

**A RETRIEVAL OF ARISTOTELIAN VIRTUE ETHICS
IN AFRICAN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL HUMANISM:**

A COMMUNITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

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for the degree of Masters of Arts in the School of Social and Human Studies,
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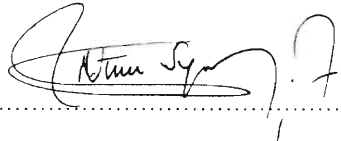
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Pietermaritzburg 1999

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **A RETRIEVAL OF ARISTOTELIAN VIRTUE ETHICS IN AFRICAN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL HUMANISM: A COMMUNITARIAN PERSPECTIVE**, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a Masters of Arts degree in Philosophy (field of Political Ethics) is my original research and has never been submitted to any other University.

Date : 26 / 11 / 1999


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ABSTRACT

Two ethical currents have been dominant during the past three centuries in moral philosophy, namely utilitarianism and Kantian ethics. As a number of moralists have observed, the contemporary moral disorder provides clear evidence of the failure of these two theories. In fact, they have left our societies in a moral crisis with social and political consequences. We may not lay the entire blame for this crisis at the feet of these theories. In any case, they are unable to resolve it. African society is not preserved from this crisis.

The problem of Utilitarian and Kantian ethics lies in the fact that they are impersonal and alienating, because they commit themselves to utility and duty for their own sakes. Thus they cannot provide us with any ground on which we can base the reconstruction of the African society which is undergoing a social and political crisis. The alternative I propose is Aristotelian virtue ethics viewed from a communitarian perspective.

While Utilitarianism and Kantianism emphasize *doing* (act-based ethics), virtue ethics is concerned with *being* (agent-based ethics), and flourishes mostly in the context of the community. As a result I argue that virtue ethics could be a solution to the moral and socio-political crisis which African society is experiencing today, in that it could help us to re-locate the individual in the community as a *being-with-self* and a *being-with-others*, that is, an individual endowed with the overall virtue of *Ubuntu* (humanity). It is this kind of individual we expect in African humanism thought to be socio-ethical.

However, Aristotelian virtue ethics is far from being an automatic panacea. In fact, it faces three major problems which social and political philosophy is wrestling with at present, namely: the complexity of our contemporary society, the current problems of

nationalism and democracy, and the problem of global ethics and cosmopolitan citizenship.

Nevertheless, there is reason to hope. This hope lies in our *being human* which entails being moral. I believe that morality implies that the human person cannot be reduced to a self-interested calculator whose social ties originate in a contract as Kantian thinkers might make us believe. Instead, a virtuous life is suggested as a relevant tool that would help us to perceive and appreciate the circumstances in which one lives and act accordingly. The solution to African society's problem is at this price.

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CHAP I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1. THE PROBLEM

For the past three centuries, virtue ethics does not seem to have been taken seriously despite the proliferation of literature in this field.¹ In fact it has been marginalized in moral philosophy in favor of utilitarian and deontological ethics. Deontological theories assert that duty is the basis of morality whereas for utilitarianism or consequentialism, the consequences of actions are of fundamental moral importance. The character of the agent who performs acts is not directly considered by either utilitarian or deontological theories. These two ethical currents have left societies in a moral crisis with social and political consequences. A number of moralists have expressed this concern. For instance, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that the contemporary moral disorder provides a strong evidence of the failure of modern ethical theories.

Even if one were not laying the entire blame for this crisis at the feet of these two ethical theories, it seems to me that they are unable to resolve it. Utilitarian theory provides no basis for the rights of the minorities in that it emphasizes the good of the

¹ Among African thinkers, the reflection on virtue ethics is lacking despite its imperative necessity. It is surprising that even the most recent work of Kwame Gyekye (1997) which considers the problem of African tradition and modernity from a (moderate) communitarian perspective does not make any reference to virtue ethics. May be the renewed interest in the concept of *ubuntu* will serve as a ground on which a reflection on virtue ethics will grow. Nevertheless, we should note that *ubuntu*, which I shall later consider as an over all moral virtue appears to be understood differently in recent reflections. These reflections include E.D Prinsloo's *The ubuntu style of participatory management* (1996), L. Mbigi and J. Maree's *Ubuntu: The spirit of African transformation management* (1995), S. Maphisa's *Man in constant search of ubuntu* (1994), R. Khoza's *Ubuntu in African humanism* (1993), N. Makhudu's *Cultivating a climate of cooperation through ubuntu* (1992), A. Shutte's *The ubuntu project*, Mbigi's *Unhu or Ubuntu: The basis for effective HR management* (1992), and finally, E.N Chikanda's *Shared Values and Ubuntu* (1990).

greatest number², while deontological ethics³ leaves human societies divided by emphasizing the individuals' freedom to choose their own ends and values.⁴

My concern is the underground influence of deontological and utilitarian ethics on African society. Both ethical theories seem to have affected African society in the social, political and even economic sectors. We seem to be living in a society wherein "everything is permitted" in the name of individual freedom. This freedom, which is often abused, is seldom balanced by individual responsibility. In the same vein, there is a tendency to emphasize duties of rights (the duties which one would like to see accomplished in one's favor) and neglect duties of virtue (duties such as benevolence or friendship).

Politically, liberal pluralism seems to be harvesting disenchantment in most African states. Pluralist democracy, which began a decade ago seems to be a failure. Many African politicians enter politics for the sake of gain and their kind of political life is not different from the life of others who live for gain. This is contrary to our

²Some versions of utilitarianism takes this good to be the aggregate of individual utilities. This does not mean that utilitarianism is individualist, as it could be regarded as majoritarianist. However, the aggregation of individual utilities could provide an implicit ground on which individualism could develop (See Macpherson 1973:173).

³The kind of deontological ethics which is my concern here is the Kantian version.

⁴In his *Building Trust in divided Societies*, Daniel Weinstock (1999) is surprised that liberal philosophers have been silent about what might be done to foster the unity of a society. It is true that some Liberals like John Rawls (1971, 1993) have advocated justice as a basis for social unity. However, this solution is not sufficient to build up this unity. Against this suggestion, Mary Ann Glendon (1991) pointed out the litigiousness of liberal society, in which individual rights are placed at the summit of the normative pyramid. Other liberals have advocated cooperation and citizenship as things which all share despite other differences. This perspective is that of Steven Macedo (1996), David Miller (1995), and Robert Myers (1994). Citizenship as the ground for social unity seems to be discarded by Charles Taylor (1989) who argues that the liberal commitment to neutrality precludes liberal societies from being able full-bloodedly to endorse the kind of patriotism required to prop up liberal institutions. The only liberal thinker who provides us with a plausible perspective of social unity is Will Kymlicka (1996) who advocates a shared identity rather than shared values.

expectation that the truly political life should be the life devoted to moral and political virtue (See Simpson 1992: 517, Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1216a23-27).

National economies appear to be hijacked by small groups of individuals who also determine the social and the political arrangement of the society, leaving behind them a host of poor masses. The notion of the common good of an entire state is progressively being replaced by the notions of individual or group interests.

It is against this background that virtue ethics is suggested as a remedy. In effect, for virtue ethics, what is important is neither the judgement of acts nor their consequences, but rather the judgement of agents. Agents can be seen as good or bad people, that is, people of good or bad character, who possess or lack moral virtues. We need people of good character in the restructuring of African society in order to achieve a society where citizens live meaningful lives. More precisely, my intention is to give virtue ethics a social and a political expression in the African context.

Aristotle, whose ethical tradition we propose to consider in our project, is the father of virtue ethics. For him, a society cannot achieve the supreme good or happiness unless its citizens are virtuous. Aristotle's reflection on virtue ethics was not just a reflection for its own sake. His concern was primarily the well-being of the *polis*, the community or *koinonia*⁵. This concern is still recurrent even today, especially among communitarian thinkers. In fact we suggest a communitarian perspective on virtue ethics particularly at this time when African society is in search of a remedy for its social and political crises.

⁵The concept of *polis* and *koinonia* are closely related. According to Aristotle, *polis* is a community (*koinonia*). *Koinonia* is a noun derived from the adjective *koinos* which means anything shared or held in common. However, the kind of *polis* he refers to particularly is the community which embraces all other communities, namely, the state (see Mulgan 1977:12-7).

ii. The rise of historical consciousness.

Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics failed to give sufficient consideration to the rise of historical consciousness by advocating a universalism founded on general moral principles. Accordingly, they ignored the fact that we are historical creatures, situated in specific historical and cultural contexts, with particular beliefs, practices, and commitments. Hence even moral knowledge is historically grounded; and at some level informed by the setting from which it is known.

Virtue ethics, which we propose as an alternative to Kantian and utilitarian ethics, set limits to rules and increase the attention given to one's own context and situation. Thus, we shall argue that ethics can no longer be regulated simply by lists of rules. Instead, it must also discuss their relative value and the historical situations in which they are applicable. Thus, the point here is that virtue ethics will provide us with the possibility of moving the focus from rules and acts to agents and their contexts. This focus on agents and their settings readily acknowledges our needs to respond to each situation's specific features (Kotva 1996:9). And specific situation do not often call for rules, rather they call for what Aristotle knows as practical wisdom or reason.

iii. Failure of the modern ethical theories to give a complete picture of human experience.

Utilitarianism and Kantianism have been accused of not giving due attention to some aspects of human existence such as friendship and other affective aspects of human experience⁶. This inattention distorts our understanding of human morality as

⁶There is a lot of literature on the issue of friendship and emotions. This includes Marilyn Friedman's *Friendship and Moral Growth* (1989), Glenn Hartz's *Desire and Emotion in the Virtue Tradition* (1990), Daniel Putman's *Relational Ethics and Virtue Theory* (1991) Stocker's *The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories* (1987) and Volbrecht's *Friendship: Mutual apprenticeship in Moral development* (1990).

well. The ignorance of human realities like friendship and emotions results in ethical theories giving only an impoverished picture of the moral life.

Utilitarian and Kantian ethics not only neglect things like friendship and affective aspects of human experience, but also they are in some respects incompatible with and undermine those realities. In effect, the focus on rational action undermines the affection side of life as misleading and dangerous or at least subordinate to rational calculated action. Thus, virtue ethics as an alternative to Kantian and utilitarian ethics proposes to offer us a fuller and a comprehensive picture of moral life.

According to the above concerns, Utilitarianism and Kantianism cannot provide us with a sufficient basis for the reconstruction of our societies. On the one hand, Utilitarianism can no more be the determining moral philosophy in a society in which the voices of minorities need to be heard. Neither should we allow any segment of the society, no matter how great it might be, to determine the course and the greatest good of the whole society. On the other hand, the deontological ethic which underlies contemporary liberalism has left members of communities without any common denominator. In fact, the notion of the common good is avoided. Both ethical theories have left a legacy of fragmented societies. Instead, virtue ethics will help us to reconstruct our societies and relocate the individual in the community.

We are concerned in particular with the social and political situation in Africa. The individualism which underlies the pluralist democracy we have embraced seems to be the cause of corruption, chaos, internal wars and the primacy of personal interest. This leaves African society in a deep social and political crisis with obvious consequences for economies and culture. Individuals have lost a sense of belonging, while adhering to values without reference points other than themselves. This constitutes the crisis of values which we observe in our (African) society today.

Another reason why virtue ethics is relevant is that it provides us with an opportunity to link ethics and politics. The assumption is that if the political life of our societies is grounded on a shaky ethical basis, it will be shaky as well. The point is that there is a continuity between ethical reflection and social and political life in a society. The ethic of virtue was first and foremost intended to provide a community in which citizens live meaningful social and political lives. To live in a community means that one has to participate also in its political life⁷. Let us recall that, for Aristotle, a human being is defined as a social and political animal.

Furthermore this reflection will also be an essay in African social and political philosophy which most African thinkers seem to have neglected. In effect, most African philosophers are still engaged in the never ending debate on whether there is and what is African philosophy. Although this debate might not be unimportant, it does not help us to provide solutions to the social, political and economic problems we are facing today, or an ethic which should underlie these solutions.

Finally, virtue ethics will also provide us with a firm ground upon which we could appreciate issues such as national identity and democracy in today's context of globalization. These issues urgently call for a redefinition of the individual and the State which we hope to provide from a virtue ethics standpoint.

1.3. ORIGINALITY OF THE TOPIC

“A retrieval of Aristotelian virtue ethics in African social and political humanism” is original. Certainly, there have been reflections on virtue ethics in general (see bibliography). However, to my knowledge so far, no African scholar has yet thought of reflecting on Aristotle's virtue ethics from the perspective of African

⁷In most of African societies, some citizens are still excluded from the political life of their societies. This is one of the causes of war in various parts of Africa.

social and political humanism. However, there have been some attempts to compare African philosophy and Greek philosophy. These attempts include Kagame's *La philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l'être* (1959), Leopold Senghor's *On African Socialism* (1964); Onyewuenyi's *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy* (1993). Other reflections which should be considered in the field are: Kwasi Wiredu's *Philosophy and African culture* (1980). Paulin Houtondji's *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (1983), Odera Oluka's *Sage Philosophy: Indegenous thinkers and modern debate on African Philosophy* (1990), Sogolo's *Foundations of African Philosophy* (1993) which are also attempts to define the existence and nature of African Philosophy.

1. 4. METHODOLOGY

Our approach will be to outline a communitarian perspective on virtue ethics⁸ applied to the African social and political context. According to Statman (1997: 17-18)⁹, it is only now that communitarianism is being explored as a political aspect of virtue ethics. This (communitarian) approach is opposed to deontological as well the utilitarian liberalism. Accordingly the communitarian approach will deny that acts could be justified in terms of the individual who chooses his/her own ends and values, and also deny that moral ends justify objectionable means.

⁸Virtue ethics is not always communitarian. Kant is said to have reflected on Virtue ethics, but as a deontological ethicist (see O'Neill 1984). I am also aware that virtue ethics can concern itself with individual's personal ideals, self-image, in short individual fulfilment, that is to say, an individualist approach to virtue ethics could be possible. That is why I say that my approach to virtue ethics will be communitarian.

⁹Statman tries to reflect on the connections between virtue ethics and communitarianism. For him such reflection could help us to understand better the political implications of virtue ethics.

Hence this approach will claim that only a person of virtue will act morally (in the way in which moral ends justify moral means¹⁰) and will assume that virtuous life must be lived in a community and helps to achieve the supreme good or happiness of the community. We also understand the communitarian approach to virtue ethics to be a way of reintegrating the lost values of African society such as the notion of *ubuntu*, the individual-in-the community and try to give them a social and political expression today.

However, since we shall be dealing with different ethical theories, a comparative approach will also be required. It is a question of confronting virtue ethics with utilitarian and deontological ethics and trying to see what its contribution to African social and political humanism could be.

Hence, we shall divide our reflection into five major chapters. The first chapter is this general introduction in which we are stating the problem, the relevance and the originality as well as the methodology of our study.

The second chapter explores the nature and the historical developments as well as the features and relevance of virtue ethics.

The third chapter explores the two major ethical theories opposed to virtue ethics, namely Kantian and utilitarian ethics. In this chapter we argue that Kantian and utilitarian ethics, which we describe as ethics of doing, cannot be the ground on which to rebuild the African society in social and political crisis in so far as they are impersonal and alienating. This is because these two ethical theories commit themselves to duty for its own sake and utility for its own sake, which are impersonal realities.

¹⁰What I have in mind here is that objectionable acts could have moral ends. For instance we can imagine a group of coup plotters who would assassinate a head of state and say that it was good because that head of state was a dictator who deprives his citizens of freedom. Although freedom is a moral good, a value to be safeguarded, it cannot justify the assassination of another citizen.

Instead we argue that virtue ethics, as an ethic of being, is an alternative because it is agent-based, hence a humanism *par excellence*.

The fourth chapter is a retrieval of virtue ethics in African social and political humanism. In this chapter we argue that African leaders and thinkers of the post-Independence era shifted from an African humanism that is socio-ethical to a humanism that concerned with economic welfare. The implication of this shift was metaphysical in that Africans moved from being to having, hence acquiring an openness to individualism that has dislocated the community. Accordingly, our task will be to relocate the individual in the community as a being-with-self and a being-with-others. This will provide us with the possibility of a redefinition of the State.

The last chapter looks at the various problems which virtue ethics must face. Three problems will be pinpointed, namely: the complexity of the modern society and the issue of individual rights; the problem of democracy and national identity, and the problem of global ethics and cosmopolitan citizenship. I will argue that these three problems do not concern only virtue ethics but political philosophy in general.

However, I argue that because we are human beings, that is, beings who are social, political and moral, of conscience and consciousness, there is hope. It is with these aspects of human beings that we shall conclude.

With this outline, we shall now embark on the first chapter of this essay.

CHAP II: NATURE OF VIRTUE ETHICS

2.1. CONTEXT AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF VIRTUE ETHICS

Virtue ethics has attracted many thinkers in various societies throughout history. These have included Confucius in Ancient China; Bouddha in Ancient India, and various philosophers in Ancient Greece. These thinkers emphasized principles of goodness of character and conduct which lead people towards moral excellence.

One of the earliest written records we have of theorising about the virtues is the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius. Confucius, who lived in the 6th century BCE, is widely regarded as the most influential shaper of Chinese ethics. It was Confucius who first viewed virtue as the mean between excess and deficiency.¹¹ Let us note that this conception of virtue is also developed systematically in Aristotle's *Nicomachean ethics*, two centuries later.

Five virtues are outlined by Confucius and his followers, namely: charity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and sincerity. In the *Analects*, Confucius describes charity as the virtue of human relations, righteousness as the virtue of public affairs, propriety as fitting and proper behaviour in human affairs, wisdom as the virtue of personal growth that comes from study and practice, and finally, sincerity as the virtue concerned with truthfulness and faithfulness in interactions with others.

The question we might ask is this: why did Confucius prefer only five virtues? Why don't we find such virtues as courage, temperance, humility, patriotism,...in his reflection? Do the five virtues entail other virtues we may think of? It is difficult to provide an answer to these questions. However, the five virtues characterize a human

¹¹The definition of virtue as the mean between the excess and deficiency is treated in Confucius' work, *The Doctrine of the Mean*. This definition is given social and political implications in another work, *The Great Learning*, in which Confucius describes personal and governmental virtues.

being in his relations to himself or herself, to society and to the world around him; the self, the society and the world being the three major realities that constitute the scope of philosophy. On the other hand, the five virtues provide us with different levels of community: the community of self with self, the community of oneself with others, and the community of self with the world. This connects us to the very task of our reflection since what we are after is the nature of community and the kind of moral life appropriate to it.

A much more developed doctrine of virtue is found in Classical Greece, in the reflections of the great philosophers of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Greeks lived in a society which emphasized human excellences such as courage, patriotism, honour and prudence. This conception of virtue in Greek society can be detected as far back as Homer. In the Homeric period honour was conceived as the reward of virtue. Thus, the idea of virtue is a descendant of the Homeric hero's expectation of honour due to his *arete*¹².

However, at this point, it is important to note that we are not interested in the virtues of courage, patriotism, honour and prudence as such. Rather, we are interested in the particular kind of people and the particular kind of society in which they purport to live meaningful lives. That is the value of virtue. This becomes obvious in the time of the Sophists, to whom we shall now turn.

When the Sophists appeared at the dawn of Greek democracy, they claimed to teach the art of virtue. So far virtue had been a matter of practice. But with the Sophists, virtue passed to the level of theory. In effect, the Sophists took virtue to be the

¹²The word *arete* means excellence in some quality. Its equivalent is virtue, which means humanness. However, the concept of *arete* has a far wider meaning than the narrow reference to human moral goodness. For instance the Greeks would talk of the *arete* of a dog or any other creature to which they would deny moral virtues. Hence, when the concept of *arete* is applied to human beings, it connotes quality which makes human being excel as a human being (O'Connor 1985:57, See also Kitto 1951: 171-5)

consequence of their intellectual enquiry. Yet we cannot doubt that they got the sense of virtue offered by Greek culture from a practical point of view.

The question we may ask is whether there is a connection between democracy and the virtues which the Sophists claimed to teach. Why were they interested in enquiring about and teaching virtue in this particular political circumstance (the era of democracy)? Are there virtues proper to a democratic society?

The answer to these questions would require a different topic. Suffice to note that according to Bertrand Russell (1991:91), during the time of the Sophists, democracy was a reaction against cultural conservatism. Those who were cultural innovators tended to be political reactionaries. It is to this group of innovators that the Sophists belonged. In fact, one of their contribution is to have initiated a theoretical reflection on the virtues. Their question might have been, how much a society can solely rely convention and practice. Correspondingly, the kind of virtue they claimed to teach would have been different from that of the Aristocratic class, which tended to be rather conservative and conventional. In the meantime, there emerged another approach to virtue, that of Socrates.

Socrates differed from the Sophists in that he declared himself to be a learner, as opposed to a teacher, of virtue. He identified virtue with knowledge. He claimed that virtue is knowledge and that it could be taught. However, it is necessary to make a distinction between intellectual knowledge of what virtue is, knowledge which can be imparted by instruction, and virtue itself. For Socrates, teaching and learning did not consist in mere notional instruction, but rather involved leading one to real deep insight (see Copleston 1946:111-112).

What is interesting in Socrates is the question that lies behind his view of virtue. On the one hand, he is concerned with what virtue is, that is the nature of virtue. On the

other hand he is concerned with how one could acquire it in the deep sense of the term. In short, Socrates makes a connection between the epistemological aspect of virtue and its practical aspect. But still the question is whether to know what is to know how. In other words, once I know what virtue is, does it follow that I can lead a life of virtue? Socrates would answer this question in the positive since he believed that if one knows what the good is, one would do the good.

Conversely, the claim that virtue is knowledge implies that if one behaves in an unvirtuous manner one must be ignorant of what goodness really is (Dorter 1997:313). Yet it does not always follow. There must be other requirements such as the inclination and the will to be virtuous and act virtuously. However, even if we grant that there is that inclination and the will to act virtuously, we must allow for the possibility that one can know what is good, yet act otherwise because one is too weak to resist temptation or fear (Dorter., Loc.Cit.;).

In his *Republic*, Plato tells us that it was Socrates who, first contended that the ideal state would exemplify and promote four main virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance and justice. However, it was Plato who identified these qualities as the core components of the moral character, hence his reference to them as the cardinal virtues. For Plato, the cardinal virtues promote the health and harmony of the soul. In fact these virtues correspond to Plato's conception of the soul: wisdom was thought to be the virtue of the intellect, courage the virtue of the will, temperance that of feelings, and justice, the virtue of relations with others in society.¹³

¹³Later, Saint Augustine reflected on the cardinal virtues from a theological perspective, as a manifestation of God's love. For him, wisdom is love's discernment, courage love's endurance, temperance love's purity and justice as the service of God's love. Augustine places the cardinal virtues alongside the theological virtues (faith, hope and love), which we find in St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians in the New Testament.

Plato's view of virtue is interesting in that virtue is tied to the being of a person. Accordingly, we could say that a virtuous act is that which comes deep from the being of a person. Plato denied that one could be mechanistic in one's actions. Another aspect of Plato's view of virtue is that he sees virtue as relevant to persons in themselves (wisdom, courage and temperance) and persons in relation to society (the virtue of justice). Finally, one would say that deep in Plato's idea of cardinal virtues lies the idea that the health and harmony of one's soul wills the health and harmony of the society. In effect, virtuous citizens will tend to promote a healthy and harmonious society. This what Plato claimed when he argued that the individual is the miniature *replica* of the state (see Berki 1977:54).

Plato accepted the Socratic identification of virtue with knowledge. For Plato, the different virtues are unified in prudence - the knowledge of what is truly good for a human being and of the means to attain that good. In the *Meno*, he equated virtue with knowledge and argued that if virtue is knowledge, it could be taught. In the *Republic*, he claims that only philosophers have true knowledge, and therefore true virtue. The philosopher knows what is good for human beings. Thus Plato claimed that the Sophist is content with popular notions of virtue and therefore cannot teach true virtue. Let us recall that the Sophists had relativized the notion of the good. Plato seized this opportunity to argue that the doctrine of virtue as knowledge is really an expression of the fact that goodness is not a merely relative term. This has political implications especially since Plato was against moral relativism as well as the chaotic and violent conditions of democracy in which his master (Socrates) was martyred.

Socrates and Plato's moral intellectualism fails to take into consideration human nature in its wholeness. The view that one's being virtuous depends solely on one's intellect, and has nothing to do with strength or weakness of the will has been questioned by a number of commentators (see Dorter 1997: 314). The view that virtue is knowledge ignores weakness of the will, unless we take virtuous people to be perfect creatures. Aristotle, whom we shall now consider, argues that virtue is not achieved

solely by intellectual inquiry, but also that one's nature, upbringing and the company one keeps are also crucial for its attainment.

Aristotle gives a central place to virtue in the *Nicomachean ethics*. Here he links virtue with happiness. He argues that happiness does not consist simply in the knowledge of the virtue. It consists rather in virtuous activity. This follows from his suggestion that the aim of ethical study is not knowledge (*gnosis*) but rather action. He claims that, unlike other kinds of study, ethical inquiry is not undertaken for the sake of theoretical knowledge, but is undertaken so that we might become good, hence the view that happiness consists in virtuous activity.

Hence, for Aristotle, virtue is connected with practical life; good character is linked with good action¹⁴, and good action leads to happiness: good action is a means to happiness. What lies behind Aristotle's view of virtue is the quantitative aspect of virtue itself and happiness: a passive human being cannot be virtuous, and therefore cannot attain happiness. Here again, we come to the same inference we made on Confucius' doctrine of virtue: that is, the virtues put us in relation to ourselves, to others in society and the world around us.

However, Aristotle's argument is not without problems. The connection between good action and happiness is not clearly defined. At this juncture, we may ask ourselves whether bad people cannot be happy, at least in appearance. On the other hand good action is predicated of rational beings. The question is whether bad people never indulge in rational activity, (cf. O'Connor 1985:57) . Although we will not follow up on this objection, it is a challenge to Aristotle's argument.

¹⁴One could understand that virtues are both constitutive of the supreme human good (happiness) and are to be possessed not only for their own sake as genuine excellences, but also for the sake of that good (MacIntyre 1992).

Despite the above objection, Aristotle's argument has political implications. In fact, Aristotle later argues that a virtuous citizen is one who participates actively in the affairs of the state. What is interesting in this point is that the individual citizen does not work for his own happiness only, but also for the happiness of the whole community (*polis*) as well. That is what is meant by active participation in the affairs of the state (cf. Hart 1989:102, Grant 1989:106).

But how is the goodness of character acquired? Aristotle argues that we have first a capacity for developing a good character, but such character has to be developed by practice. We do this by acting virtuously. But how can we act virtuously if we are not already virtuous? Aristotle's answer is that we begin by acting in ways which are objectively virtuous, without having a knowledge of these acts, and later we proceed by deliberate choice resulting from an habitual disposition.

