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African *Ubuntu* Philosophy and Philosophy of Global Management

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1. Introduction

Our globalising world needs a theory of ethical global management that is consistent with our common human nature. All management theories that maintain that the purpose of business management is maximisation of owner wealth must be rejected, because some owner-wealth-maximising actions are unethical. Furthermore, we should reject all theories of business ethics and corporate governance that are rooted in individualistic philosophical systems, including social-contract and stakeholder theories, because they attempt to correct the errors of owner-wealth-maximisation theories without addressing the philosophical root of the problem: individualism. Since we human persons are naturally communal, not individualistic, and since all traditional cultures are communal cultures, the place to begin developing the needed theory of ethical global management is the philosophy of traditional cultures in all regions of the world.

The *ubuntu* philosophy of Africa can make a significant contribution to the requisite theory of ethical global management, because it correctly understands that we are truly human only in community with other persons. Moreover, since all human persons share the same human nature, we find substantial agreement between traditional African and traditional non-African philosophy. Within the limitations of this paper, two other philosophical traditions will be considered briefly, the Confucian tradition of Asia and the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition of Europe.

2. *Ubuntu* Philosophy

One of the most striking features of the cultures of sub-Saharan Africa is their non-individualistic character: "Although African cultures display awesome diversity, they also show remarkable similarities. Community is the cornerstone in African thought and life."[1] An African is not a rugged individual, but a person within a community. In the words of John Mbiti, "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am."[2] Or, as Yusufu Turaki puts it: "People are not individuals, living in a state of independence, but part of a community, living in relationships and interdependence."[3]

The communal character of African culture does not mean, however, that the good of the individual person is subordinated to that of the group, as is the case with Marxist collectivism. In a true community, the individual does not pursue the common good *instead of* his or her own good, but rather pursues his or her own good *by pursuing* the common good. The ethics of a true community does not ask persons to sacrifice their own good in order to promote the good of others, but instead to recognise that they can attain their own true good only by promoting the good of others. Obiora Ike and Ndidi Nnoli Edozien explain this by describing the structure of Igbo society:

> The Igbo social structure consists of many small local communities. Within the village itself, power is held by various groups, and social balance is maintained by a system of checks and balances. Igbo society was such that even though there existed a strong community consciousness, the individual's rights and existence as an entity were not neglected. Free speech, free movement and free action in Igbo society were guaranteed.[4]

And Kwame Gyekye makes the same point in interpreting an Akan proverb:

> "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." ... The proverb stresses the social reality of the individual; it expresses the idea that the individual has a separate iden-

> tity and that, like the tree, some of whose branches may touch other trees, the individual is separately rooted and is not completely absorbed by the cluster. That is, communality does not obliterate or squeeze out individuality.[5]

In southern Africa, the traditional understanding that one is truly human only as a member of a community is expressed in terms of "*ubuntu*". In the words of Mogobe Ramose, "*Ubuntu* is simultaneously the foundation and the edifice of African philosophy."[6] According to Richard Tambulasi and Happy Kayuni, "*Ubuntu* is the basis of African communal cultural life."[7] And Jabulani Sithole writes, "*Ubuntu* functions as a unifying factor, bringing people together regardless of their background or access to wealth."[8]

The word *ubuntu* belongs to the Nguni group of languages, and has cognates in other Bantu languages. It can best be translated into English as "humanness, or being human".[9] As Desmond Tutu explains:

> *Ubuntu* is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, *"Yu, u nobuntu";* "Hey, he or she has *ubuntu*." This means they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life.[10]

As is the case with traditional ethics elsewhere, traditional African ethics is virtue ethics. In the words of Joseph Nyasani: "Virtues like patience, optimism, mutual sympathy and empathy are eminently characteristic of the African way of life and certainly point to a peculiar mode of existence that extends the realm of the individual potentialities to embrace the life of others and their concerns."[11] And Wendy Luhabe writes:

> Our own African culture taught us concepts such as respect, trust, compassion and, above all, that we are a collective with the success of one person depending very much on the success of all. This is a concept widely refereed to as "*ubuntu*" or "*umntu ngumntu ngabanye*" (what makes us human is our recognition of the humanity in others).[12]

