position to act towards others as demanded by our ever-changing circumstances... In learning these things... one also learns about the fragility of one's own goodness, and of the goodness of others. Because one is (ideally) content with who one is and one is able to recognise the fragility of one's own good fortune, one is also able to appreciate how others may not be in the same position, and one is able to act in ways that

are expressive of this understanding- one is able, for instance, to feel compassion for others and act accordingly."

Hence, to be a person in the fullest sense entails having a full sense of the relationship between the self, the other person and the world at large. This kind of relationship is only had in a pluralistic environment; the kind of environment that comprises of many individuals of different dispositions and orientations but still respects the uniqueness of each of the individuals and the status of the community. This is an environment that does not stifle but rather uses the uniqueness and initiatives of each individual for the flourishing of each of it's members and the community at large, as the community can only flourish when its members live a flourishing life. "The sort of community we should aspire to live in is a pluralistic one and one that fosters a relationship that does not involve blinding ourselves to the humanity of others[xv]"

As rational, social creatures that are naturally directed towards the realisation of full personhood that is eudaimonia, we are thus naturally endowed to live in a pluralistic yet communitarian community - a community that fosters and respects individual differences. Remember that full personhood is primarily an activity. It is the activity of living well. To achieve eudaimonia is to be active amongst others. An individual who relates well or virtuously to others realises her full potentiality, that is, full personhood, which is the eudaimonia life.

For her, the virtuous relationships that leads to eudaimonia life effect the whole community as the activities that are involved in living a flourishing life extend towards others in many ways that foster and nourish the good of the whole

community. "... A good society is a function of individual initiative; a good social order flow upwards from the individual to the collective. It therefore follows that one cannot expect to live happily if one delegates social responsibility to others[xvi]".

It follows from the above, Tabensky argues, that the function of the leaders in any community should be to coordinate the different efforts made by individuals towards realisation of flourishing society. Just like any other individual, their task is one of promoting over all flourishing, as their own flourishing depends on the flourishing of others - they and their subjects are in an interconnected relationship. Tabensky holds too that the purpose of leadership and other social institutions should not be seen as a replacement of the individual's responsibility, but rather their purpose should be to encourage active participation of every individual in the common good- a good that is pluralistic, complex and dynamic. The goodness at issue in no way stands over and above individual interest. For Tabensky, collective goodness is that which is constituted by the goals of the individuals who comprise the community.

A good society in Aristotelian ethics, according to Tabensky, is "... one that offers the appropriate conditions for flourishing... an ideal society offers the necessary external conditions for the flourishing of each member of that society[xvii]" A society structured around virtuous relationship is the right kind of society required for upbringing of children so that they acquire the virtues. According to Aristotle, virtue does not arise by nature. A person becomes virtuous when others train her, and she herself practises virtues. So in the virtuous society, the children learn to do good under the guidance of virtuous adults. As the child is being trained, virtuous parents and teachers will ensure that what the child considers as pleasant will be acts in accordance with virtue. They

will exhort her to perform such acts even when these acts may seem unpleasant and contrary to the child's inclinations. Parents train the child through their good examples and exhortation, and praising the child when she performs a good act. With time the acts involved will become more attractive because of the reward and approbation she receives.

The virtuous community helps the child to realise that there is more to such actions than the external rewards which have been attached to them. They mean more, not only in themselves, but to the virtuous community into which child is growing: becoming a full member of the community or becoming virtuous entails acknowledging the value of such actions, doing them, and becoming the kind of person who does them because of their intrinsic worth[xviii].

Having considered the kind of society required for human flourishing and formation of ethical character in Aristotle's ethics let us now consider the type of society that African ethics advocates for human flourishing and ethical character formation.

3.3 The Kind of Society Required for Human Flourishing and the Formation of Ethical Character in African Ethics.

In African society, as it has been noted in chapter two of this work, personhood is the peak or *telos* of the individual's development as a human person. To achieve personhood is to live a life that is flourishing, and this is not separated from the moral life of the community. In African ethics, morality is part of the fundamental constitution of a person. Full personhood is achieved by adhering to the moral or

ethical principles of a given community. Personhood, or moral personality, is a potentiality that is realised in due course in a community. It is realised in the fullest sense by being active in the community. Edward Kanyike says: "When the Bantu speaks of someone as not being a person, muntu, they refer almost always to a lack in human relations. To be human is to know how to live well in society[xix]"

The African person is first and foremost a social being, as discussed above. She can only live and survive in the community. Moreover, the African ethic of Ubuntu is only lived and realised in the community. Dirk J. Louw says "The Ubuntu ethics unites the self and the world in a peculiar web of reciprocal relations in which subject and object become indistinguishable. and in which 'I think therefore I am' is substituted for I participate therefore I am[xx]". To exist as a full person in traditional African society, the individual has to participate in the common good or values held by the society.

Despite this fact, African ethics encourages and respects the uniqueness of each individual while discouraging anything that separates the individual from her community. It encourages and upholds the symbiotic relationship between the individual and the community. An individual may, due to her talents, or wisdom rise to an important height in the community. However, it is still the community that accords her recognition and honour.

Chinua Achebe, in his novel *Things Fall Apart*[xxi], shows that in traditional African society, especially in Ibo society, an individual cannot survive independent of the

community's values and cohesion. This is evident in the life of Okonkwo, the central character in the novel.

Things Fall Apart tells the story of the first contacts between Ibo villagers and white European missionaries and colonial administration in the 1890's; in other words, of the coming of the Christian era to Africa. Okonkwo is a man who determines to overcome the example of his lazy and jolly father Unoka, and to elevate himself to a position of respect in the Ibo community of Umuofia through acts of strength and courage. He is admired for his physical strength and his hardworking spirit. Okonkwo wills himself to become the opposite of all that his father represents:

> Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children. Perhaps down his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself, it was fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father's failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate that had told him that his father was *agbala*. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that *agbala* was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion – to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness another was idleness[xxii].

Achebe writing about the physical prowess of Okonkwo at war says:

> He was a man of action, a man of war. Unlike his father he could stand the look of blood. In Umuofia's war he was first to bring home a human head. That was his fifth head, and he was not an old man yet. On great occasions, such as the funeral of a village celebrity he drank his palm wine from his first human head[xxiii].

When Okonkwo accidentally kills another man at a village festival, his community destroys his compound and exiles him to his mother's clan for seven years. It is while living in his mother's clan, Mbanta, that he meets for the first time the Christian missionaries. The Christian missionaries with simple message of Christian love and inclusion attract many converts, including the tribal outcast, the Osu, who are not welcomed in the community. Then conflict arises between the community and the Church when one of the Osu kills the sacred Python revered and worshipped by the community. In Mbanta no one dare kill the royal python. It is addressed as our Father. This results in a meeting of the rulers and elders of Mbanta to discuss the fate of Christians. In that meeting, Okonkwo says in reference to the Christians, "... until the abominable gang is chased out of the village with whips, there will be no peace[xxiv]".

But someone counsels:

> It is not our custom to fight for our god, let us not presume to do so now. If a man kills the sacred python in the secrecy of his heart, the matter lies between him and the god... If we put ourselves between the god and his victim we may receive blows intended for the offender[xxv].

Okonkwo retorts sharply:

> Let us not reason like cowards ... If a man comes to my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does. These people are daily pouring filth over us, and Okeke says we should pretend not to see... this was a womanly clan, he thought. Such a thing could never happen in his fatherland Umuofia[xxvi].

After serving his seven years in exile, he returns to his home village Umuofia only to discover that the white missionaries have come to stay in Umuofia. He wants to fight them but his old friend Obierika counsels otherwise:

> How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came

quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused
with his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has
won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one. He
has put a knife in the things that held us together and we
were fallen apart[xxvii].