However, it is not clear what Aristotle meant by "acting in ways that are objectively virtuous". This may mean two different things. On the one hand "acting in ways that are objectively virtuous" could mean that one has a natural disposition to do good. Accordingly, in book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1179b20-21), Aristotle tells us that, apart from teaching and habit, nature also has a role in making one good. And later this natural disposition is strengthened by virtue. On the other hand, "acting in ways that are objectively virtuous" could mean habituation when one is shown what is good to do. However, the question is whether we should not, henceforth, distinguish between natural virtue, as that which one has naturally, and moral virtue, as that which one acquires by teaching and habituation (cf. Jacobs 1995:35ff). We shall not dwell much on this question. Given the fact of natural virtue, it would be the role of the family, the neighbourhood and at the highest level of the society, the *polis* to edify it in moral virtue which characterises the individual's moral perfection.

After Aristotle, the Stoics also reflected on the nature of virtue, but understood the virtuous life as one lived in accordance with nature and reason. Stoics conceived of

the virtuous person as a citizen of the cosmos, and not just of the *polis*, as had previously been understood. The concept of a cosmopolitan citizen came from this conception.¹⁵ The rules, conformity to which constitutes the life of virtue, were seen as universal standards, prescribed by nature and reason.

However, the Stoics' understanding does not tell us much about the content of virtue; neither did the Stoics tell us which particular virtues characterise one who lives according to nature and reason, nor what should be the role of the family and the community in shaping the life according to nature and reason. Furthermore, although the Stoics' conception of virtue gives a picture of a citizen who looks beyond his own society, one would fear that this kind of citizen would be one who is more interested in her/his own good rather than the good of the community as whole.

The doctrine of virtue was revived by the philosophers of the patristic and medieval periods in particular, Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas, who pursued the ethics of virtue from a Christian perspective. The central questions these two philosopher-theologians battled with were how to reconcile theistic doctrine of virtue with Platonic, Aristotelian or Stoic accounts; and also how to reconcile the ethics of virtue with the divine and natural law which they understood to bind human beings universally. Answers to these questions tended to take two different forms (See MacIntyre 1992):

¹⁵According to Martha Nussbaum (1997), Kant's defense of cosmopolitan values might be built upon the Stoics' moral philosophy. This is obvious particularly in *Perpetual Peace* where Kant apparently combines the Stoics' ideas of nature and reason. Hence he writes:

The people of the earth have thus entered in varying degrees into a universal community, and it has developed to the point where the violation of laws in one part of the world is felt everywhere. The idea of cosmopolitan law is therefore not fantastic and over-strained; it is a necessary complement to the unwritten code of political and international law, transforming it into a universal law of humanity (Kant as in Nussbaum 1997:1).

One such answer rejected the philosophical account of the virtues in order to preserve theological doctrine. This was the position of Saint Augustine, who contended that only the will informed by charity, which is a gift of grace, can bring one to virtuous action. From this perspective, just, courageous or temperate acts uninformed by charity are not virtuous. Thus, charity becomes a dimension of the virtues and not just a virtue in itself. Accordingly, the virtues of justice, courage and temperance have no value for the individual who possesses them if they do not benefit other people surrounding him/her and the society. Yet charity as a dimension of virtue remains more an ideal for the secular society, as well as the Christian society which Saint Augustine had in mind.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, reconstructed and synthesized the Aristotelian framework. What is most interesting in Aquinas is the political dimension he introduces by insisting that within every human society, and for every human being a real possibility of acquiring virtue exists, and that within every society, positive law (human law) requires obedience just in so far as it accords with God's law apprehended by reason, which is the natural law. Thomas Aquinas connected virtue and the Aristotelian conception of human beings as social and political animals. His aim was to give a basis to his idea of a body politic or political community¹⁶ in modern terms (Clark (ed.) 1972:380).

¹⁶The concept of body politic or political community is a confusing one, since Thomas Aquinas never defined it clearly. However, Jacques Maritain (1951:9-19), who is a transcendental Thomist, has tried to articulate an understanding of what the body politic could be by distinguishing it from the state. First, the body politic differs from the state in that the state is a set of institutions combined in a topmost machine which is specialized in the interests of the whole. This whole is the body politic. In other words, the state is at the service of the body politic. Thus, the body politic could be understood as a communion of people who commit their existence and their possessions for the sake of this communion. The body politic has a civic sense, which is, however, founded on personal devotion and mutual love as well as a sense of justice and the law. Hence whereas at the state level, justice could be enforced by coercion (power), in the body politic justice is more facilitated, somehow by friendship and customs (see Evans & Ward (eds.) 1965: 81-3). Thus, in modern terms, the body politic is the equivalent of civil society.

However, Aquinas's synthesis was not generally accepted. After Aquinas, Buridan offered another synthesis combining Aristotelian, Stoic and Augustinian elements. This debate which followed Aquinas was informed by the Renaissance rejection of Aristotle's teleology, and the notion of divine law and hierarchical authority. A secular discussion began to emerge: we are at the dawn of Modern Philosophy.

Machiavelli is one of these political thinkers who mark the dawn of modern era. He suggested that the prince who aspired to keep power needed to learn when not to be virtuous. Machiavelli's prince needs to be prepared to use violence and deceit. However, this does not mean that, for Machiavelli, the life of virtue had no importance in politics. Instead, he is suggesting that although a politician may be virtuous, there are circumstances whereby s/he needs to reserve for him/herself the right to use evil means; that is, when the reason of the state requires it. Here, Machiavelli was teaching the art of real politics, a militaristic vision of politics.. Hence, he talks of *virtu* as the ability to achieve effective truth regardless of moral restraints.

Thus, Machiavelli challenged the idea of classical, medieval and civic humanistic political philosophies that politics must be practised solely within the bounds of virtue. For Machiavelli, apart from virtue, there is also the reason of the state of which the aim is to bring order out of chaos, in order to establish the effective conditions for the practice of virtue and morality.

Following Machiavelli, Mandeville argued that vices promote profitable trade, and that deceitfulness is important for commercial utility, whereas virtue confers no public benefit. Here Mandeville saw virtue in terms of the immediate needs of ordinary life. He does not see the relevance of virtue in all the dimensions of human life. On the other hand, Hobbes and Locke argued that self-interest requires adherence to morality. They understood virtues as those qualities which issue in just and generous actions. From here developed the idea that moral rules and virtues must be grounded in invariant human

nature rather than in local custom or tradition. They argued, in other words, that moral rules and virtues must be the same for all human beings. The implication of this understanding of virtue is the universality of goodness founded on character.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw another development in the ethics of virtue. Hume held that the natural virtues (benevolence, courage, integrity, greatness of mind and natural abilities such as prudence, patience and temperance) are prior to and form the basis of rules enjoining just and obligatory actions. This account comes close to that of Aristotle and Aquinas. For Kant on the other hand, virtues were secondary. In his *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant saw the virtues as dispositions that support those precepts linking the will to duties and which rational persons prescribe to themselves as the dictates of practical reason (Kant 1964). In this way, Kant rejected the Aristotelian doctrines of the mean and of *eudaimonia*¹⁷.

Sidgwick attempted a synthesis, and took virtues to be personal qualities manifested both in the performance of acts required by duty and in acts beyond what duty requires. Thus, Sidgwick attempted to reconcile Kantian and Aristotelian ethics of virtue. However, he was more Kantian than Aristotelian in that he did not perceive that a virtuous person effectively goes beyond what duty requires (see McCarty 1989:43-51). The point to be made here is that the Aristotelian doctrine of virtue is more than Kantian ethical formalism (I will explain this ethical formalism later).

As for Nietzsche, he saw virtues and rules as the devices of slavish morality. Hence his suggestion that virtues and rules be rejected and transcended. However,

¹⁷The word *eudaimonia* is translated as happiness or well-being, or again the final good. However, as far as the Greeks were concerned, there was no common agreement as to the nature of *eudaimonia*. Some people identified it with pleasure, others with the honor of political life, others with reflective contemplation. Aristotle understood *eudaimonia* as happiness or the final good, because he conceived it to be the only thing that is always desirable for itself and never for the sake of something else and he saw it as self-sufficient (See *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a35-b15, see also McDowell 1986; 359- 76).

Nietzsche did not provide anything in place of virtues and rules: he did not tell us how we can achieve this transcendence. In fact, he went as far as to say that morality is a bit of tyranny against nature, even against reason. One wonders whether he is advocating some kind of *laissez-aller*. Yet this is not really the case since Nietzsche understood morality as causally responsible for the emergence of a great deal that makes life worth living (Nietzsche as in Danto 1985:393).

In contemporary thought, ethical reflection on virtue has been developed among Thomistic thinkers as well as among Aristotelians. Philippa Foot (1978), for instance draws on Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas and defines the central problems of any adequate contemporary virtue ethics as concerning the relationship of virtues to benefits, the question of happiness and the unity of the virtues. Foot sees the function of the virtue as that of sustaining social convention.

James Wallace (1978) uses an Aristotelian conception of human function and excellence and offers a view which integrates rules and virtues. He argues that the different virtues function each in their own specific ways to sustain the convention informed, rule-following modes of social life, from which human activity derives its central features. Here Wallace does not differ much from Foot who also argues for the function of the virtues in terms of social convention.

Apart from the Aristotelian and Thomistic perspectives on the ethics of virtue, there is also a Humean perspective, which has been developed by Annette Baier (1985). For Baier, Hume uses empirically informed accounts of human passions, virtues and institutions to relate nature to artifice, so that rules find a subordinate place within virtue ethics. However, we shall concern ourselves, not with Humean perspective, but rather with the Aristotelian perspective of virtue ethics.¹⁸

¹⁸Note that most of those who developed an Aristotelian perspective of virtue ethics happened to be at the same time Thomists (eg. MacIntyre, Wallace,...).

2.2. APPRAISAL OF THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF VIRTUE ETHICS

So much for the historical survey of virtue ethics. But before we move on to the next point of this section, there are a number of questions we need to ask: Why did various societies throughout history consider seriously the ethic of virtue? In particular, why did Greek society and its thinkers advocate an ethics of virtue and why did this ethic decline after Aristotle? Why is virtue ethics being revived today? Let us briefly consider the two last questions. To answer them, we need to look back at the history of Greek society.

From the Homeric period until the reign of Alexander the Great, Greek Society was made up of free and independent City-States. As members of homogeneous societies, Greek citizens had forged their own social and political cultures, centred around the virtues. Virtues were not simply qualities of individuals, but also the qualities necessary to sustain a community. The virtues were treasured insofar as they enhanced the life and the well-being of the community.

Hence, in Greek society, a virtue like courage was recognized of individuals who had excelled in a battle for the glory of their cities. It is against this background that MacIntyre (1981:116) states that you cannot divorce virtues from the context of social structure, for the reason that morality and social structure are one. This is an indirect answer to this question: What is the function of the virtues or rather of morality in the society? One would say that the function of morality, hence of the virtues is to maintain order in the society. But this social order tends to constitute itself in a kind of tradition. Hence MacIntyre argues that there is a link between virtue and tradition. Now we are concerned with the tradition of Greek society. The question is what help can this tradition be for us today?

According to Copleston (1947: 379ff), in Greek society, the individual was inconceivable apart from the city (*polis*) and the life of the city. It was in the city that the individual attained his or her end and lived the good life. The city was a normative reference for the moral growth of the individual. In turn, since different individuals realized that the city, or the community, was the source of their strength, they saw it as something they ought to defend both in theory and practice. One way of doing this was to protect it against moralisms, such as the moral relativism of the Sophists, which lead to individualism. Unfortunately, individualism triumphed in the end. As a result, Greek society declined. The compact and all-embracing life of the community as conceived by Plato and Aristotle, broke down. The consequence of this decline was first the conquest by external forces. This conquest was not merely political, but also, moral and, economic. This raises the question of how we can protect our own community or communities from (moral) decadence. Our suggestion is the reconsideration of virtue ethics, which is being suggested as a remedy to the moral crisis, caused partly by Kantian and utilitarian ethics which promote individualism, and eventually moral relativism.

The Kantian individual is conceived of as an autonomous subject, who has no reference other than him/herself. Thus, the project of virtue ethics, at least from a communitarian perspective, is to re-situate the individual within the framework of community, and also to restrengthen the community itself. We shall consider this issue in detail in the next chapter. Meanwhile, we shall first give a definitional account of virtue.

2.3. THE CONCEPT OF VIRTUE DEFINED.

What does virtue mean? What makes a particular human quality a virtue? Is knowledge of what a virtue is related to the possession of that virtue? Are several virtues aspects of one single virtue, or are they connected? How are virtues exercised in achieving human good, or goods? Aristotle undertook to reflect on these questions which Socrates had raised, especially seeing that some of them had not been satisfactorily

answered. It is with these questions in mind that we shall attempt a definitional account of virtue.

Virtue comes from a Latin word, *vir* which means man. Thus virtue means (hu)manness. The corresponding Greek concept is *arete* which means excellence. Thus virtue is excellence in a given quality. Accordingly, we could understand virtue as the quality which, if fully realized, would make the person the embodiment of excellence or perfection. This definition is seen in Plato's understanding of virtue as the ideal fulfilment of the entire powers of a person in mature accomplishment.

We shall not dwell much on Plato's particular understanding of virtue. Rather, we shall focus on Aristotle's understanding of virtue, given that he worked more systematically than anyone else on the agenda laid down by Socrates and Plato, and is widely considered to be the major representative of classical virtue ethics.

Like his predecessors, the question that exercised the mind of Aristotle was: How should one live? The answer was: "Virtuously". For Aristotle, virtue is primarily a state of character, a disposition to rationally choose the mean between two extremes: The defect and the excess.¹⁹ Thus, a virtuous person is one who is disposed to act well in given circumstances. For Aristotle, to act well is to do so in the right frame of mind, or to act with the right motive (Broadie 1991:58). In other words, the Aristotelian virtuous individual is that one who perceives and acts upon the moral requirements appropriate to the situation.

¹⁹As we noted earlier, the doctrine of virtue as a mean between two extremes (defect and excess) is also found in Confucian virtue ethics. Yet this does not mean that Aristotle might have borrowed this doctrine of the mean from Confucius. As far as Aristotle is concerned, we need to underline boldly the word rational. What lies behind the rational principle is the role of intellect in virtue. Let us note that in Book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle gives an account of intellectual activities and their contributions to practical life (See Sorabji 1986: 201-220).

Virtue for Aristotle is acquired by repeating virtuous acts. Following this Aristotelian understanding of virtue, Roger Crisp understood virtue as a disposition of character acquired by ethical training, and displayed not just in action, but also in patterns of emotional reactions (Crisp 1998).²⁰ However, unlike Aristotle, Crisp does not believe that virtue is a rigid habit²¹. Rather, he claims that virtue is made flexible by the application of practical reasoning. If virtue is the disposition to choose virtuously, it means that it involves deliberation upon the particular act to be done.

Accordingly, virtue results from intentional action, determined by reason, and a stable habit. This stability of habit may be what brought Aristotle to say that a virtuous action is effortless. However, this seems to be contradictory since the intervention of reason which involves deliberation shows that there is really a genuine effort made by a virtuous person.

For Aristotle, virtue is not only possessed for its own sake. In effect, the aim of a virtuous life is the supreme human good - happiness. Thus virtues have a teleological ground. Hence the Aristotelian thesis that virtues are partly constitutive of the supreme human good and to be possessed, not only for their own sake as genuine excellences, but also for the sake of that good. This is hard to understand. If virtues are constitutive of the supreme human good, in what sense ought we to possess the virtues for the sake of happiness? Let us attempt some answer to this puzzling question. On the one hand, one needs virtues to achieve happiness. That is, the end of the virtues is happiness. On the other hand, even when a person has attained this state of happiness, the virtues which hitherto were the means to achieve this happiness become a part of the content of this very good.

²⁰In Aristotelian virtue ethics, there is a link between actions (*praxeis*) and emotions (*pathos*). But the question here is whether the habits of *pathos* can be developed in the same way as habits of actions (see Kosman 1980:103-116, Forenbaugh 1969:163-185).

²¹“Rigid” here means stable, permanent. Thus, for Aristotle, the state of virtue corresponding to a given act is stable and permanent.

According to MacIntyre (1992), Aristotle's thesis has four main features:

1. Virtues are dispositions not only to act, but also to judge and to feel, in accordance with the dictates of right reason. The practice of the virtues is required for the life of happiness, the achievement of which is the human end. Accordingly, to have virtue is to be disposed to function well as a human being.

2. There are two categories of virtues, namely intellectual virtues and moral virtues. Intellectual virtues are those excellences which inform the activities specific to reason, and are acquired only through education. On the other hand, moral virtues are those excellences of the non-rational parts of the soul when they are obedient to reason, acquired only through habituation and training. In other words, there is a connection between the moral virtues and the intellectual virtues. This connection consists in practical intelligence (*phronesis*)

3. Moral virtues direct us to the ultimate end while practical intelligence (or wisdom) selects the right mean and orders to it to the good. But each particular virtue is ordered to this good. Thus, in their relations to practical intelligence, virtues are a unity in so far as they contribute to the achievement of the same good.

4. The fourth feature is a communitarian understanding of moral virtues. It is only within the *polis* that the life of happiness can be achieved and lived out. In other words, it is in and through the life of the *polis* that the virtues are exercised. Aristotle argues that unless by the *polis*, especially by the better kind of *polis*, human beings are incapable of

the rationality required for virtue. Aristotle's claim here seems to be that morality depends also on the kind of society in which one lives.²²

The communitarian aspect of moral virtues is better reflected in Roger Crisp's *How should one live*. According to Crisp, virtues are:

- i. Learned and nurtured** only within a particular form of life. In other words, virtues are social products.
- ii. Sustained only in communities:** That is to say, I need those around me to reinforce my moral strength and assist in remedying my moral weaknesses. It is only within a community that individuals become capable of morality and are sustained in their morality.
- iii. Agent-constituting:** Our moral identity, our moral agency itself, is, at least in part, constituted by the communities of which we are members.
- iv. Content -providing:** Forms of communal life fill in the detailed prescriptions that turn abstract principles into lived morality.
- v. Worth-conferring:** Some qualities are constituted as virtues only within particular communities. Certain activity or quality of character within a given community could count as honouring only within that community and would not be a virtue outside it.
- vi. Virtue-sustaining community:** trust, civility, tolerance are particularly well-suited to sustaining communal life in general (Crisp 1996:232ff).

²²Aristotle's threefold classification of states in *Politics* aimed to find which one enhances best the virtuous life among citizens. Those which most likely enhance virtue are monarchy, Aristocracy and Polity(constitutional democracy) because these forms of government work for the common good. Instead, Tyranny, Oligarchy and Mob rule (popular democracy) cannot enhance virtue because they are concerned with private good.

There are two possible inferences from the communitarian feature of the moral virtues. The first is that human beings are political and social animals because the life of virtue which is needed in the *polis* for the supreme good of the *polis* and of the individual is achieved in and through the *polis*. The second is the kind of form of government that is required for the supreme good to be achieved. For Aristotle, lawless forms of government (tyranny, oligarchy and democracy or mob rule), do not provide a kind of society which helps the individuals to achieve the supreme good in the community, since they are concerned with their private good.

From what we have developed so far, there appears to be three major ways in which virtue can be acquired. Firstly, virtue could be acquired by nature. In this case, virtue could be understood as a natural disposition conforming one's conduct to principles of morality. One is born with it, as an inner part of oneself. Secondly, virtue could be acquired by custom, that is, it could be imparted by culture. Thirdly, virtue could be acquired by training or by education. By education, we do not mean literary, technical or intellectual education. Rather we refer to the character training that a person receives when brought up in a good family or community, or a good company of friends (Urmson 1988; Dorter 1997:315).

In the second and third cases above, a virtue is moral (as different from intellectual) if the manifestation of its absence would be punished by a moral system supported by a society in which one is expected to live (Brant 1992: 306-7). In other words, the custom and the training require one to behave in such a way that the moral system in which one is living could be rewarded by admiration or praise, and in contrary case by punishment or blame. It is here that we understand well how the society shapes the moral character of the individual.

However, modern accounts of virtue tend to depart from Aristotle's account of the four major aspects of the virtues, namely: Ground, Content, Unity and Reality. We shall consider each in turn.

i. Ground: For Aristotle, virtue has a teleological ground. Virtues represent the fullest development of a certain kind of natural creature, a non-defective male human being. However, Aristotle argues that some human beings are, by nature, incapable of a virtuous life. These are human beings such as slaves, women and barbarians. This is misleading since it appears that no creatures who are biologically human and rational should be excluded from the possibility of acquiring virtue whether they be women, slaves or otherwise.

ii. Content: Although it is not proper to criticise an Ancient Greek philosopher for not sharing modern pieties with regard to universalist ethics, we should nevertheless note that Aristotle did not show sufficient awareness of the fact that not all ages and cultures would perceive the virtues in the same way that the ancient Greeks did. Aristotle is somehow inconsistent. He gives an important place to a quality called “greatness of soul” which has to do with a grand social manner and which bears little relation to a contemplative ethic.

Nowadays, the content of the virtues has changed tremendously. A modern moralist might take kindness and fairness as major virtues. Fairness is clearly related to an important Aristotelian virtue, justice. But the virtue of justice is defined today in political and civic terms and gives a fairly restricted account of fairness as a personal characteristic.

Accordingly, we could conclude that there has been historical variation in what has been seen as virtuous. As a matter of historical fact, Aquinas modified Aristotle's account to accommodate Christianity. For him, apart from the moral virtues, there are also theological virtues. And for Aquinas, the ethical life is grounded in the virtue of charity, which is of divine origin.

iii. Unity: Before Aristotle, Socrates had argued that there is one basic virtue: wisdom or knowledge. For him other various virtues such as justice, courage,

temperance, self-control refer to different fields of application of wisdom or knowledge. On the contrary, for Aristotle, although there are separate virtues, no one could have one without having them all. Hence Aristotle claim's that all the practical virtues will be possessed by the truly virtuous person, the person of practical wisdom, or intelligence.

However, the question of the unity of virtues is rather controversial. How could one argue that if a person is generous, s/he will be prudent or courageous as well? If the unity of virtue is possible, then all the virtues are compatible. But as we have just noted with the example of generosity and prudence or courage, some virtues are incompatible (Cf. Lemos 1994:87). The issue of unity of the virtues raises also the question of how one can be morally good at all. Let us put it this way: if the unity of virtue is true, then one must be completely morally good or not morally good at all. But is it true that one can be completely good or not morally good at all? Hence if no one can be completely morally good or morally bad, the unity of the virtues is not possible, or at most difficult to realize.

To be morally good or not morally good at all means that the moral character is homogeneous. My contention is that the unity of the virtues does not entail homogeneity of character. While I disagree with Lemos (1994:104, footnote no5; See also Watson 1984) who argues that people can be morally good even if they do not possess any virtues, I would argue that one needs a minimum of virtue to be morally good.

iv. Reality. For Aristotle, virtues are defined as objective dispositional characteristics of people which they possess in rigid sense. Rigid here means that the disposition to virtue is well established, stable, permanent. But it would appear that rigidity would apply to those virtues which are acquired by nature whereas those other virtues which are acquired by habituation, through training and custom, have the possibility of flexibility. The point here is that the way one applies what one has by nature is different from the way one applies what one has acquired by nurture.

Yet in both cases one could argue that the extent to which people react depends on situation and context. Let us take an instance of a naturally merciful judge. It is difficult to imagine that he will always show mercy in any case that is presented to him. The point here is that one will act in ways that express a given virtue only within some context and situation. It is in this respect that virtue has a situational character. In fact, this is the very meaning of practical intelligence which consists in the knowledge of when and where a given virtue needs to be applied. Furthermore, we should note that virtue has a social character. In effect, a given disposition is a virtue if the community finds praiseworthy the act enjoined to that particular virtue. On the other hand, if we praise a particular act as virtuous, it would mean that we are good. That is, when we praise someone else's moral excellence, we participate with him/her in sustaining that excellence (Jacobs 1995:47).

Having defined virtue, and outlined the context and historical development of virtue ethics, let us now turn to virtue ethics itself and outline its relevance.

2. 4. THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF VIRTUE ETHICS.

We shall now give the definition of virtue ethics and outline its distinctive features. We shall deduce the definition of virtue ethics from the nature of virtue itself. Virtue ethics is simply an ethics concerned with the excellences of character of an agent. The subject matter of virtue ethics is the nature and the value of the virtues.

In contemporary moral philosophy, virtue ethics arises from a general complaint which argues that moral thinkers do not take virtues seriously within ethical theories (Statman 1997:7). Thus, a first distinctive feature of virtue ethics is that it is an alternative to the currently dominant Kantian and utilitarian traditions. Kantians and Utilitarians argue that what matters are principles, rules and obligations. A virtue ethicist would object, however, that acting in order to fulfil a duty or duties is morally suspicious. In fact, people can behave in an inhuman manner while violating no duty.

The argument here is that fulfilling one's duties and obligations can require one to be a moral machine²³. Moreover, as far as rights are concerned, Kantians believe that it is morally acceptable to do whatever one wants, provided that one does not violate some other agent's rights. However, such claims of rights are seldom balanced by an equal amount of duties.

According to Trianoski (1997:43), virtue ethics holds that judgments about virtue are basic to morality, and that the rightness of actions is always derivative from the virtue of an agent's character. There are two basic claims in Trianoski's idea of virtue ethics:

The first is that at least some judgments about virtue can be validated independently of any appeal to judgment about the rightness of action. Here, Trianoski is objecting to consequentialism, which claims that the consequences of acts are what matters, and also to any theory that places primary emphasis on the obligations to act rightly. In the same vein Plato, in his *Republic*, argued that it is the harmonious order of the just person's psyche which makes the person good, and not necessarily the disposition to produce right action.²⁴ This leads to the second claim

²³What we need to underline boldly here is the fact that morality should be an expression of our being (human). Accordingly, if one limits oneself to the fulfilment of a set of duties and obligations or rules, one would not be different from a machine that has been set to function in a certain defined way, or an animal that has been trained to do things in a way wanted by the trainer. In short a moral machine is more concerned with the fulfilment of duties/rules or obligations, rather than what is really good in life and what actions could be performed in order to bring about that good. In short, a moral machine does not perceive the spirit behind the duty or rules. A good example of this state of affairs is the conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees in the Bible. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for following the law without getting the spirit which lies behind that law. For the Pharisees had become the slaves of the law.

²⁴Of course, here there is a danger of moral relativism. In Plato's claim, it seems that the goodness and even the morality of an act depends solely on the psychological nature of the person. But we should note that even in ancient Greek society, an act was considered right or good, if the community found it to be praiseworthy.

Secondly, in virtue ethics, it is the antecedent goodness of character which ultimately makes any right act right. Accordingly, good actions are those which produce and maintain the harmonious condition of the *psyche*. Aristotle claims that what one ought to do is what the virtuous person or the person of practical reason would do. In other words, a virtuous person would perceive what is right irrespective of whether it is connected with some obligations or rules.

