A Communitarian Understanding of the Human Person as a Philosophical Basis for Human Development

by

Precious Uwaezuloke Obioha, Ph.D.
unclepees@yahoo.com
Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun State, Nigeria

Abstract

There is a challenge that confronts the human person in the contemporary time which is the constant abuse to personality with consequent frustrations of life's aspirations and potentialities. No doubt these constitute a serious bane for development and well-being. To this end there is increasing need for intellectual discourse on how to achieve human development. Thus, this paper argues that present human condition and experience of frustrations may not change until the philosophical foundation for human development is provided. This work argues that the philosophical foundation for human development lies within the African communitarian idea of personhood, and therefore, it is within this framework that the capabilities, environment and right social relationships are needed to properly investigate human development.

Introduction

Virtually all humans in every clime believe in some sort of the sacredness and dignity of human life, and this is why the instinct of self-protection and the desire for the promotion of self-comfort is almost natural in all human beings. However, the precarious nature of human life and the harshness human life is treated is a contradiction to the facts of its sacredness and dignity. In order to stem this tide and engender the flowering of human personality and the fulfillment of human destinies, contemporary discourse in the humanities and social sciences are replete with discourse in human development; yet there is little likelihood that much has improved or is going to be improve in regards to human development. Life frustrations, unfulfilled dreams, untapped potentials, and all kinds of attacks and abuses against on the human personality has impoverished many people in the world.

The understanding of human development as a process of social transformation which involves the replacement of factors that inhibit the capacity of the individual to gain self-direction and to promote social cooperation is ideal wherein it creates an environment in which all people can expand their capabilities to live long, healthy, creative lives to advance other goals they may have reason to value and to engage in as they help to shape human development equitably and sustainably on a shared planet, which is very instructive because it speaks to an environment where human development is or is not possible (Human Development Report, 2010:12).

Human life is characterized with dreams, potentialities and ambitions, but these are values that cannot be fully realized by the individual alone without a needed environment and the cooperation of others in community. The capabilities that are needed to live the kind of life one has reason to value are such that the individual cannot provide alone. Therefore, the provision of capabilities that enable people to lead the kind of life they value involves the environment and the kind of human relations where these capabilities are cultivated, nurtured and sustained for relevant human development. However, the provision of the needed capabilities and the cultivation of the right environment and relationships for human development is a function of the way the human person is conceived and understood.

As much as the various indices of human development as espoused by Human Development Report, Amartaya Sen and other well-meaning scholars of Human Development is accepted, however, it is noted that the philosophical foundation for the application of these indices is lacking. For example, in the areas of the right kind of social relationships that should exist amongst persons in the society, hence, wholesome human relationships which provide capabilities, and an enabling environment for the workability of the developmental processes for human flourishing. This is important because unless we understand adequately and rightly the subject of the human development indices (the human person and relationships) that should exist amongst persons in the community, it may be difficult to apply the said indices of human development. This paper, therefore, intends to provide these philosophical foundations vis-à-vis an analysis of what the right and adequate conception of the human person should be, and second, what is the right kind of social environment and relationship needed for a correct application of human development indices. And next, it argues that Communitarian personhood from an African standpoint provides the virtues of cooperative togetherness, liberty, solidarity, respect etc. that can provide capabilities, right relationships in an environment that enable people to lead the kind of life they value.

Understanding Human Development

Human development involves the advancement of people capacities that will determine human destiny. It is an appreciation of human worth in terms of liberty and responsibility. Tanzanian politician and the first President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere (1922-1999) in his philosophy emphasized in his work that people are the measure of development when he advocated that (Nyerere 1974:281):

> Roads, buildings, the increase of the crop output and other things of nature are not development but tools of development. A new road extends a man's freedom if he travels upon it. An increase in the number of school buildings is development only if those buildings can be and are being used to develop the minds and understanding of people. An increase in the output of wheat, maize, beans is only development if it leads to the better nutrition of people. An expansion of the cotton, coffee, or sisal crop is development only if those things can be sold and the money used for other things, which improve health, comfort, and understanding of the people. Development which is not development of the people may be of interest to historians in the year 3000 Ad. It is irrelevant to the future, which is being created.

The distinction that is made by Nyerere above between development and tools of development is quite significant, and underscores that the development process is not an abstraction or the integrity of which can be measured simply in quantitative terms (such as the rate of growth in GDP per capita or the process of social change). Instead, development and the tools of development is part of a process of social transformation, which involves the replacement of factors that inhibit the capacity of the individual for self-direction, and the promotion of social cooperation with those who promote those ideals. Hence, it is a process whose essence concerns the quality of life (including the quality of social relations) or the well-being of the people. In this vein, Akah (1977) states that development is human ascent, which is the ascent of all in their quintessence of humanity, including the economic, biological, psychological, social, cultural, ideological, spiritual, mystical and transcendental dimensions.

The above understanding of human development has also been captured and expanded by Human Development Report (HDR) from 1990-2010, an overall independent annual report commissioned by the UN launched in 1990 by the economist Mahbub ul Haq and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen based on the ideal of placing people at the centre of the development process in terms of economic debate, policy and advocacy.

