INDIVIDUALITY AND COMMUNITY: THE
PERSPECTIVES OF CLASSICAL INDIAN AND AFRICAN PHILOSOPHIES

ILUYOMADE RAPHAEL FUNWA
(B.A (Hons) OSUA
(M.A.) UNILAG

A THESIS SUBMITTED

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

2007

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

In this thesis, I develop a middle position, from Advaita and Yoruba philosophies, that avoids the logical conclusions derived from the binary representations of the individual as a personal self with ontologically prior marks of personhood and the culturally or collectivist construction of the individual.

The analysis of the self in Advaita philosophy springs from the Advaita's main proposition that Brahman is the basis of individuality and community. I argue that this presupposition does not discourage the thriving of the person's distinctive nature. Consequently, I reflect on the moral implication of Advaita notion of identity. Finally, I reflect on the problem of alterity that may ensue from Advaita's construction of identity.

The notion of identity in Yoruba philosophy is developed on the belief that *Emi* is the essence of individuality. I discuss the implications of *Emi* as the basis of individuality and community alongside the criticism that *Emi* prohibits the development of the person's distinctive nature. Among others, I reason that the idea gives the individual the liberty of self choice. This is contrary to the position that argues that community good determines identity in African philosophy. Again, I examine the moral implication of Yoruba construction of identity. Finally, I consider how Yoruba philosophy addresses the problem of alterity in relation to identity.

INDIVIDUALITY AND COMMUNITY: THE PERSPECTIVES OF CLASSICAL INDIAN AND AFRICAN PHILOSOPHIES

PREFACE

This study is an exercise in comparative philosophy. The discussion will revolve around Advaita and Yoruba views of individuality in relation to community. This subject matter has been close to my heart for many years. I grew up in an African culture where community plays a vital role in the construction of identity. I have firsthand experience of the two constructs of the self that I will like to call the social and independent constructs. I learned through my background that both aspects of the self are crucial and that they ought to be developed in a balanced manner within social and political philosophy. My fundamental concern is to reflect on how identity is expressed in these two philosophies in relation to community. Over the years I have reflected on these problems from three independent philosophical sources: the western tradition, the Advaita sources of India and Yoruba philosophy. The western liberal and communitarian philosophers hold diverse positions regarding the source of identity. On the one hand, we have the liberal position which maintains that identity is formed through rational free choice and on the other hand is the communitarians who depict identity as something that is derived from community life. I do not intend to dabble into this interesting debate. However, I will highlight, in the last chapter, the key issues that surround the liberal-communitarian constructions of identity. This will be a useful hint for those who will like to conduct some research between the western views of identity and community and the philosophical traditions that I am discussing here. By discussing ideas from Indian philosophy: Advaita Vedanta and African philosophy, especially the Yoruba tradition, I hope to generate a middle

position regarding the issue of identity and community. This position will respond largely to the traditional accounts of Indian and Yoruba constructions of individuality. Though Yoruba and Advaita endorse radically different metaphysical positions, I will argue that they reach similar conclusions concerning the nature of identity. Thus, this work is an exercise in comparative philosophy and in the constructive social dimension of political philosophy.

The first chapter will introduce the reader to the key conceptual problems that are of concern to me in this work. The problems that are associated with identity constructs in Indian and African thoughts will be outlined here. More importantly, I will discuss why some commentators are of the opinion that the virtues that delineate genuine identity are devalued in India and Africa. Three issues which are central in the study are stated in this chapter. The first issue involves the source of identity. Subsequent chapters will show whether the Indian and Yoruba philosophical traditions hold that identity is purely given or chosen. The second problem reflects on the congruence of morality and individuality in Yoruba philosophy. Finally, I will be concerned with the notion of self choice and toleration.

Chapter two will be divided into three sections. The first section will discuss the Advaita notion of identity in relation to community. I will investigate Advaita's main presupposition that Brahman is the basis of individuality. I will show how this assumption encourages the thriving of our distinctive nature. What does the idea of Brahman as the source of identity imply? Does it suggest that individuality is antecedent to community or submerged within its worldviews? These are some of the questions that will attract our attention. Furthermore, I will examine the view of Brahman as the basis of

community. Can it be said that this idea provides a basis for co-operative association where the development of the person's free and equal nature are uninhibited? Finally, I will examine how Advaita construes the formation of identity. Section two will dwell on the moral implications of the Advaita conception of identity. Here, I will focus on the extent to which the moral identity of the person is construed from the standpoint of community meanings and whether this gives the individual genuine satisfaction. Section three will dwell on the philosophical problem of alterity. Working on the Advaita conception of *avidya* (ignorance) and duality, I will attempt to develop an account of how the Advaita person would relate to the differences that are associated with others.

Chapter three will develop the Yoruba account of individuality and community in three sections. The first section will reflect on the idea of *Emi* as the essence of individuality. Against the criticisms that *Emi* prohibits the development of the person's distinctive nature, this section will draw the implications of *Emi* as the basis of individuality and community. Does this idea give the individual the liberty of self choice? How can a philosophy which maintains that the community has its basis on *Emi* support the development of the person's distinctive nature? A critical reflection on the above questions will throw some light on the error of those theories which argue that community meanings determine moral identity in African (Yoruba) philosophy. I will argue that though Yoruba philosophy holds that identity is derived as the person participates in the social space of the community, this does not hinder the person from pursuing personal goals. Section two will explore Yoruba conception of moral identity from a critical evaluation of the concept of *eniyan* (individual). The analysis of *eniyan* will show what the idea of the individual as a subject amounts to in Yoruba philosophy.

How this philosophy harmoniously explores the person's independent and dependent nature will be highlighted in this section. Section three will address the philosophical problems of alterity and identity as entailed in Yoruba philosophy. The key concepts that will be analyzed in order to arrive at this end are *aimo* (ignorance) and duality.

The final chapter will discuss the findings in Advaita and Yoruba in a comparative manner. I will highlight, in this chapter, the key points that underlie the western liberal and communitarian debate about identity. In both chapters two and three I will rely on the basic categories of thought in the Advaita and Yoruba philosophies to interpretively disclose their philosophical stand on the issues of individuality and community. I will then take these comparatively developed conceptions and apply them to the social dimension of identity in political philosophy.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

I

In this study, I will focus on the subject of individuality and community in the philosophical traditions of Advaita Vedanta and Yoruba. Advaita Vedanta philosophy is a non-dualistic philosophy in that it subscribes to the ultimate oneness of the self. Yoruba philosophy belongs to a dualist tradition. The discussion will center on how the two philosophical traditions describe the relation of the individual to the community. I hope to show the specific roles that these philosophical traditions give to the individual in self determination. The question is whether the individual is empowered to define her own identity or the community defines it for her. A number of commentators argue that the classical philosophy of India and Africa settle for the latter view. In this study, I will argue differently. I will be examining the idea of the self in these philosophical traditions in order to situate the notion of the individual in relation to community.

Before I proceed to discuss the issues that will introduce us to the notions of individuality in Advaita and Yoruba philosophies, I should mention briefly two interesting views of the self and identity that are prominent in the literature. [1] Advocates

---

[1] About these different views of identity, Amartya Sen writes: "it has not, however, always been easy to persuade social analysts to accommodate identity in a satisfactory way. In particular, two different types of reductionism seem to abound in the formal literature of social and economic analysis. One may be called "identity disregard," and it takes the form of ignoring, or neglecting altogether, the influence of any sense of identity with others, on what we value and how we behave … In contrast with "identity disregard," there is a different kind of reductionism, which we may call "singular affiliation," which takes the form of assuming that any person preeminently belongs, for all practical purposes, to one collectivity only-no more and no less". See Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2006), pp. 19-20.

of these two positions hold opposing views regarding the source of identity. Both schools of thought formulate their thesis as if identity issues cannot be pursued in a way that incorporates the thesis of both camps. I will attempt to show in this study that Advaita and Yoruba philosophical constructions of identity indicate that this is possible. The main assumption of the first school of thought is that the self is an independent, autonomous and complete entity.[2] The self, in this perspective, is not to be defined externally for this has the tendency of inhibiting its freedom. Owing to the fact that the self is a complete entity, it is argued that the individual will experience self fulfillment when she is allowed to exercise the right of self legislation. And what this means is that individuals should choose their central projects independently of any external influence. This is a necessary condition for genuine individuality to be reflected. Otherwise, the individual will be conditioned, made to serve the interests of others and, ultimately made to conform to ideals that are imposed on her rather than the one she chooses for herself. This idea finds reflection in J. S. Mill's thinking that those who do not choose their own life are not better than apes. Mill's writes:

> … the human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice … he who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation.[3]

---

[2] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton, (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1964), Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. L. W. Beck, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, (New York: Basic Books, 1974), John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), R. Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*, (London: Duckworth, 1977), Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred. D. Miller, Jeffrey Paul, (eds.), *Natural Rights Liberalism from Locke to Nozick*, (Cambridge, UK, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), B. Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980)
[3] J. S. Mill, 'On Liberty' in *Three Essays*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 72-73.