3. Differing Interpretations of *Ubuntu*

One of the criticisms of the concept of *ubuntu* is that it is vague: "The trouble is that *ubuntu* seems to mean almost anything one chooses."[13] Thaddeus Metz has brought philosophical precision to *ubuntu*, by evaluating six different theoretical interpretations of the concept. Because he correctly rejects four of them as unsatisfactory, we need only consider the remaining two:

> U4: An action is right just insofar as it positively relates to others and thereby realizes oneself; an act is wrong to the extent that it does not perfect one's valuable nature as a social being.
>
> U6: An action is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop community.[14]

Metz rejects U4, "probably the dominant interpretation of African ethics in the literature", and accepts U6 as "the most promising theoretical formulation of an African ethic to be found in the literature".[15] U6 is better, he argues, because U4 roots ethics in the good of the agent, while U6 roots it in the good of other persons:

> If I ask why I should help others, for example, [U4] says that the basic justificatory reason to do so (though not my proper motive for doing so) is that it will help *me* by making me more of a *mensch* or a better person. However, a better fundamental explanation of why I ought to help others appeals not to the fact that it would be good for me, or at least not merely to this fact, but to the fact that it would (likely) be good *for them*, an explanation that a self-realization ethic by definition cannot invoke.[16]

Metz comments further, "The idea that interpersonal relationships of some kinds have basic moral status is not often found in Anglo-American or Continental normative theory."[17] That is certainly correct. If we consider *traditional* European normative theory, however, the case is different. Aristotle's ethics is both a theory of self-realisation and a theory of interpersonal

relationships, without contradiction. The Aristotelian virtues are perfections of the self that involve relating with others.

Modern European moral philosophy assumes what Henry Sidgwick calls "the dualism of practical reason"[18] and C. S. Lewis calls "the philosophy of hell"[19]: the idea that one person's good is separate from another's. For the leading ancient and mediaeval moral philosophers, in contrast, the common good is my good. An analogy may be helpful: In a true football team, as distinguished from a collection of athletes wearing the same uniform, a player does not have to choose between doing what is best for himself and doing is best for his team. Contributing to the success of the team is simultaneously good for himself.

Aristotle is making the same point, I believe, when he says, "The excellent person is related to his friend in the same way as he is related to himself, since a friend is another himself."[20] Moreover, explanations of *ubuntu* agree that we attain self-realisation through interpersonal relationships. Lovemore Mbigi tells us, "I cannot separate my humanity from the humanity of those around me."[21] In the words of Fred Luthans, *et al.*, "Under Ubuntu there is an individual existence of the self and the simultaneous existence for others."[22] And Augustine Shutte writes, "I only become fully human to the extent that I am included in relationships with others."[23]

Significantly, Aristotle's argument that self-sacrifice is an act of self-love depends, not upon reward after death, but upon a distinction between lower-order and higher-order goods: "The excellent person labours for his friends and for his native country, and will die for them if he must; he will sacrifice money, honours and contested goods in general, in achieving what is fine for himself."[24] Aristotle's ethics is not supernatural, but it is super-material. If material goods were the only goods, then one person's good would continually conflict with the good of others. If, however, non-material goods exist, then it is possible to reconcile the ethics of self-realisation and the ethics of interpersonal relationships.

Scholars of *ubuntu* are in agreement that it recognises non-material goods. Shutte tells us that the idea of *ubuntu* differs from "the materialist view of the world and persons that is the dominant one in our scientific culture".[25] According to Shepherd Shonhiwa, "African life emphasises humanity and relationships over material wealth."[26] And Mbigi writes: "The hallmark of Afrocentric philosophy is about being a good community member. It is also about living and enjoying life rather than the acquisition of the material creature comforts of life."[27]

Consequently, it is possible to interpret "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*", "a person is a person through other persons", in such a way that both U4 and U6 are true. The actions that produce harmony, reduce discord and develop community are simultaneously the actions that perfect one's valuable nature as a social being.