Hence, a synergy of all the definitions of Human development as contained in the HDR from 1990-2009 provides a robust definition of human development, and synergistically concludes that,

> Human development is the expansion of people's freedoms to live long, healthy and creative lives; to advance other goals they have reason to value and to engage actively in shaping development equitably and sustainably on a shared planet. People are both the beneficiaries and drivers of human development, as individuals and in groups. (Human Development Report 2010:12).

The Concept of Communal Personhood

Communal theory of person sees the human person as an inherently (intrinsically) communal being, embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, never as an isolated, atomic individual. Consequently it sees the community not as mere association of individual persons whose interests and ends are contingently congruent, but as a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds, biological and/or non-biological, who consider themselves primarily as members of the group that, have common interest, goals and values.

The idea of communal personhood is derived from the African concept of communalism (or communitarianism). According to Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye (1987:155) "Communalism may be defined as the doctrine that the group (that is, the society) constitutes the focus of the activities of the individual members of the society. He further states that the doctrine places emphasis on the activity and success of the wider society rather than, though not necessarily at the expense of, or to the detriment of the individual". This shows that communalism is an ideal about social organizations, relations and net-workings and is therefore an offshoot of the African concept of humanism which places all human beings into one universal family of humankind having the same father God. This idea is expressed by an Akan axiom via Ghana/Côte d'Ivoire,

> All human beings are children of God; no one is a child of the earth.

This claim is based on the belief that there must be something intrinsically valuable in God wherein the human being is considered a child of God, presumably by reason of having been created by God and having in his or her nature in some aspect of God, and thus, it ought to be held as of intrinsic value, worthy of dignity and respect. The general African belief that human beings are created by God and that they are children of God most probably lies at the base of the values attached to humanity and unity held by the African people, and their having a speck of the divine nature (i.e. soul) in them, placing all human beings into one universal family of humankind (Gyekye, 1996).

Succinctly, the idea of one universal human family is the idea of human unity, and communal personhood is therefore the idea that the human person has a natural sociality that defines his or her being, and that the sharing in a network of relationships is what constitutes the human person. This means that people are social animals.

Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) proclaimed many centuries ago that human beings are by nature a social animal and that it is impossible for them to live outside society. Likewise, African philosophers and thinkers (Gyekye, 1996, Wiredu, 1983, Gbadegesin, 1991, Iroegbu, 2000) agree that society is not only a necessary condition for human existence, but that it is a natural for humankind. Gyekye (1996:36) believes that this idea is expressed in an Akan proverb that says:

When a man descends from heaven, he descends into a human society.

In descending into a human society, the human person does not live a solitary and uncooperative life; the type that characterizes English philosopher Thomas Hobbes' (1588-1679) sate of nature (Hobbes is best known today for his work on political philosophy). Yet, this is itself a rejection of the concept of the state of nature, as explicated by Hobbes and other eighteenth-century European philosophers who asserted the existence of an original pre social character of human beings. Nevertheless, from the outset they are involved in an intricate web of social relationships with other humans in society.

What is the basis for this idea of personhood? The idea of the dignity of the human person lies in the answers to this question. So the consequences of communal personhood are the springboard for the dignity of the human person, and consequently human development. Back to our first question: the basis for the idea of communal personhood. Human life is characterized by adventures, ambitions, dreams, desires and aspirations. This is a truism, but of no less truth is that human life is equally characterized by weaknesses, frustrations, hindrances, limitations and failures. However, these limitations and frustrations can be overcome. One observation from life's or specifically African life experiences of limitations and sufferings is the fact contained in the Akan of Ghana/Côte d'Ivoire and Igbo (via the people of south east Nigeria) maxims respectively, "A human being needs help", and "I am my brother's helper"

Being a normative (moral) statement the maxims express just more than a fact about human life or the human condition. The real meaning is that a human being deserves and therefore, ought to be helped; hence a human being must be regarded as an object of moral concern entitled to help. But such moral concern can hardly be demonstrated when human beings live a solitary life, in isolation from, and without enjoying the fellowship of other human beings. The necessity of human fellowship for the well-being of the individual human being is stressed in the following Igbo proverb: "It is a human being that is needed (*mmadu ka eji aka*)".

251

In order to overcome or not to be overwhelmed by life's challenges, human fellowship can be a basis for all kinds of help an individual may want or need. But human fellowship is constituted only by human beings, hence, their worth, as affirmed in the following maxims.

> When an animal needs to scratch its back, it runs to a tree and scratches its back against it; but when humans need to scratch their back, they run to fellow humans.

> It is the human being that counts; I call upon gold, it answers not; I can upon cloth, it answers not; it is the human being that counts.

So human beings need other humans in order to overcome life's challenges. Life's ambitions and aspirations are better and easier achieved in a cooperative environment. Individual capacities are insufficient to meet basic human requirements. A person proverbially is not a palm tree that he or she should be complete or self-sufficient. Therefore, the individual inevitably requires the succor and the relationships of others in order to realize or satisfy their basic needs and attain dreams and aspirations. This fact is expressed in these Akan, and Igbo proverbs which state that:

> The prosperity (or well-being) of man depends upon his fellow man. (Obi yiye firi obi). (Akan)

> One finger cannot lift up a thing.