The other school defends a different position arguing that the idea of the self-defining subject in the above philosophy reduces the influence that our social attachments have on us. Thus, the autonomous decision of the person is the only requirement for the determination of identity. Michael Sandel expresses this view in the following:

> As participants in pure practical reason, or as parties to the original position, we are free to construct principles of justice unconstrained by an order of value antecedently given. And as actual, individual selves, we are free to choose our purposes and ends unbound by such an order, or by custom or tradition or inherited status. So long as they are not unjust, our conceptions of the good carry weight, whatever they are, simply in virtue of our having chosen them. We are, in Rawls's words, 'self-originating sources of valid claims'.[4]

However, for this school, social attachments necessarily determine identity. Therefore, identity is constituted by the community of which one is part. This conception of individuality suggests that advocates of the free self hold a fundamentally mistaken assumption about who we are. Community consciousness, this position argues, constitutes the way of our being in the world. Without the community, there is no identity.[5] This position highlights the need to identify, preserve and possibly extend the common (community) good. Incidentally, advocates of this philosophy argue for the replacement of the ideology of the free self the end of which privileges the pursuits of

---

[4] Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self" in Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit (ed.), *Communitarianism and Individualism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 20

[5] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984), Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), Charles Taylor, "Cross Purposes; the Liberal-Communitarian Debate", in N. Rosenblum, (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 159-182. Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), W. Cragg, "Two Concepts of Community", *Dialogue*, 25, (1986), W. Kymlicka, *liberalism, Community and Culture*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), Michael Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism", *Political Theory*, 18, no. 1 (1990): 6-23. I must mention that those who are typically described as communitarian philosophers, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer do not identify themselves with the communitarian movement. None of them endorse the manifesto contained in the "The Responsive Communitarian Platform: Rights and Responsibilities" perhaps because they do not agree with some of the ideas in the manifesto.

private interests. In order to attend correctly to the issue of identity, we should concentrate primarily on the way we are in the world. The person's social, cultural and historical experiences are primary in the articulation of identity. The common good which is revealed to us, which we are associated with, determines our identity. Both of these camps maintain radically opposing positions, the former arguing that the conception of identity from the standpoint of the common good demeans the person's autonomous nature. The hostility towards any conception of the common good is due to the belief that it has the tendency of imposing certain conception of the 'good' or 'true' on all individuals.

A political theorist such as Michael Sandel would argue that community describes us as we really are, hence our identity as revealed in community life is choiceless.

> On this strong view, to say that the members of a society are bound by a sense of community is not simply to say that a great many of them profess communitarian aims, but rather that they conceive their identity-the subject and not just the object of their feelings and aspirations-as defined to some extent by the community of which they are a part. For them, community describes not just what they *have* as fellow citizens but also what they *are*, not a relationship they choose (as in a voluntary association) but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity[6].

This conception of identity is deemed to be exaggerated. Amartya Sen writes:

> However, an enriching identity need not, in fact, be obtained only through discovering where we find ourselves. It can also be acquired and earned.[7]

Amartya Sen rejects the idea that identity discovery can only occur within the community that one finds herself in. If a person is convinced that her community's worldview is deficient in defining an enriching life, she has the right to acquire the worldviews of

---

[6]   Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 150. Author's emphasis.
[7]   Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, p. 36.

others. Sen's position supports the middle line approach that I hope to defend in this study.

My discussion will proceed from a critical discussion of the philosophical traditions of Advaita Vedanta and Yoruba. Let me note at this juncture that the two philosophical traditions (Advaita Vedanta and Yoruba) do not explicitly treat the kind of social and political problems that are dominant, for instance, in the western liberal and communitarian discussions of identity. These philosophies, however, give elaborate metaphysical constructions of the nature of the individual and the society. The social and political implications of these constructions have not been given due recognition. I intend to develop the Advaita and Yoruba perspectives of identity from these theoretical frameworks. To discuss the sources of identity in Advaita Vedanta and Yoruba philosophical traditions, I will attempt to answer how the two philosophies answer the question Who am I? I will also examine the issue of morality and individuality. I will explain how Advaita Vedanta and Yoruba represent the influence that communal ethics has on identity definition. I will argue that the two philosophical traditions do not agree that the worth of the individual can only be expressed by following some universal abstract laws or by adhering strictly to some community ethics.

Thirdly, I will examine the concept of toleration. The idea of toleration will be used interchangeably with tolerance.[8] Tolerance, one would think, is a crucial virtue that the rational person ought to exhibit. This virtue is central for individuals to be accorded notable respects as autonomous subjects.[9] The understanding of identity as something that is solely derived from some universal abstract principle and the one that merges the person within the social meanings of the community are inadequate as they do not actually promote diversity in moral and intellectual pluralism. For our purpose, tolerance refers to an attitude, a pleasant disposition which stems from a willingness to accept the possibility of a contrary position as valid. It is such an open mindedness that induces one to be patient or hesitant to pass value judgment on others' belief but encourages rational deliberation in some given circumstances that engender disagreement. This conception of tolerance will fit into the Advaita and Yoruba scheme of thoughts because they do not support that a single comprehensive conception of the good could exhaust the totality of knowledge. The two systems do not accord ultimate priority to the good of the community or that of the individual such that it becomes intolerant to change. This

---

[8] Certain commentators have shown the difference between toleration and tolerance. Toleration is acknowledged to be integrally linked with liberal tradition but not tolerance. Toleration, as defined by Andrew R. Murphy, "denotes forbearance from imposing punitive sanctions from dissent from prevailing norms". It "involves at least disapproval of the behavior or thing tolerated … it involves a complex blend of rejection and acceptance". Andrew R. Murphy, "Tolerance, Toleration, and the Liberal Tradition", *Polity*, 29, no. 4 (1997): 596. Nick Fotin and Gerard Elfstrom argue that "toleration decisions challenge models of behavior postulating direct correspondences between attitudes and actions". Cited in Ibid. Toleration is classified as a form of liberty that fits into classical liberalism which understands liberty as absence of constraint. Preston King claims that the "calculus that goes into a toleration decision involves weighing the disapproval of one thing (the thing tolerated) against the disapproval of other things, including the unpleasant action necessary to prohibit that thing and competing values violated in the process of prohibition". Cited in Ibid. For further discussion about toleration, see Preston King, *Toleration*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976). Jonathan Harrison, "Utilitarianism and Toleration", *Philosophy*, 62 (1987). John Horton and Peter Nicholson, *Toleration: Philosophy and Practice*, (Brookfiled, VT: Avebury, 1992). Susan Mendus (ed.) *Justifying Toleration: Historical and Conceptual Perspectives*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). W.F. Adeney, "Toleration", in Paul Edwards (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, (New York: Macmillan, 1967), vol. 8. Nick Fotion and Gerard Elfstrom, *Toleration*, (Tuscaloosa and London: University Alabama Press, 1992).
[9] Stephen Kautz, "Liberalism and the Idea of Toleration", *American Journal of Political Science*, 37, (1993): 610-632.

springs from the understanding that any conception of the good that is held in any community or by any individuals is a partial view of the ultimate good. Here, I will explore the various conceptions of the free individuals in the philosophical traditions under study via this conception of tolerance. I will show how the two philosophical traditions view differences and how the individual ought to live with them. The moral responsiveness of the individual to difference is crucial as it promises both improved self understanding and any aspects of the community life which need change. To appreciate identity as presented in Advaita and Yoruba philosophies, it is important to highlight how some ethno-sociologists, social-psychologists and anthropologists view the notion of plurality of individuals in South Asia and Africa. This will further acquaint us with the way some critics think that individuality is understood in Indian and African cultural traditions.

II

In the paper entitled, "Conceptualizing the Person: Hierarchical Society and Individual Autonomy in India", Mattison Mines asks whether individual autonomy has a place in the understanding of Indian social thought. Before Mattison delves into a detailed discussion of the question, he says, "it is commonly accepted that individualism is devalued in India" .[10] According to Mines, the debate about the devaluation of individualism in India takes two approaches, namely, sociological and social-psychological.[11] Two viewpoints are espoused by sociologists, one of which is

---

[10] Mattison Mines, "Conceptualizing the Person: Hierarchical Society and Individual Autonomy in India", in Roger T. Ames, Wimal Dissanayake, Thomas P. Kasulis, (eds.), *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*, (New York: State University of New York, 1994), p. 317.
[11] Ibid, p. 319

championed by Louis Dumont and his followers.[12] The sum of Louis Dumont's argument is contained in the following: "individualism, as a virtue, expressed by values as equality and liberty" is disapproved of in India because the person is submerged in the social whole".[13] Dumont's work is founded on the works of others like Max Weber, Marcel Mauss etc.[14] McKim Marriot and Ronal B. Inden advocate the second viewpoint. Their attention is shifted to the analysis of what they term "the cognitive nonduality of action and actor, code and substance" in India.[15] They claim that 'holism' does not properly capture the notion of personhood in South Asia as its counterpart 'dividual'. The term 'dividual' is preferred by Marriot and Inden because, to them, the person is conceived as a composite of transferable particles. What they intend to show with the term 'dividual' is that the Indian conception of individuality stands at the opposite pole to that of the West. Both Marriot and Inden acknowledge that the western notion of individualism is intimately associated with the philosophic notions of dualism and characterized by a separation of action from actor. Contrariwise, the notion of the 'dividual' represents the Hindu person as open, a kind of thing that derives her personal nature interpersonally. This view is contrasted with the conception of the western individual as someone who has an indivisible nature which is enduring, something like a monad with closed and

[12] Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 9. Also, Louis Dumont, "The Individual as an Impediment to Sociological Comparison and Indian History" in *Religion, Politics and History in India: Collected Papers in Indian Sociology*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), pp. 133-150.

[13] Cited in Mattison Mines, "Conceptualizing the Person: Hierarchical Society and Individual Autonomy in India", p. 319. See, Louis Dumont, "Hierarchy: The Theory of the 'Varna' " in Ghanshyam Shah (ed.), *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, (London: Anthem Press, 2002), pp. 44-58

[14] See for example, Louis Dumont, "Caste, Racism and "Stratification" Reflections of a Social Anthropologist", in Robert Bernasconi (ed.), *Race,* (USA, UK: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 218- 234. Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958). Marcel Mauss, "A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; The Notion of Self", in Michael Carrithers, Stephen Collins, Steven Lukes (eds.), *The Category of Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, transl. W. D. Halls, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[15] McKim Marriot and Ronald B. Inden, "Toward an Ethnosociology of South Asian Caste Systems", in Kenneth David, (ed.), *The New Wind, Changing Identities in South Asia*, (Paris: Mouton Publishers, 1977), p. 229.

internally homogeneous nature.