Reconciling self-realisation and communalism is important, because it solves the problem of moral motivation. Modern Western ethical theories are confronted with, but have difficulty answering, the question: Why should I be ethical (if doing so is not good for me)? If, however, I understand that benefiting other persons is also good for me (even when, in the extreme, it leads to my death), then I automatically have a motive to act ethically.

4. *Ubuntu* Management

The author's experience of teaching in several African universities, noting the textbooks used in other African universities, participating in conferences, seminars and workshops in various African countries, and communicating with and reading the publications of business scholars from additional African countries suggests that there is a discrepancy between traditional African cultures and African business education, most of which is indistinguishable in theoretical content from Anglo-American business education. Theories that were created within and for individualistic cultures are not at home within communal cultures. African managers need a management theory that is consistent with their communal cultures.

The first step in developing the requisite theory of African business management, based upon the philosophy of *ubuntu*, is to recognise the firm as a community, not a collection of individuals. As Luchien Karsten and Honorine Illa point out, "Ubuntu provides a strong philosophical base for the community concept of management."[28] And Dean McFarlin, *et al*. write

that African management philosophy "views the corporation as a community and can be summed up in one word – *ubuntu*."[29]

When the firm is understood as a community, the purpose of management is neither to benefit one collection of individuals, as shareholder-value-maximisation theories claim, nor to benefit several collections of individuals, as stakeholder theories tell us, but to benefit the community, as well as the larger communities of which it is a part. In most African business schools, the doctrine that shareholder-value-maximisation is the goal of management is assumed as axiomatic. In addition to being unethical, this doctrine contradicts African cultures: "A new culture for enterprises is needed. This culture is about striving for decent survival and working towards profit-making, but not striving for the greatest profit at all costs, especially not at the exploitation of human beings, in order to attain goals characterised by greed and selfishness."[30]

To promote the good of a community is to promote the good of all its members: "The underlying tenet of Afrocentric leadership is collectivism. This notion refers to communalism, or living collectively, with the objective to ensure that no one falls too far behind anyone else."[31] Shareholder-value theories, social-contract theories and stakeholder theories agree with one another that the objective of business is to promote the good of individuals; they disagree only concerning which individuals should be benefited. All three sets of theories are fundamentally at odds with theories that understand the purpose of management to be promoting the good of the community: "Collectivism associated with harmony and cooperation means working for the benefit of the whole, based on a long-term vision, rather than the benefit of constantly changing individuals."[32]

African management theory can, of course, borrow from the West. Anglo-American management theories contain some truths that are universal. There is, however, need to discriminate between theoretical elements that can enrich a management theory based on *ubuntu* philosophy and elements that cannot:

> The concept of Ubuntu emphasises the need to harness the solidarity tendency of the African people in developing management practices and approaches. It is important for us to adopt some Western and Eastern management techniques, but these will only enable African organisations to attain competitive parity.[33]

Although any management theory based on *ubuntu* philosophy must include the role of the *ubuntu* virtues, there is no canonical listing of these virtues. Johann Broodryk identifies five virtues or "core values" – humanness, caring, sharing, respect and compassion – each of which has several "associated values".[34] Other authors identify other virtues. There is work to be done in identifying the virtues of *ubuntu* management and determining how they relate to the real world of African business.

5. *Ubuntu* and Non-African Traditions

Although some features of *ubuntu* are distinctively African, its essential features are not, because it is rooted in human nature, which is common to the entire human race: "Values such as *Ubuntu* should not only be seen as African values but also human values."[35] Belief in human nature has fallen upon hard times in the modern and post-modern West. Jean-Paul Sartre argued that "there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it".[36] But belief in human nature does not require belief in God. Apartheid was unethical, because black and white humans possess the same human rights and are subject to the same natural moral law. And we have this is common, because we share a common human nature.

Although he does not make explicit reference to "human nature", Nelson Mandela concurs:

> Ubuntu ... asserts that the common ground of our humanity is greater and more enduring than the differences that divide us. It is so, and it must be so, because we share the same fateful human condition. We are creatures of blood and bone, idealism and suffering. Though we differ across cultures and faiths, and though history has divided rich from poor, free from unfree, powerful from powerless and race from race, we are still all branches on the same tree of humanity.[37]

Peter Drucker wrote in 1982 that the only philosophical traditions capable of serving as philosophies of management are the Confucian "ethics of interdependence" and the Aristotelian "ethics of prudence and self-development".[38] Perhaps he can be excused for not including the African ethics of *ubuntu*, on the grounds that no one had introduced him to it. In any event, a brief look at the traditional philosophies of China and Greece reveals that they have much in common with traditional African philosophy that is relevant to the philosophy of business management.