> If one man scrapes the back of a tree for medicine, the pieces fall down.

> The left arm washes the right arm and the right arm washes the left arm. (Aka ekpe kwuo aka nri, aka nri kwuo aka ekpe). (Igbo)

So, in the communal social order, materials and other benefits are more likely to be available to all the members of the society than in an individually-structured society. The reason is that the communal social order is participatory and other-mindful, and that it is characterized by such social and ethical values as social well-being, solidarity, interdependence, cooperation and reciprocal obligation. According to Gyekye, all of these conduce to equitable distribution of the resources and benefits of society to the fulfillment of individual aspirations, and indeed to communal well-being (Gyekye, 1996). However, a critic may argue that if communalism is this wonderful, why have we been having some social conflicts and problems in Africa? Our answer is that the cases of social problems in Africa do not in any way negate the virtues of communalism.

Social problems are inevitable giving the ambivalence of human nature. Human nature is not the same, so human beings do not act in the same way. No matter how pristine any communal ethic may be, there is bound to be dissents by those who will do everything to disrupt it, however, because do succeed in disrupting it, does not discredit such ethic. Therefore, the African philosophy of communalism remains valuable for social cohesion and well-being as we also do not claim that African communalism is ultimately devoid of shortfalls.

So the values of social well-being, solidarity, interdependence, cooperation, reciprocal obligation etc. provide the basis for the philosophy that an African concept of communal personhood can rest. However, communal personhood has two major orientations arising from the nature of the community-individual relationship. The two orientations are namely, *radical/ unrestricted communalism* and *moderate/restricted communalism*. Although; there are various versions of the radical communal thesis, the various versions of the radical communal thesis can be reduced to the idea that community values take precedence over individual values. Therefore, the welfare of the individual must be seen from the stand point of the welfare of the community, since the individual cannot exist without the community. All the advocates of the radical thesis, without reservation, believe that it is the community that determines the social, religious, political and moral being of humankind. Radical communitarian personhood amplifies the virtues of communal values over individual values. It extols the natural sociality of people and believes that the individual depends on the community for personhood and consequently for dignity, and thus, it means that personhood is given and determined by the community. Communal personhood makes this claim because it is only within this framework that the common good of the community can be achieved.

On the other hand, the main thesis of moderate communalism is that though humankind is a social being by nature, he/she does not totally depend on the community for personhood. In order words, personhood is not determined solely by the community; neither the individual nor the community is greater than each other. Rather, there is a symbiotic relationship between the community and the individual for the purpose of advancing the common good – the good of the individual as well as the community. Moderate communitarianism, also tries to balance communal values and individual values by maintaining that the individual is not vitiated or eclipsed within the community, thus the individuality of every member of the community is still guaranteed within the community which allows the notion of self-plans and the attainment of self-goals and objectives. Moderate communalism obviously concerns itself with how individual values can be accommodated and protected within the community (Gyekye, 1992); hence, we choose to note that this version of personhood is right, balanced, adequate, and robust and therefore better represents the African ideal of communal personhood.

Communitarian Personhood as a Basis for Human Development

Communal personhood recognizes the individual capacity of the human person as well as natural sociality. The human person is communal, but of no less importance is that he/she is equally an individual; he/she is born an individual (no body is born a community), a part of the community, but equally responsible as an individual for his/her choices and actions as an individual-communal person. Dondyne (1964) corroborates this idea when he says that, "The person is a historical being in that he develops a personality as he grows up and circulates within the members of his family, his peer group, his neighborhood, his school, his church and eventually with the society at large" (Dondyne, 1964:34). Here, Dondyne is saying that the person is an individual who develops and diffuses his personality within the community.

Communal personhood is significant for human flourishing, and naturally recognizes the reality and dignity of the individual within the community. African cultures generally recognize that the social human being also has individuality, personal will, and an identity that must be exercised. The reality of the individual is expressed in numerous African maxims or proverbs. The following Akan maxim is a testimony to this reality, "The clan is like a cluster of trees which, when seen from afar, appear huddled together, but which would be seen to stand individually when closely approached" (Gyekye, 1996:47). The import of this maxim is that the individual is real and his or her individuality is not eclipsed by membership in a human community. The Igbo of southeastern Nigeria sees self as an individual with freedom and separateness, yet deeply committed to his/her *Umunna* community. And a ritual of significance is when the drum sounds early in the morning for a gathering of the village community to deliberate over a newly arisen situation, the entire people gather, but each person comes out from his or her house as individuals. Hence, there is no community formed until the individuals come together, and when all have gathered, it is individuals that speak, argue, and deliberate. The community as community, taken as a mass, does not speak, thus the aspect of the community that is at stake here is the individuals, the selves, the units and the singulars. This is proved by the fact that opposing opinions are expressed, conflicts arise and variety of view-points manifests themselves so each self-differs from the other, though all share in the same community. Perhaps this explains why the Igbo celebrate the individual even within the community. This is expressed in such names as *Dike, Diji, and Odogwu*, which mean a hero is achieved out of some dint of personal hard work.

The recognition of the individual in African thought is further shown by these maxims:

It is by individual effort that we can struggle for our heads.

As you make your bed so you lie on it

Life is as you yourself make it.