The social-psychological discussion of the Indian devaluation of the individual is predicated on the view that the ideologies which are associated with Indian hierarchical social system encourage conformism and punishes autonomy.[16] Since the classification of individual is done on caste basis, it is believed that each individual will have to pattern her life in accordance with the codes of conduct peculiar to her caste. On this ground, individuals will be forced to regulate their behaviors in some manners relevant to the hierarchy, caste and family codes.[17] Not only this, it is maintained that at a later stage of a person's existence, the necessity to move towards a kind of fusion with the absolute is not negotiable. Hence, the individual must conform at every stage of life with external values. The humanity that one carries is only achieved on the condition that one can imitate the lifestyle that typically represents one's social group. The life of the individual is characterized by dogmatism, blind conformity to community beliefs as against a life of independence and liberty. Ramanujan argues that this manner of life

> does not permit the emergence of a cogent adult role as perceived in Western societies. Subordinating one's individual needs to the interests of the group, be it a family, a kinship group, a clan or a class is upheld as a virtue … Thus self-assertion becomes selfishness, independent decision making is perceived as disobedience.[18]

---

[16] Mattison Mines, "Conceptualizing the Person: Hierarchical Society and Individual Autonomy in India", p. 320.
[17] See Mattison Mines, *Public Faces, Private Voices Community and Individuality in South India*, (Berkeley, Los Angelis, London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 6.
[18] Cited in Mattison Mines, "Conceptualizing the Person: Hierarchical Society and Individual Autonomy in India", p. 320. See also B.K. Ramanujan, "Toward Maturity: Problems of Identity Seen in the Indian Clinical Setting" in , Sudhir Kakar (ed.), *Identity and Adulthood*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 37 – 55.

The works of Levy Bruhl, Evans Pritchard, Placide Tempels, Leopold Senghor, John S Mbiti and others stimulate the discussion about individualism in Africa.[19] Father Placide Tempel writes that the conception of separate forces is foreign to Bantu thought. In his words, "Bantu speak, act, live as if, for them, being were forces. Force is not for them an adventitious, accidental reality, force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: Force is the nature of the being, force is being, being is force".[20] The implication of this is that Bantu man/woman will never think of himself/herself as a separate individual. In the book *African Religions and Philosophy*, Mbiti argues that the conception of identity that is peculiar to Africa is derived from a social cooperation of individuals. His common dictum "I am because we are: and since we are, therefore I am", summarizes his position.[21] This idea, to some, is a confirmation of the inability of Africans to conceptualize an individual as an independent subject. Thus, Africans are said to be incapable of making independent decisions. In this regard, a befitting term which describes African way of thinking is 'unanimism'.[22] This term suggests that "all men and women in … societies speak with one voice and share the same opinion about all fundamental issues".[23]

I need to mention that a number of thinkers have reacted to the criticisms above. Some ethno-sociologists and anthropologists claim that it is not true that Indians are motivated by external forces. Based on the empirical studies that are conducted by these

---

[19] See Richard A. Shweder, E. J Bourne, "Does the Concept of Person Vary Cross-Culturally?" in R. A. Shweder and R. A. Vine (eds.), *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Levy-Bruhl L, *Primitive Mentality*, (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1923), Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, English Translation (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959). John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann, 1969).

[20] Cited in V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa,* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 139

[21] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 108.

[22] See Paulin J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, 2nd edition, (Bloomington and Indiana Polis: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. xviii.

[23] Ibid.

scholars, they claim that Indians are able to develop personal goals that are separate from the goals of the group. Mattison Mines, Milton Singer, McKim Marriot among others disagree that the Indians are lacking the motivation for individual goals.[24] Reading the works of philosophers like Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Rashbihary Das, G.R. Malkani, T.R.V. Murti and T.M.P. Mahadevan, P. T. Raju, it is sure that Indian thoughts do not encourage dogmatism or rigid conformity to social values. African philosophers such as Kwasi Wiredu, Segun Gabdegesin, Robin Horton, Peter H. Coetzee, Kwame Gyekye, K. C. Anyanwu among others have argued against the claim that the concept of individuality is alien to African thought systems. I will pursue this line of reasoning by looking specifically into the relation of the individual to the community in Advaita Vedanta and Yoruba philosophies.

III

The two philosophical traditions which I propose to discuss in this study approach the subject of self from two different perspectives. Let me mention here that I will reflect more on Shankara's idea of self in my deliberation on individuality in Advaita philosophy. I choose to do this because Shankara holds that the fundamental nature of the person is identical to Brahman. Since Brahman is ultimately dissociated from anything that is presented to us in the world, it is assumed that Shankara holds that the

---

[24] See Mattison Mines, *Public Faces, Private Voices*, Singer Milton, "Industrial Leadership, the Hindu Ethic, and the Spirit of Socialism" in Milton Singer (ed.), *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972). McKim Marriot, "Hindu Transactions: Diversity without Dualism", in Bruce Kapferer (ed.), *Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior*, (Philadelphia: Ishi Press, 1976). B. N. Ganguli, *Concept of Equality: The Nineteenth Century Indian Debate*, (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1975). Kwame Gyekeye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1996). Marcel Griaule, *Conversation with Ogotomeli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965). K. C. Anyanwu,, *The African Experience in the American Market Place*, (USA: Exposition Press Inc., 1983).

fundamental nature of the finite individual is dissociated from the world. I hope to reveal how Shankara's philosophy advances our knowledge of individuality, showcasing it as something that is not estranged from the community meaning or totally immersed in it. Interpreted from the standpoint of identity, Shankara may be misunderstood to represent the person's identity as something that is antecedent to community. In his exposition of Advaita philosophy, Shankara submits that the ultimate subject which defines the identity of the individual is the transcendental Brahman. The analysis of Brahman, as we shall see later, indicates that the choice of identity is not entirely free as some think; neither is it a fixed thing that is given by the community. Yoruba analysis of identity is founded on the indefinable permeating force known as *Emi*. Yoruba philosophy subscribes to the thesis that the community is the source of identity, but it does not claim that community meanings exhaust the nature of the self. Brahman and *Emi* share many features in common: whereas Advaita philosophy uses the idea of Brahman to unfold the relation between the transcendental and the immanent nature of the individual, Yoruba philosophy uses *Emi* to illustrate the immanent and transcendental nature of the individual. Both philosophies subscribe to the thinking that the individual is, in reality, a moral subject.

Advaita and Yoruba philosophies distinguish between the lower self and the higher self. The lower self is the self that is known with qualities such as fatness, thinness, the self that belongs to an association, a culture, family, nation etc. Advaita and Yoruba philosophies hold that the self which shares any relation of whatever kind to any particular group belongs to the category of the lower self. The higher self is believed by both philosophies to share none of those relationships. But the higher self is known

through the lower self. Although the knowledge of the higher self may come from the lower self, the higher self is not identical with any of the particularities of the lower self. This self is not a thing that is thin, fat or belongs to any association. This is why it constantly negates the particularities of the lower self. The two philosophies argue that the knowledge of the higher self gives a superior understanding of individuality. Both philosophies agree that the knowledge of the higher self facilitates the understanding of the individual as an intelligent and moral chooser. In addition, these philosophies argue that the identity of the higher self transcends whatever experience (personal or communal) that anyone can claim to have about the self. The kind of individuality that emerges from the above will be shown shortly, and how the ideas of Brahman and *Emi* explain a balanced idea of authenticity will be discussed in detail later. This will be discussed in line with the thinking that the philosophies of Brahman and *Emi* curtail the development of genuine identity. The next two sections below summarize the major presuppositions of Advaita Vedanta and Yoruba about the ultimate self.

IV

Advaita Vedanta philosophy is developed on the proposition which claims that Brahman is the reality behind the individual and the world. Brahman is the highest self. It has no inside or outside; it is the all encompassing force in the universe. To Shankara,

> … Brahman is coextensive with all that is external and internal, since He is birthless", "That Brahman is without prior or posterior, without interior and exterior. The self, the perceiver of everything is Brahman.[25]

---

[25] *Brahma-Sutra-Bhasya of Shankaracharya*, III.ii.14 transl. Swami Gambhirananda, foreword by T. M. P. Mahadevan, (Delhi: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), henceforth known as BBS. Also, see *Katha Upanisad* I. iii. 15, *Chandogya Upanisad*, VIII. Xiv. 1, *Mundaka Upanisad*, II. i. 2.