5.1. Confucian Management

Confucianism, which is not a religion but a "humanistic philosophy",[39] influences Chinese business today:

> Although the Confucian system is not now in official vogue in China, the influence is still felt in many facets of Chinese life. For the business person expecting to trade with China, an understanding of this system is essential. Confucianism is so ingrained after 2,000 years that it cannot be ignored. It still forms the basis of most business practices in China.[40]

This passage may exaggerate somewhat the influence of Confucianism in contemporary Chinese business. Buddhism and Western capitalism are also significant influences. Nevertheless, Confucianism has had a strong influence on Chinese culture in the past, is growing in popularity in China today, and has the potential to make the practice of Chinese business more humane.

In traditional Chinese ethics, as in traditional African ethics, the institution of the family is central: "For Confucius, the family, hierarchically ordered, was the unit of society."[41] Confucian ethics is also virtue ethics. One translator of Confucius's *Analects* renders the Confucian virtues as humaneness (*ren*) – an over-arching, all-encompassing virtue – virtue (*de*), loyalty (*zhong*), filial piety (*xiao*), good faith (*xin*), rightness (*yi*), reciprocity (*shu*), deference (*rang*), courage (*yong*) and goodness (*shan*).[42]

According to Kam-hon Lee, Confucian ethics applied to business manifests itself in:

- being sincere towards others (i.e. no deception and always seeking for mutual benefits);
- being trustworthy in handling transactions (i.e. treasuring one's credibility);
- taking righteousness as profits (i.e. treasuring righteousness more than profitability); and
- being grounded on kindness (i.e. being kind to others and not taking advantages when others are having crises).[43]

Confucianism forms the philosophical foundation of not only Chinese culture, but also the cultures of Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore and other East Asian nations: "The virtues stressed [by Confucianism] are fundamental for China and the Far East generally."[44] The case of Japan, the world's second-largest national economy, is significant. The Japanese adopted technology from the West, formed business corporations consistent with their own traditional culture, and soon produced industrial goods of higher quality and at lower cost than Western companies: "Japan's example should be important for Africa, because it shows that modernization need not mean Westernization. Developing countries need to learn from developed ones, but they do not have to abandon their culture and traditions in the process."[45]

It should be noted that the economic empire that China is now building in Africa has more to do with Adam Smith than with Confucius: "The reasoning behind China's new focus on Africa is simple. If its economic boom is to be sustained, Beijing must find more raw materials and new markets for manufactured goods."[46] The primary purpose of an empire is to enrich the mother country at the expense of the colonies. In the past, most empires were built by first conquering and then governing foreign lands. Since the middle of the twentieth century, following the collapse of the European empires and widespread condemnation of colonialism, imperial strategy has shifted towards neo-colonialist domination of the economy of a foreign land, without political governance: "With every day that passes, China's economic tentacles extend deeper into Africa. While Europe sought direct political control, China is acquiring a vast and informal economic empire."[47]

Confucian business management is partly a present reality and partly a legacy to be claimed. Within China, Confucianism was suppressed during the Cultural Revolution, but is

regaining popularity today. It is also influential in other Asian nations. Insofar as it is a tradition of communities and virtues, it is similar to traditional African and European traditions.

5.2. Platonic-Aristotelian Management

Much has been written about the differences between African and European philosophy. If one compares traditional African philosophy with *modern* European philosophy, the contrast is, indeed, striking. If one compares traditional African philosophy with *traditional* European philosophy, however, the differences diminish.