All these considerations resemble Statman's understanding of virtue ethics as an approach according to which the basic judgements are about the individual's character. Two theses can be inferred from this definition. The first is that some judgements about the values of character are independent of judgements about the wrongness and rightness of actions. The second thesis is that the notion of virtue justifies right conduct.

In both theses we are faced with the question of the relationship between virtue and the rightness of actions. According to Statman, virtue is not justified in terms of right behaviour but rather in terms of their essential role in the well-being of the agent. Aristotle makes the same point in writing about the teleological ground of virtuous acts. Virtues are thought to be the necessary conditions for and constitutive elements of human flourishing and well-being (Statman 1997:7-8). This gives us a clear picture of the difference between Kantian ethics and virtue ethics. While for Kantian ethics, what matters is the duty for its own sake (impersonal morality), for virtue ethics, what matters is the well-being of a person (we shall come to this point in the next chapter). In virtue ethics, a good act does not consist in the obligation enjoined to it, but rather in enhancing the happiness of the individual and his/her community.

Thus, judgments about character are essential to virtue ethics. Judgements about character are prior to deontic judgements; that is, judgements about the rightness and wrongness of actions. As far as virtue ethics is concerned, what secures good action is not the obligation or duty enjoined to it; rather it is the authority of practical wisdom (See Broadie 1991:209). And the practical wisdom is linked with the kind of person

expected to be the author of a good action. However, the problem is that a good action may not always bring about a good result, as consequentialists would have us believe. In fact, later, we shall show that this constitutes a major difference between the ethics of being and the ethics of doing.

A Kantian would object that the ethic of duty affirms that virtue consists in a proper orientation towards the right (cf. O'Neill 1994:). Accordingly one would be brought to believe that virtues are varieties of the sense of duty. However, it is worth noting that in practical experience, acting out of virtue and acting out of duty are two quite different things. Suppose you go to visit a sick friend, and when he thanks you for the visit, you reply that there is no need to thank you since you visited him out of duty and not out of friendship. He would understand that you are not behaving as a personal friend. What you would have done is what any other person, who is earning a salary from it, for example, could do.

The point being made here is that, in Kantian ethics, there is no relationship between a person and another, rather there is simply a relation between a person and duty or rules. It is this kind of relation that I would call a dehumanized, impersonal relationship. Where virtue ethics sees the primacy of the human being, Kantian ethics (and even utilitarian ethics) see duty or rules. It is this dehumanization and impersonality of Kantian and utilitarian ethics that I shall object to.

Another feature of virtue ethics lies in the fact that it is a theory of moral worth rather than a meta-ethical theory concerned with the conceptual priority of moral notions. As a theory of moral worth, it holds that virtue is the ground of moral goodness. Virtue ethics is not so much concerned with the nature of moral claims as with the (practical) knowledge of virtue. This concern is for the happiness of the virtuous individual, and of the community in which s/he is living, rather than with the knowledge of virtue for its own sake.

It is against this background that Aristotle claims that the aim of ethical study is not knowledge but action (*praxis*). On this ground virtue ethics takes a step ahead of deontological ethics. Where deontological ethics is concerned with principles of action that are universal or universalizable, virtue ethics claims that these principles are too abstract to provide helpful guidance in the complicated situations of everyday life. Principles are too vague to offer real help, and apply more to general situations than to the particular cases which may be presented to us. MacIntyre himself denies that rules and principles equip us to deal with the moral complexities of human reality. He claims instead that we cannot be (abstract) individuals governed by universal principles of obligation as Kantian and utilitarians²⁵ would argue. Accordingly, virtue ethics focuses on human life rather than on rules and principles.

Virtue ethics also takes a step ahead of utilitarianism. Whereas utilitarianism is concerned with the happiness of the greatest number, in which some may be excluded, in virtue ethics, happiness is not only for the benefit of some segment of society, but rather for the whole community. Moreover, for utilitarianism, happiness consists of the aggregates of individual goods. Instead, in virtue ethics, happiness is a self-sufficient composite, a goal of the good life at which all people individually and communally aim (see Ackrill 1980:15-34). This leads to the last section of this chapter, the relevance of virtue ethics.

2.5. RELEVANCE OF VIRTUE ETHICS

Why virtue ethics? Why does virtue figure so largely in Aristotle's thinking? Why so much interest in virtue ethics in contemporary moral philosophy? Of what relevance is virtue ethics? In the previous section, we saw that virtue ethics could be an alternative to Kantian ethics and utilitarianism. We noted that Kantian ethics attaches an importance to

²⁵Mill claimed that utility is the ultimate source of moral obligations

universalizable moral principles which may not help us to cope with the complicated situations of everyday life.

Complex situations, in which different moral considerations are in conflict, often arise. In such cases, Kantian ethics appears unlikely to offer us a principled solution—since Kantian ethics is more formal than action guiding²⁶). According to Statman (1997:23), applying principles in complex moral situations is not a simple exercise in logic, but a matter of judgement. Statman's point is that right behavior cannot be codified into a set of *a priori* principles, the following of which necessarily leads to right action. The virtuous person is not someone who has excellent knowledge of some set of principles, but rather someone who perceives correctly and appreciates sufficiently which rules should apply in particular circumstances (see also Salomon 1986: 174-177; Audi 1995; Larmore 1987: 1-16; Pincoffs 1986: 24-25).

Besides, Kantian ethics leaves human societies divided by emphasizing on the individual's freedom to choose his or her own ends and values. Utilitarianism, on the other hand, attaches fundamental importance to the maximization of utility and is concerned primarily with the consequences of actions, without sufficient regard on the morality of these actions. As a result, we live in a moral crisis which these two ethical theories cannot resolve, and of which they are partly the cause. It is against this background that virtue ethics is suggested as an alternative.

²⁶I am aware of the fact that this could sound controversial since there is also a traditional charge of rigourism against Kantian ethics. It is difficult to hold against Kantian ethics the charge of rigourism and formalism simultaneously. Although, this is not the right place to deal with this problem, it is necessary to provide a clue which may help us in later discussion. Kant's rigourism lies in the fact that he claimed that reason lays down principles which are universal, categorical and internally consistent. For Kant, these principles bind all people independently of circumstances and conditions. Formalism goes with the claim that Kantian ethics lacks substantive moral implications. That is, moral rules do not have a determinate content. Hence the charge that Kantian ethics is not action guiding.

In her article, “*Modern Moral Philosophy*”, Anscombe (1958) noted the moral crisis mentioned above, and argued that it was a mistake to seek the foundations of morality in legalistic notions such as obligation and duty. She proposed virtue ethics as an alternative for three major reasons:

1. No secularized moral “ought” has intelligible application to all rational beings, or even to all human beings, independently of their interests and desires;
2. No ordinary “ought” or norm can apply to every human beings everywhere and at all times: there is no general “ought” which can instruct us about what is good for us.
3. The notion of our good is to be conceived in terms of what we need or require in order to flourish (as in Trianoski 1997:44).

The communitarian aspect of virtue ethics is particularly relevant to our African society which suffers from a crisis of values. First of all, Communitarianism comes as an attempt to reconstruct a public ethic to include those values that cultivate community²⁷ (see Daly 1994). In fact, communitarianism is a social and political expression of virtue ethics. In his recent work *Democracy's Discontent*, Sandel tries to show the connection between Communitarianism and virtue ethics. He criticizes procedural liberalism²⁸ and

²⁷By emphasizing the reconstruction of the community, we must be careful that the community is purged of a tendency towards authoritarianism and hierarchy. We are aware that the individual and the community are opposed. The problem is how to respect and uphold society's moral order while the community upholds and respects individual autonomy (see Etzioni 1996). If such is the case, communities need to be virtuous, no less than the individuals would need to be.

²⁸Procedural liberalism is a kind of liberalism that lays emphasis on procedures. In Rawls' *Theory of Justice*, these procedures begin in the original position under the veil of ignorance. However, the concept of “procedural” was used for the first time by Schumpeter in 1942 in his work, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. Schumpeter's reflection gave birth to the Procedural theory of democracy which opposes totalitarianism and the belief in the common good as well as the notion of the will of the people.

argues that virtue or moral character should be the basis of self-government and the common good (Sandel 1996:123-167). In the same vein, Statman shows a connection between virtue ethics and the ordinary life of business and says:

Individuals find their identity and meaning within communities, which for most of us, are companies or the institutions in which we work. ...[B]eing part of such communities is necessary for leading a successful and meaningful life. But being part of means much more than getting a salary from or making profits from. It means identifying with the ends of the company, an identification which incorporates the virtues of loyalty, honesty, cooperativeness, decency and others. It also means perceiving one's colleagues as friends with joint *telos*, who spend their days together in whatever they love most in life; for since they wish to live with their friends, they do and share in those things which give them the sense of living together (Statman 1997:25, cf. Salomon 1997:205-26).

As far as this reflection is concerned, our aim is to try to apply virtue ethics to a larger community - African society, in its social and political context. Before we do this, we shall first review virtue ethics and its contending ethical theories, namely Kantian and utilitarian ethics. The aim of the third chapter will be to present virtue ethics as an alternative to Kantian and utilitarian ethics and, having appreciated the virtue of virtue ethics, examine its social and political implications for African humanism.

CHAP III. VIRTUE ETHICS AND ITS CONTENDING ETHICAL THEORIES.

3.0. INTRODUCTION

There are two basic questions that must be confronted if one is to outline an ethical theory. The first is the question of what one should do. This question can be answered from two major perspectives. On the one hand, what determines what one ought to do is that which is universalizable. This answer is associated with deontological ethics, of which Kant (1724-1804)²⁹, Ross (1877-1940)³⁰ and recently Rawls³¹, are the major proponents. On the other hand, some have argued that we ought to do that which maximises happiness. The theory associated with this answer is utilitarianism, of which Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill are the major proponents.

The second question which one must face is what kind of person one ought to be. This question has to do with the concept of character. The ethical theory associated with the concept character of the person is virtue ethics³², of which the major proponents are

²⁹The peculiarity of Kant's deontological theory lies in the simplicity and singularity of what one's perceives to moral duty. For Kant, one should act according to a maxim that is at the same time valid as a universal moral law. We should note that this principle (the categorical imperative) is spelled out in various forms. For instance, one of these forms goes as follows: Act on that maxim which you would will at the same time to be a universal law (of nature).

³⁰Ross (1930) developed a deontological theory known as ethical intuitionism. He claims that, through reflection on ordinary moral beliefs, people can intuit the rules of morality (e.g. a duty such as that one ought to tell the truth). These rules are *prima facie* obligations or duties. Ross argues that a basic duty can be superseded by a higher obligation in some circumstances.

³¹The kind of deontological ethics which Rawls developed could be called contractarianism or rights-based theory. Rawls claims that a just society is that one which requires equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties. For Rawls, it is the fairness of society's norms and rules (principles agreed upon in the original position under the veil of ignorance) that gives those rules moral force (See Rawls 1971).

³²Virtue ethics is also a teleological theory. In fact, as we have already noted in the previous chapter, the father of virtue ethics, Aristotle, is a teleologist. For Aristotle, a moral act must have an end which could be the happiness of the virtuous individual and/or the

the classical Greek philosophers (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle), St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and in contemporary moral reflections, moralists like G.E.M Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Alasdair MacIntyre, to name but a few.

As far as this present reflection is concerned, we shall concentrate on Aristotle's ethics, as it is the classical statement of the tradition of virtue ethics. What is most interesting is the kind of person and society that Aristotle has in mind. However, before we move any further, there is a problem that we need to keep in mind as far as Aristotle's ethics is concerned: utopianism in the virtue ethics of which Aristotle is the forerunner. In effect, the kind of community on which Aristotle theorised about was a small community in which almost everybody knows everybody. The problem then is how we are to adapt this ethics in our complex society where each segment does not only have its own interests, but also could have its own set of virtues. Conversely, the question is how to deal with the problem of moral cohesiveness and value unity which Aristotle saw as prerequisites for a viable moral community (see Louden 1997:217ff).

Yet our hope is in the main characteristic of virtue ethics in itself, that is the fact that a virtuous person does not rely much on doing but rather on being such that the moral traits emphasized by virtue ethics are more "spiritual" rather than "actional"³³. In other words, the value of being are not dependent on doing. If this is the case, the good person we are after should be good not only in a small community, but also in a larger and complex community.

community in which he/she is living. However, the difference between Aristotelian teleological ethics and utilitarian teleological ethics is that the former is not solely concerned with the end of an act but the nature of the person who is the author of that particular act. Utilitarianism, on the other hand, is concerned with the consequences of the act in question, and it is therefore a form of consequentialism.

³³For this terminology, of *spiritual* and *actional* characterisation of the ethics of being and the ethics of doing, see Trianoski's *Should We Be Good? The Place of Virtue in our Morality*, as quoted by Louden (1997:210)

This chapter will therefore consist of outlines of three major ethical theories, namely:

1. Kantian Deontological Ethics.

2. Utilitarianism

3. Aristotelian Virtue Ethics.

We shall argue that neither the ethics of rules or obligations (held by Kantians) nor the ethics of utility can help us to solve the actual moral, social and political crisis we are facing in Africa today. In fact, we shall also argue that the two ethical theories are partly responsible for this crisis. Our aim is to show that African society can be based neither on Kantian ethics, nor the kind of social welfare that utilitarian ethics promises. The main charge against both ethical theories is that, by laying much emphasis on duty and utility for their own sakes, they alienate³⁴ human beings in some way.

Thus, the purpose of our argument is to show that (Aristotelian) virtue ethics is a viable alternative, despite a number of criticisms against it. We aim to show that the superiority of virtue ethics over the ethics of duty and the ethics of maximization of utility (Cf. Mayo 1993:231) lies in the fact that virtue ethics emphasizes the ultimate value of human beings rather than what is external to human beings. It is on this ethics that we want to base African social and political humanism. We shall now reflect on these three ethical theories in turn.

³⁴The term “alienation” will be understood in two major ways: In the present, we shall understand alienation to mean the fact that the principles enjoined to duty or to utility appear to take priority over the person. In other words, it is question of alienation from one’s own nature. Latter, we shall use “alienation” to mean the fact the a human being is cut off from some larger whole- the community (as a consequence of individualism (cf. Macquarie 1986).

3.1. DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS

3.1.1. The nature of deontological ethics.

The word deontological is derived from the Greek word *deon* which means duty or obligation. Taken literally, deontology, means the science of duty or obligation³⁵. It approaches morality by stressing what is obligatory, what one ought to do with respect to a set of principles or rules, without any reference to value or a conception of goodness.

Thus, deontology denotes a view of morality which takes as its fundamental categories, the notions of duty, obligations and the rightness of acts. The ethical theory associated with the notions of duty, obligations and rightness of acts is known as deontological ethics. This ethical theory does not concern itself directly with agents' qualities. What matters is the fulfilment of duty or respect for principles. Correspondingly, the notion of the good is a derivative category, defined in terms of the right. The good to be promoted is the right action for its own sake. More so, the virtues would be defined as those pro-attitudes towards one's duties.³⁶

Deontological ethicists differ from utilitarians and virtue ethicists in their claim that some acts are obligatory, or right or wrong independently of their ends (against teleological ethics of the Aristotelian kind) or their consequences (against consequentialism). A well known version of deontological ethics which is highly influential in contemporary socio-political philosophy, and with which we shall concern ourselves with here, is that of Immanuel Kant. The Kantian version of deontological

³⁵It is surprising that the term deontology seems to have been used by Jeremy Bentham to designate his own utilitarianism (see Macquarie 1986). In contemporary ethics, deontology is understood otherwise, as we shall see.

³⁶Kant's *Doctrine of Virtue* is understood in these very terms.

ethics has become the leading ethics of liberals, notably in the theory of the central figure in the contemporary liberal social and political thought, John Rawls.³⁷

Kantian Philosophy was a large project which advocated a morality thought to be universal to all rational beings. The purpose behind Kant's project was to show that the authority and the objectivity of moral rules is precisely the authority and objectivity which belong to the exercise of reason³⁸. Yet Kant was aware that the fact that morality relies ultimately on the exercise of reason does not mean that people cannot do wrong thing.

It is worth noting that Kant was, partly challenging the traditional Christian (deontological) ethics which claims that moral principles derive their authority from God. This claim is associated with the Divine Command theory which holds that moral principles are laws issued by God to humanity, and that their objectivity and authority thus derive from God's supremacy.

From the above, we can derive three major characteristics of deontological ethics, to which we shall now turn: The first characteristic of deontological ethics is that many versions of it claim not to rely on any theory of human nature. The second is that it emphasises the priority of the right over the good. And thirdly, deontological ethics

³⁷Rawls' deontological ethics is found in his *A theory of Justice* (1971) and his recent work, *Political liberalism* (1993), in which the theoretical foundations of the much commented on *Theory of Justice* are given practical implications.

³⁸See Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), and *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797). Kant's project has been revived by analytic philosophers in their controversial debate with intuitionists and emotivists. In effect, for analytic philosophers, moral conclusions can be validly derived from a set of premises. The best known contemporary analytic philosopher, who has tried to revive the Kantian project is Gewirth. In his *Reason and Morality*, Gewirth (1978) argues that, in order to be admitted as a principle of practical reason, a principle must be analytic, and in order for a conclusion to follow from the premises of practical reason, it must be demonstrably entailed by those premises. N.B. In general terms, a proposition or a judgement is **analytic** if the predicate of the concept is contained in the subject concept.

claims that morality lies in principles that are universalizable. Reflection on these characteristics will help us to locate precisely where deontological ethics has gone wrong.

3.1.2. Characteristics of (Kantian) deontological ethics.

1. Deontological ethics does not rely on any theory of human nature.

This was the claim of Kant himself. By human nature, Kant meant the psychological, non-rational side of human beings. But what does it mean to say that deontological ethics does rely on a theory of human nature? First of all, as a moral theory, Kantian ethics is concerned with principles of obligation or duty, that is, what people do or fail to do. After all, this is what rules and principles are for. Thus, it would appear as if in Kant's understanding of morality, people could have no moral qualities, but simply have principles and the will to act according to these principles. That is what he seems to imply when he says:

For duty has to be practical, unconditioned necessity for action; it must therefore hold for all rational beings (to whom an imperative can apply at all), and only because of this can it also be a law for all human wills. Whatever, on the other hand, is derived from the special predisposition of humanity, from certain feelings and propensities, and even, if this were possible, from some special bent peculiar to rational beings -all this can indeed supply a personal maxim, but not a law, it can give a subjective principle -one on which we have propensity and inclination to act - but not an objective one on which we should be directed to act although our every propensity, inclination, and natural bent were opposed to it; so much so that the sublimity and the inner worth of the command is the more manifest in a duty, the fewer are the subjective causes for obeying it and the more those against,-without, however, on this account weakening

in the slightest the necessitation exercised by the law or detracting for its validity (Kant 1956:92).³⁹

Elsewhere Kant writes:

Empirical principles (that is, the principles based on natural, or moral feeling) are always unfitted to serve as a ground for moral laws. The universality with which these laws should hold for all rational beings without exception- the unconditioned practical necessity which they thus impose- falls away if their basis is taken from the special constitution of human nature... (Kant 1956: 109).

Let us note that Hegel criticised Kant on this very ground. He accused him of splitting humans into pure reason and natural inclinations, hence creating a sharp dichotomy between a person's rational will and his/her emotions and inclinations (See Omoregbe 1989:182). Hegel's criticism of Kant has to be taken seriously, because the moral value of an action lies in the struggle between one's natural inclinations, emotions and feelings and reason for acting in that way. This being the case, the moral value of an action cannot rely solely on reason, neither can it rely only on emotions or inclinations.⁴⁰

Secondly, to say that Kantian ethics does not rely on any theory of human nature is to say that it does not make its concern the teleological scheme of the transition from person-as-s/he-happens-to-be to person-as-s/he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature. For a Kantian, there is no movement from the former to the latter as far as ethics is concerned. That is, there is no movement from being to doing. It would seem that in

³⁹The translation being used is that H. J Paton: *The moral Law or Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

⁴⁰In trying to reduce everything to the power of reason, Kant dismissed, for instance, love simply because it cannot be commanded. He argued that it should be replaced by "beneficence from duty" which is practical love. For him, love as traditionally understood in the Bible is conceptually incoherent if it is understood as requiring a feeling (see Kant, as in Schneewind 1997:196).

Kantian ethics, an act does not consist in bringing the agent to self-realization and self-perfection.

However, the claim that Kantian ethics does not rely on any theory of human nature is questionable. We noted that Kant's ethics is based on his conception of the person as a rational being, that is, a subject and an object of experience. This Kantian conception is a theory in itself. It presents a person as not an object of human desires but as a subject of desires. The Kantian ethics simply ignores the fact that we are always creatures of a certain kind; we cannot ignore the fact that we are the product of the historical, social and political conditions which shape the individual and the way s/he conceives of his/her values and ends (see Sandel 1982).

Aristotle is in agreement with Kant regarding the claim that we are rational, but denies that there is no such thing as human nature. However, if in Kant's terms, human nature refers to the non-rational aspects of a person, then we should say that the rational and non-rational stand together as two aspects of the same person. Hence, whereas, for Kant, the non-rational aspect has no bearing on the morality of an action, we would argue, instead that both rational and non-rational aspects contribute to our being moral.

More importantly, the question we need to ask is the implication of emphasizing the priority of principles and duties. The problem is that this emphasis seems to undermine the fact that it is human beings who determine these principles and obligations of duty. Human beings are prior to principles and obligations. To make this point more sound, let us come back to the example of Jesus and the Pharisees in the Bible (which we have considered earlier in chapter one of this reflection). The Pharisees claim that they have no (moral) problem since they follow the Law. But Jesus tells them that it is not enough to follow the law. Jesus gave a simple example concerning the law forbidding to work on a Sabbath day: Suppose that one has a sheep and it fell down in a hole on the Sabbath day. Would he not get hold of it and lift it out? Hence, what Jesus is pointing out there is something behind the law: the spirit of the law which is to make

human being good. Most importantly, Jesus points out that a human being is not there for the law; which means that human beings are prior to laws and principles.

Hence the point being put across is that Kantian ethics, (in fact deontological ethics in general) runs the danger of making human beings slaves of principles of obligations and the duty enjoined in them. Accordingly, if we accept that moral principles are derived from our rational nature as human beings, we have to follow the logical conclusions of this fact: we must not allow these principles to rule us. The problem we are trying to avoid is the fact that Kantians dehumanize persons by giving priority to principles and duties while appearing to ignore the fact that human beings determine these principles and obligations of duty.

This problem is also connected with Kant's principle of duty for its own sake. That is, the fact that one acts, not in order to achieve any particular result, nor yet to fulfil any desire. There must be a reason why something is a duty, such that it cannot just be duty for its own sake (in an abstract sense) as Kant tells us (see Omoregbe 1989:183). Now, the question is what is the reason why something is a duty? We would argue that it is the moral goodness of a person to which duty is geared or/and is an expression to some extent. In other words, moral principles are a means to an end. This end is not duty but rather human goodness.

Of course, Kant would say that one acts in order to conform with a moral maxim, that is, that moral principle thought to be universally right, and hence accepted and acted upon by anyone at any time in the appropriate circumstances. However, the complaint against Kant is that principles thought to regulate morality are too impersonal. They throw us in a world where no one is praised or blamed for a good or bad action s/he does, and hence leave us in a kind of a-social society; that is, a society in which social relations between people are poor, if not absent (cf. Sandel 1982). Bernard Williams has the same complaint against Kant when he argues that in Kantian accounts, -for instance

that of Rawls, persons are conceived so abstractly that they are drained of character, and therefore have no basis for personal relations (Williams 1981).

Thus, Kantian deontological ethics promotes duty and principles of action but preaches personal alienation. As we have argued, the personal alienation lies in the fact that moral principles appear to have priority over human beings, when it should be the other way round. Personal alienation lies also in the fact that in Kantian ethics, with moral principles, the individual appears to be outside social relations in the community. Put differently, the individual is now regulated by abstract moral principles rather than the community to which s/he belongs. It is against this background that Goldmann comments on Kantian ethics and says that deontological ethics has a peculiar and almost inhuman kind of personal detachment (Goldman 1990:107). This joins our earlier criticism on the relationship between the agent and principles and duty for its own sake.

Yet, Kant writes that, even for the sake of duty and obedience to our principles, the agent should always act so as to treat humanity, whether in his own person or that of any other, in every case as an end and never as a means only (Kant 1956:47). How are we then to answer this challenge? In ordinary life, we do effectively use other persons as means to our ends. This happens in business, sex, politics... Kant suggests that these ends should be limited to these shared or rationally willed by other persons involved.

For Kant, there must be a balance between the happiness of others and the cultivation of one's abilities. While the cultivation of one's abilities stems from the requirement to will the means to some end which the agent may adopt, the happiness of others brings the agent to secure the means that require cooperation. However, it is difficult to balance the means one uses and the end one promotes.

This objection does not concern Kantian ethics only but also other ethical theories as well; in that they may articulate moral ideals difficult to attain. To be practical, one may wonder how much a businessman is interested in promoting his customer as an end?

If the businessman promotes his own end (profit) together with his customer, something more than a duty is required. What I have in mind is virtue, because, we would expect a virtuous businessman, not only to be concerned with his own profit but also his customer as an end in himself.

2. The priority of the right.

The right is primarily conceived of as that which fully rational and free agents would choose. The objective criterion of rightness lies in the fact that purely rational agents necessarily will morally right action. This should be seen against the background of Kant's effort to provide an analysis of the content of judgements of obligations that could be objectively binding and valid for all rational agents, irrespective of their feelings and beliefs. Accordingly, rightness does not depend directly on fulfilling or aiming to fulfil the desires of others, but on acting or willing to act for reasons that could be adopted universally, and making one's will coherent with the rational will of all rational agents.

From another angle, the priority of the right consists in the fact that both an action and the will that initiates it do not derive their moral worth from the ends achieved or sought. It consists in the fact that the morality of an action cannot consist in the ordinary feeling that moves the agent to act. The priority of the right is tied up with moral obligation because moral worth applies to all rational agents regardless of their feelings. That is what Samuel Freeman (1996:336) expresses when he writes thus:

The priority of right is a claim about how the content of a moral conception restricts the desires and interests moral agents can take into account, individually or collectively, in formulating their purposes and rationally deciding what they ought to do.

The point being made here is that as far as the priority of right is concerned, the reasons supplied by moral motives have absolute precedence over all other considerations such as personal feelings and/or inclinations.

The priority of the right over the good also means that (moral) actions are intrinsically right (or wrong) regardless of the consequences that they produce. In other words, in Kantian ethics, the right does not depend on the good results it produces. Hence, in Kantian terms, the right or ethically appropriate action is deduced from a duty or a basic human right. Conversely, actions have an intrinsic moral value. It is in this sense that, for Kant, the moral person must perform actions for the sake of duty regardless of the consequences.