Brahman is here declared as the one without parts and without an other.[26] It is also revealed as the transcendental subject which is aware of everything. If Brahman is really a subject of awareness, is it not the case that it is aware of something that is different from it? Shankara says no because there is no other reality that Brahman can be aware of apart from itself.[27] Shankara describes Brahman as the all-pervasive oneness which excludes all possibility of relation to others. Even when Brahman is described in relation to the world and thus given some dual qualities, Shankara contends that the purpose is to aid the knowledge of the self which is non-dual. The ultimate nature of the self is, according to Shankara, non-dual. He writes:

> … for along with (the mention of) each difference created by limiting adjunct, the scriptures affirm the non-difference alone of Brahman, as in, "The same with the shinning immortal being who is in this earth, and the shinning immortal corporeal being in the body … Hence, the difference having been spoken of for the sake of meditation, and non-difference being the real purport of the scriptures, it cannot be held that the scriptures support the view that Brahman is possessed of diverse aspects.[28]

The nature of the individual is identical with the nature of Brahman. Here is a claim about the individual's reality. To Shankara, the difference-less subject (Brahman) is the ultimate nature of the individual. If the above assumption about the individual's reality is not carefully interpreted, taking into consideration the other crucial points that are

---

[26] Ibid

[27] Shankara contends that in the world we perceive things from the standpoint of subject-object division, our perception seems to indicate that there is a kind of relation between the subject that is aware of an object. If our perception is correct, it must mean that the relation between the subject and the object is real, the fact of the separateness between the subject and the object also cannot be denied. If Brahman is the reality in the subject and the object, then Brahman cannot be one, it must be many. Shankara rejects this position. To him, Brahman is not many, it is one. If Brahman is many, we need to conceive of its parts which could either be identical with it or different from it. If identical, the parts will not have any individual existences and, if different it will be impossible to conceive of any relation between them. A part is different from another by becoming what the other is not, Shankara holds. If the many that we perceive in the world is different from Brahman, we will not be able to conceive Brahman in them as the ultimate reality. The fact that the many which appear in the world lapse into Brahman as their reality upon thorough investigation confirms that Brahman is not many but one.

[28] BBS. III.ii.14, see also, Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, II. v. 1.

highlighted by Shankara about the nature of this subject, Shankara's conception of individuality may be read as cutting off the person as a subject from community. We will see shortly why it will be incorrect to read Shankara's philosophy in this manner. Shankara describes the difference-less subject in the following passage:

> As a lump of salt is without interior or exterior, and purely saline in taste, even so is the Self without interior or exterior, entire, and pure Intelligence alone, which means that the self has no internal or external aspect apart from pure consciousness. Its nature being mere impartite consciousness without any interstices.[29]

It is evident that worldly qualities which are associated with individuals are false. The only thing that is real in the individual is its transcendental nature which Shankara claims to be identical with Brahman. Let me say at this junction that Shankara does not refer to the individual's finite consciousness as the transcendental subject. In other words, the individual's subject of awareness that is identical with Brahman is not the mind. The consciousness that the individual shares with Brahman is higher than finite consciousness.

One may wonder how a philosophy like this will construe the notion of individuality. This sense of wonderment may increase as one encounters Shankara's idea of reality and the individuals in the world. Many have misinterpreted Shankara's position to imply a denial of the reality of separate individuals and the world. In order to attend to the above, we need an analysis of the conception of the world in Shankara's philosophy. Shankara does agree that the world and the individuals in the world have their reality in Brahman. When the reality of individuals is focused upon, their distinctiveness will be seen to be unreal. As I engage in the study of Shankara's conception of the individual, I

---

[29] BBS. III. ii. 16.

will show the kind of reality which Shankara gives to individuals' distinctive identity. Let me quickly mention that Shankara does not claim that the separate existence of individuals is unreal. Advaita metaphysics identifies Brahman as the ultimate Existence. As the ultimate Existence, it is wrong to determine Brahman by the qualities that appear with Existence. Doing this means that we are qualifying Brahman and qualification involves negation. So, in what way are we to relate with appearance since it is perceived as many and Brahman is not? Shankara holds that we should relate with the many as false since Brahman alone is true. However, Shankara argues that because these qualities affect us and we, indeed, feel them to be real, we cannot deny them of some level of reality. Though the attempt to deny them does not necessarily involve self negation as in the case of Brahman, they cannot be taken to be completely unreal so far as they exert their forms on us. We may ask, what are the implications of the foregoing on identity? This will be seen in chapter two. Just to mention here in passing, the position shows us how to treat the particular features that distinguish us in the world. Shankara's position presupposes that we treat them with the sense that they are relatively real. If we construe the various identities that we hold in the world to be relative, we will stand a better chance to reflect on our essential nature which transcends whatever identity we may be associated with in the world.

V

Yoruba philosophy will be read from the perspective of the Purist School of thought.[30] Advocates of this School argue that the term African philosophy is problematic simply because it presupposes that the whole of Africa subscribes to one system of thought. To overcome this problem, it is proposed that conceptual issues should be approached from the point of view of individual thinkers, and in cases where the individuals behind certain thoughts could not be traced because of the problem of documentation, such thought should be discussed from the perspective of the specific tribe where it had flourished or is still flourishing. This essay will follow the latter method in the discussion of individuality and community. The ancient idea of Yoruba will attract my attention.

There are two distinct senses of the self in Yoruba philosophy. The first refers to the self whose real nature goes beyond what the senses can apprehend. This is the ultimate self. It is known only in introspection and it antedates all things. This self is also believed to be present in all things. It is the primordial self called *Emi* (literally, its English equivalence is Spirit but it is not defined in terms of the sharp contrast which the English version delineates between spirit and matter). Metaphysically, *Emi* is the ultimate reality. It is also present in the individual. It is the subject that is not amenable to change.

---

[30]A number of eminent scholars belong to this School. Among others are, Campell C. Momoh, Sophie Oluwole, Claude Sumnea, W. E. Abraham, Barry Hallen, J. O. Sodipo, Akin Makinde, K. C. Anyanwu, I. C. Onyewuenyi, Jim Unah. This school holds that African philosophy should be reflected upon as it emerges from the experiences of the author or the experience of the people it bears upon. Although, this will not mean that African philosophy cannot be compared with other philosophical traditions neither will it mean that African philosophy cannot discuss issues that are of universal relevance, but it should be free from foreign influence. This means that African philosophy needs to break away from the control of western conceptual schemes. It should stem from a view of reality which represents how Africans understand their environments and cultures.

By nature, *Emi* is formless. It is the One. It is the indivisible substance without parts.[31] Before the coming into being of individual beings, *Emi* is the one indivisible Being that is. It lacks any quality with which it could be exhaustively defined. The Yoruba describes *Emi* as a no thing. It could not be curtailed by anything. It transcends all things. *Emi* has neither interiority nor exteriority. Its pure form is indescribable.[32]

Following the philosophical conception of the person in Yoruba philosophy, *Emi* refers to the inmost being of the individual. Its close semblance with *emi* (I) supports this claim. *Emi* is written in the same way that *emi* (I) is written, the only difference being that the first letter (E) in *emi* (I) is not marked underneath with a dot. When *emi* (I) is used by an individual, it is used to refer to one's inmost being. The expression depicts a kind of self understanding which no other person can possibly claim to have. The term *emi* (I) refers to an unmistaken knowledge of one's total being. While other persons can refer to me as *iwo* (you), I am the only individual who can identify myself as emi (I). In its strict sense, *emi* (I) and *Emi* (roughly called Spirit) have the same meaning. As the inmost nature of the individual, *Emi's* ultimate identity is only known with certainty to

---

[31] For an in-depth conception of the relevance of *Emi* to the Yoruba worldviews, see Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare; God in Yoruba Belief*, (London: Longman, 1962), William R. Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa*, (Indiana University Press, 1969), Jim I. Unah, (ed.) *Metaphysics, Phenomenology and African Philosophy*, (Nigeria: Hope Publications, 1998), K. C. Anyanwu, "The African World-View and Theory of Knowledge" in E. A. Rauch and K. C. Anyanwu, (eds.), *African Philosophy, An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa*, (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1981), Ulli Beier, *Yoruba Myths*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), E. T. Lawson, Religions of Africa, (USA: Harper and Row, 1984), E. Geoffrey Patrrinder, *West African Religion, A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo and Kindred Peoples*, (London: Epworth Press, 1961), Stephen Larsen, *A writer and his gods : a study of the importance of Yoruba myths and religious ideas to the writing of Wole Soyinka,* (Stockholm : University of Stockholm, 1983), Wande Abimbola, *Ifa : an exposition of Ifa literary corpus*, (New York : Athelia Henrietta Press, 1997), R Dennet, "West African Categories and the Yoruba Language", *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 14, no. 53 (1914): 75-80, Andrew Apter, "The Historiography of Yoruba Myth and Ritual", *History in Africa*, 14, (1987): 1-25.
[32] D. E. Idoniboye, "The Idea of an African Philosophy: The Concept of Spirit in African Metaphysics" *Second Order*, 2 (1973): 83-89, Jim I. Unah, "The Nature of African Metaphysics" in Jim I. Unah (ed.) *Metaphysics, Phenomenology and African Philosophy*, pp. 341-342, C. S. Momoh, "African Philosophy, Does it Exist?" *Diogene*, 130 (1985): 104.

the individual. Though, the identity which is associated with the individual through her external appearance confirms the reality of *Emi*, it does not exhaust its nature. *Emi* encapsulates both the physical, emotional, psychological etc. dimensions of the individual.

This understanding of the nature of the person leads Yoruba to conclude that *Emi* is the only reality which knows the ultimate identity of individuals in the world. All individuals are possessed with *Emi*. The *Emi* in each individual contains the dynamics of growth and decay. One Yoruba expression states that the dynamism of *emi* in all beings makes it possible for them to strive toward self development, none is satisfied with self preservation. This striving is innate. It is an essential mark of life. Everything passes through different stages of self development, and when the dynamism of growth is not activated, it reverses to the condition of decay. How can a philosophy like this explain the notion of identity? Can it provide a robust understanding of individuals as free and equal beings given the fact that the individual's reality is *Emi*? Will it be right to say that the philosophy makes the individual a mere object rather than a subject? Will it imply necessarily that the philosophy encourages the individual to seek her identity in some external forces? These are parts of the questions I will be looking at in order to enunciate the Yoruba thinking on how identity is constituted.