In what is sometimes called the "perennial philosophy", the mainstream of Western philosophy from the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, through the mediaeval philosophers, and continuing until it was rejected by the leading European philosophers during the Enlightenment, it was understood that "the city belongs among the things that exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political [communal] animal."[48] In other words, it is natural for human persons to live in community with other human persons. Furthermore, traditional Western ethics is about acquiring certain excellent habits and character traits. According to Plato, the chief of these virtues are "justice, moderation, courage and wisdom".[49] Aristotle distinguished theoretical and practical wisdom, and the latter came to be known as prudence, from the Latin *prudentia*. The Western tradition also gained the concept of natural law from the Roman stoic Cicero, and was simultaneously teleological and deontological, without inconsistency.

Among the early-modern European philosophers who rejected the perennial philosophy was Thomas Hobbes. And, in order to understand the change that took place, one must understand that the fundamental error of Hobbesian ethics is not egoism, as is commonly alleged, but individualism. Within the tradition that Hobbes rejected, to pursue one's own true good is ethical. When Socrates and Thrasymachus argue in Plato's *Republic* about the advantageousness of justice, it is Thrasymachus who asserts that "the just is really another's good" and Socrates (speaking for Plato) who maintains that "it is better in every way [for the agent] to be just than unjust".[50] Hobbes' innovation is not egoism, but the belief that the "natural condition of mankind" is "solitary".[51]

As long as it is understood that one's own good is inseparable from the good of the community, "egoism", or the pursuit of one's own true good, is altruistic. When persons are understood as having interests independently of any community, however, we have conflict between my interest and yours. After listing nineteen non-egoistic laws of nature, Hobbes tells us that a man "has no more to do in learning the laws of nature, but, when weighing the actions of other men with his own, they seem too heavy, to put them into the other part of the balance, and his own into their place, that his own passions, and self-love, may add nothing to the weight".[52] Self-love is now in conflict with natural law. If we understand "egoism" as the claim that acting ethically is good for the agent, then Hobbesian ethics, like most of modern moral philosophy, is non-egoistic.

Ethical theories that tell us we must choose between egoism and altruism, between self-love and love of others, between prudence and morality, or between one's own good and the common good are individualistic ethical theories. Not only theories of shareholder-value-maximisation in business management, but also social-contract theories and stakeholder theories in business ethics, are rooted in the individualistic philosophy of Hobbes. And, while many writers have argued that the economics of Adam Smith must not be unethical, because he also wrote a book on moral philosophy, one should note that his ethical theory is Hobbesian insofar as it includes a separation of private and public interest: "The wise and virtuous man is at all times willing that his own private interest should be sacrificed to the public interest of his own particular order or society."[53] Smith's analysis of self-sacrifice could not be more different from Aristotle's.

Relatively little has been accomplished thus far in applying traditional Western philosophy to business. Nevertheless, one can readily see the relevance of the four cardinal virtues to the practice of management. The distinctive characteristic of the management profession is decision-making, and prudence is the virtue of the decision-maker. Aristotle's sub-virtues of distributive, commutative and legal justice are required by any manager seeking to promote the common good. Fortitude is required by managers who must make correct decisions in situations

where the consequences of doing so could be unpleasant. And temperance, especially its subordinate virtue humility, is required by the manager who is tempted to place too much confidence in his or her own judgment, rather than seeking the counsel of subordinates.

Mbigi identifies *ubuntu* with the Western philosophical concept of solidarity: "The concept of Ubuntu ... is the *collective solidarity* of the poor on survival issues".[54] Karol Wojtyla defines solidarity as "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all."[55] The application of the solidarity to business involves understanding business firms, not as "legal fictions that serve as a nexus for a set of contracting relationships among individuals"[56] but as communities: "A good business is a community with a purpose."[57] And, when the firm is understood as a community, the purpose of management is to promote the good of the community, the common good.

It is true, of course, that Plato and Aristotle did not write about communities the size of ExxonMobil or Wal-Mart. In order to understand the large, multinational corporation as a community, we need solidarity's twin subsidiarity, "the principle that each social and political group should help smaller or more local ones accomplish their respective ends without, however, arrogating those tasks to itself".[58] According to subsidiarity, management should be decentralised. We should attempt to promote the common good at higher levels only when it is impossible to do so at lower levels in the organisation.