The priority of the right over the good goes with the notion of justice. In fact, they are inseparable. Thus, according to John Rawls, the priority of the right gives the principles of justice a strict precedence in citizens' deliberations and limits their freedom to advance certain ways of life (Rawls 1993:209). In the same way, Rawls argues that the notion of the right is an account of people's rightful claims that do not depend on any conception of the good⁴¹. Accordingly, each person's good matters equally and should have a standing that puts limits on the sacrifices that can rightfully be asked in the name of the overall good (Rawls 1971:31).

The point being made here is that, for Rawls, the priority of right is a way of affirming that each person's good be given equal consideration, hence the need for

⁴¹We must be very careful with the term "conception of the good". Especially seeing Rawls uses it in a political sense. Hence he distinguishes between admissible conceptions of the good and those which are not admissible. Admissible conceptions of the good are those, the ends and activities of which accord with the requirements of the principles of right. An admissible conception of the good would consist, for instance, in those desires, interests and plans of life that may legitimately be pursued for political purposes (Cf. Rawls 1971: 31, 449). The non-admissible conceptions of the good are, for instance, racist conceptions of the good. These are not politically admissible, because actions done in their pursuit are either prohibited or discouraged by a just social scheme (as in Freeman 1996:338).

justice which lies in the fact that people's goods can conflict. It is on this ground that Liberals claim that each individual is free to determine his own ends and values, that is his/her own good. But the question is whether Liberals are really justified in avoiding the overall good, which could comprise the individual goods. Again, if each individual is free to define his/her own good, values and ends, are we not most likely to end with the development of relativism, the implications of which would be moralisms and intolerance (cf. Sandel 1996:322-3). If so, is justice a sufficient basis for addressing the problem which results from this liberalism. Can we take justice as a common denominator.

Rawls distinguished between two meanings of "the priority of the right", namely, the particular and the general meaning (Rawls 1993:209, see also 174 for the particular meaning). As far as the particular meaning is concerned, the priority of the right means that the principles of justice set limits to permissible ways of life. The claims that citizens make to pursue ends transgressing those limits have no weight. The priority of the right gives the principles of justice a strict precedence in citizens' deliberations and limits their freedom to advance certain ways of life.

In its general meaning, the priority of right means that the ideas of the good used must be political ideas so that we need not rely on a comprehensive conception of the good but only on ideas tailored to fit within the political conception. Put simply, in the general form, the priority of the right means that the admissible ideas of the good⁴² must respect the limits of, and serve a role within, the political conception of justice (Rawls 1993:176).

We must see these two meanings of the priority of the good against the background of Rawls's idea that the right and the good are not incompatible, but rather complementary. In his own words, the right and the good are complementary and no

⁴²See the preceding footnote.

conception of justice can draw entirely upon one or the other, but must combine both in a definite way (Rawls 1993:173). However, Rawls does not tell us clearly how to operate this combination.

There are two implications of these two meanings that specify the nature of the priority of the right. In the first place, these meanings give the moral sense of the priority of the right. Accordingly, the priority of the right means that individual rights cannot be sacrificed for the sake of the general good. In fact, the general good cannot be conceived as far as a liberal society is concerned. Such a good would prevent individuals from choosing their own values and ends. Hence, Rawls claims that each person has an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of the society as a whole cannot override (Rawls 1971:3).

One may wonder whether Rawls' justice as fairness could not be conceived of as the general good. This good fulfills the criterion of not preventing individuals from pursuing their own values and ends. Moreover as Rawls himself says, justice as fairness has the advantage of being the virtue of social and political institutions. However, we cannot conceive justice to be the general good in so far as justice itself is one of the means to an end, which is the common good. This leads us to the second implication of the two meanings of Rawls' notion of the "priority of right".

The second implication is that the two meanings give us the foundational sense of the priority of the right over the good. According to this sense, the principles of justice that specify individual rights cannot be premised on any particular vision of the good life. This affirms the plurality of goods in the society, since individuals are free to choose their own ends and values, provided the pursuit of these ends and values do not violate the principles of justice (See Rawls 1993: 176, footnote no.2).

The notion of the priority of right is also widely discussed by Dworkin, who contrasts it not only with the personal good but also with the common good.

Accordingly, Dworkin (1993: 1051) argues that the right has priority not only over personal goods but also over the common good, because the protection of individual rights is the highest aim of the liberal political order. Here again the notion of justice is central as the political value which orders the relationships between persons and their particular values. The right becomes synonymous with the just. But if the protection of individual rights is the highest aim of the political order, can we take to be the highest good in society?

The problem that arises so far is that the notions of the priority of the right and justice in liberal social and political philosophy are articulated as if there are no other values which regulate human society. A careful observation would show us that the priority of right and justice do not have the place they are given by liberals in such settings as the family, or friendship. Sandel has the same objection when he claims that in societies where personal and civic attachments prevail, the circumstances of justice will rarely obtain. He argues that, for instance, in the ideal family situation where family members interact mainly via spontaneous affection,

Individual rights and fair decisions procedures are seldom invoked, not because injustice is rampant but because their appeal is preempted by a spirit of generosity in which I am rarely inclined to claim my fair share (Sandel 1982:31)

In the same vein, Sandel argues that in communities with a sufficient measure of benevolence or fraternity, justice, far from being the first virtue, would seldom be engaged.

However, we are not dismissing the relevance of individual rights and justice, rather we are saying that we cannot attribute to them the sort of priority the liberals attribute to them (See Buchanan 1989:855). At most, we could grant them equal consideration. This view is also espoused by John Tomasi who argues that individual

rights are compatible with the virtues of community, because of the fact that the moral quality of any intimate community is importantly connected to the capacity of each community member to conceive of her/himself as a holder of rights (Tomasi 1991:523-536).

So much with the priority of right over the good. Let us now consider another feature of Kantian ethics.

3. Universality of principles.

This universality is implied in Kant's categorical imperative. The categorical imperative is what it is because there is no condition attached to it. It is one that represents an action as objectively necessary in itself apart from its relation to a further end (Kant 1956:82). Moreover the categorical imperative obliges all people without exception. The imperative of morality is absolute and categorical and nobody can be exempted from it. The categorical imperative is formulated in different ways, three of which are important for our discussion here:

- i. Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same will that it should become a universal law [of nature](Kant 1956:70, 88,89).
- ii. Act so as to use humanity both in your own person and in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end, never simply as a means (Kant 1956:96).
- iii. Act as if you were, always through your maxim, a law-making member in a universal kingdom of ends (Kant 1956:100ff).

In all these formulations, it is important to note the word "universal". Yet we may want to ask what the source of the moral law is. Obviously, it is not external to one's rational will. Otherwise, one would say "No". In fact, if it is anything external, the moral

law would not be categorical but a hypothetical one. The source of the moral law cannot be God, because it would be only the person who wants to obey God who would feel obliged by that law. It cannot be society either, for the same reasons.

Thus, Kant's source of moral law is the rational will. Accordingly, Kant talks of the principle of the autonomy of the will. It is what one wills that one should universalize. One is the source of one's law. The question is whether this aspect enhances the human person and in what way? The problem is that once one has set up the law, the law seems to take priority over the agent who is its author as if one does not stand over against the law. Thus, Kantian ethics, far from being a *humanism*, could be viewed as *legalism*⁴³.

In fact, a close look would show us that the emphasis is not anymore on the person who acts but rather on the duty and obligations which the so-called law commands. The problem is that the individual is so overwhelmed by his/her obligations that s/he cannot be free anymore. It appears as if one becomes a slave of impersonal principles and obligations (Conly 1988:84). Our concern is whether there is anything that can come to one's rescue.

Kantian ethics seems to liberate the individual from the external authority of traditional morality. But even here Kantian ethics is problematic. In effect, if each moral agent can now speak unconstrained by the externalities of divine law (reaction against Christian ethics), natural teleology (against the Aristotelian tradition), and against hierarchical authority (cf. the rise of constitutional democracy), why and how should anyone else listen to him/her (MacIntyre 1982:66)?

⁴³Here I am using the terms *humanism* and *legalism* in an extraordinary way. By *humanism* I mean the priority of a person over anything, particularly the law; and by *legalism* I mean the priority of the law over the person.

At this juncture, it appears that we have no reason take moral utterances of the newly autonomous agents as authoritative. It is true that for Kant the categorical imperative, because of its universality, serves as an objective ground for moral authority. However Kantian the principle of universalisation comes under Hegel's attack. For Hegel, universalisation is not really a test of the morality of action. Hegel argues that if an agent is willing to see the maxim of his action become a universal law, that would not mean that the action in question is morally right (Hegel as in Omoregbe 1988:183). Let us note that before the maxim is universalised, one would have first to prove whether it is objectively right.

Hence, we are thrown in a world of relativism and scepticism where individuals have no moral reference. Following his criticism of Kantian ethics, Hegel claims that morality is inseparably bound up with the society, because we live in a society; and because we are part of the society to which we belong. In Kantian ethics, the society from which the individual has her/his background cannot serve as authority since the individual is one who chooses his own values and ends and therefore determines her/his own morality. This provides the ground for individualism, which may destroy not only social relationships, but also society itself.

This idea is expressed differently by Tom Sorell (1991:30) who argues that the Kantian individual does not seem to have a place among friends and a place within the society. Such an observation is a question that seeks an answer: how can we re-place the individual in the community where s/he does not just serve duty but serve his/her fellow individual? We shall face this question later. Meanwhile we turn to another example of the ethics of doing, namely utilitarianism.

3.2. UTILITARIANISM

3.2.1. Context and historical development of utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is another aspect of the ethics of doing. It is an ethics that claims to replace duty-ethics, and thereby Kantian deontology. Utilitarianism has a long history. It has its roots in ancient thought. The notion of welfare cherished by modern utilitarianism is a view discussed by Plato as the great balance of pleasure over pain. This becomes Bentham's hedonism. The notion of impartiality which is another major theme of utilitarianism has its roots not only in Plato but also in Stoic ethics as well as in Christianity (Chappell and Crisp 1998).

Utilitarianism saw its systematic development in the enlightenment era with its key proponents being Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Both developed their utilitarianism as a system of social criticism. To begin with, Bentham focused on problems of institutional structures, public policy, registration as well as political administration (Bentham [1789] 1996). Thus, Bentham viewed utilitarianism as an ethic that justified reforms in English penal law, as well as the democratisation of the English parliamentary system (Lyons 1992).

Following Bentham, Mill pursued utilitarianism as a framework for social criticism as well as institutional reform. He moved a step further than Bentham by emphasizing problems of personal conduct, the value of justice and liberty and also the value of human potentiality, individuality and moral sensibility.

However, although utilitarianism developed as a solution to social problems, we shall argue that, just as Kantian deontological ethics, it cannot be an adequate ethical basis for a society in search of a solution to its moral, social and political crisis. This is because it lays emphasis on utility which, like duty and obligations enjoined to it, can

alienate human beings, and most importantly it divides the society by its principle of the greatest good of the great number. The contention is that even the minorities need the attention of the community. That is what we shall demonstrate by considering the nature of two varieties of utilitarianism, namely: act and rule utilitarianism.

3.2.2. Nature of utilitarianism.

What is utilitarianism? There is no commonly agreed upon definition of utilitarianism. This difficulty arises from the fact that there are many varieties of utilitarianism. However, in the foundational sense, utilitarianism is a theory according to which acts should be judged as right or wrong according to their consequences. An act is morally right if it produces more good for all the people affected by that act, in comparison to any alternative act. The good thus produced is known as utility. Hence the term “utilitarianism”. Mill defines utilitarianism in these terms:

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals utility or the Greatest Happiness principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness (pleasure or absence of pain) (Mill 1968:6).

As we noted, utilitarianism has many variations and complexities. First, utilitarianism is seen as a version of welfarism, that is, the view that the only good is welfare or well-being (happiness). Accordingly, welfare should be maximized and agents should be neutral between their own welfare and that of others. Another version of utilitarianism assumes that we can compare welfare across different people's lives. A third form of utilitarianism advocates the impartial maximization of values such as equality.

The form of utilitarianism we shall concern ourselves with is utilitarianism as welfarist consequentialism. This version claims that an action is right if it produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number. This version of utilitarianism was suggested and formulated by Mill and is derived from the principle of equality: everyone counts for one and no one for more than one. However, earlier Bentham suspected that the principle of equality could be dangerous for "some" people. Hence the preference to minimize the "some" through the principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

The first problem we need to note is that although utilitarianism is a maximization ethic, it cannot conceive the good of all. That is, there is always a problem of the "some." Correspondingly, the impartiality which is supposed to be the aim of utilitarianism becomes problematic since some people are left out and/or used as a means to achieve utility. Consequently, the principle of impartiality fails.

In the past, Stoic moralists developed a notion of impartiality according to which self-concern extends rationally to others and eventually to the whole world. Later, Mill argued that wanting happiness justifies the pursuit of the general happiness. This also is problematic. In most African societies, for instance, we have segments of society who take pleasure in monopolizing social and political power while excluding others. They argue that, although others are excluded, they act for the good of all the community. However, doing so is to violate the right to participation of the other citizens.

Another problem is that the greatest utility or overall good suggested by utilitarian ethics is an aggregate of individual goods, and this also leaves room for individualism which we purport to avoid. Hence, we cannot conceive of this kind of good as the common good⁴⁴ we want to secure for the kind of community we want to build.

⁴⁴ In classical terms, the common good to be the set of conditions necessary for the development and the fulfilment of the person in the community. These conditions are, for instance, public order, material prosperity both public and private; and the intellectual, spiritual

Moreover, if utilitarianism takes the over-all good in an aggregative way, the distributive dimension of social morality appears to be neglected. One understands morality to be concerned with not only the size of the utility, but also how it is distributed among the citizens.

Let us pursue this criticism by considering two variations of utilitarianism, namely, act-utilitarianism and rule-utilitarianism⁴⁵. Here, we shall see that neither of the two forms of utilitarianism can be an ethic that helps to solve the moral crisis of African society.

3.2.3. Act-utilitarianism

According to Smart (1990: 199), act-utilitarianism is the view that the rightness or the wrongness of an action is to be judged by the consequences, good or bad, of the action itself. The good consequences of an action can be thought of as the maximization of utility. This utility can be actual or expected. Thus, we have two ways of accounting for the rightness of an action; that is, objectively and subjectively. The objectively right action is that which would maximize actual utility. The subjectively right action is that which is legitimately expected to maximize utility.

There is another distinction made by act-utilitarians. They distinguish between total and average utility. According to the total view, the right act is that which produces the largest overall utility; while the average view holds that the right act is one which maximizes the average level of utility in a population. One proponent of the total view,

and moral values that characterise a community (Ntibagiriwa 1997:269, Cf. Guerry 1962: 120-25).

⁴⁵Although I choose the two varieties of utilitarianism, we should note that there are other forms of utilitarianism. For instance, individual and collective utilitarianism (Dereck Parfit 1984:30-31); individual motive utilitarianism and universalist utilitarianism.

Derek Parfit (1984) argues that if a population of people with lives barely worth living is large enough, it is preferable to a smaller population with very good lives.

The suggestion behind Parfit's claim, is that utility, whatever its size may be, should be distributed to a larger number of people (existing population). But the problem with this solution is that the welfare may drop below a certain level and the loss cannot be compensated for by quantity. The problem is how a utilitarian would actually distribute utility, that is, how utility actually affects the greatest number of people. There is a suggestion that utilitarianism may require self-sacrifice to promote greater benefits for others.⁴⁶ However, utilitarianism does not tell clearly how we can bring the individual to the spirit of self-sacrifice.

There a double issue here: First there is a question of how to understand the value that lies in the distribution of utility. Secondly, there is a question of how the good of the individual is linked with the good of others (cf. Lyons 1992). The whole problem lies in the aggregated good, which is thought of as the greatest good for the greatest number of people. On the one hand, in a society, you could have some individuals who are in possession of wealth. This wealth, if distributed, would eventually serve the greatest number of people. But on the other hand, we are faced with the question of *how* this distribution could be made possible. In practical terms, the problem is how, in societies like the USA or South Africa, the potential total wealth can actually be made available to great number of its population.

Hence, it is obvious that act-utilitarianism does not work. It is difficult to comply with act-utilitarianism. This form of utilitarianism does not provide any guidance

⁴⁶Suppose that the maximisation of the greatest good for the greatest number requires that some people be enslaved as a way sacrificing themselves, I wonder whether a utilitarian would endorse such a case. This case is one which is often cited as an objection to utilitarianism in general. It goes as follows: if we were to have a group of sadists, would a utilitarian accept that a person be tortured in order to maximise the happiness of these sadists?

regarding how one could relate one's own welfare to the welfare of other people as well. Our aim is try to show that virtue could solve the problem which act-utilitarianism fails to solve, that is, the problem of the distribution of the common good. But before we embark on this enterprise, let us first consider another form of utilitarianism, namely, rule-utilitarianism.

3.2.4. Rule-utilitarianism.

While act-utilitarianism is seen as a direct theory, rule-utilitarianism is seen as indirect. Rule-utilitarianism is the view that the rightness or wrongness of an action is to be judged by the goodness or badness of the consequences of a rule that everyone should perform the action in like circumstances (Smart 1990:199). In terms of maximization of utility, the right action is that which is consistent with those rules which could maximize utility if all accept them.

This form of utilitarianism comes close to Kantian ethics and in fact, could be a bridge between utilitarianism and Kantian deontological ethics. This can be seen by recalling two varieties of rule- utilitarianism: one can construe the actual rule or the possible rule. The latter is close to Kant's view when he says: Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

One of the proponents of rule-utilitarianism is R. M. Hare (1981). According to Hare, what we ought to do is that which the rule commands. In other words, the rule is an action-guiding. Another aspect Hare notes is the universalisability of the rule. One should be ready to assent to any moral judgement one makes when applied to situations similar to the present one in their universal properties. That is to say, when one judges what ought to be done, one should put oneself, not only in one's own position in the present situation, but also in others' positions which involves taking on board their preferences. This description is similar to that of Hooker (1990:67) when he says that rule-utilitarianism:

[it] assesses the rightness or wrongness of any particular act... indirectly in terms of a set of desires, dispositions and rules, which is assessed in terms of the consequences of everyone's having that set.

[it] assesses the rightness of any given act... in terms of the desires, dispositions and rules which are such that everyone's having them would bring about the best overall consequences.

There are two perspectives from which we can see where rule-utilitarianism goes wrong. Firstly, we can see rule-utilitarianism as a version of Kantian ethics. In this case we would apply the same criticisms applied to Kantian ethics, having in mind that in the latter, one acts on a rule for the sake of duty while in the case of utilitarianism, what matters are the consequences.

The problem of an ethic founded on rules is impersonality and rigidity. Rules are impersonal and do not allow flexibility. In effect, rule-utilitarianism makes the rightness or wrongness of particular acts not a matter of the consequences of those individual acts, but rather a matter of conformity to rules whose acceptance by everyone would have the best consequences (Hooker 1990:70).

To see the problem of the above point, let us suppose that we find that disobeying a given utilitarian rule would result in the best overall good. Rule-utilitarianism does not provide a decision procedure whereby the rule followed may be given up in favor of that exception whose end product has better overall consequences than that of the rule. The point we want to get across is that rule-utilitarianism does not necessarily justify acting according to the situation or circumstances and the disposition of one's conscience, especially when these latter are in violation of the rule, yet for the sake of maximizing the overall good.

The second perspective is that from which rule-utilitarianism can be reduced to act-utilitarianism (see Lyons 1965, Hare 1963: 131-6). That is, rule-utilitarianism collapses into extensional equivalence⁴⁷ with act-utilitarianism provided the rules are specific. But if such is the case, it follows that rules, as far as utilitarianism is concerned, could be irrelevant. In effect, a rule-utilitarian advocates his principle because s/he is ultimately concerned with the consequence (of the act enjoined to a given rule). But if I know the end of my action, why should I need a rule to arrive at that end, and why should I want that others obey that rule which, is not needed anyway. Hence Smart's point that:

No rule, short of the act-utilitarian one, can therefore be safely regarded as extensionally equivalent to the act-utilitarian principle unless it is that very principle itself... Rule-utilitarianism of the Kantian sort must collapse into act-utilitarianism in an even stronger way: it must become a "one rule", rule-utilitarianism which is identical to act-utilitarianism (Smart 1990:201).

Two things matter here, namely, the act governed by a fairly general rule, and the consequences thereof. Once again, the problem is that of impersonality. The general rule, as we noted earlier ignores the particular circumstances an agent may find herself in. The point here is that general rules may be abstract and inadequate such that one would need to turn to other moral grounds such as virtue⁴⁸.

⁴⁷By extensional equivalence... we mean that, although they are two different perspectives, act-utilitarian could be an extension of rule-utilitarianism since we expect a rule to be enjoined in a given act. Yet a act does not necessarily need a rule.

⁴⁸I am aware that in the same way, while rules can be inadequate, a virtuous disposition can be unreliable. Yet a virtuous disposition appears to have the advantage of applying to those particular circumstances where the general rules are not of great help(see Bennet 1974, Kupperman1988:119)

Furthermore, acting so as to produce the best consequences must take into consideration the limitations of human beings. The fear is that rules which nevertheless produce the best consequences understood according to the principle of utility, would therefore be justified, allowing utilitarians to say that the end justifies the means. Imagine, for instance, a rule which allows that some people be tortured so as to extract from them secret information which would lead the great happiness resulting from a victory in a war. Would a utilitarian endorse such a rule?

In the same way, utilitarians do not show clearly how for instance they could deal with a case in which some individuals could be exploited whenever this maximizes the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

3.2.5. Conclusion

So far we have argued that utilitarianism, just like Kantian ethics, cannot be an ethic on which to base a new African society. In fact utilitarianism cannot help to solve the moral and socio-political crisis which African society is undergoing. The reasons we gave were that apart from the fact that utilitarianism does not provide any basis for the rights of minorities, the welfare it purports to promote is impersonal and makes human beings a means to welfare, instead of making them the end of the welfare. The major problem is that both Kantian ethics and utilitarianism depart from the question of “what ought to be done” instead of “what ought one ought to be”. In other words, both ethical theories emphasized doing, therefore actions instead of the being of the person.

In the next point, we shall provide an ethic which is agent-based, that is virtue ethics. It is this ethic which we propose as an alternative to both utilitarianism and Kantian deontological ethics. This reflection on virtue ethics will not be a reflection for its own sake. Our aim is to draw out the social and political implications of virtue ethics for a society in moral, social and political crisis.

3.3. VIRTUE ETHICS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO DEONTOLOGICAL AND UTILITARIAN ETHICS.

So far we have noted that act-centred ethics cannot serve as a basis for a safe African society. This is simply because an ethic of doing relies on what is external to human nature. We noted that deontological ethics, particularly the Kantian variety, emphasizes rules and duties for their own sake as if these are prior to human beings. Duty for its own sake appears to undermine the priority of human beings. Alienation⁴⁹ lies in the very impersonality of deontological ethics. Another problem of Kantian deontological ethics noted was most importantly, how individuals who choose their own ends and values, unconstrained by any externalities (social authority or society, divine authority,...), do not acquire moral authority.

As far as consequentialism is concerned, we noted that it is committed to utility, that is, the greatest happiness for the greatest number, which means that the happiness of some could be sacrificed for the happiness of the majority. This ethic also suffers from impersonality, in that it is alienating. Utilitarianism does not concern itself sufficiently with what means are used to arrive to social welfare. At this juncture my fear therefore was that questionable means could be justified on utilitarian grounds because of their happy consequences.

The only advantage of the ethics of doing is that it is an ethics of efficient action. Deontological ethics gets things done, while consequentialism requires the creation of utility. However, whatever the advantage of the ethics of doing may be, our complaint is that we cannot value so much what alienates us and divides society beyond recognition. We cannot value duty or utility for their own sakes. Thus we suggest as an alternative

⁴⁹See the footnotes on the concept of alienation.

Aristotelian ethics of being, which centres on the character of the individual, that is, virtue ethics. Our discussion will evolve around two topics, namely:

- 1. The virtue of virtue ethics,**
- 2. The social and political implications of virtue ethics**

2.3.1. The virtue of virtue ethics.

The first virtue of virtue ethics lies in its very nature: it is an agent-centred ethic. In this respect it is an ethic that primarily values human beings for their own sake. The starting point of virtue ethics is not something external to human beings, but human beings in-themselves and in-others. This is obvious in these remarks of Aristotle:

...the good man should be a lover of self -for he will both himself profit by doing noble acts, and will benefit his fellows... the good man obeys his reason. It is true of the good man too that he does many acts for the sake of his friends and his country, and if necessary dies for them; for he will throw away both wealth and honours and in general the goods that are objects of competition, gaining for himself nobility... (Nicomachean Ethics 1169a 10-25).

Hence, it is obvious that virtue ethics takes a step beyond deontological and utilitarian ethics which give priority to something outside human beings (duty or utility), and thus alienate human beings. (Aristotelian) Virtue ethics is not interested in the act for its own sake or utility for its own sake. It is interested in actions and utility to the extent that they bring the individual to self-realization and self-perfection, not only for him/herself but also for the community which provides him/her with the necessary conditions of achieving this self-realization and self-perfection.

Conversely, Aristotelian virtue ethics is concerned with the living and flourishing of human beings and their communities. Thus, Aristotle would argue that morality, the good life, and reason are not seen in terms of impersonal duty or impartial maximization of well-being but in terms of a life of personal flourishing bound up with others in special relationships.

The basis of Aristotle's argument is the principle according to which the human being is a social being. Correspondingly, virtues are lived in the community and acts are virtuous in as much as they benefit the individual for himself and his community. When Aristotle says that an action is blamed or praised accordingly as it is vicious or virtuous, he is underlining the interaction there is between the individual and his community. In other words, to say that an action is blamed/disapproved, praised/approved by the community means that the community takes an interest, and participates in one's actions.

Here Aristotelian virtue ethics takes another step beyond Kantian ethics and the political liberalism which it has given birth to. In a liberal society, the link between the individual and the community is cut, because the individual chooses his/her values and ends without necessarily referring to the community- provided s/he does not violate the rights of others.

Furthermore, as far as an act is concerned, it is duty for its own sake that matters and not much the appreciation from the people around you. In other words, the individual is no more blamed or praised for his/her actions. In fact, in liberal societies, people tend to neglect the fact that all human beings believe that they have a certain inherent worth. When that worth is not recognized adequately by others through praise or blame, it is a sign that the society has lost the sense of itself and of the human being (cf. Fukuyama 1995:358f).