VI

In this study, I will argue that the fundamental claims of Advaita and Yoruba philosophies suggest that it is a mistake to think that the individual must choose between being autonomous and being a member of the community. This conclusion is premised on the assumption that takes individuality to be antithetical to community. One of its

27

many consequences is that it privileges individuality over the community. A rigid construction of individuality and community is apparent in this position. In this study, the community is construed as a whole made up of individuals as its parts. Since the community is a collection of individuals, it cannot be opposite to its parts. So, the terms individuality and community will be explained, in this study, as mutually inclusive concepts. In this regard, it will not be inaccurate for the individual to define herself from the standpoint of her relation to the community. Again, it will be incorrect for the individual to conceive her autonomy as something that must negate the authority of the community. On the other hand, the nature of the individual cannot be exhausted by community experience. Her true identity is something that is always kept in view. This suggests that the identity that is constituted by shared meanings does not exhaust individuals' self. Although the shared meanings have some authoritative influence over the individual in that it constitutes her primary mode of being in the world, she is beyond this mode of being because she could change or extend its frontiers.

The individual's higher self depicts her as a being that is part of the community and beyond it. In the former, this nature is understood from the perspective of the constitutive consciousness which defines identity in terms of the rules of social engagements. As I will argue later on, it is dangerous, on the one hand, to deny this fact. But, on the other hand, it is wrong to posit individuals' nature as embedded in the world as something that is formally alike. In both cases, the individual is not given a due respect that accords with her nature. One possible effect this may have on the person is to cause her to lose insight into the fact of her difference or her specific mode of being and how this finds connection with the common good which allows her to live the satisfactory life

that she alone cannot live. I will argue that Advaita and Yoruba philosophies lay a balanced account of individuality and community that allows for a fruitful development of the independent and dependent aspects of identity. This shows that the supposition of the two philosophies cannot be depicted as denying the reality of human concrete existence. Furthermore, the affirmation of an indivisible transcendental being as the ultimate nature of the individual does not subsume the individual under the authority of a few individuals who are in charge of the affairs of the community; instead, the idea is meant to show why the values that govern the community life must always be developed. Self understanding requires, for the two philosophical systems, the virtue of sociableness. The individual is not only assumed to be a free chooser, she is an intelligent and moral chooser. I will argue that Advaita and Yoruba philosophical systems maintain that community contexts ought to be taken as the starting point for the knowledge of individuality.

My discussion will construe Advaita and Yoruba philosophies as important communitarian systems which accord great importance to dialogue in self understanding. The systems of dialogue that these philosophies develop are consistent with the harmonious interpretations of the two crucial aspects of the person, namely the independent and the dependent aspects. Also, the two philosophies show that communal values are not to be regarded as static or eternally given. They are to be fine-tuned from time to time to meet current realities. This study will show that the systems of Advaita Vedanta and Yoruba concede that identity and the quest for the good life requires the notion of autonomy that respects communal or cultural contexts but is not limited to it. Thus, showing moral respect for one's cultural values and critiquing it cannot be deemed

to be contradictory. Rather, they should be seen as harmonious. Alternatively, a departure from one communal context to another is also a legitimate thing. This is acceptable in the two philosophical systems because the rigid classification of cultures is weakened; hence, individuals can freely choose to belong to some other cultures and choose to develop themselves there.

The systems of Advaita and Yoruba reconcile the freedom of the person and the authority of the community through their systematic development of the higher and lower selves into one compatible entity. Firstly, the compatibility of the two selves allows for the recognition of the fact that central authority is not immune to the freedom of individuals to subject its beliefs to criticism and possible eradication in view of better alternatives. Secondly, by giving the final authority of self legislation to the individual as, to put in the Vedantic construction, the atman that is in Brahman, individuals are to be armed with one important truth, namely, I am by nature the sole reality, a complete entity independent of any external relations and what this connotes, to put in an African sense, is that I am because we are. Here, the individual is told that the ultimate definition of her self lies entirely in her hand. A refusal to pursue any of her clear aims because of some social factors will not imply a loss of self but a loss of relative identity. In the next chapter, we shall see how Advaita discusses the subject of individuality and community. I will explore the relation of the self to the world in the first section of this chapter. Here, I will dwell on the issue of identity. Is it correct to say that identity is solely chosen by the individual or solely by the community? My focus in the second section of chapter two is to see who determines the values by which individuals' identities are to be measured. Finally, I want to see whether the nature of the individual, as held in this philosophy,

gives room for tolerance. If the individual is truly free by nature, will her freedom allow her to tolerate difference? Let us see the interesting way Advaita Vedanta attends to these questions.

CHAPTER TWO

A CRITICAL EXPOSITION OF ADVAITA VENDANTA PHILOSOPHY

I

THE WORLD IN ADVAITA VEDANTA

> With half a *sloka* I will declare what has been said in thousands
> of volumes: Brahman is real, the world is false, the soul is only
> Brahman, nothing else.[33]

The above declaration is contained in a stanza in the *Balabodhini*, a work that many have attributed to Shankara. Interestingly, it reveals a profound fact about the nature of the world and the individual. Fredrick Max Muller identifies the claim as the main content of Shankara's philosophy. The focus and logical consistency with which Shankara pursues the claim accumulate so much that the term 'Vedanta' is frequently used to depict Advaita Vedanta. Muller sums the thesis of Shankara's philosophy in the following words, "… Brahman is true, the world is false, the soul is Brahman and nothing else".[34] To Mohanty, the claim summarizes Advaita's main belief, "Brahman (alone) is real, the world is false, the finite individual is identical with (and) none other than Brahman".[35] Incidentally, the core of this claim prompts one to think that Shankara is an idealist. Idealism subscribes to the position that the fundamental constituent of the world is immaterial. To think in this manner however raises another important question, what kind of idealist is Shankara? Is he a subjective idealist? Is he not? A subjective idealist holds that the world exists only in the mind. This position denies the objective existence of the

---

[33] Cited in Richard Brooks, "The Meaning of 'Real' in Advaita Vedanta" *Philosophy East and West* 19 (1969): 385.

[34] Friedrich Max Muller, *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, with an introduction by G. P. Guha, (New Delhi : Associated Publishing House, 1982), p. 114.

[35] J. N. Mohanty, *Explorations in Philosophy*, vol. 1 edited by Bina Gupta, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 67.

world. In view of some other arguments used by Shankara in defense of his position, it will not be right to categorize him as a subjective idealist. For example, Shankara rejects the point that denies the existence of the external world on the ground that it ends in nihilism. Nihilism, Shankara holds, is an indefensible philosophical position.[36] In addition, Shankara rejects the thinking that the external world exists merely in the mind. He says,

> Not so; because it is accepted that *Atman*, like space, is by nature not composite. Although, *Atman* exists as connected with nothing, it does not follow that the body and other things are without Atman, just as, although space is connected with nothing, it does not follow that nothing has space. Therefore, there would not arise the fault that [I shall] arrive at the Nihilist's position.[37]

The external world, Shankara argues, cannot be said to be unreal because its appearance is real, and the effect of the contents of the world on us cannot be denied to be real. However, the true nature of the world is different from what is presented in appearance. In order to apprehend this nature, we will need to transcend all that is temporal to reach the eternal. Shankara considers this eternal substance to be true. This is Brahman, the only reality whose knowledge opens one to the knowledge of all the individuals in the world. This explains why Muller includes the following words in his description of the essence of Advaita philosophy.

---

[36] Tom Rockmore argues in *Hegel, Idealism and Analytic Philosophy* that "no idealist denies the existence of the external world. It would indeed be absurd to do so, since there seems to be no way to argue for such a conclusion". Rockmore makes an insightful comment about the relevance of idealism to the understanding of individuality, to him, idealism enables the individual to come to term with human incapacity or frustrations to escape from the limits of certain historical moment but, regardless of the hurdle in which the individual finds herself she understands that the claims to know are objective but also historically relative. See Tom Rockmore, *Hegel, Idealism and Analytic Philosophy* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2005).

[37] *A Thousand Teachings The Upadesahasri of Sankara*, (transl.) Sengaku Mayeda, (Japan: University of Tokyo Press, 1979), p. 236.

"There is nothing worth gaining, there is nothing worth enjoying, there is nothing worth knowing but Brahman alone, for he who knows Brahman, is Brahman".[38]

Muller's point reveals the existential import of Advaita philosophy. The deeper one explores Advaita thought, the more one is convinced that the knowledge of Brahman does not separate one from the world. It is clearly stated that the one who possesses Brahman's knowledge is blessed with the intuitive capacity which unfolds the connectedness between the inner and external realities of the world.[39] Mohanty writes,

The goal of this process is not supernatural, other-worldly, sotereological. It is not salvation. It is discovery of the identity between the innermost truth of one's 'psyche' and the innermost being of the world: of psychology and physics.[40]

Although Shankara did not talk about social and political philosophy, the import of his philosophy to the social and political dimensions of identity remains significant. This will be the focus of this study. An interpretive discussion of Advaita in the above sense can be classified under practical Vedanta.[41] This calls for a rethinking of the views of some commentators who hold that the postulation of Brahman as the absolute and the

---

[38] Friedrich Max Muller, *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, p. 114.
[39] BBS 1. iv. 23.
[40] J. N. Mohanty, *Explorations in Philosophy*, p. 113.
[41] In his discussion on the practical relevance, "and the ethical and social applicability of the Vedantic metaphysics of nondualism", Wilhelm Halbfass reflects on the four lectures delivered by Swami Vivekananda in London between 10 to 18 November 1896, Wilhelm Halbfass identifies the following comment by Swami Vivekananda as capturing the spirit of practical Vedanta, "therefore, I will ask you to understand that Vedanta, though it is intensely practical, is always so in the sense of the ideal. It does not preach an impossible ideal, however, high it be, and it is high enough for an ideal. In one word, this ideal is that you are divine, 'Thou art That'. See Wilhelm Halbfass, "Practical Vedanta', in *Representing Hinduism the Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, Vasudha Dalmia, Heinrich Von Stietencron (eds.), (New Delhi, London: Sage Publications, 1995), 211. In the same paper, Wilhelm Halbfass quotes the following as the sum of what M. S. Golwalkar perceives as the core of 'practical Vedanta', "the 'I' in me being the same as the 'I' in the other beings, makes me react to the joys and the sorrows of my fellow living beings just as I react to my own. This genuine feeling of identity born out of the community of the inner entity is the real driving force behind our natural urge for human unity and brotherhood. Thus it is evident that world unity and human welfare can be made real only to the extent that mankind realizes this common Inner Bond". Cited in Ibid, p. 213. For further studies on 'practical Vedanta', see Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, 8 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1979).