For the first maxim, "heads" is a reference to our fortunes, interests, goals and needs. The maxim is saying that individual effort is a necessary condition for fulfilling our needs and reaching our goals. "We can struggle" is a reference to competition which is also recognized in African thought. The second and third maxims appear like that of French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) which argue that "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself''. And as these maxims and this principle of existentialism underlie the idea that an individual is responsible for the life he or she fashions, this existentialism principle is atheistic in its philosophy as the maxims are theistic in their metaphysics in that they see the human being as God's creation. Hence, the above maxims are here to point to the African belief that personal responsibility is central to a person's situation in life. In the same vain, the maxim "The clan is (merely) a multitude" presented by Gyekye (1996) attenuates African acceptance of individualism via the community. Here, Gyekye suggests that within a clan there are no specific and reliable persons always to turn to for the fulfillment of one's needs, thus this maxim emphasizes the value of self-reliance because one cannot always depend on the group, however, he/she must be responsible for self as an individual. The maxim aims at deepening the individual's sense of responsibility and to help the individual recognize that complete dependence on others is unwise and will lead to disappointment, frustration and grief. It simply shows that there is a limit to the amount of help one can realistically obtain from one's relatives. Thus the maxim: "The person who helps you to carry your load does not develop a hump", means that a helper does not completely take over another's burden. Rather every individual bears his or her own burden. The following maxims also express the idea of an African notion of the value of personal responsibility.

> *You reap what you sow*
> *(Ometara buru; Ihe onye metara sobe ya)*
>
> *The lizard does not eat pepper for the frog to sweat.*
> *If you get your bundle ready, you will be helped to carry it*
> *(i.e. to place it on your head).*
>
> *One does not fan (the hot food) that another may eat.*

In sum, the first and the second maxims straightforwardly say that a person must be responsible for his or her actions. The third stresses the value of personal initiative, while the fourth maxim expressed that "Nobody cracks palm kernels with his teeth for another" which suggests that the values of initiative and responsibility: one has no claim on what results from the exertion of another person's effort. And in contract, the Igbo proverb that says: "when a finger gets oily, it soils the entire hand" (*ofu nkpuru aka ruta mmanu ozuo oha onu*) is therefore wrong in the sense that nobody is punished for the offense or crime of another person.

However the proverb is only right within the context that one person's mistake may affect adversely the entire community. Here, Danish philosopher-theologian Soren Kierkegaard's submission that it is easy to point up someone's responsibility for an action when individualism is recognized within the crowd is particularly instructive. However, Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is not totally correct when he claims that the crowd (and by crowd we hope he means the community) renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible. Kierkegaard writes:

> The person is an individual, not a crowd. A crowd, of course, is composed of individuals, but each of them loses his individuality in the crowd. It is easy to point the responsibility of an action to him than to a crowd. It is argued that the crowd renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible. (Kierkegaard, 1964:55).

The community does not render the individual irresponsible. Radical communitarianism may dominate the individual, but it does not kill responsibility. Instead of killing responsibility it extols the virtue of the ethic of social responsibility. In fact, the community in communal personhood provides the individual the opportunity, the environment and the resources necessary for pursuing his or her life plans, set goals and objectives (Sen (1999) calls it "capabilities" that help people lead the kind of life they have reasons to value). Oladipo corroborates this when he says that, "it is the community, seen as a network of relationships, institutions and their underlining norms, which provide the conditions for individual security, identity and well-being. In a sense, then, the individual is dependent on the community for his or her self-fulfillment; the community provides the ambiance under which he or she pursues his or her interest" (Oladipo, 2009:78). Note here interestingly that the 'individual is dependent on the community for his/her self-fulfillment and the pursuit of his/her interests, not for his/her personhood.

It also should be noted that what makes possible and successful in the pursuit of self-fulfillment is the acknowledgement and acceptance by the individual of personal responsibility. Gyekye strongly supports this view when he states that, "faced with social demands and requirements (like meeting the needs and demands of the group; and the fulfillment of other social norms), an individual would strive in several ways to demonstrate this sense of personal responsibility, to achieve some measure of success in life, and to have a family (that is, immediate family)…. All these strivings are in fact part of the individual's self-expression, an exercise of a capacity he has as a person."

Juxtaposing, another significance of communal personhood for human dignity and development suggests that its recognition and respect for the individuality or selfhood of the human person within the community. Hence, a recognition that individual persons can and do have the right to reflect (to accept or reject) the values and norms of their communities.

And within this, individual persons, as participants in the shared values and practices, and enmeshed in the web of communal relationships, may find that aspects of those cultural givens are inelegant, and can be un-dignifying or unenlightening, but they can be thoughtfully questioned and evaluated. This evaluation may result in the individual's affirming, amending or refining existing communal goals, values and practices, but it may or could also result in the individual's total rejection of them. Cases of individual attempts to reassess re-evaluate and sometimes reject certain community norms abound in history. For example, an Amos (an 8th century minor prophet) denouncing the Hebrew society of his time, or to span the centuries, like an English Anglican bishop via Trevov Huddlestone (1913-19980 or South African cleric, theologian and leading Afrikaner anti-apartheid activist Beyers Naude (1915-2004) rejecting the hegemony of people in South Africa, or politician Camelo Torres (1766-1816) of Columbia, or Vietnam War resisters, etc. All this explains the socially detaching power of conscience. And correspondingly, English philosopher and physician John Locke (1632-1704) also alludes to the right, and the capacity of the individual to question and reassess the norms of his society, according to him,

> As a child grows up, he uncritically imbibes or absorbs what is just there. Hardly does he doubt the wisdom of the rules in society…. There are also localized rules that he may encounter later as those of his school and his peer group. In the process of growing up, he simply tacitly follows these rules. In this sense, he is passive. When he becomes critical at some point in his life, he starts rejecting some of those rules and selects those which are useful to him. Those he has explicitly accepted he follows (Locke, 1960:112).