The tension between the Church and the community continues to boil up. The

overzealous converts provoke the villagers and the villagers retaliate by destroying

the church building. The Government intervenes in order to restore peace in Umuofia,

but Okonkwo wants Umuofia to fight the Government that has aligned itself with the

Church. With his machete, Okonkwo murders the messenger sent by the colonial

government. In this murder he acted alone as the members of his clan were no longer

united. When the district commissioner comes to arrest him, Okonkwo is found to

have hanged himself. In acting alone in killing the messenger, Okonkwo failed to

reason together with his clan. Such behaviour destroys the bond that holds the

community together. And, Achebe seems to be saying, destroys the individual for

without such bonds, the individual cannot exist.

Carl Brucker writes:

> Okonkwo's greatest flaw is his inability to adapt to cultural change. He
> is humiliated that Umuofia does not rise in his support and go to war
> against the white man. In a final desperate act, he murdered the district
> commissioner's messenger and hangs himself. At the end of the novel,
> Okonkwo stands alone, a self-proclaimed defender of a rigid
> traditionalism that contradicts the true flexibility of his culture. He is an
> exceptional individual, but the heroism of his final act of defiance is
> undercut by his alienation form his clan. He does not understand that
> Umuofia is a living culture and has always adapted to meet new
> challenges[xxviii].

What I hope to have shown with the tragic story of Okonkwo is that one needs the

community to survive in traditional African society since the individual is simply

considered as an entity firmly embedded in society. Any individual who alienates

herself from the communal values and norms or fights against the values that the

community stands for will not live a flourishing life in African society. Indeed, it may be difficult for the individual to live any kind of life. This is evident in the life of Okonkwo who single-handedly takes it upon himself to champion what he sees to be the cause of Ibo society in Achebe's novel.

One might argue that Okonkwo's community is a kind of community that stifles individual autonomy. This is not a true reflection of the Umuofia community, however, because the community provided him with the social conditions to flourish and, thus, to exercise his autonomy. The community recognized his physical prowess and allowed him to represent them in village wrestling competitions and also elevated him to a great position in the community. African ethics does not crush individual autonomy. It advocates the communal conditions necessary for individual autonomy to flourish. The community provides the conditions and the backdrop for the expression of individual talents and the realisation of individual potential. The elders said in regard to Okonkwo:

> Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife. To crown it all, he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two intertribal wars. And so, although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered. As the elders said, if a child washed his hands, he could eat with kings. Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands and so he ate with king and elders.[xxix]

The community support for individual flourishing is also seen in another episode. During the farming season when Okonkwo had cleared his farm but had no yam seeds to plant, he approached his family friend Nwakibie, for assistance. He said:

> I have come to you for help... perhaps you can already guess what it is. I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow. I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yam, especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work... if you give me some yam seeds, I shall not fail you[xxx].

Nwakibie in response said:

> It pleases me to see a young man like you these days when our youth have gone so soft. Many young men have come to me to ask for yams but I have refused because I know they would just dump them in the earth and leave them to be chocked by weeds... But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you. As our fathers said, you can tell a ripe corn by its look. I shall give you twice four hundred yams. Go ahead and prepare your farm[xxxi].

It is understood in African ethics that if the individual flourishes. the society also flourishes. Okonkwo met his doom when he alienated himself from his clan and failed to reason along with them. The African person is a social being and can only survive and prosper in the community.

The kinds of networks of social relationships that are advocated by African ethics can be seen more clearly in a number of spheres of social life: namely the extended family system, stokvel, consensus, and democracy and ancestors. I examine each of them in turn.

3.3a The Extended Family System.

This is part of the African way of life. The members of one's family extend beyond the western nuclear family. Extended cousins and nieces are normally seen as the members of the individual's family. In African society, an individual may have many fathers and mothers.

> In African life, child has many fathers and mothers. The brothers of his natural father are also regarded and respected as his father and the sisters of his mother are all addressed as "Ma" (mother). There are therefore no orphans in traditional Africa; if the natural parents of a child die, the other fathers and mothers in the extended family automatically take over custody of the child[xxxii]

And in their social relation, they help each other financially and materially. They lend and borrow items to and from each other. They also take care of each other's properties.

3.3b. Stokvel.

This is one of the ways the Africans help each other financially without making profit from each other. It can be seen as a kind of social club whereby the members contribute certain amounts of money with the sole aim of sharing it among themselves after a stipulated period. In some cases, the whole amount is given to a single person while other peoples wait for their own turn. Louw has this to say:

> Stokvels are joint undertakings or collective enterprises, such as saving clubs, burial societies and other cooperatives. The term refers to a wide range of community based financial arrangements according to which resources are pooled and the again disbursed to members as either (interest-free) loans or payouts... Profits are shared on an equal basis. Making a profit is important but never if it involves the exploitation of others[xxxiii].

This stokvel also extends to farm works and agriculture. Gbadegesin writes, " A member may call upon the group to help him harvest or plant or clear the weeds. He only has to feed the participants and later he may be called upon to help[xxxiv]".

African society also discourages the individualistic concept of property rights. Teffo writes:

> Hence most things are jointly owned by the group, for instance there was no such things as individual land ownership. The land belonged to the people and was merely under the control of the local chief on behalf of the people. When cattle went to graze it was on an open veld and not on anybody's specific farm.[xxxv]

3.3c. Consensus and Democracy.

Social life and the centrality of relationships in African society are very explicit in the way the Africans conduct their meetings. At meetings, everybody is given an opportunity to air their view, and decisions are taken after everyone has spoken. This method of arriving at consensus is based on the view of humanity that holds that all people are equal. Louw says:

> Traditional Africa democracy operates in the form of (continuous extremely lengthy) discussion. Although there may be hierarchy of importance among the speakers, every person gets an equal chance to speak up until some kind of an agreement, consensus or group cohesion is reached[xxxvi].

3.3d. Ancestors.

Traditionally, Africans have a practical relationship with the dead. The ancestors are seen as living dead. Although they are dead it is believed that their spirits are still alive in the family and the community. During traditional ceremonies and rituals, their spirits are invoked to bless the occasion. People entertain them during feasts by throwing food or pouring wine on the ground. People also invoke the ancestors before embarking on journeys and business endeavours. If they are successful, they make thanksgiving offerings to them. An individual who commits evil in the community is taken to have disgraced the ancestors. Louw writes:

> Ancestors are extended family. Dying is an ultimate
> homecoming. Not only the living must therefore share with
> and care for each other, but the living and the dead depend
> on each other. This accords with the daily experience of
> many (traditional) Africans. For example, at a *calabash*,
> which is an African ritual that involves the drinking of beer,
> a little bit of wine is often poured on the ground for
> consumption of ancestors. And as is probably well known
> (yet often misunderstood), many Africans also belief in God
> through the mediation of ancestors. In Africa societies there
> seems to be inextricable bond between man, ancestors, and
> whatever is regarded as the Supreme Being... [xxxvii]

3.4. Explanation of Some of the Values of Ubuntu.

The African person does not live a flourishing life by only recognizing the

importance of community in her life and attaching herself to a particular community,

rather she becomes a fully actualised person that lives a flourishing life by relating

and living well with others in her community. A good relationship that leads to

human flourishing in African society is a relationship that is based on the ethic of

Ubuntu.

> The ethical values and virtues of Ubuntuism are plentiful and
> vary from author to author; but the most frequently
> mentioned are those of solidarity, respect, sharing, loyalty,
> cooperation, participation, caring, humaneness, sympathy and
> empathy[xxxviii].