However, the criticism that is most likely to be launched against Aristotelian ethics is with regard to moral responsibility. It seems that blame and praise are justified,

not on the basis of the agent's merit or desert, but on the basis of their contribution to the formation and control of the agent's character.⁵⁰ A vicious person who would perform a praiseworthy act would not be praised in the same way as a virtuous person. We shall not concern ourselves much with this problem. Suffice to say that there is a causal relation between the state of character that is the focus of blame or praise, and the good or bad activities it produces (Meyer 1993:134).

Another aspect of virtue ethics that needs to be emphasized is what I will call the priority of virtues over rules and calculations. We noted that one of the problems of deontological ethics is that people could be like robots, mechanically fulfilling a set of rules or obligations. Kant would say that the ground for the fulfilment of moral obligation is reason, moral obligation being enjoined to the maxim that flows from the agent's practical reason. We should note, however, that not everybody is attuned to their reason to the extent they always do the right thing.

Thus, reason alone is not enough. To be rational is not a sufficient ground for one to fulfil one's duty. Reason alone cannot ensure the fulfilment of one's duty. On the contrary, we would argue that it is virtue that may guarantee fidelity to rules (Cf. Kilcullen 1983:451). Moreover, a virtuous agent is not limited by rules. Her practical reason allows her to ignore rules and obligations as the situation dictates, provided it is for her own flourishing and that of her community.

But to some people, the idea that one's actions must be directed towards one's flourishing and that of the community could sound simply like another rule, obligation or variation on utility. In a way, they would be right. However, for a virtuous person, the rule, obligation or utility do not flow from without as it may in the case of Kantian and utilitarian ethics. Instead, they flow from within. Accordingly, Conly (1988:83-4) argues

⁵⁰This is the very meaning of the difference between character and conduct. It is the agent rather than the actions which count morally. Hence, it is not the substance of an agent's actions that is the focus of moral appraisal (See Loudon 1997:213).

that, as far as virtue ethics is concerned, one is good because of good character arising from within, rather than because of obedience to laws imposed from without. In the same way, Putnam argues that being virtuous requires perception and appreciation as well as action (Putnam 1988:379).

On the same point, Roger Crisp argues that virtue ethics provides guidance where guidance is required and allows flexibility where circumstances call for it. In this connection, the decision of a virtuous person does not depend upon calculation, but on practical reason coupled with an informed conscience (Cf. Kilcullen 1983:465). Practical reason and informed conscience involve truthfulness and fidelity to oneself. A virtuous agent does not consider violating the rules which virtue guarantees.

Finally, the social character of virtue ethics requires it to be taught by exemplification. This aspect is very important, especially at this time when morality appears to be relativised and when we seem to have no more moral reference; as it is the case in the actual context of liberalism and individualism that goes with it. It is against this background that Anscombe argues that the concept of moral law and the associated concepts of moral obligation and moral duty make no sense when they are divorced from the idea of a divine lawgiver.

As far as this teaching by exemplification is concerned, Alderman talks of the paradigmatic individual with paradigmatic character⁵¹. He puts it thus: the paradigmatic individual creates the very possibility of a universality of paradigmatic character (Alderman 1982:145).

⁵¹The terms, paradigmatic individual, and paradigmatic character have to do with models or examples. Thus, the idea behind these terms is that morality is taught by exemplification. This was also Aristotle's idea since he suggested that being virtuous needs also a good company (that is, people who are virtuous).

The point being made here is that since rules cannot capture the nuances of life, we need to learn how to be virtuous by imitating virtuous people. In society, we are often asked to be like this or that, but also to be like so-and-so where so-and-so is either an ideal character (Plato's just man in the *Republic*, Aristotle's person of practical wisdom, Augustine's citizen in the *City of God*, the *Mushingantahe* (person of integrity in Burundian culture,...) or else an actual person taken as representative of the ideal (Socrates, Jesus Christ, Buddha, the heroes of epic writers, movies or of novelists) (Mayo 1993:235-36). Conversely, as Becker says, we depend on others in the sense that our rational agency is the product of social experience (Becker 1986:38).

Hence the lesson of virtue ethics is that we cannot be moral for the sake of duty or for the sake of utility, we are moral primarily because that is the way we are made to be as social beings. Another way of putting it is by saying that moral development has social roots. In effect, as we noted earlier, a human being needs those around him or her to reinforce her/his moral strength and assist in remedying his /her moral weaknesses. Accordingly, it is within the community that the human being becomes capable of morality and is sustained in his/her morality (Crisp 1996:232).

So far we have reflected on virtue ethics as if it is free from criticism. Before, we move to the social and political implications of virtue ethics, let us consider some of the criticisms that could be launched against our alternative to the ethics of doing.

3.3.2. Criticisms against Virtue ethics.

The first problem with virtue lies in that people expect ethical theory to tell them something about what they ought to do and what they ought not to do. But virtue ethics does provide answer to such questions. Accordingly, those who hold this criticism argue

that virtue ethics is most likely to be weak in the areas of casuistry and applied ethics⁵². However, I do not think virtues are just dispositions to behave in specific ways for which rules and principles can always be cited. The virtues involve skills of perceptions and articulations, situation-specific and know-how all of which are developed only through recognizing and acting on what is relevant in concrete moral contexts as they arise. Virtue ethics does not need rules and principles in that these are necessary only in the derivative sense (Louden 1997:206). What virtue needs is appreciation of the circumstances and the will to respond to them.

Another criticism launched against virtue ethics is the case whereby the best virtuous people make the wrong choices on matters on which the rules and principles would have helped to make the right choice. This is linked with what we can call error in judgment. However, every human being is fallible regardless of their character. Anyone can fall into the sort of mistake from which tragedies are made, even when aided by principles and rules.

But still on the above criticism, opponents of virtue ethics argue that because the conceptual scheme of virtue ethics is rooted in the notion of the good person, it is unable to assess correctly the occasional tragic outcomes of human actions. On this criticism, one would say that, in so far as virtue ethics is concerned with the person and his/her character, it can help us to distinguish tragic heroes from fools, and to view the acts that flow from each character type in their proper light (Louden 1997:207). In the same vein, Lawrence Becker (1975:111), argues that there are time when the issue is not how much harm has been done, or the value to excusing the wrongdoer, or the voluntary nature of

⁵²For a discussion on this criticism, see Hursthouse's reflection, *Applying Virtue ethics*. Hursthouse says that this criticism is linked with the fact that so far Virtue Ethicists who are cited such as Foot, McDowell, MacIntyre, Anscombe have been concerned with the theory and with applying it to yield conclusions about actions. However, she argues that this fact on its own could not hardly justify a criticism of Virtue Ethics (Hursthouse 1995:57ff).

the offending behaviour, but rather whether the sort of character indicated by the behaviour is acceptable or not.

There is also a question of whether it is possible to have a community which solely operates on hypothetical imperative ideals such as moral virtues? This is a question that is asked to virtue ethicists like Philippa Foot (1972:305-316) who, in her articles, *Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives*, envisions a moral community composed of an “army of volunteers”, that is, of agents who voluntarily commit themselves to such moral ideals as truth, justice, generosity and kindness. For Foot, in a moral community of this sort, all moral imperatives become hypothetical rather than categorical.

I do not think we would go to Foot’s extreme; because she speaks as if there is a possibility of a “heaven on earth” which only virtue ethics can achieve. I would rather say that in so far as moral virtues remain ideals we struggle to attain, certain categorical imperatives are necessary (but not sufficient), especially to help those who have not yet acquired sufficiently moral insights. However, I agree with Foot in the sense that behind her point, there is the idea that categorical imperatives could quickly show their limits in the kingdom of vicious citizens.

The last criticism which needs to be mentioned here is that of Griffin (1996:113-16). Griffin agrees that the standard of virtue ethics is informed dispositions in wise balance. However, he questions this criterion as unclear. First, if virtues are dispositions of the right sort, how do we decide on the right sort? Secondly, how do we decide on the right balance between these dispositions. For Griffin we must distinguish between virtues and feelings. For instance the virtue of compassion needs to be distinguished from soft-heartedness. Hence he says:

But if we find the right dispositions in the right balance with one another, then the criteria for right threaten to occupy the ground

floor in the moral structure, kicking virtues upstairs (Griffin 1996:114).

Griffin is right to suggest that virtues must undergo a critical refinement. But he forgets that when we talk of the virtues, we effectively distinguish them from naive feelings. In effect, we define the virtues as dispositions to act well when the occasion arises and, most importantly under the guide of practical intelligence.

We can also respond to Griffin's criticism by distinguishing between motivated virtues and the virtues of the will (see Roberts 1993:266-88). The motivated virtues characterise the desire or motive to behave in a morally correct manner. Accordingly, the presence of the right desire, such as the desire to tell the truth, or the desire to help the needy is a condition for possessing the virtues of honesty, or of compassion. Instead the virtues of the will are grounded in the capacity to resist the desire. For instance, courage resists the desire to flee, self-control and perseverance resist the desire to relax or enjoy. Hence a proper balance between the two types of virtue is necessary to avoid what we have called naive feelings, which may drown one in nonmoral passions but also to avoid one becoming a "moral monster" who could put his/his great power of self-control in the service of evil.

Griffin (1997:115-6) also points out the fact that virtue ethics is most likely to be unrealistic by proposing a programme that cannot be carried out. Correspondingly, he discards the goal of virtue ethics as overly ambitious. For him, the idea that virtue ethics can cultivate an ideally virtuous person, whose dispositions are in perfect balance and who therefore is better able to perceive situations correctly, including features that general principles fail to capture, is just implausible. However, this is not really a criticism. Griffin is rather pointing at the limits of virtue ethics. Certainly, virtue ethics does not promise to make humans gods. Instead, virtue ethics is committed to the goodness of human beings as far as this is possible. In fact, later we shall note that what

virtue cannot achieve in the society, the law supplements. This being the case, let us now turn to the social and political implications of virtue ethics.

3.3.3. Social and political implications of virtue ethics.

Before we enter in the core of our subject-matter, it is necessary to show the link between virtue ethics and communitarianism, which we proposed as an approach to this ethics. What is communitarianism? As the concept indicates, communitarianism has to do with community. Thus, communitarianism can be regarded as a perspective in social and political philosophy that defines human beings in terms of social bonds rather than individual traits in the community (Daly 1994:ix).

To be precise, the general characteristic of communitarianism is the view that liberalism does not take into account sufficiently the importance of the community for personal identity, moral and political thinking, and judgements about our well-being in the contemporary world (Bell 1993:4). According to Avineri and De-Shalit (1992:1), Communitarianism is the most crucial and substantive challenge to Kantian liberalism and the individualism to which it gives birth.

There are two main angles from which communitarianism can be looked at, namely, methodological and normative perspectives (Avineri & De-Shalit 1992:2-3). From the methodological stand-point, the communitarians argue that the premises of individualism such as the rational individual who chooses freely are false, and the only way to understand human behaviour is to refer to individuals in their social, cultural, and historical contexts. Accordingly, the suggestion is that the liberal image of individual self is ontologically false. Individual identity is constituted by the community of which one is part. This argument is found articulated in the reflections of communitarian like Charles Taylor (1989) and Alasdair MacIntyre (1981).

From the normative stand-point, communitarians argue that the premises of individualism give rise to morally unsatisfactory consequences, such as the impossibility of achieving a genuine community, the neglect of some ideas of the good life and unjust distributions of goods. Thus, to solve these problems of individualism, communitarians argue that we should reconsider the goodness of the community. The community is defined as a body with some common values, norms and goals in which each member regards the common goals as his or her own. This perspective is mostly developed by Michael Sandel who argues that it is morally good that the self be constituted by its communal ties (1982, 1996).

There are two major implications of the normative perspective of communitarianism. The first implication is that personal autonomy is better achieved within the community than outside communal life. In effect, it is the community that gives our lives their moral meaning. It is against this background that Charles Taylor argues that the community is good because it is only by virtue of our being members of the community that we can find a deep meaning and substance to our moral beliefs. The danger is, of course, that the individual freedom might be absorbed in the community. No attention is given to the fact that there are some values which derives from or/and shares with the community and other values which one holds personally. Moreover, there is a risk of the individual shifting her/his responsibility to the community (just as in liberalism, the responsibility is often shifted to the individual).

The second implication is that ontologically, in order to justify the obligations that we hold to the members of our communities, we must attach some intrinsic, non-instrumental value to the community itself and to our relations with other members of the community. It is on this ground that we can justify the obligation to fight for one's state in the case of war. This obligation is not necessarily a matter of choice. However, such an obligation does not go without problems as it is obvious in case of national movements which may involve apartheid, genocide, racism,...With this note in mind, we shall now consider the link between communitarianism and virtue ethics.

One way of perceiving the link between the two is by noticing that some communitarian thinkers draw heavily on Aristotle, who happened to be the father of virtue ethics as linked to the life in the community. This is the case of, for instance, MacIntyre. However, we should quickly note that not all virtue ethicists are communitarians. Kant developed a doctrine of virtue, yet he is not a communitarian. Hence, our suggestion is to look at communitarianism as an approach to, and a sociopolitical expression of, virtue ethics. In this way, we hope to connect virtues to social and political order while defending the communitarian critique of liberalism, in so far as virtues are understood by communitarians as aspects of character that enable people to live according to a shared view of good life.

Now, by looking at the social and political implications of virtue ethics, we propose at the same time to challenge liberal criticism according to which communitarianism, which is an approach to virtue ethics, lacks a theory of the state (Downing & Thigpen 1993:1049ff). I will suggest that this criticism is misleading because it fails to perceive the link between an ethical theory and political theory. Aristotle made his ethics a preface or, as Urmson puts it, a prolegomenon to politics.⁵³ In fact his approach ranges from the smallest unit of social relations to the highest unit of complex social relations- that is, the State.

Moreover, as we have already noted, Aristotelian ethics considers humans as naturally social and political. Accordingly, ordinary social relations culminate in the political arrangement of the state. Thus, the present point consists in considering Aristotle's definition of human beings as naturally social and political within the context

⁵³Of course this does not mean that I accept Urmson's interpretation of Aristotle's connection between ethics and politics. In effect, Urmson argues that for Aristotle, both ethics and politics are concerned with determining the good for human beings. This is true. But Urmson is wrong when he says that ethics considers only the good for human beings abstracted from the community, whereas politics studies human being in his complete social context (Urmson 1988:109). I think Urmson fails to see that Aristotle's starting point in ethics and politics is that human being is a social animal. It is to this end that Aristotle dedicates a substantial part of his reflection on friendship and virtues related to human interactions.

of his virtue ethics (see *Politics* 1253a, *Nicomachean ethics* 1169b 15-19) which aims at making the state a society in which individuals live meaningful lives.

To say that human beings are social animals is to say that one cannot but be the product of a society. The first aspect of society is the family, in which one receives one's moral education. It is in the family (both nuclear and extended as well as the neighbourhood) that one learns how to be generous, kind, just, truthful cooperative, hospitable, friendly,... and learns what is good. That is what Aristotle means when he talks of private education, and says that children start with a natural disposition to obey the injunctions and the habits of the father in the household (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1180b4-6).

The family is the lowest level of human community. At the highest level is the State.⁵⁴ In fact, Aristotle says that the family is a constituent or a part of the state (*Politics* 1253a 12-13). The question is whether the virtues one learns in the family contribute to one's life in the state on the one hand, and on the other hand whether the contribution of the state in the formation of one's character enhances the life of the family in return. These questions will help us to deal with the question of whether we can think of a well-ordered⁵⁵ society, be it liberal, utilitarian or otherwise without virtue.

The connections between the family and the state in matters of moral education are found summarized in the following:

[For], inasmuch as every family is a part of a state, and [these] relationships are the parts of a family, the virtue of the part must

⁵⁴I will consider the family and the state as two extreme levels of the community. That is to say, between the two levels, there are other instances which I shall not consider here, but which are nevertheless important for one's character. These include the clan, tribe, and other forms of association where a virtuous life may be learned and practiced.

⁵⁵Here I am borrowing Rawls' aesthetic concept of a well-ordered society to mean a harmonious society, not necessarily based on the principles of justice, as Rawls suggested, but based on virtuous lives.

have regard to the virtue of the whole. And therefore [women and] children must be trained by education with an eye to the state, if the virtues of either of them are supposed to make any difference in the virtues of the state,... for children grow up to be citizens...(*Politics* 1260b 15-16).

The idea being expressed here is that the family is the first instance is the formation of one to a virtuous life of a citizen. By so doing, the family participates in the task of making good citizens. Aristotle notes that the virtues children are taught in their families may differ. But this does not matter, since families educate their children in virtue with an eye on the State of which they are part. I would argue that the duty of the parents to make their children virtuous is also a duty of the State.

Consequently, if one does not learn in the family how to respect the goods of the family, we cannot expect one to respect the goods of the state either. If a child does not learn properly how to obey the orders or customs in the family and the neighbourhood, it will be difficult for him or her to understand the meaning of authority and respect the laws of the state that promotes the common good.

The point being made here is that it is in the family that the individual learns to respect to people of his/her society, the sense of service and proper human relationships, the sense of sharing and cooperation, reasonableness, honesty, tolerance, fairness, justice, the distance vis-a-vis of wealth... In fact, we would argue that it is the family that teaches the virtues that integrate individuals into the larger society, the State. Put differently, it is in the family that one learns to be human. Hence, it is not surprising that some liberal theorists are paying increasing attention to the moral development of citizens in the family and neighbourhood (See Buchanan 1989, Paris 1991).

Now what is the role of the state in the inculcation of virtue and why should the inculcation of virtue also be the duty of the state and not only of the family? This

question may seem irrelevant to liberals, who argue that because persons have the right to choose their personal good, the state should neither mandate any conception of the good life, nor enforce virtues linked to a particular way of life. Instead, they would argue that only political virtues may be taught by the state.

However, I think the distinction between nonpolitical virtues taught by non-political institutions and political virtues taught by political institutions is a misleading one. Virtue is virtue; the distinction between political virtues and non-political virtues is not necessary. As a matter of fact, the virtues taught in the family culminate in the life in the State. It is through virtue (as primarily a moral and not political quality) that we recognise that a particular person is human. By human, I mean what Africans of Bantu culture call the embodiment of *ubuntu* (humanity), *ubufpasoni* (human dignity, self-respect) and *ubutungane* (integrity).

Let us come back to our question of the task of the state in the inculcation of virtue. In the family, which is a nonpolitical institution, the individual has acquired the virtues that integrate him/her socially. Now s/he has to acquire from the state, which is a political institution, the virtues which integrate him politically.⁵⁶ By virtues which integrate the individual politically we mean those virtues by which the individual fulfils his/her nature as a political animal. The most important of these virtues consists in fulfilling one's duties to the State while perceiving and claiming one's rights from the State. The first duty which also happens to be a right for a citizen is the participation in political arrangement.

I am saying that fulfilling the duty of participating in political arrangement is a virtue taught by the State. This virtue is very important because it involves other virtues such as sharing and cooperation, which mean making available for others the spiritual

⁵⁶This distinction is justified because we would not have any reason to believe that the virtues that integrate one socially in the family and neighbourhood are the same as those that integrate the individual politically, that is, at the highest level of social relations.

and material resources one has, such that no citizens should be lacking in sustenance and support (See *Politics* 1329b 9ff). It is by this virtue that the common good can be promoted and enhanced.

If the state fails to train its citizens in this virtue, it will most likely find itself with citizens who are interested in themselves and who promote their own interests while disregarding the interests of other citizens and of the whole society. It is this kind of citizen who amasses excessive wealth which alienates them (makes them inhuman) by distracting them from healthy social interactions. It is this kind of citizens who would devise ways of not paying taxes while involving themselves in unlawful or illicit economic activity. Other kinds of vices that come with the lack of virtue we noted are insolence, arrogance as well as mercenary attitudes (see Nusbaum 1990:209). As a consequence, corruption and despotism arise and the society starts to malfunction.

It is on this basis that when we talk of the duty of the state to train virtuous citizens, we are suggesting that it is the duty of the state to provide the conditions and circumstances under which a good human life may be chosen and lived. It is education in virtue that produces citizens who are capable of functioning well (Nusbaum 1990:214) for their own happiness, and the happiness of the whole society.

So far our concern has been virtue ethics as an alternative to deontological and utilitarian ethics. We noted that the virtue of virtue ethics lies in the fact that it is an agent-centred ethics. Accordingly it is committed to human beings as social and political beings. Hence, virtue is not acquired for its own sake. It is acquired for the happiness of the person who possesses it as well as the happiness of the society in which s/he practices it and which provided him with the conditions for acquiring that virtuous life. In the next chapter, we shall apply this ethic to African society which is experiencing a serious moral, social and political crisis. This crisis is due to the fact that African society has departed from regarding human beings as the centres of all interest and has invested in what alienates the African.

CHAP IV. A RETRIEVAL OF VIRTUE ETHICS IN AFRICAN SOCIO-POLITICAL HUMANISM

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter we noted that Kantian and utilitarian ethics alienate human beings by committing themselves to utility and principles or rules. Yet these ethical theories claim to liberate human beings from external forces (divine authority, social authority, natural teleology...)⁵⁷. As a matter of fact, the project of Kantian ethics was to restore the autonomy of the individual, whereas utilitarian ethics purported to promote human beings by providing the greatest happiness for society. The problem here is the starting point. Where and how should we start if we are to promote human beings? My criticism is that, far from promoting human beings, the two ethical theories engaged themselves in the systematic devaluation of human beings (cf. Isaac 1987:639).

The most important aspect of this devaluation was that these ethical theories neglected the fact that human beings are primarily socially situated; that is, human beings are naturally social (See Taylor 1984). If we are to restore human dignity and integrity, we need to acknowledge that, outside of society, no individual can become fully human. Put differently, society is a normative and an axiological reference⁵⁸, which makes the individual fully human (Clair 1997: 144). Thus against utilitarians and Kantians, we are

⁵⁷From now on, I will talk of “the promotion of human beings” to refer to the whole project of Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics to liberate human beings from external authorities such as divine authority, social authority,...

⁵⁸By axiological reference, I mean “value norm”. Thus, to say that society is an axiological reference is to say society is a reference of values for individuals; that is, the values of the individual have to be measured against the values of the society to which s/he belongs.

arguing that no one could be fully human if utility or abstract principles were indeed the fundamentals of morality.

What is deeply wrong with Kantian and utilitarian ethics is that they assume a mechanistic view of life and the world. The world and society are conceived of as a machine in which people are objects and atomistic individuals seen in terms of what they can do with little or no attention to what they should be. Accordingly relations are weighed in terms of utility or duty. Reason becomes the sole means to utility.

On this view, moral conduct in a mechanistic society is guided by personal interest.⁵⁹ And since each individual is autonomous and guided by his own interest, the result is disagreement on what is moral which, as we noted earlier, implicitly leads to moral relativism⁶⁰ despite Kant's moral objectivism. Liberals such as Rawls suggest that conflicting interests could be managed on the basis of justice, which is thought to safeguard the rights of individuals. This perspective is referred to as liberalism. Obviously we need justice when disagreements occur, but justice cannot satisfy most of the needs of the community.

African society has inherited this kind of liberalism, which undermines the ties that bind people together, not only in the community, but also in the cosmos. Hence the socio-

⁵⁹It may be true that Kantianism and utilitarianism reject self-interest. Yet self-interest could be seen as a consequence of these theories. In effect, by emphasizing individual autonomy, and the freedom to determine one's values and ends (Kantianism), or by conceiving of the greatest happiness as an aggregate of individual goods, the by-product cannot avoid being self-interest. As far as Kantianism is concerned, for instance, Rawls conceives of the parties behind the veil of ignorance as individuals disinterested in each other. As a result, Rawls' Kantianism suffers from a kind of individual bias.

⁶⁰ Liberal philosophy would hold that government should not legislate morality because all morality is merely subjective, a matter of personal preference not open to argument or rational debate (see Sandel 1996 :8). In fact, it seems that the individual who determines his own values and ends, needs to determine the kind of morality (utilitarian or Kantian) that regulates his/her choices.

political crisis we Africans are living through today lies in the fact that human relations are devoid of moral qualities beyond liberal justice. We shall argue that the root cause of this crisis is the fact that African leaders and thinkers of the post-independence era moved from an African humanism that is socio-ethical, to a kind of humanism that is concerned with economic modes of production in the hope of providing their fellow Africans with socio-economic welfare, as if this was the whole of human happiness.

This move had a double implication. The first implication was the shift from being to having, which meant that Africans came to be interested in what they could have rather than what they could be. The second implication was the shift from the community to the individual. For the African, the community ceased to be a normative and axiological reference for a fully human individual. Thus, our effort will be to restructure African Humanism by means of virtue ethics, which is itself a humanism in so far as it is an agent-centred ethics. This will help us to re-locate the individual in the community beyond the family, the clan or the tribe: a state.

4. 2. THE NATURE OF AFRICAN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL HUMANISM

At the centre of African thought lies a conception of the human person which Mbiti expresses as follows : “ I am because we are, since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti 1964 :141).⁶¹ It is this communal life and solidarity that gives African society a humanistic foundation. By humanism, we shall understand a system of thought which makes human beings its centre. More precisely, it is the recognition of a person as a being endowed with dignity, integrity and value, manifested in life with others in the community.

⁶¹ This aspect of person-in-the community is expressed differently among the Xhosa of South Africa when they say « *umntu ngumntu ngabantu* », that is, a person is a person through other persons (Shutte 1993:46ff). This aspect is, of course amenable to the Aristotelian principle of viewing a human being as a social animal. What lies behind this principle is what Thomist philosophers have claimed when they say that we depend on other persons to act, develop socially and culturally, and fulfil ourselves as persons (see Lachance 1939, McCool 1975 :15).

This African humanism was given a social and political expression by African political leaders and thinkers of the post-independence era. However, since there is no definition of African social and political humanism agreed upon by all African political thinkers, we shall outline five salient features which are found in most individual reflections:

4.2.1. Critique and struggle against liberalism

The first salient feature of African social and political humanism is the critique and struggle against liberalism in all its forms, be they political, philosophical, economic, or cultural (Sindima 1995 :94). Hence Nyerere tells us that African humanism is a socio-economic and cultural critique of the liberal paradigm. In the same vein Senghor views African humanism as a culture which emerged to fight against the liberal forces which destroyed African culture, robbed Africans of self-esteem and undermined their self-determination, all of which are important factors in achieving selfhood (as in Sindima 1995 :94).

The purpose of all this criticism against liberalism is to re-place the individual in the communal context, because with the advent of liberalism the individual does not consider his/her social nature when s/he claims his/her freedom to pursue his/her own ends and values. In fact, such an individual does not sufficiently consider the question of how liberal freedom empowers him or her, and the limits of this empowerment.

Hence African political leaders and thinkers hoped to move beyond the social, political and economic order which Kantian and utilitarian ethics created, and from there, create a kind of society in which citizens could become fully human by realizing their personhood. However, this was not easy. For instance, Kenneth Kaunda acknowledges the power of liberal politics and economics and what it has done to African society as he writes:

While there is plenty of goods that Africa is justly proud of in its set up of a mutual aid society... one has got to understand and appreciate that the powerful forces from the West which have been aggressively shattering in their individualistic, competitive, possessive approach, have had serious and grave consequences on the African community (Kaunda 1967 :9).