John Hick (1922-2012), a philosopher of religion and theologian born in England who taught in the United States for the larger part of his career calls it "the moral creativity of the prophetic mind". Hence, he states that the moral prophet is characteristically an innovator who goes beyond the established ethical code and summons his or her fellows to acknowledge new and more far-reaching claims of morality upon their lives (Hick, 1994).

No doubt this has brought about ethical progress in human society. In support of this idea, Gyekye contends that, "the possibility of re-evaluation means, surely, that the person cannot be absorbed by the communal or cultural apparatus, but can to some extent wriggle himself out of it, distance himself from it, and thus be in a position to take another look at it; it means also, that the communal structure cannot foreclose the meaningfulness and reality of the quality of self-assertiveness which the person can demonstrate in his action" (Gyekye, 1992:112). Now, the development of human, i.e., communal culture results from the exercise by individual persons of this capacity for self-assertion; it is this capacity which makes possible the intelligibility of autonomous individual choice of goals and life plans.

And the fact that changes do occur in the existing communal values, as some fall into obsolescence, is undoubtedly the result of the evaluative activities and choices of some autonomous, self-assertive individual persons.

Furthermore, in talking about the relation of the individual to communal structures, communal personhood guarantees that the individual is not abused or dehumanized by social structures since both the community and the individual are partners in progress, so to speak, wherein none is to be used at the expense of the other. In the publication, *The Human Person and Social Structures*, scheduled to be canonized as a saint on April 27, 2014, Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) insists that the re-discovery, maintenance and improvement of the human person are the goals of all socio-political and other human ordinances. Every man and woman, for instance, has a right to be respected, but each equally has a duty to respect in others the rights claimed for a person since rights and duties are mutually reciprocal. Pope writes: "The most frequent pitfall for human activities is the possibility of losing sight while performing them, of the clearest truths, the most elementary principles" (Pope John Paul, 1980:1).

What are these clearest truths, the most elementary principles? They are that:

- The human transcends the social structures in which life unfolds.

- Structures are made for humankind and not vice-versa.

- The principle of the dynamic development of these structures is the human person himself and not laws for the sake of laws, nor any ideology of any class (Pope John Paul, 1980:3).

The message contained in these principles are clear, the transcendent nature of human person over social structures does not suggest that individuals can take laws into their hands. Rather what it means is that the structures i.e. the laws, state policies, institutions etc. are made for people and not people for them. The consequence of these principles is that the human person must be the constant judge, source and center of the structures that control his/her life. Therefore constant and regular reviews are a desideratum. Further, social structures are to be judged on the criterion of service. If they no longer serve humans and worse still, if they become negative by, for instance, turning oppressive, or dehumanizing, these laws and structures must be dismantled or changed. Therefore, moral conscience must guide people in their deployment of structures for self and in relationship with other human persons. A correct conscience, one that is alive and dynamic, sees not only the good of the self or the individual; and it equally sees the good of the community, hence, the larger society in which the human race lives.

The implication of this is that a false functioning of the human society is unacceptable. This is unacceptable because according to Cronan (1958), any false notion of the state would inhibit the dynamic perfection of the human person and inevitably would lead to the destruction of his/her natural human dignity. He therefore contends that the state must be accommodated to the natures of human persons because their presence and natures are necessary to constitute civil state. And such a community is not beside or above the individual persons, but in them all together, a moral unit grasping and organizing and integrating into a social whole which can be logically distinguished as a particular and accidental mode of co-existence, but never as any physical reality existing separately and independently from its individual and personal members (Cronan, 1958). Further, Cronan also contends that if the state were to act as a separate and higher physical entity which could deny the development of individual powers and values, then there exists a denial of the concept and reality of human society, and the group is heard (Cronan, 1958). The import of this is that the state cannot, in the name of social structures, destroy personal dignity because it was created as the instrument of development and protection and perfection. In view of this Gripaldo (2008:3) argues,

> When the community overshadows the individual, collective will then become primary and the individual may become secondary. Although theoretically, the collective is set up to protect the interests of the individual, it may turn out in practice that the interests of the individual may be sacrificed for the interests of the collective. In this regard, the individual may cease to be a real person or its quality as a real person may be diminished.

Thus, whatever the interest of the collective is, the so-called 'public interest' must not be pursued at the expense of the individual human person. Accepted that there are times when it is necessary that individuals sacrifice certain aspects of their interests for the common good which must benefit or be made to benefit the individual person at the end, otherwise such 'common good' is not worth it. Hence, communal personhood ensures the realization of this through its recognition of the worth and the respect of the individual person, and equally the value of the community as what provides the environment and the general "capabilities" for a realization of individual potentialities and personalities, and by extension, the good of the entire community.