The individual, as it has been shown in this work, who embodies and practices the

values of Ubuntu, is a good person. She is the one who lives a flourishing life in

African society. These values are lived and practiced in the community; they are

primarily concerned with human relationships since the individual is defined in

relationships with others – umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu.

Broodryk explains some of these values of Ubuntu in social relationships[xxxix]. I shall examine each in turn:

Humanity

Ubuntu upholds the value of humanity. It is this value that calls the African to treat every person as a human being. It is the value that shows that the human person is an empathic person who identifies with the problems and sufferings of others. It is respect for human dignity.

Respect

Respect is an important concept in Ubuntu and it is related to discipline and order. It is believed where there is respect there is always unity and progress. Children are obligated to respect their parents, young people are expected to respect their elders, and followers their leaders. Ubuntu advocates that every person should be respected. Thus, parents, elders and leaders should also show respect to others. The living also expected to respect the ancestors as they are regarded as the guardians of the family and the community.

Caring

Caring is an important value in African society. Parents are naturally required to care for their children and children to care for their parents in their old age. That is why, in African society, there are no old age homes as the aged are cared for by their children. Extended family members and the community at large care for the disabled and the underprivileged.

Hospitality

Visitors and strangers are often surprised by the way they are received and treated in African society. Rems Nna Umashiegbu in his book, *The Way We Lived*[rd], said that in Ibo society, when there was a visitor, the neighbours would all entertain the visitor in turn. The wife would go to the host or hostess to bring the visitor to her house. Secretly, she would find out what the visitor liked and then prepare that food. When the guest arrived, *Kola* would be served and food brought. It would be a sign of disrespect for the visitor to refuse the food. On the other hand, visitors were not supposed to finish all the food. They were expected to leave some morsel of it. Children who wash plates and dishes would be unhappy if they did not find remnants of food on the plates or dish.

Sharing

In daily Ubuntu life, assets and food are shared without compensation as if the belongings of the individual are also the belongings of the extended family members. In African culture, food is always shared together by all those at meetings, funerals, or the work place. Sometimes, a bottle of beer may be shared by five or six people, all drinking from the bottle. One person will drink and pass on to another until the beer is finished.

The individual who can participate well in society in such way that leads to the realisation of personhood in African society is the individual who has acquired all the values of Ubuntu, and practices them. It is the responsibility of the family and the community at large to see that a child is equipped with these values in order to be able

to relate well with others in the community. Children learn quickly through observations. The parents and adults should endeavour to set good examples for the young ones. If children observe adults being kind, caring and respectful to one another, consequently they will learn the importance of those values in realisation of their own human flourishing and that of the community. The way the community responds to the needs of her members serves to show the young to value the humanity of others.

Any individual in African society that values the humanity of others in the way embodied by these values will surely live a flourishing life. Where the values of Ubuntu namely humanity, caring, sharing, sympathy, compassion, solidarity and so on, permeate the whole community, the children will eventually embody those values of Ubuntu. Broodryk writes:

> Love is fundamental to Ubuntu. It is amazing how it reflects when children are brought up in atmosphere of love and compassion. Children growing up in an atmosphere of love are usually children who are also living the (Ubuntu) values ... they are kind, forgiving, empathic and sympathetic...[xli]

The community also through various initiations and ritual activities instil in the young ones, the laws, customs and values that hold the community together:

> Initiation schools are traditional institutions, which may be seen as the version of finishing school. Young adults attend these schools where they become men and women and during these periods they also taught traditional lessons of life, cultural norms and values. After attending these schools young adults are accepted by adulthood as adults and are regarded as ready to engage in marriage.[xlii]

These values are meant to help the individual to live and relate well with others in her community. It is by living well with others in the community that the individual

attains personhood in African society, that is, lives a flourishing life. Thus the kind of community that instils the values of Ubuntu in the young and provides them with the social conditions for practising these values is the right society for human flourishing.

3.5. Critical Comparison between Aristotelian Ethics and African Ethics.

It seems that the notion of the good life in Aristotle's ethics is structurally similar to the notion of the good life in African society. The good life is lived and realised in a community or social milieu. It is a question of an agent relating well with the other members of her community. Both accounts are based on a conception of person that is essentially social. It is the community and the family that are essential in the formation of ethical character leading to human flourishing. Furthermore, crucially, it is only in certain networks of relationships that the individual can practice virtue, or the values of Ubuntu, so achieving her *telos*.

The Aristotelian individual, through the circle of her virtuous friends, can acquire virtues and learn how to act virtuously towards her friends. From acting virtuously with her friends she learns too that she is ought to live well with others who are not the members of her circle of love. Similarly, the African person through good social relationship with her family acquires the Ubuntu values of caring, sharing, respect, humanity and so on that will help her to relate well with other members of her community who are not the members of her extended family. In the Aristotelian account, the friend needs her virtuous friends to enjoy life and express her goodness to others. In this same way, the African person needs the extended family and the community to live and enjoy life and express her goodness.

I have also shown that the realisation of human flourishing is an ongoing process both in Aristotelian and African ethics. Human flourishing is an act of living well. The individual is continuously challenged to express the virtues, or the values of Ubuntu relations with others,

According to the Aristotelian account, virtuous friends care for one another and extend this caring to the whole community because their lives are embedded in the life of the community. Similarly, a member of a particular African community cares and respects the community because she is part of the community and her life is dependent on the community. Thus an individual can flourish in both Aristotle and African ethics when the community or society is the kind of society that is required for human flourishing: a society that provides social conditions for the flourishing of each of the members of the community; a society that does not stifle the individual's autonomy and initiatives, but is, indeed, the necessary backdrop for this. As should now be evident, the social conditions required for flourishing are established when the individual is embedded in a network of the right kind of relationships: relationships that embody the virtues, or the values of Ubuntu.

The aim of formation of ethical character is to enable the individual to be a good person; to attain human flourishing. It is the community that forms the individual by instilling the virtues or the values of Ubuntu in children. This can only be achieved when a good community – a community that values the virtues, or the values of Ubuntu - is in place. The community aims to ensure that what the child sees as pleasant and useful are acts that accord with virtues, or the values of Ubuntu.

Just as the virtues need to be actively exercised in virtuous friendships for individuals to achieve flourishing so to do the values of Ubuntu need to be actively exercised for individuals to achieve full personhood or live a flourishing life.

In what follows I examine in detail how the exercise of the values of Ubuntu in African social relations is similar to the exercise of virtues in virtuous friendship in Aristotelian ethics. This illustrates the crucial role that the right kinds of networks of social relations play in achieving human flourishing.

The Extended family

The members of extended family normally see themselves as brothers and sisters. There is no discrimination amongst them. In other words, they value the humanity of each other. Each person sees the other person as herself and loves her as she loves her own self; they share in the joy and sorrows of one another. They are ready and willing to come to the help of the other. Each is encouraged to respect the other. As they live and interact together daily, they learn more about each other and come to cherish their unity.

From this extended family system they come to appreciate and respect the dignity of the other members of community who do not belong to their own extended family. For, from valuing the humanity of their extended family they acquire the moral disposition to treat every other person as their own brother and sister. Moreover, they care for their community as their lives are embedded in the community, and because some members of the extended family may have friends and colleagues who do not

belong to the family and these people's lives directly or indirectly affect the lives of the members of the extended family.

Similarly, according to the Aristotelian account, virtuous persons through their virtuous friendships, learn to care for other members of the community: some of them may have friends who are outside of their circle of virtuous friendships and yet who also indirectly determine the flourishing life of the members of their intimate circle of friends.