The criticism of liberalism helped African leaders and thinkers to fight colonialism in the spirit of nationalism and eventually to get independence for their respective countries. But one wonders whether it achieved the kind of society hoped for. Before we answer this question, we shall first review other features of African humanism.

4.2.2. Socialism.

African social and political humanism was captured in a socio-political system known as socialism. According to the fathers of African independence, African socialism is a rejection of both Western socialism and Western capitalism. Both produce a society in which the individual is alienated from others (Apostel 1981 as in Shutte 1996 : 32). African socialism should not be confused with Western socialism, even though they appear to be the same. Both kinds of socialism consist in a struggle against the forces of liberalism and its economic, political and social implications: Socialism is a struggle against capitalism which is an ideological expression of the political philosophy of liberalism.

However, African socialism differs from Western socialism with regard to the context in which it arose. While Western socialism emerged out of a class struggle, African socialism is patterned on the nature and structure of African society and African cosmology.

According to Nyerere, Marxist socialism was born out of a civil /class war between the landed and the landless masses. However, African socialism did not start

from the existence of conflicting classes in society. In fact, as Nyerere notes, there is no such thing as class⁶², the absence of which is due to the African concept of *Ujamaa* (familihood). In short, for Nyerere, the African political system is opposed to doctrinaire socialism, which seeks to build a happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between people (Nyerere 1967 :170).

Another characteristic of African socialism is that it rests on a kind of cosmology, an explanation of the universe, according to which being is seen holistically. In this cosmology, the group and the individual are not two distinct realities, but one and same reality (Dia Thiam 1962 :33-4). Accordingly, the individual cannot determine his/her own ends and values without any reference to the ends and values of the community to which he belongs, neither could the community determine its values and ends without considering those of the individual. Put differently, there is a relation of reciprocity between the individual and the community.

One last difference between African Socialism and Western socialism is that the latter was a reaction to the capitalist concentration of wealth. However, it appears as if African socialism was not a fact but an aim to be attained. This aim consisted in producing a modern social and political order in which citizens would cooperate to maximize their welfare as well as their autonomy and dignity. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this welfare and dignity were not achieved as African socialism shifted to the Western socialism it purported to avoid. This meant a shift from the very ground of African socialism, which is socio-ethical, to a ground which was mainly economic, a shift which meant a move from being to having. We shall come to this point later.

⁶²That there is no such thing as class does not mean that there were no inequalities in African traditional society. However, the kind of inequalities observed in African society were not the kind that could generate class war.

4.2.3. The nature of African society

The nature of African society is another feature of African humanism. African society is by nature communal. Africans believe that the individual is empowered by the community. In African society, people are bonded to each other in a web of life such that what affects one affects the community (Sindima 1995 :27). For Senghor, African society is communal because of the communion of souls rather than the aggregate of individuals. The African society is that which makes a person feel that s/he can develop his/ her originality only in and through the community (Senghor 1961 :123-4)⁶³.

The African society is an inclusive and accepting community. It is a web of relationships which involve mutual responsibility. It includes the living, the dead, and even the unborn. The relationships between the three categories are manifested through ancestral cults which serve to remind the living of those virtues which define the morally good person and life. These are means by which the community creates the individual through incorporation and seeks to emphasize the basic concept of bonded-ness between people. Accordingly the concern for the common good comes first and the individual is unceasingly reminded that he owes existence to other people, both the living and the dead.

However, this kind of society is not without its problems. The question is how one accounts for personal freedom, since the group appears to exercise pressure on the individual in order to conform to the group. How can one account for personal responsibility, which appears to be shifted to the group? These questions are real and crucial. Nevertheless, African society encourages individual achievement, and even competition, provided they consider and protect the dignity of the community as a

⁶³ This definition of African society is ontological in nature. We understand that human society is a normative and axiological reference point. No one can develop to become fully human outside society (Clair 1997:144). We should recall that Aristotle also understood society as a natural environment, wherein a person fulfils himself, a place of common and good life characterized by an intrinsic link between ethics and politics.

whole. The affirmation of the self is encouraged but not at the risk of ending in individualism. Thus, one's dignity and humanity are achieved in society, a kind of community which is, however, limited to clan or tribe (we shall see the implications of this limit later). This takes us to the next feature, the value of the dignity of persons.

4.2.4. The value of the dignity of persons.

African humanism is also understood as an attitude whereby humankind is the end of all social activity in the community. The value and dignity of persons and community life arise from the concept of the world. In African cosmology, humankind is the central character. The community exists to uphold the sanctity of life and maintain and sustain the value of and respect for individuals. The family is the first unit in which dignity and respect develops. It is against this background that Nyerere argues that African humanism is a social, political and economic approach to the African quest for dignified humanity. In the same vein, Kaunda argues that anything, social, economic or political, that would diminish the value of persons would bring not only African society, but also the world, to an end.

Based on these four features, we can conclude that African humanism is a socio-ethical principle grounded in African cosmology. This socio-ethical principle is in turn intended for political and economic awareness and transformation of the traditional society into a modern society. Kaunda argues that African humanism is more than a socio-ethical principle. For him, African humanism is a state of mind whereby human spiritual, social and political nature is brought to consciousness (Kaunda 1967 :5). In this kind of society, human conduct is dictated by human needs to grow humanly, morally, socially but also economically.

The values emphasized in this social and political humanism are values such as sharing and cooperation, mutual aid and, of course, the community. Hence, for Nyerere the project of African humanism is to re-establish the network of social relationships that

provide security for individual because life is meaningful when it is shared. One's integration in such a network of social relations is manifested through labour and the production of goods common to all the members of the community. Accordingly, Nyerere conceives of African humanism as a moral force structured in such a way as to prevent the unequal distribution of wealth, which would end in the domination by the wealthy few.

Nyerere and other fathers of African independence claim that the overall aim of African humanism is the development and the promotion of social, political and economic equality with the objective of creating an environment of respect and responsibility, in which all members have equal rights and opportunities. This is the kind of society in which there is no exploitation of one person by another. However, this is also the project of Western socialism.

The real difference between African humanism and Western socialism is the metaphysical background and the emphasis on community. African humanism is based on African cosmology and the structure of the African society and draws on its traditional heritage which is the recognition of society as an extension of the basic family unit. In contrast, Western socialism is concerned with economic modes of production and the eradication of economic injustice, born out of the industrial revolution and the philosophy of individualism.

The crucial question is whether Africans have succeeded in securing African humanism as a socio-ethical system. We have already hinted at an answer to this question. Africans have failed to secure African humanism in two ways:

1. The African leaders and thinkers quickly adopted a kind of socialism based on alien metaphysical grounds, just as today, Africa has adopted a social and political liberalism with an alien metaphysical background.

2. African society dropped the ethical and metaphysical ground of our traditional society without submitting it to the kind of critique which would allow them to fully appreciate it.

Hence, Africans moved from humanism, based on a socio-ethical system, to a Marxist socialism which was primarily concerned with the modes of economic production⁶⁴. This move meant, at the same time, a move from being to having, in which Africans lost their cultural, social and political identity. Traditionally, the problem was not how much one possess, but rather how much one makes human values his/her concern. Instead, African is now ultimately defined in terms of economic wealth. This economic wealth becomes the source of (social and political) power. It is true that even in African traditional society, power and wealth were valuable, but they were not emphasized to the extent they are today. Now let us look at the present situation, which is the consequence of this shift.

4.3. A REVIEW OF THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SITUATION IN AFRICA.

This review will cover the period from the 1960s to the present day. The concern is not just to review the social and political past of African society. Rather we want to try to answer the question of why African society is what it is today, in order to provide an alternative. To begin with, the social and political situation of Africa can be summed up as follows:

Whereas Africa entered its decade of independence in the sixties amidst euphoric confidence about its socio-political future, it is entering the nineties encumbered by memories of dashed hopes, unrealized dreams,

⁶⁴Here I am not implying that Marxist socialism is not concerned with ethical questions besides the modes of economic production. It cannot be doubted that Marxist socialism is concerned with such moral values as justice and equality. But this concern is not idiosyncratic to it. What we are underlying here is that the basic premises of Marxist socialism are primarily economic (see Gyegye 1997:148).

unfulfilled promises and a dicey future. Having witnessed several military coups, dictators, civil wars and sectarian schisms, the praxis of governance and politics on the continent has outlined a failure of theory and obduracy of practice (Ayoade & Agbaje 1989 :v)

We noted that African leaders chose African socialism as a social and political system believed to be responsive to the traditional structure of African society and its metaphysical backdrop as we described it. However, although there was a difference in context, the similarity in terms between African socialism and Western socialism made the intervention of Western socialist states (and China and Cuba) in African countries possible (cf. Agostoni 1997:28ff).

Thus, during the struggle for independence, the Soviet Union and its allies helped the African leaders more than any other countries. The socialist bloc quickly became a reference point for African socialism. Hence, traditional African society, and its values, as well as African metaphysics, ceased to serve as reference points as promised by the political leaders and thinkers.

In the political process, African leaders preferred a one-party system, which they believed would allow socialism to succeed. They argued that the one-party system was compatible with the structure of African society. The idea behind this political arrangement was the preservation of unity and national cohesion in the context of a synthesis between African tradition and modernity (which emphasises economic development). This was right in some ways. On the one hand, the African tradition is community-centred; and community means cohesion and unity, and hence the absence of competitiveness, especially in the political sphere. On the other hand, the idea of a political party was new. It was intended to be a political means to maintain and sustain the cohesion of the community.

However, in African tradition the community is often limited to a clan, a tribe, a language, or a religion. In the new system, the social and political arrangement was to give rise to a higher order whereby tribe, language and religion had less significance, giving way to a common nationality (Chipasula 1991:340). That is to say, the one-party system was a way of fitting the different tribal, ethnic or clan communities into a larger community, which was the socialist state.

The promotion of a larger unity was believed to cohere with the idea of economic development. Here, economic development became the goal that justified the political activity, while citizens ceased to be the end of political organisation and economic development. Leaders pointed out that, because of extreme poverty, many people lacked the basic essentials of life. Economic development, it was argued, required that the whole population team up as one. In the course of this development, tensions arose, workers organised themselves to demand higher wages and the unemployed demanded employment opportunities. Socialism became something of an illusion, both economically and socio-politically.

It is true that fundamentally African socialism and its one-party system had many advantages: its apparent compatibility with the structure of African society, its ability to gather citizens into one political unit. However, the problem is that its end was no more the person but politics and the economy for their own sakes. Moreover, most political leaders were motivated by a hunger for power and material wealth. In the same way, they never understood that, in fact, economic welfare is not what constitutes human happiness. Human happiness needs also spiritual welfare.

Another problem is that where (African) socialism apparently succeeded, political leaders quickly became dictators using war and state terrorism. The community of decision-making became the political leader himself: Sharing and cooperation, as well as the notion of the free and responsible individual in the community disappeared, together with African values. Power, and the authority of the state were, henceforth, the property

of a single person, the political leader. The duties and obligations of citizens to the state were no more rendered to the state but to those who were in power, or who had a share in power.

It is worth noting that not all African countries embraced socialism as a politico-economic system thought to be suited to the nature of African society. Those who were not attracted by socialism embraced the capitalist ideology. These acquired as their allies the Western states which wanted to affirm themselves vis-à-vis the socialist system, especially in the climate of the cold war. These African states offered for Western liberal societies the opportunity for replication, but also a justification of the liberal capitalist ideals of state and society.⁶⁵

In both the socialist and capitalist systems, the leadership was trapped between two worlds, namely the heritage of the African past and the imperatives of contemporary living, derived from the Western experience (Ayoade 1986)

The consequence of the move to a kind of socialism based on an alien metaphysics was that when Western socialism fell, African socialism fell as well. Thus it is not surprising that when the Soviet Union crumbled, along with the totalitarian systems of Eastern Europe, political organisation in Africa was seriously shaken as well. This new order led to the present situation, which is characterised by the dominance of liberalism.

⁶⁵ This is also obvious in African studies. There are African scholars who defended the left, those who defended the right and those who defend the centre. (See Lonsdale 1981, Walker 1980, Copans 1985).

4.4. THE PRESENT SITUATION: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES.

So far we noted that the post-colonial era was marked by socialism as the political ideology believed to be compatible with African traditional society and cosmology. Time and again, Nyerere claimed that the African socialism is rooted in the African past and that modern African socialism can draw from its traditional heritage the recognition of society as an extension of the basic family unit (Nyerere 1968:12). As for Nkrumah, he argued that if one seeks the socio-political ancestor of socialism, one must go to communalism⁶⁶; and that in socialism, the principles underlying communalism are given expression in modern circumstances (Nkrumah 1964:73).

We noted that most African leaders betrayed their own social and political beliefs, as they moved from a socio-ethical perspective characteristic of African humanism, to a humanism that is economy-based. This later became the ground on which the liberal system was to rest (cf. Gyekye 1997:146).

Accordingly, the shift from African socio-ethical way of life to the economic one was at the same time a move from the life of communalism to individualism. There is no doubt that, by choosing socialism and its economic system, African leaders aimed at economic welfare. But they never perceived that this welfare could mean the alienation of the individual from the life of the community as well. The individual could see the economic changes, but s/he never saw what African culture was becoming in the process. This was the source of the crisis of identity in Africa at all levels: social, political, and cultural.

⁶⁶By communalism here, I refer to the African way of life whereby there is emphasis on fellow-feeling, solidarity, and selflessness. This is seen in the cooperative endeavor in which people help one another on a specific task, for instance, in building a new house, clearing the field for farming, mutual help in the education of children,... Accordingly the structure of traditional African society is said to be communal (see Gbadegesin 1998: 294-295).

Today, there are new economic, social and political demands, characteristic of the new world order. This new world order is characterised by liberalism, which is gaining in popularity throughout the world. In Africa, it has come to us in the form of political pluralism or liberal democracy. Nowadays, it passes without comment that there is no democracy without political pluralism. Yet democracy is not necessarily synonymous with political pluralism (Cf. Fares 1992:29).

At this juncture, we could also ask whether the socio-ethical ground of African humanism could not have been a basis for democracy. Why did Africans need to borrow from Western culture if it is democracy that matters? Although an answer to these questions matters if we are to provide an ethical theory suited to Africa, we nevertheless need to face the actual situation: the predominance of liberal democracy in Africa.

Liberal democracy in Africa is a feature of the 1990s, the time when we observed brutally quick social and political changes. The root of these radical changes was partly the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in Africa. The consequence of this change was that features of socialism, such as the one-party system, close control of personal freedom, and the centralised economy, were shattered. In place, there were pressures and incentives which surged from Western socio-political and economic culture to fill the vacuum.

All these factors promoted pluralistic political participation, extended freedom of expression and economic liberalisation. In short, we could say that it is the international environment that provided the occasion on which the social and political tension observed in Africa could explode. But more deep than this was the search for a political system that is more ethical than socialism, which has dominated Africa for about thirty years.

In this atmosphere, socialism lost its capacity to be a modern expression of African communalism and humanism. This loss of meaning was characterised by the alienation of the individual from the State. For most Africans, the government and the state have

become the enemy of the people (Ayoade 1986:27). This has created moral and political disorientation.

Thus, political liberalism meant reorientation, and was therefore perceived as liberation from political, tribal, ethnic or military totalitarianism which had characterised socialism. Political pluralism meant a framework in which social and political values such as individual rights, freedom and equal opportunity to participate in the social and political affairs of his society, are defined. Unfortunately, these rights were not balanced by duties and responsibilities. Freedom was unlimited, while equal participation meant self-service and not service to society.

The difficult question we face is how to harmonize the values of pluralism and the values of the community which we want to safeguard and how to harmonise the values of respect for the individual ushered in by pluralism, with the values of the African community?

The issue we face here is that of how to reconcile political pluralism and national unity, and also how to deal with the fact that an individual detached from the community loses his/her moral reference point and the virtues needed for social and political cooperation. Liberal democracy instils selfishness indirectly into individual citizens, while promoting the right of individuals to determine their own values and ends.

4.5. THE INADEQUACY OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC WELFARE BASED ON UTILITARIAN ETHICS.

The ethics that underlaid the political system of the post-independence era was utilitarian, not in the classical sense but in a surreptitious manner. This utilitarianism consisted in seeing socialism as an economic goal.⁶⁷ Thus, the greatest good consisted in economic development. However, this economic welfare did not benefit the whole society as the leaders of the socialist states had promised. In fact, wealth became a property of the few individuals who constituted the political class.

Furthermore, economic welfare as a goal of African socialism was but a means used by certain political leaders to ascend to social and political power, because power generates honour. Hence, in most cases, it can be shown that the economic development aimed at was never achieved because most of the political leaders were concerned with sumptuous ceremonies which could enhance their honour.

Thus, after three decades of the post-independence era, African countries live in abject poverty. The social and economic welfare hoped for was an illusion. Politically, governments became unsettled, choppy and unharmonious. Social and political instability pervaded the continent and military coups d'etat become the order of the day. Corruption was rife under African socialism. The corruption with which we are concerned with is political corruption, that is, the misuse of political positions for personal ends.

The serious matter of political corruption is the financial haemorrhage suffered by African states. According to Gyekye (1997:192), this was one of the major causes of

⁶⁷What I have in mind is to show how ethical theory operates in ordinary life: in our economic, political and social life. I am not saying that when the utilitarians worked out their theory of utility, or the greatest happiness for the greatest number, they were reflecting directly on economic matters. Rather what I am suggesting is that utilitarianism has economic, political and social implications. After all, an ethical theory is relevant if it helps us to see how to live a better life economically, politically, socially and culturally.

military coups, and the consequent disruption of democratic management. The military themselves did overthrow civilian governments to correct the evils of political corruption, but rather to enrich themselves. This political corruption was not only associated with the mismanagement of public wealth, but also with graft, fraud, nepotism, kickbacks, favouritism and the misappropriation of public funds.

Such was the source of social upheavals; a situation which prepared the ground for today's predicament.

4.6. THE FAILURE OF POLITICAL PLURALISM BASED ON KANTIAN ETHICS.

When African leaders saw clearly the failure of socialism, the time of political pluralism arrived. This option, as we noted, came as a result of the new world order, as well as internal social, political and economic dissatisfaction. This liberal system was embraced without considering its limits and the limits of the philosophy behind it. One feature of the liberal political system is that it is underlaid by an individualist philosophy which makes it impossible to achieve a genuine community. It is underlaid by the Kantian philosophy which lays emphasis on the autonomy of the individual, who acts unconstrained by forces other than his own rational capacity.

Thus, political liberalism does not help us to build the community. Instead, it has given birth to a fragmented society. This fragmentation is obvious in the political parties founded on ethnic groups, regional, personal or group interests, as well as various forms of division within the civil society. Each of these political parties appears to have as its objective becoming the state it is thought to serve.

However, the problem is more complex than one might think. If we take the case of Burundi, for instance, what we observe in the social and political scene is that the individuals use ethnic groups or regions, as a means to gain power or to serve their personal interests. In other words, these individuals do not really represent their groups.

Of course it is true that although a leader may have ascended to power by means of his own group without genuinely promoting the interests of its members, the group feels satisfied by seeing one of their own promoted.

The task we face is to reconcile the individual and his own group on the one hand, and on the other hand, channel the conflicting interests of different individuals and groups into an interest that is common to all citizens. How do we avoid war between individuals or between groups? Above all, how can individual interests contribute to the common good? These questions are perennial ones in political philosophy. Logically speaking, it is the problem of reconciling the particular and the general (See Hermet 1993: ch.8). However the crucial problem is the fact that individuals who determine their own values and ends are more concerned with their personal rights than with their duties toward their fellow citizens and society as a whole.

Thus, the question is whether we can talk of democracy in a society in which the individuals who claim their rights have no respect for the public good and the rights of their fellow citizens. (But also how we can talk of democracy where the public good excludes the the good of the individual?). This problem can only be solved if we imbue political practice with ethical values: in particular the moral virtues. Hence, we want to argue that citizens, as well as their political leaders, must be won over to moral virtue, without which democracy will degenerate into chaos and anarchy. I think here of a democracy where individuals are superior to the law, and who attempt to maximise their own ends without thinking of maximizing the common good (See Courter 1984:67).

4.7. TOWARDS A SOCIO-POLITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF AFRICAN SOCIETY BASED ON VIRTUE ETHICS.

In our previous reflection, we noted that neither utilitarianism nor Kantian ethics can be the basis of a safe society where citizens live meaningful lives. Both ethical theories alienate human beings by substituting them as ends either with an impersonal concept of the overall good (socio-economic welfare), or by encouraging uncontrollable individual freedom, which divides the society beyond recognition. The consequence of these two ethical theories in Africa is that African humanism has been lost as a moral reference. The alternative which we suggest in order to restrengthen African humanism is virtue ethics.

Why virtue ethics? Because, as we argued, it is an agent-centred ethics and therefore puts at its centre the fulfilment of the individual and his/her community. Hence, virtue ethics itself is a humanism *par excellence*. To say that the individual fulfills himself in the community is to say that a person is essentially social. The virtue that characterises a human being as social in African society, and which sums up all moral virtues, is *ubuntu*⁶⁸ or humanness or humanity (See Twesigye 1987:109ff).

4.7.1. Ubuntu as an overall virtue

Ubuntu as an overall virtue characterises human beings as social in so far as his/her context is the community (see Mbiti 1969:100-110, Twesigye 1987:111-113). It is in this context that one acquires normative principles for responsible decision-making and action, for oneself and for the good of the whole community. It is *ubuntu* alone that can allow the individual to transcend, when necessary, what the customs of the family or the tribe requires without disrupting the harmony and the cohesion of the community. That is to say, once one has acquired this virtue s/he no more does things because the community

⁶⁸See footnote no.1

expects him/her to do so, but because it is the right thing to do both for him/herself and the community. It is in this respect that Kasenene observes that:

A person who becomes famous and respected in the community... as a virtuous person, is the one who has proved to be superior to the norm in some way, and who has evolved a life plan of his/her own, achieving through his or her own efforts and ingenuity what is admired by the community (Kasenene 1993:10).

Here Kasenene is in agreement with Aristotle who talks of the power of practical reason. Practical reason characterises an individual endowed with *ubuntu*. Such an individual can discover that the community cannot regulate the whole life of the individual. Tshamalenga (1985:59) calls this state an eccentric positionality⁶⁹. The same view is also held by Kwame Gyekye who argues that:

The communitarian self, such as is held in African moral and political philosophy is not permanently detached from its communal features, and though the individual is fully embedded or implicated in the life of her/his community, nevertheless the self, by virtue of - or exploiting - other natural attributes essential to its metaphysical constitution, can from time to time take a distanced view of its communal values and practices and reassess or revise them (Gyekye 1998: 327-8).

Thus, the human being as a moral creature cannot be entirely regulated by custom. Here lies the importance of *ubuntu* as the permanent condition or habitual state of human moral goodness, uprightness and humanness (Twesigye 1987:112).

⁶⁹Here I am arguing for a moderate communitarianism based on certain aspects of African society such as the recognition of individual capabilities and wisdom by which certain people can become charismatic leaders or advisers in the community. Accordingly, I do not think the individual is crushed by the community since individuals are valued in themselves as potential contributors to communal survival. The individual who understands African society in this way is no more limited by what the community requires. S/he can take responsibility and initiatives for the good of the community (see Gbadegesin 1998; Gyekye 1998:326ff).

When we observe the state of African society today, we find that Africans have in some way lost this value of *ubuntu*. This value was lost, as we argued, in the process of reducing African socialism, which is socio-ethical, to Western socialism which is fundamentally economic, being primarily concerned with economic-welfare. The African came to be interested in possessions, that is having, which provided the ground for the individualism from which African society is suffering today.

Thus, by retrieving the virtue of *ubuntu*, we intend to help Africans to re-discover the morality of being which characterises African humanism as a socio-ethical system. There are two aspects of this being: the first is *being- with- self* which is the affirmation of personal individuality and responsibility, yet without undermining African communalism. The second is *being- with -others* which lays emphasis on the importance of the community and affirms the nature of human beings as social. Let consider each of these concepts in turn.

4.7.2. Two aspects of ethics of being of a person: *being-with-self* and *being-with-others*

1. *Being-with-self*

By *being-with-self*⁷⁰ we mean the individuality of the person and hence deny that African communalism deprives the individual of his/her freedom and responsibility which are the inner side of moral virtue.⁷¹ To say that freedom and responsibility are the inner side of the moral virtue is to say that, in acting, the virtuous individual engages him/herself in a process of deliberation, weighing different choices, appreciating the circumstances and the relevance of his/her actions before s/he acts. In other words, a virtuous person does not act as if s/he is forced by what s/he cannot control.

Hence, it is when one can take moral responsibility that we can say that one has grown (in moral integrity). This kind of individual is one whom Burundians call

⁷⁰We could compare my concept of *being-with-self* with Paul Ricoeur's concepts of *idem* (the same) and *ipse* (the self, of the self, by oneself). By *idem*, Ricoeur means a permanence in time that depends on an unchanging core of sameness. As for *ipse*, Ricoeur means the selfhood that accommodate change over time and is constituted in relation to what is other than self. For Ricoeur, *idem* and *ipse* overlap in the phenomenon of character as the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized (Ricoeur 1992:121). Ricoeur unifies the two concepts in the concept of self-constancy as he writes:

Self-constancy is for each person that manner of conducting himself or herself so that other count on that person. Because someone is counting on me, I am accountable for my actions before another. The term 'responsibility' unites both meaning; 'counting on' and 'being accountable for'. It unites them, adding to them the idea of a response to the question 'Where are you?' asked by another who needs me. This response is the following; 'Here I am!', a response that is a statement of self-constancy (Ricoeur 1992:165).

⁷¹By insisting on individual freedom and responsibility, I am echoing Aristotle, who gives us three conditions of responsibility for an action or a decision as constituting the inner side of moral virtue. These conditions are as follows: a. the action is voluntary, that is, the action is done without compulsion. b. the agent has knowledge of the circumstances and, c. the agent has free choice: the action is done by choice, that is, it is a result of previous deliberation (Aristotle NE Bk III, Chs.1-5).

*umushingantahe*⁷² or *umufpasoni* (wise person in terms of practical wisdom). Both terms denote the embodiment of *ubuntu*. The *umushingantahe* or *umufpasoni* is first characterised by a high sense of justice, truth, harmony and order, not only among people but also in the world of things.⁷³

The question that one may ask is why people endowed with *ubuntu* are more and more rare, especially in this time of crisis in African society.⁷⁴ The answer lies in what we have been reflecting on, namely the passage from being to having, due to the fact that Africans abandoned a humanism which is socio-ethical to one concerned with economic welfare. Even the few individuals who might have resisted the process of change are being rendered powerless by the overwhelming morality of having characteristic of the contemporary African society. Having is the corruption of being. The consequence of this powerlessness is a generalised cultural and socio-political crisis (Cf. Kagabo 1990, 1992, 1995).