declaration of the individual and the world as false represent a major difference in the philosophical styles of the west and India.[42] The latter is regarded as inward, religious and mythical, the former is said to be scientific.[43] To understand Shankara's view about the individual and her relation to the community, we need a careful exploration of his conception of Brahman and its relation to the individual and the world. Relevant to this discussion is the question of how Brahman determines the identity of the individual. If it can be established that the Brahman that is granted to be our reality is external to us, then we will need to know the kind of influence that it will have on us. If it is the case that Brahman imposes itself on us and forces us to conform to its will, then it will mean that the philosophy of Brahman represents the individual as an object, not a subject. It will imply that individuality and the virtue of freedom which is supposed to go with its conception is devalued in this philosophy. This section will explore the philosophical nature of identity in Advaita philosophy. Three headings will be entertained, Brahman: basis of individuals, Brahman: basis of community and self identity: how is it formed?

---

[42] The belief in Brahman as the absolute, according to Rajendra Prasad, creates the "impression in the minds of many that Indian philosophy is philosophy in a sense different from the one in which Western philosophy is philosophy. See R. Prasad, "The Concept of Moksha", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. xxi, no. 3, (1971), 383. A similar idea is highlighted by Ramakrishna in the following, "Sa*m*kara makes no concessions of any kind. He begins and never parts with his conviction that whatever is, is one and the same in itself, without variableness or shadow of turning. This, what he calls the Brahman, does not possess any qualities (*visesha*), not even those of being and thinking, but it is both being and thought. To every attempt to define or qualify Brahman, Sa*m*kara has but one answer--No, No! When the question is asked as to the cause of what cannot be denied, namely, the manifold phenomenal world, or the world as reflected in our consciousness, with all its individual subjects, and all its individual objects, all that Sa*m*kara condescends to say is that their cause is Avidyâ or Nescience. Here lies what strikes a Western mind as the vulnerable point of Sa*m*kara's Vedânta-philosophy. Available at *The Internet Sacred Text Archive*, "Vedanta-philosophy", http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rls/rls20.htm

[43] See C. A. Moore, *The Indian Mind: Essentials of Indian Philosophy and Culture*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967).

Brahman: Basis of Individuals

I should mention again that a social and political construction of identity in Shankara's philosophy requires largely an interpretation of his metaphysics. A lot of his metaphysical positions are contained in the footnotes. However, in what follows, I will strive to establish the metaphysical basis of any social or political claims about identity that I associate with Shankara. Shankara observes that Brahman is the reality that is immediately known in the world. Brahman "is not absolutely beyond apprehension, because it is apprehended as the content of the concept 'I' … it is well known in the world as an immediately perceived (i.e. self-revealing) entity".[44] This is a reference to the reality of individuality. The same idea is confirmed in Shankara's admittance to the fact that Brahman is not entirely unobservable. Brahman is the 'immediately perceived i.e. (self revealing) entity' in the world. What does this imply? It means that Brahman can be apprehended as an entity of some sort. But, what kind of entity since Brahman is not a thing that has qualities? This question highlights the need to reconcile the difference between the Brahman that is given in direct perception and the Brahman that has no quality of any kind. Before attending to this question, let me mention that this confirms the above submission that Shankara is not a subjective idealist. However, if it is true that Brahman is directly perceived as the content of the concept 'I', should it not follow that Brahman also possesses the contents that are associated with the 'I'? By implication, Brahman will no longer be without parts. Will it not be improper to admit that the 'I' has certain contents and deny that this same 'I' possesses those contents? If the 'I' that possesses the contents is Brahman, why does Shankara hold that Brahman is a thing

---

[44] BBS. 1.i.1.

without parts, without interiority and exteriority? These questions are germane to the understanding of individuality in Shankara's philosophy.

Shankara argues that though Brahman is apprehended as the content of the 'I', it does not possess any of the contents. According to Shankara, the Brahman that is presented in appearance is misconceived and thus, it is given a nature that is different from its real nature. He explains this with the analogy of the space which though appears to be divided when contained in, for example, a jar, but, in reality, it is indivisible.[45] He pursues the same line of reasoning to resolve the doubt about whether *akasa* (space) and Brahman are identical in Chandogya Upanishad VIII. xiv. 1. Shankara holds that *akasa* and Brahman are identical. In this passage, *akasa* is asserted to be the 'accomplisher' of names and forms (that which makes names and forms to be possible) and Brahman is asserted to contain names and forms. So, it is in spatial conditions that names and forms make sense but the different senses that names and forms make to us are contained in Brahman. Interpreting this position, we understand that individuals' distinguished identities, the kind that occur to us in names and forms are contained in Brahman. Moreover, the passage continues that *akasa* which constitutes the ground of names and forms is different from names and forms. Hence, the doubt as to whether *akasa* and Brahman are identical. Shankara answers that since nothing apart from Brahman can be said to be different from names and forms, then *akasa* can plausibly be regarded as having the same identity with Brahman. Here, Shankara affirms that the fundamental basis of difference is the difference-less Brahman. In Shankara's words, other than

---

[45] BBS. II. i. 13.

Brahman, "the whole of creation consists of a manifestation of names and forms (i.e. word and its meaning".[46]

The relevance of the above to the understanding of individuality is as follows. Firstly, the position confirms the reality of our plural nature. By implication, the position confirms that individuality is truly articulated when apprehended from the standpoint of its plural form. This is deduced from the consideration that *akasa* which is identical with Brahman is the accomplisher of names. Going by this reading, *akasa* is that which characterizes the individual as such. This *akasa* is also said to be identical with Brahman and Brahman is different from the individual as characterized by *akasa* though Brahman contains the characterization. It follows that Brahman must be different from the individual only in certain respect. This reveals a kind of dual but inseparable relation which Brahman holds with the individual. The first relation is that it contains the different experiences of the individual e.g. social, psychological, cultural, historical etc. Secondly, Brahman absorbs the individual's experiences into itself ultimately making them to be non-different from itself. Thus, Shankara shows that the two expressions of individuality are inseparable. The individual that appears in the world is ultimately not different from Brahman which lacks any of the forms of its appearance. This position, as it will be observed later in section three, sheds light on how individuals' multiple identities can be harmoniously explored. The allegory of the sun has also been used to show the dual but inseparable nature of our identity. Although the sun participates in its different reflections in the water, that is, the sun expands when the surface of the water expands and it contracts when the surface of the water contracts, but in reality the sun remains the same all the time. While it may be true to say that the sun appears differently

---

[46] BBS. 1. iii. 42

in the water at different times, it will be wrong to maintain that the ultimate nature of the sun is what is reflected in the water. Shankara describes the permanent identity of the sun as a reflection of Brahman and he contends that it is this permanent nature that ought to guide our reflection about identity.[47]

What is deducible from the above is that, in appearance, the indivisible self is perceived differently. This self is associated with diverse qualities, characteristically associated with many affiliations out of which one is dominant. The community life weighs so much on us that often the dominant identity is the one that the individual inherits in the community. This identity is often over emphasized in a way that makes the person relapse in the pursuit of reality. What happens is that she will begin to wax cold in cultivating the moral identity which would enable her to put equal importance on her other membership categories. According to Shankara, the identity that associates Brahman with names can never be classified as the highest. Shankara argues that it is the lower self that manifests this identity. Nonetheless, the ultimate nature of the lower self is identical with the highest self. This self is eternal, pure, intelligent and free.[48] Indisputably, this, for Shankara, is the ultimate nature of the person. In a manner analogous to Amartya Sen, Shankara's philosophy presupposes that "the singular-affiliation view would be hard to justify by the crude presumption that any person belongs to one group and one group only".[49] The kind of singular characterization of the person that is dominant in, for example, caste identity is here declared unjustifiable. The person is thus understood as a being with an unbounded nature. The human nature is free. If this is correct, it implies that the person can choose to belong to any community, group

---

[47] BBS. IV. i. 5.
[48] BBS. III. ii. 22.
[49] Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence The Illusion of Destiny*, p. 25.

or social organization that suits her interests. This confirms nothing other than the fact that the individual is an autonomous subject. Defining the individual as such, Shankara cautions any constituted authority from curtailing the capacity of choice of the individual as this is not given by the community. This capacity depicts the person as someone that transcends community meanings. From Shankara's perspective, the individual's nature is wholly free, but this nature is also rational and not until we give due recognition to these attributes will we be able to gain an accurate view of autonomy. I will discuss Shankara's notion of rationality and how this impact our understanding of identity in chapter two. Then, we will see that regardless of the crucial recognition of human capacity of choice, Shankara rejects the construction of rationality that abstracts the person from community. An understanding of the rational individual as someone who knows her identity prior to her participation in the community is, to Shankara, mistaken.