Stokvel

Here, the values of caring and sharing are very prominent. Every member is always encouraged to care for the others in the group, and to share what she has with the others. It is when money, food, clothing, and sometimes even knowledge about life, is shared among themselves that they are bound to experience their friendliness. What they gain from the stokvel, they take home to their community to share with those who are not members of their club. Just as the virtuous person learns form her virtuous friendships that she ought to care for those who are not members of her circle of friends, as the outsiders are also the members of the community in which her life is played out, so are the benefits of stokvel shared amongst the whole community.

Consensus and Democracy

The African process of consensus and democracy can be likened to the expression of virtuous friendship in Aristotelian ethics. In African society at meetings everybody is given opportunity to her view. This is based on the value of humanity that sees every person as being equal. During meetings they discuss social, political, economic and

ethical issues, which provide the attendants the opportunity to learn from each other about their community. They learn, among other thing, about the things the community advocates and abhors, and to assess themselves if they are living in harmony with the members of the community and the community at large, and also to make amends where these is called for. Broodryk says:

> The Ubuntu norms and values of the community are similarly respected since they determine life in that community. If one has been offended by a member of the community, other extended family members would collectively become involved in discussing the offence to settle the problem in order to maintain peace and unity[xliii].

Similarly, the virtuous in their interaction with one another, assess their behaviour to ensure that they are still on the track that leads to living a virtuous life. Each person is a mirror to the other.

Ancestors

Another area of African life where values of Ubuntu are exercised actively is in relationship to the ancestors. The living are encouraged and expected daily to respect their ancestors. To commit an abomination such as murder is to dishonour the ancestors. Being disrespectful of one's parents and elders of the community is considered as being disrespectful of the ancestors who are believed to be guiding the family and the community. Thus the value, respect, is actively exercised daily as people interact and live together with the ancestors. This suggests that the network of what can be understood as virtuous relationships in African society, extends to the relations between the visible and the invisible worlds.

One important difference between Aristotelian ethics and African ethics is that Aristotle holds that human beings are first and foremost rational animals. It is this rational capacity that necessitates, in a sense, her social relations with others, for it is only in social relationships that the individual can pursue her rational activities. According to African ethics, however, a person exists immediately in relation to others once she is born. She is primarily a social being. Kanyike writes: "It is not reason as such that determines human existence, but relation[xliv]"

Moreover, the African person exists also in relation with the visible and invisible worlds. Through ritual she is reminded of her ancestry and the role the ancestors play both in her life and that of the community, and she is taught that to violate communal values and customs is to bring disgrace to the ancestors and community. Aristotle, however, makes no reference to the role of ancestor in virtuous living.

Having developed an account of the kind of society required for human flourishing, I aim, in the next chapter, to critically examine the radical, postmodern individualism prevalent in (mostly western) contemporary societies in order to determine whether such individualism can provide the conditions required for the formation of ethical character that leads to human flourishing. African society itself is becoming individualistic at a very fast pace. Africans came into contact with the western world through colonialism. Schooled in the western thought, western individualism has been followed by many at the expense of African humanism or Ubuntu. I investigate whether this individualistic ethic does or does not foster the conditions for human flourishing that Aristotelian and African ethics support.

ENDNOTES.

[i] It is quite well known that Aristotle was an aristocrat as he believed that the good life was meant for just a few. I distance my self from his aristocratic stand in that I believe that flourishing is not in principle restricted to any class of persons, though sometimes circumstances or bad luck can prevent an individual from reaching eudaimonia.

[ii] P. Tabensky, *Happiness, Personhood, Community, Purpose.* (USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), pp149-150

[iii] The conditions are external in the sense of being external to the individual.

[iv] P. Tabensky, *Op.cit*, p.157

[v] Carolyn Ray, Friendship in Aristotle Nichomachean Ethics, Indian University, 1989. http://enlghtenment.supersaturated.com/essay/arist.../aristfriend.htm., p.4

[vi] P.Tabensky, *Op.cit*, p.160.

v. C. Ray, *Op.cit*, p.5

[viii] P. Tabensky, *Op.cit*, p.163

[ix] M. C. A. Pfaff, Core Values: The Problems of Justification and Motivation, http:/www.usafa.af.mil/JSCOPE99/Pfaff99.html. p.5

[x] P. Tabensky, *Op.cit*, p.169,

[xi] Ibid, p.171

[xii] Ibid, p.175

[xiii] M. Cornforth, *The Open Philosophy and The Open Society*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), pp225-226

[xiv] P.Tabensky, *Op.cit*, p.134

[xv] Ibid, p.180

[xvi] Ibid, p.187

[xvii] Ibid, p.150

[xviii] Frank M. Flanagan, Virtue Ethics and Education, http://uk.geocities.com/limerickphilos/virtueethicsand educationI.htm, p.6

[xix] E. Kanyike, *The Principle of Participation in African Cosmology and Anthropology*, (Malawi, Monfort Media, 2004), p.138.

[xx] D.J.Louw, Ubuntu and the Challenge of Multiculturalism in post- apartheid South Africa. http://www.phys.uu.nl/-unitwin/Ubuntu.html, p.5

[xxi] C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, (London: Heinemann, 1958)

[xxii] Ibid, p.9

[xxiii] F. A. Irele, The Crisis of Cultural Memory in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v4/v4i3al.htm, p.9

[xxiv] C.Achebe, *Op.cit*, p.112

[xxv] Ibid, p.113

[xxvi] Ibid, p.113

[xxvii] Ibid, p.124-125

[xxviii] C. Brucker, Chinua Achebe, 1930- In Survey of World Literature, 1992. http://Ifa.atu.edu./Brucker/ Achebe.html p.4

[xxix] C.Achebe, *Op.cit*, p.6

[xxx] Ibid, p.15

[xxxi] Ibid, p.16

[xxxii] J. Broodryk, *Ubuntu , Life Lessons from Africa*, (Pretoria: Ubuntu School of Philosophy, 2002), p.96

[xxxiii] D.J.Louw, *Op.cit*, p.5

[xxxiv] S.Gbadegesin, *African Philosophy, Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*, (New York: Peterlang, 1991),p.66

[xxxv] Lessiba Teffo, "Moral Renewal and African Experience(s)", in W.Makgoba (ed), *African Renaissance*, (Cape Town: Mafube Publishing Ltd, 1999), p.156

[xxxvi] D.J.Louw, *Op.cit*, p.2

[xxxvii] Ibid

[xxxviii] O. Yurkivska, A Question Mark Against Ubuntu: Comparissons with Russian Communitarians, hhtp://www.crvp.org/book/ Series02/11-7/chapter-vi.htm p.1

[xxxix] J. Broodryk, *Op.cit*, 32-38

[xl] R.N.Umeasiegbu, *The Way We Lived*, (London, Heinemann,1969),p.39

[xli] J. Broodryk, *Op.cit.* p.38

[xlii] Ibid, p.95

[xliii] Ibid, p.55

[xliv] E.Kanyike,*Op.cit*,p.138

CHAPTER 4

A Critique of Contemporary Individualism

4.1. Introduction.

In this chapter, I will use the ideas of communitarians such as Charles Taylor, Alisdair Macintyre, Michael Sandel, and Pedro Tabensky, as well as the account developed in the previous chapter to critique contemporary postmodern individualism. My overarching aim is to show that this contemporary individualistic ethic does not create the kind of society required for human flourishing, as it does not foster the conditions for formation of ethical character that Aristotle and African ethics advocate. I will also argue in this chapter, for a renewal of African moral values at the expense of the values of contemporary postmodern individualism.

4.2. A Critique of Contemporary Individualistic Society

Whether a society is an individualistic or communitarian depends largely on the concept of personhood it holds and entertains. Kwame Gyekye says ".... The type of social structure or arrangements evolved by a particular society seems to reflect and be influenced by the public conception of personhood held in the society'". Thus a society that maintains, for example, an individual psychological criterion for personhood or personal identity is likely to be an individualistic society. In such a society a person is understood to be a person through her individual psychological features. The self becomes viewed as a self-sufficient, atomic individual, who does not need to depend on her relationship with others for her personhood. In such society, individualism is much stressed and emphasised. It is widely thought that this has been the nature of western society since the Enlightenment.