6. Traditional and Modern Derivations of Ethics

To maintain that we should develop a theory of business management rooted in the tradition of natural law and human virtues, and in an understanding of human nature common to traditional cultures on different continents, is not to assume that doing so is unproblematic. For nearly two millennia of European history, most leading moral philosophers believed that human nature and the natural law do exist, even as they argued with one another about theories of each. Today, belief in their existence is unpopular. Although Alasdair MacIntyre holds that "a theory of morals is inseparable from a theory of human nature",[59] his is a minority position. The history of this paradigm shift in Western moral philosophy is complex, involving changes in metaphysics, epistemology, theology, politics, economics, etc. To survey that history is beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, it is possible to observe briefly one of the many steps in the transition.

In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume raises the question whether we should search for the most general principles of morality in nature or elsewhere. He replies that "our answer to this question depends upon the definition of the word, Nature, than which there is none more ambiguous and equivocal." He then writes that "nature" has three different meanings, depending upon whether it is opposed to "miracles", to "rare and unusual" or to "artifice". Hume then states that "nothing can be more unphilosophical than those systems, which assert, that virtue is the same with what is natural, and vice with what is unnatural"[60], because this is not the case according to any of Hume's three definitions of "nature". Hume's argument is invalid, however, because when Aristotle, for example, writes that "the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature, but we are by nature able to acquire them",[61] he uses "nature" in none of Hume's three senses.

John Wild identifies five, interrelated meanings of "nature" in the works of Plato and Aristotle: "the general relation of fitness, and the dynamic entities ordered into a world or cosmos by this normative relation"; "the form or definite structure of a finite entity which determines its basic tendencies"; "the tendencies determined by this form"; "the fitting direction of these tendencies in such a way as to lead them towards fulfilment"; and "the good or fitting condition of existential fulfilment".[62] He continues:

> These five existential factors are essentially connected. One cannot exist without the others. Hence, a broad and flexible term was needed to express this unity. For Plato and Aristotle the word *nature (φύσις)* met this need. Their linguistic usage has since been followed by realistic moral philosophers in the West, and for this reason realistic ethics came to be known as the theory of natural law.[63]

When Aristotle writes that "in the case of the depraved, or those in a depraved condition, the body is often held to rule the soul on account of their being in a condition that is bad and unnatural", he means neither that this condition is miraculous, nor that it is rare and unusual, nor that it is artificial. He means that it is defective and, therefore, not conducive to human fulfilment. Hume failed to demonstrate that understanding virtue as natural and vice as unnatural is erroneous. His *Treatise on Human Nature* was in fact one step towards the belief, popular today, that there is no such thing as human nature.

To criticise Hume is not to demonstrate that ethics can be derived from our common human nature. To the objection that doing so is problematic, the appropriate response is to acknowledge that it is, but then to point out that deriving ethics from any other source is also problematic. Let us consider briefly the "two favorite philosophers of business ethics"[64]: Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill.

Kant rejected human nature as the starting point for moral philosophy and attempted to derive from pure practical reason an ethical theory that would be valid "not merely for men but for all rational beings generally".[65] He criticises his predecessors for failing "to ask whether the principles of morality are to be sought at all in the knowledge of human nature".[66] The metaphysics of morals must be "completely isolated . . . not mixed with any anthropology".[67] Nevertheless, in his resulting ethical theory, a central role is played by the concept of the will, which belongs to some but not other theories of human nature. Furthermore, Kant's ethical theory is notoriously incapable of distinguishing ethical from unethical actions: "It is very easy to see that many immoral and trivial non-moral maxims are vindicated by Kant's test quite as convincingly – in some cases more convincingly – than the moral maxims which Kant aspires to uphold."[68]

Mill's attempt to derive ethics from human experience contains a classic example of fallacious reasoning: If an object is seen, then it is visible; if a sound is heard, then it is audible; therefore, if anything is desired, then it is desirable.[69] His principle of utility is no more capable of distinguishing ethical from unethical actions than is Kant's categorical imperative. According to utilitarianism, as John Rawls makes the point, "there is no reason in principle why the greater gains of some should not compensate for the lesser losses of others; or more importantly, why the violation of the liberty of a few might not be made right by the greater good shared by many."[70]

To paraphrase Winston Churchill's assessment of democracy, deriving ethics from a common human nature is the worst approach, except for all those other approaches that have been tried from time to time.[71] *All* attempts to derive an ethical theory are encounter enormous problems. The most significant difference between the tradition of natural law and human virtues and the ethical theories that are popular today is that the former, together with its accompanying anthropology, were rejected by the mainstream of Western philosophy during the Enlightenment – though not on the basis of sound arguments.