However, there is hope for redemption. Aristotle tells us that moral virtue is a disposition which is potentially present in every healthy human being, but one which will be gained only after a process of education and habituation. This being the case, there is still the possibility that Africans can regain *ubuntu*, by awakening that moral virtue which

⁷²Adrien Ntabona from the University of Bujumbura has widely reflected on this concept of *ubushingantahe*. See Ntabona (1985, 1990, 1991, 1992a, 1992b) and Liboire Kagabo (1991)

⁷³A. Ntabona pinpoints three major characteristics of *ubushingahahe*, namely:

- a. the sense of justice;
- b. intellectual capacity (practical wisdom) and
- c. human maturity (Ntabona 1992:438 footnote no.14).

⁷⁴The crisis of African society is mainly marked by a crisis of values which, by implication, involves a moral and political crisis. This moral and political crisis is particularly noticeable in what we have termed political corruption (see Kagabo 1995).

is dormant in them. This will be done not only through academic education⁷⁵ which, in our times, is seen as the source of having, but also and mostly by a social and moral education which will help the individual to evaluate himself or herself in order to re-situate him/herself in the community (Ntibagirirwa 1997). This brings us to the next aspect of being which is **being-with-others**

2. Being-with-others

As we have already noted, *being-with-others* is expressed in various ways. The popular one being that of Mbiti: "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am." Mbiti expresses the meaning of his principle as follows:

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 (Mbiti 1969:141).

Mbiti's principle suggests that the individual human being cannot develop and achieve the fullness of her potential without relationships with other individuals. It suggests further that an individual cannot live in isolation from other people. In short, the individual is constituted by social relationships in which s/he necessarily finds him/herself (Gyekye 1997:38, cf. Menkiti 1984).

Hence, in African society, to be is to belong such that *being-with-others* becomes *being-in-others*, which involves total integration. Hence, an individual exists corporately in terms of the family, clan, or ethnic group. That is to say, the individual's identity is that of the group to which s/he belongs. Accordingly, excessive personal autonomy is

⁷⁵Academic education puts less emphasis on how to live a good life. Yet it is this good life which puts together the actual human desires and inclinations.

regarded as a denial of one's corporate existence. Thus the emphasis is on interdependence and an individual's obligations to the community.

An individual who has realised Mbiti's principle is fully a person: *umuntu*. This is because, according to Menkiti, personhood is achieved through social incorporation into the community (Menkiti 1984:172). That is to say, it is in the community that the individual attains and practices moral excellences or moral virtues.

Being-with-others arises from the natural sociality of human beings. In effect, the individual is born into an existing web of human relationships. Thus it would appear that human sociality cannot be optional, in the same way as the community cannot be optional, since human beings do not voluntarily choose to enter into human community.

However, *being-with-others* has been damaged. It is an ideal which will take effort to achieve. In effect, the new way of life centred on having makes *being-with-others* optional. Human relationships are used to further personal interests or the interests of some group of people (such as a political party, or an association) to which one belongs. That is, the traditional human relationships which were lived for their own sake are now perceived in a interest-motivated way. This is a negation of one's nature as social and by implication the denial of one's being.

Hence, the reconstruction of African society requires a retrieval of those values characteristic of an individual as a being who needs others to grow socially and ethically. These are values such as sharing, a sense of neighbourhood, cooperation, mutual aid, respect for human values, a sense of the common good, justice, harmony and peace with others. For these values to be more effective, the individual needs to look beyond him/herself, the small circle to which s/he belongs and see him/herself as a citizen, belonging to a greater entity, the State. It is to this entity to which we shall now turn.

4.8. A RE-DEFINITION OF THE AFRICAN STATE BASED ON VIRTUE ETHICS.

At the heart of our argument lies the view that moral virtue has a social and political value. This is another way of saying that human beings are naturally social and political and that the inculcation of moral virtue consists in helping the citizen to realise his/her being, that is, to bring his/her being to perfection. But the perfection of the individual depends on the social and political institutions in which s/he is incorporated (cf. Lachance 1939:11).

The institutional structure we are concerned with here is of course the State. We understand the state to be a *milieu* in which the individual realizes and fulfills him/herself as a social and political being. But we must avoid confusion here, especially seeing that we want to talk of the African state. We do not see the state as an individual, a clan, or a tribe, not even a political party. Accordingly, this way of conceiving of the state will help us to avoid the kind of national self-determination based on clan or tribe which we observe in various countries of the African continent. More so, our conception of the state is geared to the rejection of the idea of some African leaders who have gone as far as holding the slogan "*l'état c'est moi*" (the state is myself), that is identifying the state with their own person.

Hence, by suggesting virtue ethics as way of reconstructing African society, our aim is to create the kind of citizen who is able to look beyond the family, the clan, the tribe, and his private interests. For this kind of citizen, the state is a comprehensive and

overall expression of the common good.⁷⁶ That is to say, the state stands above the particular communities to which one belongs, as well as above individual interests.

L.S. Senghor developed the same idea of the state when he wrote:

The Nation groups together the homelands in order to transcend them. Homelands⁷⁷ arise naturally and are expressions of a particular place and environment; the state is a deliberately will construction, or rather reconstruction... But to attain its object, the State has to inspire all its members, as individuals, with a faith in itself, beyond the Homelands (Senghor 1996:45-6).

Thus, we should note that the state is the end of a process. The state is created as the individual disengages him/herself from the biological units of family, clan, tribe, all of which, however, are necessary for the sense of community, to a higher form of community which requires reason. In other words, we are saying that the state is the fruit of human reason (cf. Maritain as in Evans, et al. 1953:85ff).

Of course, one fears that the individual might be absorbed into the state to the point that the individuality which characterises one's *being-with-self* is annulled. But this is not a problem since we have already defined the kind of individual who is to live in this

⁷⁶In this definition of the African state, I am indebted to Aristotle's way of defining the state. For Aristotle, the state is a creation of human reason, because it involves a high level of socio-political organization. Basically, the state arises from individual motives, as the individual realizes that isolation means limitation, reason which enables the individual to articulate his/her interests with those of his/her fellows, and the human's being parental instinct, which gives rise to the family as the first unit of society, and from which originates the sense of responsibility and power. From an African perspective, this evolution could be articulated thus: from the individual, the family, the clan and the tribe to the state, which must be created.

⁷⁷By Homelands, Senghor means tribes, that is, people linked to each other by the same ancestor, land, language, manners, customs, folklore and an art, a culture, in fact, rooted in one particular area and given expression by one race (Senghor 1996:45).

kind of society: the individual whose *being-with-self* and *being-with-others* interact harmoniously.

Thus, the question of whether the community exists for the individual or whether the individual exists for the community does not matter, as, by implication, the common good of the state is inseparable from the good of each individual citizen (see Maritain 1948:35ff). The individual and the state belong together in mutual relationship and share the same substance and purpose (happiness).

In Aristotelian terms, individual fulfilment is the end, and the existence of the state is the means to this fulfilment (Berki 1977:61)⁷⁸. It is in this respect that the good of the state is to be perceived as the noblest of all human goods because each individual and group of individuals (eg. kinship) find their shares in it.⁷⁹ Accordingly, one should understand the state to be the framework of the perfect social, political, economic, spiritual and moral life of a people which constitutes the common good of the society.

This good is attained in as much as the state is the highest form of community, and has the overall power to ensure that virtue, in all its aspects, is effectively learned and practised. In other words, the virtuous citizen lives in the state and takes part as much as possible in its activities. Where virtue is lacking, the law supplies. That is, the State embodies the law which, for Aristotle, is another form of the education of the citizens. This does not mean that virtue is incompatible with the law, as if they could be used separately. Rather, the two complement each other. Even where there is virtue, the law is always necessary.

⁷⁸Berki tells us that when Aristotle calls politics the master of science, he means the authority of the state to decide what sciences are to be taught to the citizens in order to enhance the good life of the community.

⁷⁹On this note, I am indebted to Thomas Aquinas' s *Commentary on Aristotle's politics*, Book I, Lecture. 1.

Of course, this is not an unquestionable question. Why do we need the law for virtuous citizens? Aristotle was convinced that human beings, however sociable and virtuous they may be, potentially also have anti-social tendencies. These anti-social tendencies are minimized by the law and justice (justice being also a virtue both for individual citizens as well as for the social and political institutions of the state).

The kind of state we have tried to define so far is preferable to the socialist state of the post-independence era and the liberal state which has attracted today's African leaders. In the first place, the socialist state neglected the socio-ethical aspect of African society. In the socialist state, economic production came to be seen as the overall good of the state. Yet economic welfare does not constitute all the happiness we desire. Moreover, human beings cannot be reduced to economic machines. Accordingly, it would not be proper to subordinate morality to economy. This is because the State could not be based on the human relations but would be rather an immense industrial and commercial network, a kind of firm controlled by the monetary power whereby the individual would be nothing but a functional tool (Lachance 1939:56-7).

What we are against here is the view that economic production is an end in itself to which citizens are subordinated. This is what we referred to as alienation. In the same vein, we cannot reduce the state to a kind of economic enterprise, so far as we understand the state to be a community of people in search of a human good (Lachance 1939:11-2).

Secondly, the liberal state, just like the socialist state, also neglects the socio-ethical aspect of society, albeit from a different perspective. In the liberal state, the individual is alienated by his/her freedom to pursue his/her own values and ends, and easily forgets that s/he is partly constituted by social relationships in the community. Thus, the danger of the liberal state is that individuals have no common denominator and could claim that they have rights to use their fellow citizens to achieve their ends. Accordingly, we have to avoid allowing that some individual citizens, by holding all the

wealth, become powerful enough to be the commanders of the state while reducing their fellow citizens to servitude.

Another problem of the liberal state (in Africa) is the development of wild capitalism, of which the consequence is economic dysfunction. One characteristic of this dysfunction is the incapacity of government to intervene in the economy, coupled with the process of privatisation. It is true that non-governmental intervention and the process of privatisation may promote initiative, creativity and efficiency, but it can also allow lucky individuals to look solely to their own interests and undermine the common good (Agostoni 1997:42). Obviously, economic dysfunction has moral and political implications.

Let us try to view the above point in a practical way. It is true that individuals try to render the best service to their fellow citizens, but as a way to a greater profit. This may be done by increasing inconsiderably the prices of the common services. Here the virtues which would be undermined would be all of those virtues which regulate the relationships between individuals, and between individuals and the society as a whole, but also those virtues that make the individual fully human or, in the terminology we have used, endow people with *ubuntu*. As far as this argument is concerned, we turn to Kaunda's insight when he says:

Whatever we are producing, we must ask ourselves what we are producing it for. If the answer is to accumulate wealth, or to stay in the production race, we are behaving irrationally. If we are producing "for man", we are doing something much more noble, but at the same time something much more difficult to understand and to communicate because man has not yet understood his own importance (Kaunda as in Agostoni 1997:42)

4.9. Conclusion

Our argument so far has been that the post-independence era has been characterised by a shift from African humanism, which is socio-ethical, to Western socialism, which is concerned with economic welfare. The consequence of this has been a shift from being to having, as well as a shift from the community to individualism. The result is, as we have argued, the loss of African identity and values.

Our effort has been to try to re-strengthen African humanism by means of virtue ethics, which is also a humanism in so far as it is agent-based (but also community-based; a virtuous individual being the one who flourishes in the community). As an ethics of being, virtue ethics is relevant to African humanism in two respects: Firstly, virtue ethics helps the individual to discover his/her *being-with-self* as a source of individuality and responsibility. Secondly, virtue ethics is relevant in that it helps us to re-locate the individual (in the community) as a *being-with-others* or better, a *being-in-others* in so far as human beings are naturally social and political. An individual so defined is one who has achieved an overall virtue, the virtue of *ubuntu*. It is this kind of individual who is known as a great-souled person in Aristotelian virtue ethics.

This helped us to argue that the state is an all-embracing structure arrived at as the individual rationally looks beyond the family, the clan and the tribe. In return, the state becomes a means by which the individual attains his/her supreme good, a good which is not inseparable from the common good of the state itself.

In our last chapter, we shall turn to a critique of virtue ethics and see whether it could help to cope with the complexity of modern society; a society haunted by the problems of nationalism and democracy on the one hand, and the problem of global ethics and politics on the other.

CHAP V. A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF VIRTUE ETHICS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

So far we have concerned ourselves with the theoretical foundations of virtue ethics and its implications for African society. We argued that it could be a possible solution to the moral and socio-political crisis which African society is experiencing today, and which is partly due to Kantian and utilitarian ethics and the individualism associated with them. While we recognize that both ethical theories have the advantage of efficient action, we still believe that their legalistic grounds are too impersonal and alienating. Thus we argued that Kantian and utilitarian ethics are legalistic rather than humanistic. Being moral is more than rules and principles can require of us. Put differently, human morality is more than the reality of the moral law (against Kantian ethics) and the moral requirements of utility (against Utilitarian ethics).

Instead, our appreciation of virtue ethics is that, in so far as it is agent-based and flourishes mostly in the context of the community, it could provide us with a kind of human being who has a place among friends and in the society, a better citizen in the State and in the universal human family in general (cf. Sandel 1982:179-182). The idea we are attempting to get across is that principles and rules, duty and utility for their own sakes, fail to give due consideration to the sociality of human beings, and hence alienate people from themselves and the society.

However, we have to acknowledge that things are not as simple as that. We are far from suggesting that virtue ethics is an automatic panacea to the crisis which the African society is experiencing. Instead, my argument is that, in so far as virtue ethics works more on our being than on our doing, it requires that we engage ourselves in a process of transformation within ourselves. We live in a too complex situation for virtue ethics to just be a miracle solution to the moral and social and political problems of the African

society. Accordingly, this critical appraisal will attempt to look at virtue ethics with regard to three major problems, namely:

1. Virtue ethics and the complexity of the modern society and the challenge of individual rights;

2. Virtue ethics and the problems of nationalism and identity in the actual context of democracy;

3. Virtue ethics and the problems of global ethics and cosmopolitan citizenship.

Our conclusion will be that there is a reason to hope. This hope lies in the fact of our **being human**. Let us now consider each of these points in turn.

5.2. VIRTUE ETHICS AND THE COMPLEXITY OF MODERN SOCIETY

The first question we need to address is what modern society requires and needs. This question is linked with the problem of adapting Aristotelian ethics to the modern complex society. Howard Radest paints this situation in the following way:

Moral education always happened in an environment filled with differences, contrasts, and contradictions. Today, the environment has grown even more varied, confusing and unstable. Whereas once moral habits could achieve a great deal, modern instabilities reduce their usefulness... We know we cannot "go home again" because the community of yesterday is no more(Radest 1989:22).

Radest agrees with Putnam (1988:381) who also argues that virtue ethics as done by Aristotle or by Aquinas assumes the existence of a stable and uniform society. In this kind of society, there was no room for a radical critique and little room for the individual to flower in the liberal sense of the term. In some way, Putnam's observation is wrong if

we remember that Aristotle inherited a society which was experiencing democracy, a system which involves not only self-critique but also the critique of the way the Greek society was hitherto living.

It was this kind of society for which Aristotle, and Plato before him, had tried to provide their own moral, political, cultural solution. Yet, Putnam is right in the sense that our own society is no more an "homogeneous" society. Besides our own society, we have the knowledge of the world through the TV screen, press, films... Accordingly, as far as morality is concerned, we are most likely to be influenced by figures other than those our own society provides. How much this could help us to build our own society is a difficult question.

The fact of being open to the world is most likely to influence the way we picture ourselves in our society, especially in the area of individual and group rights. Today we are living in a society in which individuals and groups are staking their claims as a result of the re-strengthening of liberal democracy in the aftermath of the failure of Marxist socialism.⁸⁰ Against this background, economic, social and political arrangements call for rational calculations rather than rational feelings. In these rational calculations, individual rights which might challenge one's own community are at stake.

However, increasing claims of individual rights are paralleled by an increasing need for community. Thus the problem is how we can bring them together. The tension between the individual and the community is amplified by the fact that rights-oriented liberals insist that if individuals are to be free to choose their personal good, and if the principle of equal concern and respect is to be maintained, the social and political order

⁸⁰In fact, a glance at the current international political situation reveals that the world is obviously moving towards a social and political universalism centred on liberal democracy. This form of government is thought to secure individual rights more than any other political arrangement. We could question this belief by recalling the problems of immigrants in Western Europe or America.

must not enforce any particular way of life. Here the ground of the community falls, and even if it does not fall, it is seriously endangered. The question here is how the individual could conceive of his own good without undermining the good of the community. And which community does the individual give allegiances to: the club, the nation, the state, the school, or the world which we can now pocket? And what could be the contribution of virtue ethics here?

One way of responding to this problem is by noting the fact that the virtues are important for a liberal political order no less than they are for the communitarian political order. That is what Galston observes when he argues that the viability of liberal society depends on its ability to engender a virtuous citizenry (Galston 1988:1279). However, the virtues which are endorsed by the liberals are of one kind: the political virtues. Accordingly, Rawls argues that his principles of justice are the source of the virtues of fair social cooperation such as civility, tolerance, reasonableness and a sense of fairness (Rawls 1988:263).

Yes, we can talk of fair cooperation. But the problem is that with regard to fair cooperation, as Rawls and other liberals conceive of it, the person is considered as essentially a party to an abstract cooperative enterprise, applying principles of give and take in relation to others. And this is an impersonal understanding of the individual in the liberal community.

But the important question is what happens to social virtues? The fear is that, in the light of the strong claims of individual rights, the development of virtuous citizenry is left to chance, while the viability of the liberal society, henceforth, depends upon some invisible hand.

Maybe the solution should be to develop new conceptions of the common good, and hence the virtues proper to this new sense of common good (Downing & Thigpen 1993:1048). This would provide us with a ground for reconciling liberalism and

communitarianism. One way of finding this ground is, as John Tomasi suggests, to see the moral quality of any community as connected to the capacity of each community member to conceive of him/herself as an independent holder of rights. But this would suppose that individual rights be thought of as compatible with virtues (Tomasi 1991:522). This compatibility is, of course, not clear.

The claims of individual rights are linked with individualism, an individualism which is being advanced by modern technology. Technological innovations have individualistic effects. Television and other electronic technologies, unlike earlier entertainments such as meetings of people in simple conversation and sharing, involve one-way communication with little or no opportunity for direct social interactions in which the virtues would be lived (Fukuyama 1995:317). Has virtue ethics got a way of dealing with this problem? Can virtue ethics provide us with a way of living the technological era virtuously? These are real challenges which virtues ethicists have to face.

However, one of the advantages of technological development is that it could give a new sense of community; the kind of community Fukuyama calls a "virtual community" which does not depend on geographical proximity as it is classically held. Hence, a virtue such as friendship would no more be limited to those who are physically closer to one, but also to those one can communicate through electronic technology, such as the internet, as well.

My suggestion is that the virtuous person able to live a virtuous life in this technological era would be Aristotle's great-souled person who would know that nothing can compromise his self-respect, dignity and integrity, that is, her/his sense of *ubuntu* and *ubushingantahe/ubufpasoni*. However, we have to face Griffin's criticism according to which the goal of virtue ethics is unrealistic and overly ambitious (Griffin 1996:115). We have to take Griffin's criticism seriously.

First of all, there is a question of whether and how the community could educate such a virtuous personality. Because the community, even in its smallest versions, such as families or neighbourhoods, is no longer the sole instance in the education of the individual, therefore not the sole source of values. Apart from the education of the community, be it a family or a neighbourhood, we also have schools. And it is difficult to say that it is easy to coordinate the education of the community and that of the schools, especially because school education often encourages the individual to be critical of those values which the community may be relying on.

Moreover, even if harmony would eventually be achieved, one's values are most likely to be in disharmony with those of other people coming from different cultures. Here we face the problem of multiculturalism, and the possibility of a transcultural education ⁸¹(See Siegel 1999).

Another problem that arises for neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is the fact that the Aristotelian community was a small face-to-face community, where the pool of potential models of good people (*phronimoi*), thought to be the people of practical wisdom (*spondaios*), generally came from certain well-established families, who were well known throughout the *polis*. Within a community of this sort, one would naturally expect to find wide agreement with regard to judgements of character.

Hence, according to Loudon (1997:213), to apply Aristotelian virtue ethics to a different sort of community, one where people really do not know each other all that well,

⁸¹The question of multiculturalism and transcultural education has become much preoccupying, particularly in this decade. The issue is what moral values should be taught in institutions of learning. A number of thinkers have reflected on this question. The reflections include Harvey Siegel's *Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Transcultural Educational and Philosophical Ideals* (1999), Various contributions in R. K. Fullinwider's *Public Education in Multicultural Society: Policy, Theory, Critique* (1996) and J. A Bank's *Multicultural Education: Characteristics and Goals* (1992). Other interesting work on the issue of multiculturalism is that of Charles Taylor: *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*, although it does not deal directly with the issue of (moral) education.

and where there is wide disagreement with regard to values will be problematic. Louden's observation is crucial in that today's community is one in which there is a variety of cultures. Today, we are living in community which contains, for instance, different religious values, as well as people alien to that very community: non-citizens for instance.

This is a problem to which most communitarians have offered theoretical solutions, which are difficult to apply. For instance, MacIntyre (1982) remains within the framework of the Aristotelian face-to-face community, and suggests a historical and particularist perspective on virtue ethics. Accordingly, he suggests that we see ourselves in our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity, because each inhabits a role in our social environment. In effect, he argues, we are citizens of a country; and sons, daughters, parents, aunts, etc... in a family. Such roles provide our moral starting-point.

However, MacIntyre does not consider sufficiently the problem of the geographical mobility of people in our modern society, neither does he consider seriously the problem of various religious values within what he calls "social identity". Firstly, I argue that the first instance of moral education is the family (both nuclear and extended). Yet within the context of the complexity of the modern society, the family does not have the monopoly on education anymore, as we noted it already. In fact, the notion of the family as traditionally understood is, in fact, problematic. The traditional family has the strength of being stable and rigid, today's family is unstable and flexible.

The problem of geographical mobility also concerns the society at large. But we will not treat this problem here, as it is concerned with cosmopolitan citizenship, an issue which we will consider later. Rather, at this point, let us pursue the problem of cultural pluralism. The society in which we live today contains more ethnic, religious, and class groups than the moral community which Aristotle theorised about. Each of these segments of society has not only its own interests, but also its own set of virtues as well.

There is no general agreed upon and significant expression of desirable moral character in such a community.

Given this situation, are we not most likely to surrender to the suggestion of value neutrality and its lack of allegiance to any one moral tradition? This would be supplemented by more emphasis on rules and regulations, hence a return to a more legalistic form of morality, due to the fact that our complex society lacks the sort of moral cohesiveness and value unity which traditional virtue ethics saw as a prerequisite for a viable moral community (Cf. Mayo 1958:217). Or again, should we have recourse to the liberals' solutions of minimal state limited to the narrow functions of protection against force, theft, fraud, enforcement of contracts, etc,... (Nozick 1974:ix).

Correspondingly, justice as conceived of by liberals would be of great value. But justice is a virtue we want both social and political institutions and individual citizens to have for the well-being of the society as a whole as well as for individuals. A society without justice would certainly fall in chaos and anarchy. On the other hand, communitarians hold that the common good cannot exist without justice. Justice demands that the community respect and foster the well-being of all its members equally in certain fundamental ways, and indicated by correct understanding of the good life for all (Porter 1990:177)

However, some moralists do not see the cultural pluralism as much of a problem, as far as virtue ethics is concerned. Accordingly, in his *By virtue of virtue*, a Harold Alderman (1982:127-153) argues that paradigmatically, virtuous characters are indisputably and trans-culturally recognizable as such. Hence, for him, there is even no need for a theory to tell us about virtue and vice. Here Alderman is advocating intuitionism in virtue ethics, appealing to our primitive beliefs in the universality of our inarticulate opinions. This kind of approach has three major problems which make it uninteresting:

- i. It lacks of an explanatory force. The virtues need to be articulated and evaluated for them to be more relevant;
- ii. It does not face the truth of disagreement in morality accross cultures and finally,
- iii. It is difficult to defend philosophically (Conly 1988:84, footnote 3).

In short, the intuitionist approach to virtue ethics fails to solve the problem of cultural complexity and neglects the aspect of moral evaluation in any ethical theory.

However, the intuitionist approach to virtue ethics, which emphasizes the universality of the virtues across cultures should not be dismissed totally. Most of the virtues are universally recognized. Such virtues as truth, justice, humanity, honesty, confidentiality, respect for oneself and others, friendliness, kindness, generosity, hospitality, cooperation,... are universally recognized, and therefore transcultural. It is these virtues that could be emphasized in families, neighbourhoods, schools, as well as in the diplomatic world.

Nevertheless, the problem remains that our moralities have different grounds. Some cultures find their morals within culture or nature. Others finds their moral authority fixed into the universe or divine law. Accordingly, there is no doubt that there may be some virtues of culture based morality which may differ from religion-based morality or nature -based morality.

The implication of these differences is that there is a great probability that each moral tradition could surround itself by walls which other traditions cannot penetrate. This may be advantageous as far as the values in a given community need protection; yet democratic culture requires more and more that the values of one's community interact with those of other communities. This interaction would challenge the community to evaluate and articulate its values and provide a ground where it could appreciate the values of other communities and bring the individual to realize that s/he also belongs to

the universal community of all human beings. This brings us to consider the issue of national identity, which is recurrent in contemporary social and political philosophy.

5.2. VIRTUE ETHICS AND THE ISSUES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AND DEMOCRACY.

The problem of national identity and democracy is well described by Veit Bader in terms of paradoxes of sovereignty and citizenship. He sees four paradoxes of state sovereignty in our epoch marked simultaneously and contradictorily by the process of the erosion and the strengthening of nation-states:

In a world of fast and thorough economic, ecological, political and informational globalization, we are confronted with ethnic revivals, new tribalism, ethnic cleansing, the implosion of states and the like. The myth and practices of indivisible sovereignty of nation-states contradict the developments of internal delegation (devolution of state sovereignty to states, provinces, regions, communities) and external delegation (reconstruction of state sovereignty) to supra-state levels and international organizations... The myth and practices of unitary sovereignty, focussed in the nation-state and claiming a monopoly in legislation, jurisdiction, currency, taxation, and legal enforcement contradicts the simultaneous disentanglement and delegation of those powers. The myth and practices of unlimited, absolute sovereignty of the nation-state contradicts the growing factual, moral and legal external limitations that complement the well-known internal limitations (liberal-democratic constitutions) (Bader 1995:211).