Charles Taylor speaks of the influence of Locke on today's understanding of the western person:

> The subject of disengagement and rational control has become a familiar modern figure. One might almost say it has become one way of construing ourselves, which we find it hard to shake off. It is one aspect of our inescapable contemporary sense of inwardness. As it develops to its full form through Locke and the Enlightenment thinkers he influenced, it becomes what I want to call the 'punctual' self[ii].

Taylor further states "Locke's theory generates and also reflects an ideal of independence and self-responsibility, a notion of reason as free from established custom and locally dominant authority[iii]". Rosalind Shaw also notices the movement from the communitarian type of society to the present day individualism of the western society:

> ...an evolutionary trajectory from personne to moi, from a relational model of personhood as the exterior acting out of social roles to an 'inherent attribute' based on selfhood in terms of an interior psychological essence. This trajectory, more over, is viewed as a movement from socially "constrained" agency to political "freedom". And "freedom" finally is understood in terms of the Rights of man - rights that are themselves largely defined in terms of the absence of social constraints upon individual agency[iv].

Shaw further states:

> ...in both the United States and Britain today, the language of "freedom of speech", "freedom of choice", "individual opportunity", "the individual right to privacy", etc, is central to nationalist self- constructions as optimal societies for 'individuals'- and "individuals" are thereby defined in terms of their capacity for autonomous actions.[v]

Alisdair Macintyre describing this idea of individualism says:

> ...From this standpoint of individualism I am what I myself choose to be. I can always, if I wish to, put in question what

are taken to be the merely contingent social features of my
existence. I may be biologically be my father's son; but I
cannot be held responsible for what he did unless I choose
implicitly or explicitly to assume such responsibility...[vi]

Thus, according to individualism, the individual is the only architect of her life.
Objective values, community and traditions have no place in individualism, unless the
individual chooses it to be so. Furthermore, the state exists with the sole aim of
providing the individual with freedom. According to individualism, everything is
contingent. Our hopes, desires, language, our conscience, community, and our
solidarity are all contingent by-products of chance and time.

Though a person is considered to be an individual in atomistic sense, this does not
imply that she cannot relate socially. According to individualism, she maintains social
relationships but always remains autonomous. The goals of the society need not be
her own goals for she has the freedom to remake the goals of the society to suit her.
Society is there to respect her rights, while she remains autonomous of the authority
of her clan or nation.

The rise of individualism in western society can be linked to the rise of democracy.
Nivedita Menon tracing the history of democracy in his article *The Rise of
Democracy*[vii], says that historically the rise of democracy has been intrinsically linked
to the growth of capitalism. He argues that modern democratic ideas grew initially in
order to nurture the growth of capitalism. He maintains too that the key notion of the
individual, invested with rights to her body and property emerged at this time,
replacing the idea of the self as an extension of the community.

African society, as I mentioned above, has and is embracing individualism to a large

extent. A.T. Dalfovo maintains that:

> African culture has always had the communal dimension of
> life and ethics as a strong and healthy asset. Today, however,
> one needs to reckon with an intensive and relentless influence
> of individualism brought about by contemporary social change
> emerging, for instance, in urban life, job competition,
> economic management and privatisation policies...[viii]

Preston Chitere, commenting on the influence of western civilisation on African

community, says:

> The effects of capitalism are already being felt in our families.
> Individualism in society is increasing. Even families in rural
> areas like to operate in isolation, and those who offer any help
> are keen to help their immediate families only. The (conjugal)
> family is becoming more independent. The loss of community
> networks and the development of individualism have resulted
> in (increased occurrences of) suicide, loneliness, drug abuse
> and mental illness. The communal system is breaking down.
> The extended family had certain functions to perform, for
> instance, to reconcile couples at loggerheads with each other,
> but this is no longer the case. It is no one (else's) business to
> know what is happening in one's marriage today[ix].

Thus, the traditional African family structure is breaking up due to rapid social

change. John Lawson Degbey says that under these conditions it is failing to fulfil its

primary role of socialisation. In the urban centres we see a nuclear family system

growing rapidly at the expense of the extended family system. It is now a matter of

the individual's life, her house, her flat, her possessions, and no longer a matter of the

traditional usage of our farm, our home, sharing all happiness, woes, successes of the

extended family loyalty and being responsible to one's elders[x].

Contemporary individualism has attracted many criticisms from communitarians such

as Charles Taylor, Alsdair Macintyre, Michael Sandel and Pedro Tabensky because,

in keeping with Aristotelian and African ethics, these theorists believe that the self is essentially social and that, consequently, individualism does not provide a proper moral framework for the flourishing of human beings.

For the postmodern individual, the most radical strand of individualism, absolutely everything about herself is contingent. Communal or social ties are external to herself, as are values, to be picked up or discarded at will. It is my claim that such a view of the individual cannot possibly provide the conditions necessary for human flourishing. As discussed above, these conditions are primarily social and consist primarily in the individual being embedded in a network of the right sort of relationships to others.

In Nicholas Smith's book, *Strong Hermeneutics: Contingency and Moral Identity*[xi], Taylor claims that a person is a being for whom things matter. So, in attempting to understand the actions of a person, one must take into account interpretations of what matters for the person. The identity of a person is particularly dependent on self – interpretations. For Taylor, we are selves only because certain things matter to us. Interpretation serves to disclose what these things are. Not every thing matters. What matters for a person is good life not a mere life, worthwhile not worthless, significant not trivial. The identity of a person is intelligible in virtue of their capacity to make such distinctions. The things that make the life of a person or group of persons worthwhile, significant and fulfilling is that which defines the good life for that individual or group. Taylor gives three different strata to the good life otherwise identified as three axes of moral intuitions or moral thinking.

1) A good life will be meaningful and fulfilling

2) A course of life can possess various degrees of dignity; a life lacking

   dignity lacks goodness.

3) Individuals have obligations to others.

The good is a kind of interpretation Taylor calls strong evaluation. Most often, objects are evaluated and choices are made on the basis of what a person happens to desire. Strong evaluation employs qualitative distinctions concerning the worth of alternative desires, and indeed alternative courses of action and way of living. This evaluative framework guides the way we think, act and feel; and this framework is implicitly or explicitly expressed in our moral conduct and reactions. The measure of evaluation in such cases is not a mere preference, but an independent standard of worth against which the values of *de facto* desire satisfaction are questioned.

For Taylor, a person's sense of self and identity is conceptually tied to strong evaluation. He holds that since a person is a being for whom things matter, a particular person's identity is what particularly matters for that person. I am specifically this person rather than the other because I take this kind of life to be fulfilling and that kind of life to be empty, or because I interpret this course of action as right and that action wrong. In answering these questions about identity, Taylor says the individual is forced to take a stand in the space provided by a framework of strong evaluation. Thus strong evaluation for Taylor is a criterion of personhood. A self-identity that is formed against a background of strong evaluation is non-contingent in that desires stand measurable against an independent source of worth.

Taylor holds that doing without such a framework is utterly impossible, for the horizons within which we live our life and which give them meaning must include these strong qualitative distinctions or horizon of significance. This horizon is independent of one's background or culture: in other words it is universal, categorical and ontological. To be without this sense of orientation, which the strong evaluation provides, is to have an identity crisis. To suffer an identity crisis is to be incapable of answering why a life should be lived one way rather than other. A person who fails to answer this question suffers a kind of acute disorientation or emptiness. For Taylor, a person who loses orientation to her horizon of significance loses all resources for answering the question 'Who am I'?