Therefore, the common good, described as the good of all individuals embraced within a society is achievable within communal personhood (the importance of the common good to the achievement of human development cannot be overemphasized). The common good is not merely the sum of the various individual goods, but instead, it speaks of certain needs that are basic to the enjoyment and fulfillment of the life of each individual which include shelter, food, health, equality of opportunity, and liberty. Thus the common good is predicated on a true or essential universal (the good of all) that is essentially good for human beings, not conceptually opposed to the individual good of any member of society that can embrace his or her individual good as it embraces the good of other members of society, and logically the individual good is attainable. Cronan largely supports this idea when he writes that,

….only... the attaining of the common end or good may be the means of their individually attaining their individual perfection. It is from this then, and as always, from individual persons, that the common good gets its value, because it is linked to the perfection of its person members, not only in a coincidence of ends, but also by a kind of reciprocal action, in that the attaining of the common goal which is more valuable than any one individual's is at the same time the means for each individual's attaining that individual perfection which coincides with his final destiny (Cronan, 1958:151-152).

The above captures the mutuality and the reciprocity that exists between the individual and community. However, Cronan errs when he argues that "man is not made to increase the value and dignity of society but society to give him the chance to perfect his individual and personal worth by the opportunities it gives him…." because the relationship that exists between the individual and the community is a symbiotic and complementary one. The community provides opportunities for personal fulfillment for the individual, but the individual is no less responsible for the dignity of the community or its continuous existence and flourishing. And if the society does contribute to personal and continuous development by guiding against a person's own stupidities and incipient indignities, and supplying proper opportunities and protective leadership for his/her connatural and unimpeded self-development, then it is only necessary and wise for the individual to contribute and ensure the continuous increase of the value and the dignity of the society so that the society will continue to provide for the individual the needed leadership and guidance for continued human flourishing.

In view that the respect for human dignity (a natural or fundamental attribute of the person) cannot be set at naught by communal structures in the name of the so-called collective will or public interest, communal personhood can be said to easily generate regard for personal rights, and within this, there is no gainsaying that respect for human rights is germane to the development of human personality.

Communal personhood promotes respect for individual rights and also recognizes that certain rights are inalienable and should be respected as such. The reason is that the natural membership of the individual person in a community cannot rob him or her of dignity or worth, a fundamental and inalienable attribute possessed as a person. That dignity or worth is better achieved or promoted when rights are respected, and in fact, the recognition of the human person as a self-determining autonomous individual possessing the capacity for evaluating or re-evaluating the entire practice of his or her community is anchored on the recognition and respect for rights. Indeed, some of such evaluations may touch on matters of rights, the exercise of which a self-determining individual may see as conducive to the fulfillment of the human potential, and against the denial of which a person may raise some objections.

The theory of individual rights and human dignity can be derived from theistic conceptions of the intrinsic worth of persons. It is believed that people possess a divine spark called soul that further confirms that humankind is created by God, hence the Akan axiom: "All persons are children of God; no one is a child of the earth". A person must therefore be held as intrinsic value, an end in self, worthy of dignity with respect. A theistic derivation of a theory of individual rights with human dignity is attested to by the American Declaration of Independence (1776): "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights…." A theory of individual rights with human dignity can equally be derived, not from theism but from reflecting on human nature, particularly on the qualities that will dispose the human being to function at his/her best in human society, and realize full potentiality as a person. Hence, it is a quality as part of a person's capacity as a rational being with moral autonomy that allows him or her to be treated as an end in self (Kant, 1965). From this German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) further derives his notion of moral rights, which he refers to as "innate rights", also called natural rights, because they belong to everyone by nature.

At this juncture, it is not particularly difficult to see how a theory (communal theory of personhood) that is equally heavily communalistic as it is individualistic would accommodate and strongly advocate for the doctrine of individual rights. This is because allowing the free rein for the exercise of individual rights which obviously includes the exercise of the unique qualities, talents and dispositions of the individuals will certainly enhance the cultural development and success of the community, and therefore by recognizing and respecting the exercise of individual rights, the community benefits.

And a likely fear that may be entertained by the critics of this theory of personhood need be cleared. That is the fear of the likelihood of individuals slipping down the slope of selfishness by insisting on their rights. In communal personhood individuals would not always have a penchant for, an obsession with, insisting on their rights because the economic, political and social needs of the individual members, which are the concern of most individual rights, would be expected to have been recognized, if not catered for, to some degree of adequacy by the notion of the common good. Individuals know that insistence on their rights could divert attention to duties that they, as members of the communal society, strongly feel about and how it may impact other members of the community. For example, if it is my right to all my possession or to all that has resulted from the exercise of my endowments, I may not be able to show sensitivity to the needs and welfare of others. So individuals may at times sacrifice some of their rights for the common good of the community which is eventually for their own good. George Mclean (2001) puts it more categorically when he opines that communal consciousness helps to avoid the excesses of extreme individualism and makes room for the achievement of the common good necessary for social flourishing.