There are two major observations that can be made in this lengthy quote. The first is the fact of nation-states and their sovereignty on the one hand, and the fact of the supra-state due to the fact that (nation)-states tend lose their monopoly in larger federations, as we see in the case of the European Union, and other economic, political

regional associations around the world.⁸² The problem we have to deal with here is the tendency towards universal inclusion within states (legal and political equality among citizens) on the one hand, and the issue of systematic exclusion (citizens/non-citizens) on the other. The question is the stand of the virtues vis-a-vis inclusion and vis-a-vis exclusion.

We are certainly aware of these problems of inclusion and exclusion in the affirmation of nationalism in Rwanda, Burundi (hutu/tutsi nationalisms), Turkey, Yugoslavia etc, on the one hand; the problems linked with the issue of immigrants in various societies of the world on the other hand. Inclusion and exclusion go with the closure of cultural and politico-economic borders. According to Bader, this closure is important in three respects:

- i. Closure is thought to be necessary and legitimate to defend the shared meanings, values, and ways of life of specific (ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic, historical) political communities or states;
- ii. Closure is necessary and legitimate for the reproduction and development of collective political identities and attachments;
- iii. Closure is necessary and legitimate for the development of socially and culturally embedded, rich personalities (Bader 1995:213).

Closure could certainly be relevant for the inculcation of a virtuous life. The problem, however, is ethnic, religious and racist fundamentalism, with their hostility to

⁸²In the African continent, the Pan-Africanism preached by the fathers of independence such Julius Nyerere and Nkwame N’Krumah was not successful. Instead, today we see regional associations (ECOWAS in West Africa, PTA/COMESA in East and Southern Africa, CEAC in Central Africa,...). These associations seem efficient in dealing with economic as well as social and political matters. These associations could limit sovereignty, as has been observed in Burundi after the coup d’Etat of 1996, or in the DRC with regard to Kabila’s regime.

other people who do not belong to the same ethnic, or religious community. If we are to transcend this problem, we have to take cognisance of our *being human*. But what is being human?

We have already defined what we understand by being human in term of being-with-self and being-with-others in the context of virtue ethics. Hence by so doing, we affirmed both the individuality and the sociality of the person. A combination of the two characterises the virtuous person. A virtuous person is one who has a universal vision which prevents exclusion without doing harm to inclusion. This is the ground against which we can appreciate national solidarity and personal identity. Of course, it is not a problem which is easy to deal with, since as far as the issue of inclusion and exclusion is concerned, there is a danger of being virtuous in one's community and being vicious to those who do not belong to one's community. We are already familiar with the problem of ethnic cleansing in various parts of the world. Let us closely look at this issue as it concerns the case of nationalism.

What is Nationalism? Nationalism is derived from the concept of the nation. Thus nationalism refers to the sentiments of identification with a particular nation. It is an expression of shared identity. According to Simon Caney, a group of individuals constitutes a nation if they define themselves as such and if they share a common culture and history (Caney 1997:352).⁸³ Thus, it is characterised by a higher sense of cultural, ethnic loyalties and/or patriotism. However, nationalism is tainted with moral ambiguity. Nationalism can evoke the most courageous, sacrificial behaviour but also it can provoke

⁸³Following the demise of the Soviet Union, the reunification of East and West Germany, as well as failure of communism, there flourished various reflections on nationalism. Among these reflections, we note Barry's *Self-government revisited* (1991), Miller's *In defence of Nationality* (1993), *On nationality* (1995), Tamir's *Liberal nationalism* (1993), Buchanan's *Secession* (1991), *Secession and nationalism* (1993); Brilmayer's *Secession and Self-determination* (1991), Greenfeld's *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (1993), Kristeva's *Nations without nationalism* (1993), to name but a few.

the most brutal, xenophobic, racist acts. Hence, there are two perspectives from which we can view nationalism.

Firstly, nationalism is an expression of the national loyalty of a given group of people. Accordingly, nationalism can assume various forms. The common one is the struggle for political independence, as in African societies during the colonial era, but also the actual context of liberal democracy (see Kukathas 1997, cf Kymlicka 1995). Another common form of nationalism is the struggle for justice and freedom. This latter form is mostly born of economic oppression and exploitation. These two forms of nationalism are compatible with virtue ethics and connect well with *being human*.

The form of nationalism that is problematic as far as virtue ethics is concerned is the nationalism of ethnic or religious fundamentalism which ends in separatism (for instance the issue of Islam in Algeria and Nigeria, the conflict between Muslims and Christian in the Sudan,...), that is, the demand of a people with unsatisfied grievances against the larger political entity for self-determination and sovereign identity based on a tribal, linguistic or religious community (Geyer 1986, see also Caney 1997:351ff). It is a movement which is *à la mode* in the actual social and political ordering. There is a question we need to address here: whether nations should be allowed to secede⁸⁴ from a larger entity, given our definition of the state as the movement from the family to clan, tribe and then the state.

Simon Caney (1997) argued that national self-determination and secession are legitimate because and to the extent that they promote the well-being of the members of the nation. For Caney, membership of a national culture promotes people's well-being, and national self-government is justified because it best protects and further national cultures in which people can strengthen their life of virtue. Yet, Caney comes back and

⁸⁴A community secedes when it breaks away from the present state and founds its own independent state. In other words, secession involves the creation of a new state with sovereign jurisdiction over its citizens.

argues that national self-determination does not automatically justify national secession. In this case, the problem is that the life of virtue is not extended beyond culture.

Caney's reflection on nationalism and self-determination would agree with MacIntyre's understanding of tradition as the context in which the individual gains self-understanding. For MacIntyre, it is through the social practices of a given tradition that the individual is able to live a meaningful life. And of course, it is within a tradition that individuals develop the social virtues necessary to their own well-being and the proper functioning of the community.

National self-determination is understood in a strong and a weak sense. The strong sense insists that a nation be given statehood. This obviously leads to secession. In the weak sense, national self-determination requires some form of self-government. This latter sense is compatible with a multinational state in which nations are given some political autonomy (Buchanan 1991:49-50).

But whether we take national self-determination in the stronger or weaker sense, what can we say of virtue ethics? Miller makes a connection between national self-determination and the virtue of social justice. He argues that national self-determination best furthers ideals of distributive justice, in the sense that members of nations have special obligations to fellow nationals, which they do not have to people who do not belong to their nation. Miller's point is that it is more difficult for members of a nation to fulfil their national obligations in a multinational state (Miller 1988:83-5, see also 1998).

Miller might be right in the sense that belonging to a nation creates obligations to one's fellow nationals in the same way that we normally think of belonging to a family as creating obligations to fellow members of the family because of the affection that links them. However, the problem with Miller lies in the concept of obligations. Obligations are enforceable. In other words, to say that one belongs to a nation would mean that s/he is compelled to care for his/her fellow nationals. This helps to recover that spirit of ties

of affection characteristic of smaller communities which may be difficult to develop in the larger entity.

One advantage of Miller's reflection is that it brings us to Aristotle's smaller community whereby people who are eminent in virtue could be known to everybody. It is this kind of community where cooperation and trust as well as respect are possible.⁸⁵ In fact, Miller argues that states need nations if they are to perform certain important roles. One of these roles is the inculcation of virtue. Miller argues that the provision of public goods such as clean and healthy environment requires a society in which people are willing to cooperate with others in smaller entities (See Miller 1988:90-93, Barry 1991:174-5, 177-178). It is against this background that Miller further argues that democratic states require everybody to cooperate with others and to treat others with respect. But willingness to cooperate brings along with it other virtues such as friendship, sharing, mutual aid,... For Miller these attitudes are provided by individual nations in a given state (Miller 1988:96-8).

The problems with nations and nationalism is often the hostility that surrounds nationalism vis-a-vis the non-members. In other words, some members of nations tend to repress those who do not belong to their community. This concern has particularly been raised by Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz (1990). It is a problem which is observed in various African societies such the DRC, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Burundi, South Africa and Somalia, where nationalism has brought fierce wars. In this case, virtues such as patriotism, sharing, cooperation, respect... are limited since they fail to be extended to all in a larger community.

Hence, our suggestion is that, as far as virtue ethics is concerned, we could avoid the problems caused by nationalism by recalling our earlier point that a virtuous life

⁸⁵ Apart from Fukuyama's volume on *trust*, Daniel Weinstock (1999:287-307) has also reflected extensively on this concept of trust in his article, *Building trust in Divided Societies in the context of multiculturalism*.

should follow the movement from the family to clan, from clan to tribe and then to the state. Virtue is not just for the interests of the family or of the clan or tribe but also of the larger society, the state and from the state to humanity as a whole. Here we are recalling what Montesquieu observed when he said:

If I knew something useful to myself and detrimental to my family, I would reject it from my mind. If I knew something useful to my family, but not to my homeland, I would try to forget it. If I knew something useful to my homeland and detrimental to Europe, or else useful to Europe and detrimental to humankind, I would consider it as a crime (Montesquieu 1951:981).

The life of virtue should follow this pattern and so fulfil our being human. Accordingly, as far as nationalism is concerned, there are two major constraints which have to be satisfied for virtue ethics to be meaningful. The first is the internal constraint: the virtue of each member of a nation should respect not only the members of that very nation, but also those who do not belong to that nation within that state (Cf. Birch 1989:64-6).

The second constraint is external. The virtuous life within a given nation has meaning to the extent that it does not disrupt the social and political arrangements of the whole society to which it belongs (Cf. Caney 1997:371). At this juncture we should add also that if the virtues do not serve the whole of humanity, they fail to be genuine virtues. On this note we shall now consider the last section of our reflection.

5.3. THE PROBLEMS OF GLOBAL ETHICS AND COSMOPOLITAN CITIZENSHIP

Besides the claim of national identity coupled with the felt need to reconstruct communities, the world is more and more becoming a global village such that the individual cannot be isolated in a traditional limited society anymore. The implication of the global village is the feeling that the individual is the citizen of the world rather than a

citizen of particular state or society.⁸⁶ This global village calls for a global ethics and politics. Hans Küng has also expressed the same concern when he says: "there can be no new world order without a new world ethics, a global or planetary ethics despite all dogmatic differences (Küng 1997:92). According to Küng, this global ethics does not imply a single culture for the whole of humankind. Rather it implies the necessary minimum of common values.

This situation is not particular to our time only. We know that after Aristotle, who had developed a community-centred ethics, the Stoics developed a cosmopolitan ethics in connection with the fact that the Greek society was now part of a greater entity after it had been conquered by Alexander the Great. Today, the question of global ethics and politics and cosmopolitan⁸⁷ citizenship is a by-product of Enlightenment, particularly, Kantian ethics. According to Martha Nussbaum, Kant, more than any other Enlightenment thinker, defended a politics based upon reason rather than patriotism or group sentiment, a politics that was truly universal rather than communitarian. Nussbaum implies that Kant owes his view to ancient Stoic cosmopolitanism (Nussbaum 1997:3). What Kant appropriates himself from the Stoics⁸⁸ is the idea of the kingdom of

⁸⁶Veit Bader talks of a citizenship which is developing in two ways in a multiple and multilayered concept: political citizenship is complemented by economic, industrial and social citizenship (many spheres of citizenship) and political citizenship is gaining importance on different, increasingly supra-state levels of political integration (many levels of political citizenship) (Bader 1995:212)

⁸⁷The word "cosmopolitan" is derived from a double Greek word: *kosmou* (cosmos or world) *polites* (citizen) which means world-citizen or the citizen of the world. The word *kosmou polites* was coined by a certain Diogenes, a philosopher, who, asked where he came from replied: "I am a kosmopolites" (Diogenes Laertius 1970: vi.3). By this Diogenes meant that local affiliations were of lesser importance than a primary affiliation with humanity. In the same vein, Marcus, a Roman thinker said: It makes no difference whether a person lives here or there, provided that, wherever he lives, he lives as a citizen of the world. And again he said: My city and my country, as I am Antoninus, is Rome; as I am a human being, it is the world (Marcus as in Nussbaum 1997:7, see also footnote 25).

⁸⁸ The Stoics, let it be noted, argued that each of us has two communities: the community of one's birth and the community whose boundaries extend to the whole of humanity. Then the question is whether the two communities have the same values or whether they have different values. And if they had the same values, one is not necessary. Either the

free and rational beings equal in humanity, each of them to be treated as an end no matter where in the world s/he dwells (Nussbaum 1997:12). The best expression of this idea is the Universal declaration of human rights (cf. Hugues 1999).

Stoics such as Cicero held that nature ordains that every human being should promote the good of every other human being just because s/he is human. Hence the idea of Stoic cosmopolitans that we should regard our deliberations as deliberations about human problems of people in particular concrete situations, and not problems growing out of a local or national identity that confines and limits our moral aspirations.

The idea of cosmopolitan citizenship is an attempt to solve one problem. It avoids the problems that could be generated by intense loyalties to local communities: some of these problems are, for instance, social and political instability due to division born from continuous claims of cultural autonomy and the problems of nationalism that result from it. Cosmopolitanism could help us in the project of a multicultural state. The condition here is that we should first de-politicize the national identity.⁸⁹ Of course, this is not an answer to the question, but a question that seeks an answer.

Cosmopolitanism is one of the problems of virtue ethics but also of political ethics in general. This difficulty has been expressed by various thinkers such Amy Gutmann (1999) and Bernard Yark (1995). According to Yark there is a problem of the relationship between the political community and the cultural community. He observes that it is precisely the mix of political and cultural community in political experience that makes

local community or the world community could be forgone. On the other hand, if both have different values, one could wonder whether one would not be confused when s/he finds himself in either community. It is this question we have to face in our times. Which community has authority over the individual, since according to the universal declaration of human rights, the individual can establish him/herself wherever s/he wishes?

⁸⁹Yael Tamir has suggested as a way of dealing with the issue of national identity, to depoliticise this very concept. He argues that the right to national self-determination stakes a cultural rather than a political claim, namely, it is the right to preserve the existence of a nation as distinct cultural entity (Tamir 1993:57).

nationalism so problematic for both modern political theory and practice (Yark 1995:180).

The cosmopolitan view of citizenship is also valuable in that it recognizes in persons what is especially fundamental about them: the fact that human rational and moral capacity are worthy of reverence and acknowledgment (Nussbaum 1997:8).

Now the question is how this global ethics and cosmopolitan citizenship constitute a challenge to virtue ethics. To answer this question, let us first look at different attempts which have been made to provide us with a global ethics and politics. The well known attempt is that of the United Nations which has already created numerous transnational, transcultural and trans-religious structures of law. One of these structures is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was articulated after the excesses of Facism in Italy and the Nazi movement in Germany. The question is whether, this declaration has been successful, and if not, what prevents it from being successful?

The other attempt was that made at the meeting of the Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1993 in Chicago. This Council made four major assertions, namely:

- ethics has a priority over politics,
- every human being must be treated humanely,
- every human being is to behave in a genuinely human fashion
- what you wish done to yourself, do to others.

These assertions have a legalistic pattern and do not tell us clearly how they should be made concretized.

Hence, as far as virtue ethics is concerned, these attempts at formulating a global ethics miss an important point. First of all, these attempts are more concerned with rules

and principles which, however, do not constitute the whole of ethics. In other words, ethics cannot be exhausted by laws. This view is supported by Küng, who argues that no comprehensive ethic of humanity can be derived from human rights alone, not even from legalistic spelling (Küng 1997:102-3). For Küng, the presence and the application of the law presupposes an ethic. Now, how can this ethic be conceived? Our suggestion has been virtue ethics. It is the virtues that could give law a spirit. And the life of virtue flourishes in local communities or states at the highest level and make one a full human being.

A number of communitarians have also rejected the idea of global ethics arguing that there can only be a regional ethics (MacIntyre, Rorty, Bubner in Küng 1991:148:9). Michael Walzer (1983, 1994) on the other hand, argues that there is something like a core morality, that is, a whole set of elementary ethical standards that can be universalised. Those are described as minimal or thin morality which can be maximized, thickened or enriched by the various cultural, historical, religious and political contexts. For Walzer, there are two basic ethical standards, namely truthfulness and justice. Küng adds a third one, which is humanity (Küng 1997:98). In our reflection, we have referred to humanity in the African concept of *ubuntu*. Hence Walzer makes a link between "regional ethics" and global ethics.

However, our contention (against Walzer) is that it is not proper to start from global ethics. In fact, the project of global ethics would fail if it does not depart from a community ethic. It is in the community that the individual learns the basic moral and social virtues. If the individual does learn the virtues of truthfulness, justice and humanity in his/her own community, these values will mean nothing for him/her in the global setting. Thus, before we think of a global ethics, we have to reconstruct the community as a basic unit where the individual learns first how to be moral.

But the problem, however, as we have noted is that the local communities are problematic given the complexities of our modern society as well as the global context

itself. Moreover, even with the actual movement of nationalism, there is still a problem which communitarians such as MacIntyre (1994) would acknowledge, namely a permanent moral danger in patriotic loyalty. Accordingly, we cannot rule out the possibility of blind loyalty to corrupt practices in a given culture, as has been observed in various nationalist movements of our time. Yet there is a reason to hope!

5.4. REASON TO HOPE

So far our concern has been what we believe to be the major problems which face virtue ethics. Those are not the only ones, there are many more problems. The question is then what can we hope for. Our hope lies in our **being human**. Being human entails being moral. As human beings, our hunger for moral safety is overwhelming (Radest 1989:17). Morality implies that the human person cannot be reduced to a self-interested rational calculator whose social ties solely originate in a contract as the liberal thinkers might make us believe. It is true that the contract was useful as a philosophical fiction for resisting various forms of social and political oppression, yet it has never been an adequate picture of the complexity of the human person who is born into the network of relations to other human beings and who develops over time within a context of social and political institutions (Hugues 1999:49).

That our society is complex is an undeniable fact. Virtue is there as a relevant tool that can help the individual to perceive and appreciate correctly the circumstances in which s/he lives, and act accordingly? The first problem a virtuous life solves is that of the relationship between the individual rights and the community rights. This is because the virtuous person is the one who realizes fully that s/he is a being-with-self and a being-with-others. Accordingly the interaction between the virtuous person who claims his/her rights while safeguarding the community will, henceforth, consists in Etzioni's golden rule: "Respect and uphold society's order as you would have society respect and uphold your autonomy" (Etzioni 1996:xviii).

The actual search for personal identity with the movement of nationalism in the context of democratic arrangements brings the puzzle to communitarians as to what community the individual ought to commit him/herself to (cf Thompson 1992:107). The problem is whether individuals should commit themselves to the state as our primary community, as Walzer seems to suggest, or to the nation, or some other kind of community, one which is more homogeneous and therefore less alienating (for instance the feminist movement, or any less complex association).

This problem is minimized if we consider the way we have defined a virtuous person as the one who moves beyond his/her own family, clan, tribe to a larger community, that is, the state on the one hand, and on the other hand, the one who exercises her/his practical reason to perceive and appreciate the circumstances before s/he acts. This is because we are not just social, but we are also political beings. And the state, if it genuinely fulfils its function, is the best means to express ourselves socially and politically, that is actualizing our nature of being human.

Yet the tension is still there between our communitarianism and contemporary cosmopolitanism. However, even this tension is minimized if we reflect in terms of the African way of conceiving any human being as your own brother or sister. In other words, we must recognize the fact that apart from the relationship we have in our local community or associations, there is also a universal family which binds the whole of humanity. A virtuous life could be a means of strengthening this universal community of humankind in the global village, while avoiding vices that might be linked with loyalties and patriotism in one's own community. A virtuous individual, therefore, will be the one who, communicating with a friend s/he has never seen *via* Internet, could say like the Ethiopian philosopher (Skendes), "you are my friend, you are my brother/sister", or like the Thomist who sees the large world as his "parish"⁹⁰.

⁹⁰ I have used parish, not in the ordinary clerical sense, but rather in socio-political terms, to mean the smallest unit of a local government.

Hence, virtue ethics could help us to live in the smallest unit of our local community, as well as in the largest community of humanity, that is, the global world. More so, to affirm the community as a basic context where virtue is lived, and where the individual learns to be fully human, implies also the preparation of the individual to live in the global context. We want to say that in the same way as the individual cannot live in isolation, so also a community cannot live in isolation. Thus, in virtue ethics, we are affirming three major goods: the good of the individual, the good of the local community (nation or state) and the good of the entire human kind.

Hence, as communitarians and as far as virtue ethics is concerned, we do not necessarily reject all appeals to individual entitlements, nor do we suppose that the individual has no interests and aims of their own (yet we reject the individualism that does not recognize the good of the community), nor do we generally suppose that communities have a right to exist whatever nature they may have (we reject all kinds of nationalism or group identity which exclude others on a racist, ethnic or gender basis). Neither do we claim that the fact that the community is centrally important to the virtuous life means that it is the only thing of moral importance. The world -community could be an instance in which one learns morality as far as some fundamental ethical standards are concerned.

Thus virtue ethics seeks to relocate the individual in her/his humanity (*ubuntu*) so that s/he can live in the community to which s/he belongs locally, that is, the community of her/his culture, traditions and values as well as globally, that is, in the community of human race.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

We have come all the way from the criticism of Kantian and Utilitarian ethics to Aristotelian virtue ethics as an alternative and its retrieval in African social and political humanism. This reflection did not originate in a vacuum, nor was it a theory for its own sake. Basically, it departed from an observation and a concern: the moral, social and political crisis in our contemporary African Society. As we have argued, the crisis is fundamentally due to the fact that African leaders and thinkers of the post-independence era moved from African humanism that is socio-ethical to a kind of humanism that is socio-economically minded. This move had a metaphysical implication: the move from being to having. This new way of life, we argued, is the ground of the individualism which characterises liberalism and results in the dislocation of the community.

Our contention has been that the situation of crisis is not beyond redemption. In effect, Aristotelian ethics, which is an agent and community-based ethics could redeem the situation, yet without pretending to solve all the moral problems of our modern complex society or end the moral debate. Aristotelian (virtue) ethics helped us to reconstruct the individual at two major levels.

First the individual as *being-with-self*. This concept has helped us to consider the individual as a subject of freedom and responsibility beyond what the community could impose. This is the kind of individual whom we conceive of as a person of integrity and dignity, a person of practical wisdom, simply put, a person who is the embodiment of *Ubuntu* (as an overall virtue) in African humanism.

The second level was of the individual as a *being-with-others*. This means that it is only in terms of other people that the individual becomes really conscious of his/her own being, his own duties, privileges and responsibility towards him/herself and other people. Ultimately *being-with-others* arises from the natural sociality of human beings. This is because one is born into a network of human relationships.

This anthropology provided us with the ground on which to define the state as a social and political reality, attained as the individual looks beyond his/her family, the clan, and tribe. That is, in Aristotelian terms, the state comes into being as the human being and his/her reason disengage themselves from the biological feelings characteristic of the family and the tribe. In other words, the state is a fruit of deliberation, therefore of reason, which transcends the nations and homelands, to recall Senghor's terms.

If our argument has been convincing enough, virtue ethics should be able to face the various problems which constitute the moral, social and political crisis we are concerned with, not only for the African society but also for any society at all. We have singled out three crucial problems that virtue ethics is to face. Those problems can be expressed in these terms: the relationship between the individual and the complexity of our contemporary society; the individual and group and national identity and finally, the individual and the global world.

These three problems concern political ethics in general, and not solely virtue ethics. In fact, they are the major problems with which contemporary political philosophy is wrestling. As far as virtue ethics is concerned, our reaction has been an argued hope in *being human*. Our being is essentially social, political and moral.

As social beings, we realize that the individual good alone is not enough. We need also the good of community. Hence our identity is socially constituted. To say that individual identity is constituted is to say that the realization of personal identity requires the mediation of others who contribute to the narrative emplotment of our character (Hugues 1999:53). Accordingly, it is in the social context of the community that the individual acquires the values that integrate him/her into a larger entity of humans who do not necessarily belong to one's local community.

However, the problem still remains as to how we should reconcile individual rights and community virtues, individual good and the common good. This problem is

not easy to solve in this time. Yet in our argument, one would discover that this tension is solved by the idea of the virtuous individual. The virtuous individual does not just claim his or her rights without fulfilling her /his duties to the community, nor could s/he claim her/his personal good without realizing that it is part of the good of the community. This is because, in normal circumstances, the autonomy of the individual is respected when the social order is respected and upheld, as we noted.

As political beings, we realize that the best structure which fulfills our nature is the state. The state is the community of communities attained as the individual disengages her/himself from the biological. Of course, the problem is still whether, in the same way as the individual disengages from the biological, s/he can equally accommodate ethnic or racial differences. It seems it is still a problem in African society, and also in various other parts of the world. The cases of Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Nigeria, the DRC, Yugoslavia and Turkey, to name but a few, remain quite challenging. Yet I am not suggesting that we should surrender to our passion when reason fails. Instead, we are suggesting that it is either the balance between passions and reasons, or the passage from passions to reasons that is a virtue.

As moral beings, we realize that we are not just members of our local community (clan, tribe, state). We are part of a far larger entity: the human race or the universal human family. We have argued that this universal family cannot be regulated solely by a body of laws as some institutions and social and political thinkers have suggested. We believe that ethics and being moral is more than what the law can offer us. Virtue ethics is, effectively, an alternative to moral legalism.

The rejection of laws as a basis of the universal human family is grounded in our rejection of liberal philosophy that underlies it. Liberal philosophy, let us recall, is grounded in Kantian and utilitarian philosophy, which commit themselves respectively to duty for its own sake and utility, the greatest happiness for the greatest number conceived as the aggregate of individual goods. Accordingly, we denied that either the ethics of

duty, or the ethics of utility can take us far, given the impersonality and alienation of human beings they cause. It is true that the two kinds of ethics appear to offer us moral certainty because moral rules are fixed and secure. Yet the probability is great that we will pay the price of our integrity and dignity (See Radest 1989:19-20).

Our contention is that the laws which are thought to be able to regulate the universal family can only be successful if people acquire the sense of *ubuntu*, humanity, that underlies our integrity and dignity and which we have potentially. But how can this sense of ubuntu be actualised? We have argued that it can be actualized through the recovery of the ethics of being, which Aristotle suggested. Hence we have suggested this kind of ethics as a means to restrengthen African society, which is experiencing a serious crisis.

However, we cannot promise that the acquisition of moral values rooted in the ethics of being will be automatic. Moral values require a thorough moral education which involves a process of transformation within ourselves. Moral education is a difficult task in itself; and the communitarian approach we have suggested is even more difficult. Start from the family. We live in a world whereby the family is frequently a single-parent family. It would be surprising if the individual moral development from childhood does not become more shaky as well (see Moynihan 1986, Cf. Radest 1989:20).

But the experience of the family reflects the world out there. Here again we still rely on our being human, with its moral connotations. Hence, beyond society and culture lies also our nature with what it requires of conscience and consciousness of who we are and how we should live, given our identity as human beings. This, for me, is the beginning of a virtuous life, the ground of our *ubuntu*; and therefore, the starting-point for the reconstruction of African society, morally, socially, politically as well as economically.

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