Taylor, elsewhere[xii], argues that the self is not independent of the moral obligations of the group that she finds herself in. The group's expectation and values help the self determine what is valuable, good and worth having or doing. In this way the group, or the community, gives the self frameworks to evaluate her actions. Taylor sees the self as social in another way: by the words the self uses for self-interpretation. The words the self uses in describing and interpreting her actions, feelings, desires and situations are interrelated and interdependent. Each has meaning or significance in relation to other words. For Taylor, this important relationship between the words the self uses in her self-interpretation entails an equally essential relation between the self and other selves in the community.

Taylor has two reasons for holding this view. The first reason is that for the self to be able perform self-interpretations she must have access to a vocabulary that embodies them, and for Taylor a language is only meaningful in a language community;

amongst those who have access to and understand the vocabulary. The second reason is that the answer to the question 'Who am I?' can only be found in my relations to other selves, by establishing where I speak from in the family tree, in social space, in my intimate relations to my loved ones. Thus one is a self amongst others. This relationship between the self and other selves determines partly the identity of the self.

On Macintyre's Aristotelian view, known as the narrative view[xiii], the self shares a history with others. The story of a self's life is part of the stories of others and their own stories are part of her own story. In this community of story telling people, the self is educated about virtues, which help the members of the community to seek the communal good. This communal good is the good life for human beings. The self *qua* individual will not be able to seek the human good or exercise the Aristotelian virtues alone. The self with other selves has got a certain *telos*; a goal to which they all aim. As a member of the community what is good for the self has to be good for the others who inhabit the community. The rightful expectations and obligations of the community become the expectations and obligations of the self.

For Michael Sandel[xiv], the self is social in the sense that she is not independent of her constitutive attachments. Constitutive attachments here imply the family, clan or community. The self's responsibilities and commitment to her attachments and those attachment's responsibilities to the self make up the self's history. This history gives the self a character. It is her history that influences her choices and conducts. The self as social bears a lot of moral responsibilities towards herself and her constitutive attachments. As the self is capable of, she is capable of self-knowledge, which arises

from reflecting about her moral obligations and responsibilities the self shares the same constitutive attachments with the other selves she is capable of forming friendships.

These communitarian theorists can be read as echoing the communitarian accounts discussed in the previous three chapters. Communitarians argue that contemporary individualism overlooks the fact that human beings are naturally communal in nature. Because individualism fails to underscore this fact, it makes it problematic for the realisation of the human good, which is communal in content. For communitarians, the human good cannot be realised in a society whereby the self is individuated, and autonomous from her end and the choices that she makes. They hold that human good is only possible in the community or society where the self is attached to her aims and ends. and exists in a certain networks of social relationships. It is within communal frameworks, they argue, that morality is rational and meaningful, for, it is within such frameworks that the obligations and goals of the community become the goals of its citizens.

Sandel would say that the individuated self is incapable of character, friendship, and self-knowledge. She is incapable because she does not have any constitutive attachments. That this attachment does situate us in relationship with others and make us have commitments to them, which in turn define our character and gives us self-knowledge. According to Macintyre and Sandel, individualism relies on the idea that individuals are atomistic, independent of and prior to the society. Society is an aim or end, which the people can decide to choose or not. Thus, when individuated or 'unencumbered' selves choose to form a society, their society is a sort of mutual

cooperation without any strong bond between the members. They are only members
of the society because of the advantages they derive from it. The communitarians
argue that in the society of individuated selves, there is no unity of life because there
is no common goal uniting the people, since any unencumbered self is free to choose
her own means to arrive at her own ends. According to Macintyre, the world of
unencumbered, individuated selves does not provide the framework necessary for the
practise of Aristotelian virtues:

> For a self separated from itself in the Satrian mode loses that
> arena of social relationship in which Aristotelian virtues
> function if they function at all...at the same time the
> liquidation of the self into a set of demarcated areas of role
> playing allows no scope for the exercise of dispositions which
> could be genuinely be accounted virtues in any sense remotely
> Aristotelian[xv].

And Taylor says:

> ... any adequate conception of morality, of the self and its
> narrative unity, and of practical reasoning must acknowledge
> the foundational importance of moral frameworks or
> qualitative distinctions; and all such frameworks are
> essentially communal in nature: they can be established,
> maintained and acquired only through the membership of a
> language community[xvi].

As I mentioned earlier, one of the strata of good life, according to Taylor, is that the
individual has obligations to others. Strong evaluation makes the individual aware of
her autonomy and the communal characteristics of her existence. Thus morality is
understood in the context of the community. This is not the case, however, according
to radical, postmodern individualism where morality is subjected to the whims and
caprices of the individual. Macintyre, who uses the term 'emotivist self' for the
contemporary person, says in regard to individualistic ethic, "...the emotivist self and

the corresponding decline of moral debate into the conflict of arbitrary personal wills

first became definitively established during the Enlightenment[xvii],"

Pedro Tabensky commenting on Macintyre's view of the emotivist self writes:

> I might further add to the detriment of a sense of our common
> essence - our common purpose. And I might also add that the
> lack of a sense that we have a common essence is not
> surprisingly, linked to the fact that the cotemporary subject is
> archetypically one that tends towards moral emptiness.
> Macintyre's critique of the modern democratised self parallels
> my critique of the contemporary self - the self who dwells in
> what could be characterized as the age of consumption...
> Macintyre's critique of the democratized self - the sort of self-
> fostered by contemporary consumption-driven neo-liberal
> democracies - is based on a critique of what he refers to as
> 'emotivism'. Macintyre defines emotivism as the thesis that
> states that all moral judgements are nothing but expressions of
> preference, expressions of attitudes or feelings...'.It is not
> hard to see why this characterization of emotivism ties in very
> neatly with the moral bankruptcy of the contemporary subject.
> If, indeed, one embodies emotivism - the sort of ethic
> embodied in neo - liberal communities - the there is ultimately
> no reason, except the whimsical reason that this is simply
> what one desires, to behave in one way rather than in another,
> for there is little sense that life has a direction[xviii].

In this kind of society where every body does and acts as she likes and deems fit, as

there is no communal evaluative framework, exploitation of others is likely. The

contemporary individualistic society is a kind of society that encourages the idea of

survival of the fittest. The weak are exploited, marginalized and disfranchised.

People are discriminated against because of their race, colour and gender. Everybody

attempts to use her fellow human beings in order to obtain unlimited freedom and

independence. Society is seen not as guaranty for safety or social welfare, but as a

means to make as much money as possible. Tabensky says:

> There are many other types of relationship in which engage
> daily that undermine the humanity of our fellow humans. I am

thinking of male attitudes towards women (which is exploited
to great effect by Hollywood, and the tabloid press), of the
attitude of transnational corporations in their relentless pursuit
of cheap labour in Asia (in particular), of the way in which we
engage with providers of goods and services, of the manner in
which dominant groups typically treat disadvantaged minority
groups.... However, there is a general reason why such
exploitative practices are fostered – namely, that the pluralism
embodied in contemporary neo- liberal democracies is
radically individualistic. The ethos embodied is one that blinds
people to one of the fundamental conditions of individuality-
our radical interconnectedness[xix].

The idea of postmodern individualism does not, then, support the idea of

communitarian common welfare. In the individualistic society, every individual is

expected to cater for her own needs, and sometimes the needs of her nuclear family.

One then wonders who will carter for the needs of the disabled or dependent who do

not fit the model of the autonomous individual?

It is the virtues, and the values of Ubuntu that make truly people consider and care for

the needs of every human person. We cannot build the kind of society required for

human flourishing, the kind of society that will help us to be virtuous, if we cannot

respond to the needs some people have due to factors beyond their control.