Now that the dynamics and the significance of the selfhood dimension of communal personhood have been explored; the excellences of the communal aspect of this theory will be considered next. And thus far, the social nature of every human person has long been established in our thesis, so it is not difficult to see the reality and the importance of the Akan proverb:

"When a man descends from heaven, he descends into a human society.
(*Onipa firi soro besi, obesi onipa kurom*)" (Gyekye, 1996:36).

The reality of this proverb is that human beings are a creation of the Supreme Being *Onyame* (Akan), *Olodumare* (Yoruba) and *Chukwu* (Igbo). The import of the proverb is not only that no person is born to live a solitary life, but also that individual capacities are insufficient to meet basic human requirements, so the individual inevitably requires the succor and the relationships of others for the achievement or the realization of his/her full potentialities and personality. This truth is also contained in the following proverbs:

We triumph by human beings or it is human being that is needed
(Mmadu ka eji aka)

The prosperity (or well-being) of man depends upon his fellow
man (Obi yiye firi obi)

One finger cannot lift up a thing.

If one man scrapes the back of a tree for medicine, the pieces fall down.

The right arm washes the left arm and the left arm washes the right arm
(aka nri kwuo aka ekpe, aka ekpe kwuo aka nri)

These and other numerous proverbs similar in content in African thought show that nobody exists or lives sufficiently or fully by his/her self. Everybody needs every another person for a full and flourishing life. This is so because it is in the communal social order those materials and other benefits are more likely to be available to all the members of society than in any other social system. And therefore, the communal social order is participatory and is characterized by such social and ethical values as social well-being, solidarity, interdependence, cooperation and reciprocal obligation and there is no gainsaying that these values provide the needed capabilities to expand people's choices so they can lead lives they can value.

And here, the communal idea of personhood extols the virtues of wholesome human relations that incorporate respect for old age, solidarity, reciprocity, hospitality, brotherhood, unity and cooperation; and interdependence as values that could help define and enhance personhood and human dignity, and thus, the community is more than simply a group or collection of persons. Consequently, in a community, several persons are in interaction; there are social relationships among the persons and finally, there is a degree of consensus or concerted action where the community exists when there are social relationships among a number of persons. Social relationships, in turn, are a consequence of recurring or repeated social interaction between two or more persons. Thus, an individual, in action, takes into account what is considered to be the expectation of others and his or her behaviour, which means that he/she expects others to act toward him or her in a certain way, owing to mutual expectations and a person's evaluation of them represent his or her social role. And in communal personhood, the individual takes his or her social role as far as the social relationships with tenacity and backed by an altruistic moral philosophy that gives it a religious fervor to the extent that a person is willing and able to make sacrifices-personal, economic, spiritual etc. to see it endure and perform his or her obligations therein. Hence the emphasis on wholesome human relationships is very important, even at some times, at all cost.

The African belief that everyone is a child of God and no one is a child of the earth makes possible the philosophy of integration and solidarity reinforced with a sense of personal and group commitment, thus everyone has a stake in the maintenance of wholesome social relationships in the community wherein everyone will contribute to its further enhancement and sustenance. Second, what we have, we share in order to nurture, and all our actions will be calculated towards reinforcing, rather than in breaking the cord of human relationships. Thus, the thinking is that wholesome human relationship brings about a conducive environment which in turn is a necessary and requisite factor for the realization of life's aspirations both for the individual and the community at large. Because, generally, when people are committed to one another in a healthy social relationship it encourages respect for human dignity and worth; and where and when human dignity and worth is respected, it certainly and normally leads to human development, therefore, a commitment to one another in social relationships is a commitment to equity, justice and fair play, essential imperatives for human development.

And what accounts for this mutual commitment or strong fellow-feeling existing among African people is, according to philosophy professor William Abraham (1962) is that the African people sees all people as encapsulated spirits, spirits who are roaming this part of the universe who do not have a feeling of externality to the world as the Western world feels, but who feel part of the world and of being internal to it. In this context, it is no wonder, then that in general, a feeling of comradeship and wholesome relationship should exist among the spirit inspired, the super ordered, and ideally, among African people.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the crisis of the twentieth century is a crisis of human relationships. Whether in Arab countries or Africa south of the Sahara, the testimonies are the same. The civil disturbances, for instance, that are sweeping through most of the Arab countries and African countries are the problems of human relationships occasioned by either bad leadership or power mongering or both reflect in the crisis. From Zimbabwe, Egypt, Libya, Yemen to Iraq and Afghanistan, some citizens are fed up with their leaders as a result of bad leadership or because their leaders have held unto power for a long time, and thus, they seek a needed change. However, their leaders are not ready to embrace change or relinquish power and as a result, there is a face-off between citizens and their leadership and the consequences usually have been bloody.