As the basis of individuals, Brahman makes the individual a subject. The nature of this subject is radically characterized with negation. In this wise, it stands out as a complete entity, negating anything that represents it as ultimately depending on something else. The implication of the above on identity is interesting. Firstly, it represents identity as something that is inexhaustible by the empirical circumstances that one belongs to. Let us note that this is not saying that the knowledge of identity can occur independently of one's empirical circumstances. The higher nature of the person depicts her being as something that is beyond the community meanings. Thus, she is capable of evaluating and readjusting her choices in relation to any community good. But Shankara argues that the essence of the transcendental nature is to enable us to view the ultimate unity of plurality. On the one hand, this indicates that identity is not a rigid thing such

that once it is inherited, it cannot be changed. On the other hand, Shankara's position reveals that a person cannot be wholly defined by a singular identity no matter how dominant this may play in her life. By virtue of our higher nature, we are able to understand that our real identity goes beyond anything that is revealed to us in the community.

Shankara presents two important ways of knowing identity. He identifies the way of knowing which represents the individual as she is in reality and the way of knowing which represents her as she is associated with the community.[50] Both ways of knowing are true, the only difference being that one represents her highest nature and the other represents her lower nature. Both representations must not be confused and a misrepresentation of the lesser nature for the highest nature is, according to Shankara, false. In Shankara's analysis, the two ways of knowing the individual are not contradictory. The higher nature of the individual is bliss and this is depicted by Shankara as the sole reality of the person, the principal function of this reality is to provide fruitful ground for meditation. The identity of the lower and the higher self is unfolded in meditation.

> But all the other attributes like bliss, which are spoken of for propounding the real nature of Brahman, are to be understood everywhere, since they have an identity of purport, that is to say, the Brahman, which possesses these attributes and which they seek to establish, is the same. Hence, there is a difference (between the two groups of attributes), inasmuch as these (latter) are meant simply for the attainment of knowledge (and not for meditation).[51]

Shankara highlights in the above passage the crucial role of the other attributes of Brahman (the attributes that represent Brahman as having dual forms), these other

---

[50] BBS. III. ii. 22.
[51] BBS. III. iii. 12.

attributes, in Shankara's view, 'are meant simply for the attainment of Knowledge'. Hence, the knowledge of one's existential reality as depicted by one's lower nature is genuine. It follows that the independence which is associated with the higher nature does not necessarily warrant the extermination of one's dependent condition in the world. In the world, the individual has many affiliations and it is by taking the various contingencies of her life experiences seriously, reflecting on them from her innermost feelings that she will be able to attain her true identity. This explains why her identity in the world cannot be expressed wholly as an asocial thing. Thus, her specific aims and historical conditions cannot be entirely overlooked as she steps out to exercise her autonomy in the world. This position shows that Shankara's individual is not bound to the community and she is not entirely disconnected from it.

Surely, Shankara's representation of the individual as a subject has certain consequences. An understanding of identity which seems to represent the individual as an impersonal subject, the one that is ultimately driven by a system of abstract rationality, is in Shankara's view inaccurate. This is explicable in his refusal of any description of Brahman as something that dissociates the individual from experience. He claims that such is condemned by the scripture which says, "if anyone knows Brahman as non-existent, he himself becomes non-existent".[52]   Interestingly, Shankara uses the above passage to react to the view that Brahman is completely a non-existent entity. In *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* III. i. 1, Shankara maintains that the scripture cannot mean that Brahman is entirely removed from the world and yet contend that "I will tell you of Brahman". The possibility of deliberating on Brahman implies that it cannot be entirely non-existent. In another place, Shankara says that Brahman cannot be far apart from

---

[52] BBS. III. ii. 22. See also *Taittiriya Upanisad*, II. vi. 1.

experience and another scripture will affirm that "The Self is to be realized as existing".[53]

The foregoing refutes the claim that identity can be known solely by pure reason. Shankara's emphasis denotes that individuals should first reflect on their practical conditions for them to apprehend their real identities. Shankara regards individuals' experiences as possible means of reflecting on identity as contained in Brahman. One other thing that is underscored in this philosophy is the possibility of transcending every local and historical affinities without fearing any loss of identity. Shankara maintains that when the statement 'Brahman is beyond speech and mind' is mentioned, it is intended to show that the denial of the phenomenal expressions of Brahman still leaves Brahman irrefutable.[54] This entails that even when one reflects and rejects certain associations that one finds affinity with in one's community, one is demonstrating her real nature as an autonomous subject. All of the above shows the importance that Shankara gives to the individual's experiences in the articulation of the authentic identity. In order for us to show how the individual is related to community in Shankara's conception of identity, we need to discuss the relation of Brahman to the community.

---

[53] Ibid. See also *Katha Upanisad*, II. iii. 13.
[54] Ibid. Upadhyaya writes that Brahman is incomprehensible in any affirmative proposition. In Upadhyaya's words, "even the affirmative mode of speech, such as "Brahman is real, knowledge and infinite" (*satyam jnanam anatam Brahman Taittiriya* II. I. I) is to be understood only negatively as conveying that Brahman is different from all that is not real, laden with ignorance and finite". See K. N. Upadhyaya, "Sankara on Reason, Scriptural Authority and Self-Knowledge", *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 19, no. 2 (1991): p. 128.

Brahman: Basis of Community

The story in *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 1. 4. 1 suggests that Brahman is the basis of community.

> In the beginning this world was just a single body (atman) shaped like a man. He looked around and saw nothing but himself. The first thing he said was, 'Here I am!' and from that the name 'I' came into being. Therefore, even today when you call someone, he first says, 'It's I', and then states whatever other name he may have.[55]

Here, the supreme reality which contains the distinctive names of individuals is atman. Every instance in which an individual is identified with a particular name, the 'I' (atman) is attached to the name. The 'I' is the universal identity shared by all, not the names. As mentioned above, the view that Brahman shares no identical relation with individuals' identity as manifested in names does not imply that Brahman is incomprehensible. Brahman is here depicted as the self shining consciousness which is revealed at the dissolution of all qualified identities. Hence, it becomes a legitimate basis of universal cooperative relationship. What does this mean? I mean atman becomes the basis or the ideal of social cooperation. This position may be contested since atman, by nature, is different from any distinctive identity associated with the name that any individual or community holds. Conversely, this will render Brahman as a thing that is not identical with any particular identity, personal or communal. Therefore, the question of how Brahman can be the basis of social cooperation remains. At best, it may be said that any stipulated ideal that is associated with Brahman is as assumed by individuals. This point will render the whole project of self realization nothing more than mere expression of personal feelings and beliefs. Then, we will need to worry about a possible relapse into

---

[55] *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 1,4,1. Parenthesis is mine.

moral subjectivism. It has been said that any theory which subscribes to moral subjectivism will find it difficult to promote the common good for the very reason that it disrupts the basis of social cooperation. But the atman based notion of identity expresses a different position. It conveys the idea that community good does not exhaust the nature of atman. However, this is less satisfying as it opens another question, namely, what kind of values and virtues may legitimately be said to be inherent in atman? Only when we have been able to attend to the above question will it make sense to hold that atman can stand as the legitimate basis of community.

Atman as the ground of social cooperation is not able to predicate a particular way in which community good must be defined because this is not part of its nature, but it is able to situate the fair good for all. This is a kind of good that allows for the development of the equal and free nature of all individuals. However, it may be asked how will individuals who subscribe to this philosophy pursue their own goods and at the same time preserve community good? This is important as it raises the issue of the primacy of the community. Often, this primacy is misconceived to imply that any personal idea of the good that is not definable in terms of the central social good is insignificant. A careful analysis of the image of the atman indicated in the above passage cast some light on how Advaita deals with this problem.

The passage above describes atman in the form of a man, yet atman is said to see nothing in the community apart from himself. Literally, this raises some difficulties. How can atman identify himself as a man if there were no other individuals he compares himself with? Let us recall that the difficulty of this identity is further compounded by the fact that this is the beginning. I mean the possibility of atman distinguishing himself as a

man is more contestable at this stage particularly when it is affirmed that there is no other person apart from him. It would possibly make better sense if atman's identity is said to be derived through a system of classification. In this case, it would mean that atman has something to contrast itself with, thereby realizing his distinguished identity. But, the story is illuminating as it illustrates the possibility of identifying differences with the contents of the ultimate self. This is made possible by what Kanada, the founder of Nyaya School, calls the 'particular'. I will explain in detail this idea of the particular below. The story represents for us how our different identities ought to be explored from the perspective of the ultimate, formless self. It presupposes that the person has the capacity to see beyond the realm of difference to the essence which contains it. One important thing that this philosophy emphasizes is that we are first unitary and then we become plural. Therefore, we must long to live by the unitary nature which is showcased in the depth of self consciousness rather than the shallow division which is revealed in our plural nature. More often than not, the divisive nature of the plural nature is given more emphasis. This shallow emphasis takes the lead in the approach of some philosophers to identity. It is the bedrock of certain political theories which characterize people as having singular affiliation which predominantly needs to be discovered and ought to be preserved even at the expense of other identities. This goes against the moral extension of the self in which others are covered and loved. Some commentators are skeptical about the genuineness of this so called moral intuition. Especially in the contemporary world that is polarized with various distinctive identities each of which is badly seeking recognition and dominion over the others, they claim that the reference to our moral oneness is simplistic. But Advaita philosophy stresses that the prominent

division which characterizes our time results from the increasing loss of the understanding of the true self. This loss can be remedied by the knowledge of our worldly identity as the Brahman in disguise. The possession of this knowledge would eradicate the fear that is generated from holding unto the false self.