To return to a point made earlier, Degbey says in his article, Africa Family

Structure[xx], that the traditional African society has also come under the influence of

individualism which has not only transformed the society's orientation but also has

distorted the social system. He contends too that the traditional family structure under

pressure from rapid social change is undergoing erosion, and is splitting to such an

extent that it is failing to fulfil its primary role of socialisation. In the modern era, he

says, family has gradually shrunk to become the nuclear family, consisting only of

parents and their children, thus denying the parents the help they once received from extended family support networks. As a consequence, many parents find it extremely difficult to carry out all their work and family responsibilities.

Degbey says the situation has become worse in our contemporary period due to the fact that the stability of marriage has been seriously threatened. Marriage has gradually become the individual's concern rather than a business of two families who give their daughter or son respectively and support the marriage through counselling and financial assistance. Lack of active involvement of extended family in marriage today has its consequences: The divorce rate has risen sharply and the number of single parents has increased dramatically, says Degbey. The children of these broken homes suffer. Many children of broken homes today end up in the street to earn a living. Street life, with its freedom, and lack of family control is not without its repercussions; the end result is that our society is filled with individuals without morals, tribal mores or traditions. Degbey claims that unwanted pregnancies and abortion, among girls, become the order of the day. Others may attracted to early marriages and others may take to prostitution thereby standing at a high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

The good life for human beings, as I argued in the previous chapter, can only be realised in a community. Contemporary individualistic society does not foster the conditions for human flourishing that African and Aristotle ethics advocate. As it has been shown earlier, human flourishing is only possible when the individual practises the virtues, or the values of Ubuntu. The virtues, or the values of Ubuntu are only intelligible in social engagements; it is social engagements that the individual is

challenged to express her goodness to others. When the individual expresses her goodness to others by living well with them she achieves human flourishing. Good character formation can be achieved only in a community where the agent is trained and encouraged to practise the virtues, or the values of Ubuntu.

However, we are not yet condemned to a completely dehumanising and selfish society. This is explicit in the formation of European Union and existence of certain charitable organisations. The countries of Europe are coming together to form a united community. It has been argued by many that main aim of European union is for economic and commercial gains and not a communal life. An unidentified writer says:

> It is significant that the politicians are organizing a united Europe whereas there is a complete failing of social unity and justice. For the people there are no possibilities to develop themselves as individualists. Since united Europe will be organized as a commercial enterprise ordinary people only count as inevitable expenses. Of course, one tries to make those expenses as low as possible. And there is no interest in creating conditions for individual development except when there should be a need for educated employees for the business. But such individuality is limited to a prescribed form of behaviour. It is but a cosmetic individuality[xxi]

I claim that no matter how they view the European union, the union is directly or indirectly aimed at providing a flourishing life for Europeans. I hope to have shown that human flourishing can only be realised or reached in communal living whereby the adults and the community instill Aristotelian virtues and the values of Ubuntu in the children by being virtuous themselves.

As I mentioned above, the western world is taking greater interest than ever before in African society. Today, Koffi Annan is carrying the whole world on his shoulders as

the secretary general of United Nations. In 2010, the whole world is coming to the African continent for the first time to watch the soccer world cup. The world is in many ways becoming one global community.

The traditional African society has got a lot to offer to the world for the global village to become a reality. It has to offer to the world its communal values based on Ubuntu. Ubuntu, the African ethic, means total respect for the humanness of other persons. It is the ethical value that teaches the individual that the other person is her brother or sister regardless of her colour or creed. African ethics, just like Aristotelian ethics, is based on the concept of human nature; a conception of human nature that shows that human being is essentially social and rational. African ethics is in accord with our human nature and it has the solution to the unjust and dehumanising world of individualism. If values of Ubuntu were to be put into practise by every one we shall all live a life that is truly flourishing. Hence Africans should be proud of their values, and not allow them to be undermined by the individualistic postmodernist life. N. B. Pityana says:

> The cause of Africa is never going to be served by prevailing moral relativism and selectivity. There must be some common, shared and abiding values that bind us together for all time. The mark of a great people is their capacity to wrestle with the moral challenges of their time and lay the foundations of the good society for this and future generations. We are at our most human when we display moral sensitivity. That is the mark of ubuntu; the creed that has held many Africans to an ideal that affirms one's humanity as being tied up with the humanity of others. The greatest gift we can bequeath to future generations to a world that is more not less human, more caring and more loving[xxii].

L. Teffo gives a very deep insight into the link between moral renewal and African
renaissance, which also brings into prominent of dynamism of African moral values. I
will quote him at length:

> The African renaissance is an invitation to Africans – those on
> the continent and in the diaspora- to redefine themselves and
> take their destiny into their own hands... where lies the anchor
> of this African renaissance? Arguably it lies in moral renewal
> through African values. Politics and economics undoubtedly
> have a role to play, however, without a moral conscience,
> society is soulless. I recommend that we resuscitate the moral
> fibre of the family. The family unit is the foundation of
> society. Let us as parents live according to those norms and
> values we hold dear in our hearts, however demanding that
> might be. Let us inculcate those values in our children from a
> tender age. Let us remain mindful of the Kikuyu expression
> that it takes the whole village to raise a child. Let us introduce
> the study of the philosophy of *ubuntu/botho*, *menslikkheid* or
> humanness in religious studies, ethics, applied ethics,
> jurisprudence, and so forth. Let us support all initiatives by
> civil society to renew morality. Let us be true to ourselves and
> our culture... The existence of premodern, modern and
> postmodern discourse already illustrates the availability of
> alternative ways of structuring human experience. Morality
> implies respect for others. The respect for the other is partly
> based on the fact that the relationship exposes contingency in
> the being of both. With one communal or national effort
> taking a leaf from the traditional values encapsulated in
> African humanism, we can generate a unifying force that can
> enable us to transcend the stereotypes of yesteryear. In
> *ubuntu/botho* we can draw sustenance from our diversity,
> honouring our rich and varied traditions and cultures, and act
> together for the development, protection and benefit of us all.
> This philosophy recognises the indivisibility of human nature,
> and the commonness of purpose of human beings which make
> our interests, aspirations and objective intertwined. It believes
> in the totality of human effort and a holistic involvement in
> the quest for love and peace in the family of man, in the
> universal order of things[xxiii].

For our society to be a good a kind of society required for human flourishing, it
should be organised and structured along the lines made explicit by Aristotelian and
African ethics. Contemporary individualism cannot provide us with these conditions
for human flourishing, as I have argued above. African communal values are the

solution to the selfish and individualistic society that encourages inequality and oppression. It is high time Africans, and others appreciate the values of Ubuntu and make a serious effort to live them out in their daily lives.

ENDNOTES.