Also the problems of terrorism, assassinations, kidnappings, armed robbery, quarrelling and fighting both at personal and group levels are problems of human relationships occasioned by bad governance, injustice, hatred, selfishness, greed, unnecessary competitions, do or die attitude, mistrust and distrust, betrayals, infidelity and dishonesty, just to mention a few. It is a widely known and propagated in many areas of the literature that humankind's achievements in the arena of social relationship have not equaled his/her achievements in physical science and technology. In discussing this topic, Sofola states that,

> Within a few centuries man has solved many of the mysteries of the world around him. His endeavours have progressed from the realm of the folklore and magic to that of science. His knowledge of the earth and its resources, and even the vast areas of outer space, surpasses the widest imagination of the primitive man, the medieval philosophers or the early adventurers. The tremendous information he has amassed has enabled him to build great dams and irrigation projects to prevent antistrophic floods and droughts and open up marginal lands to cultivation. He has learnt to control pestilence and many diseases so that his expected life span has tremendously increased. In large parts of the western world, scientific research today increasingly deals with such intricate problems such as nuclear fission, electronics and changes in human cells (Sofola, 1973: 70-73).

Since Sofola wrote the above some three decades ago, it is obvious that he could not account for the most recent scientific breakthroughs in Artificial Intelligence, Information Technology and nuclear physics. Humankind has indeed advanced scientifically. Unfortunately, these technological advances have not brought with them a comparable degree of conquest over the problems of relationships with other people. The point being that the modern person through his/her technological development has only advanced human civilization and culture halfway. Civilization is incomplete as long as it leaves the other arm with which the bird of human advancement would inescapably have to fly, hence, the moral, and the spiritual as translated in part in the organization of social relations, interpersonal and international rapport.

It is not difficult to see that the cases of injustices, suppressions and oppressions that characterize our world today are responsible for terrorisms, war, and other violent crimes against humanity. Thus I contend that humanity is being dehumanized on daily basis; a testimony to the collapse of wholesome human relationships, and herein, the West is not only the victim, even Africa is troubled with it, thus the cases of militant attacks, xenophobic attacks, kidnappings and wars from Nigeria to Zimbabwe to South Africa to Burundi to Somalia to Rwanda to Liberia and to Kenya and Ivory Coast etc. Frankly, the modern human has lost touch with simple morality which is a hall mark of wholesome human relationship.

Conclusion

In view of the fact that human life is characterized with frustrations and abuses, there is increasingly a quest for new frontiers in human knowledge and discourse that will help secure and promote human development and well-being. We have argued that a right and robust understanding of the human person is foundational for the pursuit of human development; and that since human development is seen as a process of providing for people the capabilities that enable them to lead a life they can value, then communal personhood is germane for the realization of this all-important destiny – human well-being.

Communally defined, the human person has a natural sociality that constitutes and defines a person's being. The human person is born into the community, lives and dies in the community. Thus, his/her life revolves round the community wherein the community provides the enabling environment and resources for the perfection of potentiality and personality. Here, communal personhood provides the philosophical framework necessary for understanding this conceptual complementary relationship among persons in the community within the reality and relevance of wholesome human relationships enhancing the capacity for human development. It is within the communal arrangement that the resources, and capabilities that help people to lead the life they value in a readily available manner, establishing communal personhood as an important foundation for human development.

References

Abraham, William (1962). *The Mind of Africa*. London: Weidenfield and Nicolson.

Akah, E.O. (1977). "Africa in Search of Economic System". *African Development Studies*, 1(1), 2 12

Cronan, Edward (1955). *The Dignity of the Human Person.* New York: Philosophical Library Inc.

Dondyne, Albert (1964). *Historicity, Truth and the World.* Dublin: Gill and Son.

Gbadegesin, Segun (1991). *African Philosophy, Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*. Chicago: Gateway.

Gripaldo, Rolando (2008). *The Person as Individual and Social Being*. Manila: Dela Salle University Press.

Gyekye, Kwame (1987). *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. New York: Cambridge University press.

Gyekye, Kwame (1992). Person and Community in African Thought. In K. Wiredu & K. Gyekye (Eds.), *Person and Community: Ghanaian philosophical Studies I*, (pp. 56-78).Washington: The council for Research in Values and Philosophy

Gyekye, Kwame (1996). *African Cultural Values: An Introduction.* Ghana: Sanfola publishing Co.

Hick, John (1994). *Philosophy of Religion*. Englewood Cliffs, USA: Prentice Hall.

Iroegbu, Pantaleon (2000). The Political Significance of Belongingness. *Journal of Philosophy and Development*, 6 (1&2), 3-17

Kant, Immanuel (1964). *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals.* Translated and analyzed by H.J. Paton. New York: Harper and Row.

Kiekegaard, Soren (1964). That individual. In Walter Kaufmann (ed.), *Existentialism from Dostoersky to Sartre*. Cleveland: World Publishing Comp.

Locke, John (1960). *Two Treatise of Civil Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

Mclean, George (2001). Philosophy and Civil Society: Its Nature, Its Past, and its Future (part I-IV). *Filosofia: International Journal of* Philosophy 30 (1-2). 45-66.

Nyerere, Julius (1974). *Man and Development*. Dar-es-Salami: Oxford University Press.

Oladipo, Olusegun (2009). *Philosophy and Social Reconstruction in Africa*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Pope John Paul II (1980). *The Human Person and Social Structures*. Vatican City: Lustitia et pax.

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.

Sofola, J.A. (1973). *African Culture and the African Personality*. Ibadan: African Resources Publishers Co.

Wiredu, Kwasi (1983). The Akan Concept of Mind. *Ibadan Journal of the Humanities.* 3. 15-35.