7. The Corruption of *Ubuntu* Management

A discussion of the virtues of understanding the business organisation as a community should also note the potential vices. The first of these is nepotism:

> Since the family, the ethnic or social group and, in some cases, the tribal ideologies are strong factors in the constitution of individual and collective identity, the African manager or employee will often put the interest of his or her cousins and tribesmen before that of the organization. Occasionally, this can mean placing close relatives in the organization regardless of their suitability for the post in question.[72]

Placing the perceived interests of relatives and members of one's ethnic group before that of the community is, though common, a corruption of *ubuntu*. Tribalism is ethically equivalent to racism; both involve denying others their due because they differ from us in some morally irrelevant respect. It is in the true interest of each of the members of a true community to recruit and promote on the basis of merit. Furthermore, this is a necessary condition for African business to become competitive with the rest of the world.

Another problem with defective communalism is "groupthink"[73]:

> The disadvantage of collectivism is that it prevents individuals from acting without group consensus. One observes that in organizations, alliances (sub-groups) are formed within the larger group. Members of the alliances find themselves compelled to adopt the position taken by the sub-group. In this situation, it is difficult for individuals to act independently regardless of what their personal positions may be. Obviously, this practice can lead to frustration in the process of negotiation, initiating change, or expansion. It may also be time-consuming and inefficient.[74]

The antidote is leadership that creates an environment in which community members are permitted to disagree with other group members. Communalism is about commonality of interests, not commonality of opinions. Deciding how best to promote the common good requires listening to differing ideas about how best to promote it.

A third, closely-related vice is the discouragement of individual initiative:

> In Malawi, as in other East and Central African communities, tradition places social achievement above personal achievement. ... One often hears, "Akhufuna akhale ndani!" (What does he/she want to be?) and "Akudziyesa kuti ndi ndani" (Who does he/she think he/she is?). These commonly heard phrases signal social disapproval of the individual who places himself/herself above his or her fellow human beings, for example, through self-promotion in business or at work.[75]

A distinction must be made here between unethical self-promotion, which benefits no one, and ethical self-promotion, which promotes both the individual and the community. Seeking a promotion through sycophancy, for example, benefits no one. But every society benefits from people who excel in order to promote the common good. Aristotle's analysis of the difference between vicious and virtuous self-love[76] is helpful here.

8. Outlines of a Theory of Ethical, Global Business Management

It is now possible to provide a sketch of a theory of global management consistent with the traditional cultures of Africa, Asia and Europe. It must be a theory of productive management – so that poverty in "developing countries" can be overcome – and must also be consistent with our common human nature.

The requisite theory must understand the business firm, not as a collection of individuals, but as a community. Furthermore, it must understand that the purpose of management is to promote the common good. This means that it must promote the good of all members of the firm itself, not just its owners, and must also promote the good of the larger communities to which it belongs. It must produce and sell goods and/or services that are genuinely good for its customers, not merely whatever it can persuade customers to purchase. And it must produce and sell these good and services consistently with the demands of justice. This requires understanding prudent financial management as a means to the end of providing goods/services to the community, rather than – as is the case with the dominant management theories – understanding the provision of goods/services as a means to maximising a financial variable. Furthermore, as managers contribute to the common good, they simultaneously attain their own excellence, by acquiring the human virtues.

Obviously, much work remains to flesh out this skeleton. While I have emphasised the agreement of traditional African, Chinese and European ethics, there is also significant disagreement. The ethics of ancient Greece was tied to metaphysical theories unlike anything to be found in African and Asian traditions. Nevertheless, the African philosophy of *ubuntu* is capable of playing a central role, together with the traditional philosophies of China, Greece and other cultures, in developing the needed philosophical theory of management. With such a theory, we may be possible to achieve "globalisation for the common good".[77]

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