[i] Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought. The Akan Conceptual Scheme.* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1987), p.317

[ii] C. Taylor, *Sources of the self. The Making of the Modern Identity.*(USA: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.160

[iii] Ibid, p.167

[iv] R. Shaw, "Tok Af, Lef Af. " A Political Economy of Temne Techniques of Secrecy and Self", In I. Karp and D.A. Masolo (eds.), *African Philosophy As Cultural Inquiry,* (USA: Indiana University Press, 2000), p.27

[v] Ibid,

[vi] A. Macintyre, "The Virtues and the Unity of a Human Life and the Concept of a Tradition", In M. Sandel (ed.) Liberalism and its Critics, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p.142

[vii] N. Menon, The Rise of Democracy, http://www.hinduomnet.com/folio/fo0001/00010220.htm, p.2

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[x] J.l.Degbey, Africa Family Structure, http://www.jicef.or. jp /wahec/ful 217:htm

[xi] N.H.Smith, *Strong Hermeneutics: Contingency and Moral Identity,* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp.36-38

[xii] C.Taylor, "The Sources of Self" In S.Muhall and A.Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians,* (USA: Malden Mass, 1992), pp.111-113

[xiii] A. Macintyre, *Op.cit,* pp143-147

[xiv] M.Sandels, "Justice and the Good'" In M.Sandel (ed.) Liberalism and its Critics, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), pp.156-176

[xv] A. Macintyre, *Op.cit*, p.126

[xvi] C. Taylor, *Op.cit*, p.121

[xvii] A. Macintyre, "Morality after Virtue", In S. Muhall and A. Swift, Liberals and Communitarians, (USA: Malden Mass, 1984), p.77

[xviii] P. Tabensky, *Happiness. Personhod. Community. Purpose*, (USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), pp180-181

[xix] Ibid, p.180

[xx] J.L.Degbey, *Op.cit*. pp.4-6

[xxi] A Reflection On Individualism, http://home.wxs.nl/-filosvis/art-02.htm, p.5

[xxii] N. B. Pityana, World council of churches: Eight Assembly, Plenary: Ubuntu and the African Kairos, http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/assembly/afrip-e.html, p.4

[xxiii] L. Teffo, "Moral Renewal and African experience(s)", In W.Makgoba (ed.) African Renaissance,(Cape Town: Mafube Publishers, 1999), pp168-169

CONCLUSION

I have discussed, in this research, two accounts that attempt to determine the right way to live so that we can attain human flourishing, or eudaimonia. I have shown that there are significant similarities between these two accounts. Considering the two together can give us useful insight into the kind of society, or networks of relationships, that are required for the formation of ethical character, and thus for human flourishing. Furthermore I have shown that the ideals of individualism, particularly postmodern individualism, cannot hope to achieve the kind of society required for human flourishing, as such individualist accounts ignore the essentially social nature of both human beings and the good human life.

Aristotle bases his account of eudaimonia on account of human nature. He argues that man has a function, which is the capacity to reason, and it is this function that differentiates man from other animals. It is the thing that makes man what he is. He continues to argue that where a thing has a function, a good member of that kind is one that fully performs that function. Thus if the function of a sculptor is to sculpt statues, a good sculptor is one who sculpts statues properly. As the function of man is to actively exercise reason, human flourishing is achieved by an individual who actively exercises reason properly, argues Aristotle.

Crucially, Aristotle argues as essentially social beings, our capacity to reason can only be developed in society and, furthermore, the proper exercise of reason can only be developed in the right kind of society. A society is good when it advances the *telos* of ethical life of its members, which is eudaimonia. Aristotle holds that as persons are

naturally social, it is thus necessary and good for us to live in a society. Aristotle's strong stance on our essentially social nature is very explicit in his ideas about friendship. Friendship, especially virtuous friendships between human beings, is a necessary condition for the attainment of eudaimonia, he argues. Thus, social life in a community structured around networks of virtuous friendships is a necessary condition for our complete flourishing as a human being. A virtuous person cannot be virtuous or live virtuously unless she lives in a certain kind of relationship with and to others. It is by living with others, that is, in a virtuous community that the individual can become good and express her goodness to others.

Aristotle encourages every individual to develop virtues or dispositions that lead to living a good life. Virtues are those capacities or dispositions of character that enable us to understand any situations we might find ourselves in and react rationally and positively to those situations in order to avoid extremes and excesses so as to live a life that is worthy of us as humans. The virtues enable us to perform our function well.

The formation of ethical character is the process by which individuals become virtuous, or become fully rational in the Aristotelian sense. The formation of ethical character, because of our essentially social nature, is developed by upbringing in the right kind of society. Aristotle holds that virtues do not arise by nature; they cannot come about unless others train the agent, and the agent practises virtue. In other words, virtues are acquired by teaching and habituation. This attests to the communitarian nature of the individual and reflects the fact that human beings flourish in a community. When an individual becomes virtuous through doing good

continuously she starts to take pleasure in moral actions and choices thereby experiencing human flourishing that is eudaimonia.

Like Aristotelian ethics, African ethics is based on a particular account of the nature of persons. The African worldview comprises both the visible and invisible worlds and both worlds interact and relate, and are meaningful through the African person. The African person is defined in relation to these worlds and the other human beings around her. Today, the conception of person in Africa is enshrined in this Xhosa proverb "Muntu ungumuntu ngababntu" meaning "a person is a person through persons". The African worldview tells us that a person is a social being by nature and she can only succeed and survive in a community. Thus African ethics, which can be called Ubuntu, is only lived and realised in a social setting or community. There is no place for radical individualism in traditional African ethics. Ubuntu entails the values of humanity, caring, sharing, respect, love, kindness and compassion that ensure a happy and qualitative community life in a spirit of family.

A good person or a person of good character in African ethics is the one who embodies and practices all the values of Ubuntu in her community for her well being and that of her community. There is a kind of symbiotic relationship between the individual and community. Each member of the community stands in relationship to other members and they are united by one common goal, that is, the progress of the community and human flourishing of each other. The individual is given every encouragement to thrive and be what she wants to be. And a good community is the one that allows its members to express their talents and potentialities. And the individual always try not to bring disgrace to her community. She tries in her

endeavours to contribute to the progress and welfare of the community. In African community childrearing or training is a communal responsibility. It is only when there is cooperation in the society that the society becomes the kind that is required for human flourishing

I hope to have shown that the notion of good life in Aristotle's ethics is structurally similar to the notion of good life in African society. The good life is a question of the individual relating well with the other members of her community. Both are based on a conception of person that is essentially social. A life in the community is a life of dialogue. It is the community and family that are essential in the formation of ethical character leading to human flourish. I hope to have shown that an individual can only have flourishing life if her upbringing is within in the right kind of society. Crucial to this upbringing, is that the individual be embedded in certain networks of social relationships, particularly virtuous friendships.

I hope to have shown too that the social relationships in African ethics mirror the eudaimon, or virtuous friendship in Aristotelian ethics. African ethics, like Aristotelian ethics, does not explicitly talk about human rights. African ethics like Aristotelian ethics holds that if the values and virtues are operational they guarantee respect and dignity for the individual since a life lived in the right kind of society is a life that makes for human individual flourishing. I hope to have shown that African values can be explicated and understood with reference to the ideas of one of the greatest philosophers that ever lived. Thus, the great wealth of literature and research in Aristotelian ethics can be useful in understanding and adding to the growing research in African ethics.

After developing an account of the kind of society required for human flourishing, I examined contemporary individualism that prevalent both in the Western and African societies. Following philosophers like Charles Taylor, Alisdair Macintyre, Michael Sandel and Pedro Tabensky, I argued that the kinds of social relations prevalent in these contemporary individualistic societies are not the kinds of social relations necessary for the formation of ethical character and human flourishing. I reached the conclusion that this individualistic ethic does not foster the conditions for human flourishing that Aristotelian and African ethics support and that the contemporary individualistic societies do not provide the conditions required for the formation of ethical character that leads to human flourishing. Thus, today, one cannot become virtuous or good person in the traditional African or Aristotelian sense as present day society is individualistic rather than communitarian.

I have argued also that the Africans should be proud of their humanity and their values, and that these values are in accord with human nature. I hope that my research will contribute to the African Renaissance as I have argued for a renewal of African moral values. The contemporary contact with western democratic societies should not influence Africans to lose their African values. The kind of society required for human flourishing is far removed from the rampant individualism and power hunger evident in contemporary postmodern democratic society. Moreover, as the world is in many ways becoming one global village one possible avenue for future research is to attempt to show that the conclusions that I have reached in my research are universally applicable.

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