Going by Shankara's analysis of Brahman as the ultimate self, the qualified atman represents the real individual in the world. Knowing that the worldly form that this atman assumes represents the lower self is very important. Among other things, it guides the scope of our choices and it helps us to act in a way that will not jeopardize our own interests and those of the community. It brings to our understanding that the lower self is explicated through the social life of the community. Therefore, the community life becomes necessary in the understanding of identity. Nevertheless, this idea of the self that is derived from the community life only points to the higher self, highlighting its profundity. The higher self goes beyond the scope of meanings enunciated in the community. The higher self is not antithetical to the lower self. In fact, the higher self is revealed through the lower self. On this note, we may answer the question about what the Upanishadic literature means by saying that atman as an individual looks at the community and finds none else than himself. It means that atman sees the original identity as transcending anything that is affiliated with others. The atman sees plurality as it is contained in itself. This identity stems from the underlying consciousness which gives meaning to every particular mode of living. This consciousness is what makes the individual to be a member of the community. At the same time, it is that which distinguishes the individual as a unique person in the community. Having established the uniqueness of individuals, Advaita philosophy claims that individuals ought to deliberate

on their differences. This grants the philosophy's subscription to the fact that individuals have the power of self choice. It confirms that individuals are transcendental subjects who are capable of choosing their lifestyles and central projects. Self choice implies, in this tradition, that individuals have the capacity to explore their worldly identities and that they can cultivate it as they deem fit. However, the core of the self can only be reached when the individual transcends the division that is characterized with worldly identities. I will elaborate on this point in the third section.

Let us recall that atman is identical with Brahman and, as we have initially shown, the theory of Brahman represents the individual as a subject. What this presupposes is that the guiding principles which define the cooperative association of these subjects must not be strictly fixed. In other words, it implies that any good which the community is identified with at any point in time must be taken as relatively true. This is in the sense that such good can be reevaluated and possibly repealed in light of new knowledge. This shows that Advaita philosophy concedes to the view that individuals ought to choose their lives. It also supports the idea that a fixed conception of the good has the tendency of constraining individuals' freedom thereby demeaning their liberty. The narrower and stricter the good identified with the community becomes, the more chances it has to limit the choices of individuals. The possibility of measuring the good of individuals by the contributions they make to the community is higher in any system that imbibes the above ideology. Since Advaita rejects this ideology, it will be mistaken to argue that the philosophy attaches identity to community. Advaita philosophy argues for the claim that we do have choices over alternative identities. More importantly, the person is acknowledged as having substantial freedom regarding the various identities she may

have at the same time. Interestingly, the Advaita notion of individuality supports the virtue of freedom. It also defends the virtues of equality and fairness. Considering the nature of atman, it is certain that the philosophy allows for the articulation of the widest possible idea of the common good which individuals of free and equal nature may find satisfactory in self development.

Advaita philosophy takes any stage of self definition and the differences that are associated with it as the relative face of the self. Also entailed in this philosophy is the submission that the inherent capacity for self choice does not need to separate the individual from the community. In an important sense, the demonstration of genuine autonomy implies that individuals reflect on the multiple identities showcased in different communities as the manifestation of the ultimate Brahman. This demands that individuals consider their responsibilities to themselves as people sharing the same reality seriously. The idea of autonomy that is revealed in this passage highlights the need to respect each other's experiences because they presuppose the reality of Brahman. There are no presuppositions that indicate that the knowledge of Brahman can only be accomplished as individuals measure their lives by certain paradigm of thought which are taken to be universally valid. This view is agreeable to most Advaitins. N. K. Devaraja describes the Advaitins conception of Brahman as:

> the informing spirit of all experience, the light of awareness that constitutes the very core of the phenomenon called experience. The Advaitin reaches the notion of Brahman or Atman not through any rationative or dialectical processes, but through reflective scrutiny of experience as such.[56]

---

[56] N. K. Devaraja, "Contemporary Relevance of Advaita Vedanta", *Philosophy East and West*, 20 (1970): 133.

As revealed in the above passage, the idea of Brahman stems out of experience. Therefore, to make Brahman the intuitive idea of the community of autonomous individuals need not hinder them from pursuing their own central projects.

Autonomy, as conceived in Advaita philosophy, is not an asocial concept. The person understands her autonomous nature correctly when she apprehends it as the essential attribute that should guide her relation to others in the world.[57] This is illustrated in the question posed in Mundaka *Upanishad* 1. i. 3:

> O adorable sir, (which is that thing) which having been known, all this becomes known?

The answer comes in *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV. v. 6:

> All this, my dear, becomes known when the self is seen, heard of, reflected on, and meditated upon.

The passages above indicate that there is a necessary link between the knowledge of oneself and the knowledge of others. Mainly, the knowledge of the self guides one's dealings with others. Shankara encourages every individual to hold their worldly experiences as true because they are actually real. However, he holds that individuals must not lose sight of their distinctiveness when they relate to one another but they must be mindful of the fact of their ultimate oneness. In Shankara's words:

> This distinction can be upheld from our point of view as well; for so it is seen in the world. Thus though foam, ripple, wave, bubble, etc. which are different modifications of the sea, consisting of water, are non-different from the sea, still amongst themselves are perceived actions and reactions in the form of separating or coalescing. And yet the foam, wave, etc., do not loose their individuality in one another, they are never different from the point of view of their being sea. Similar is the case here. The experiencer

---

[57] BBS. I. iv. 23.

and the things experienced never get identified with each other, nor
do they differ from the supreme Brahman.[58]

Shankara shows a worthy respect for the distinctive experiences of individuals situated in some local contexts. He mentions that individuals should preserve their individualities even though he thinks that the forms that they assume are different from the true nature of Brahman.

In Shankara's philosophy, we understand that the basis of social cooperation is to be developed on the ultimate unifying nature, the nature that is all pervasive, holding the multi-various identities that are visible in the world. When this nature is cultivated, individuals will be able to follow the moral prompt which makes them listen to, care for, and be compassionate to those who seemingly belong to other groups. This nature does not divide us in a way that makes it difficult to respond to the plight of others mainly because we are afraid not to interfere with their own conceptions of the good. The cultivation of the nature of Brahman allows individuals to display their true humanity. This further supports what has been said before, that Advaita philosophy accords a worthy respect to the virtues of freedom and equality which are crucial in the understanding of individuality. But the kind of freedom that is illustrated in this philosophy is the freedom to be at one with ourselves regardless of our differences. Advaita philosophy directs our attention to Brahman. Seeking Brahman implies seeking the knowledge of one's inmost being. For now, we see roughly that the foundation on which the ideal of the community thrives is able to aid the understanding of the universal self regardless of the depth of experience that anyone might be affiliated with. There is no experience that is not viewed under this system of thought as a relative face of the

---

[58] BBS. II. i. 13.

inexhaustible Brahman. Each compartmentalized experience is to be constantly dugged and redefined to meet current realities. Although the individuals in the community are not denied of having certain affections and devotions which are distinct from one another, their understanding that the differences are contained in Brahman makes them seek their point of unity. Ultimately, these individuals understand that the distinctive attachments that they pick in the society do not exhaust their nature. Hence, they are challenged to embrace the differences in the particularities which they find comfortable to define themselves. None of these is able to exhaust the nature of the extensive self which is the innermost being in all. If this is the case, it means that the violence which we sometimes engage in, and which at other times leads to a lot of destructions, results from the erroneous thinking that our real self is exhausted in those distinctive forms which we adopt from our participation in the world. Shankara develops an interesting philosophy on how to approach differences.

As we shall see later, contrary to the kind of shallow tolerance that is seen in the action of the modern individual who is faced with tribal, religious, cultural etc. differences, Shankara's philosophy provides a platform that enables everyone to see difference from the perspective of the one ultimate reality which underlies the many.[59]

---

[59] The idea of the modern individual is here used to refer to someone who sees the self as nothing more than what is experienced mentally and physically. This reductionism engendered the ignorance that the self can be realized or lost in actions. Hence, each individual must strive unwaveringly and without any serious consideration of the interests of others to realize the self. This is the characteristic of the modern world, this modern conception of the self has created a kind of tension and strains between individuals. Not only this, the institutions which are supposed to bridge the gap and restore the bond which ought to guide human relations and the whole of existence are tailored in the mechanistic paradigm which excels in dividing and separating people into inconclusive groups.

This is the significance of Indian philosophy.[60] Although, Shankara refuses to grant the highest level of reality to the separate individuals in the world, he emphasizes the need to see individuals as we see Brahman. The respect that is given to Brahman as the supreme Lord of the universe is also to be given to individuals who are identical with Brahman. I shall now proceed to the discussion of the formation of identity. I will reveal one fundamental problem that is inherent in the way the question of identity is posed in what follows.

Self Identity: How is it Formed?

The question about identity is often posed in two senses, namely, is identity chosen? Or, is it given? When the question of identity is posed in the above ways, we expect a kind of answer that is definite. Thus, if identity is chosen, then it cannot be given and vice versa. The view of identity as a thing that is chosen follows from the conception of the individual as a self determined agent. It seems to mean that if we agree that the individual is really capable of self choice then she has all the freedom of self determination. David Gauthier expresses this view as follows:

---

[60] Reading from Raju, one sees a very crucial nature of Indian philosophy, how it connects the essentially inward life to the outward. Indian philosophy presents a clear notion of the person with passion and critical reflection. Raju shows the holistic approach in the following remarks, "The Advaita conception of the constitution of the individual also is the same as that given by the Upanisad in its doctrine of the levels of the *atman* and body. These levels are interpreted by this school as sheaths (*kosas*). The original pure *atman* is encased, first, in the sheath of bliss; this is encased in the sheath of reason, this is in the sheath of mind, this is in the sheath of life, and this, finally, in the sheath of matter. The original nature of *atman* is *saccidananda*, existence, consciousness, and bliss". See P. T. Raju, "The Concept of Man in Indian Thought" in P. T. Raju and S. Radhakrishnan, (eds.) *The Concept of Man A Study in Comparative Philosophy*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1955), p. 287.

But if we admit that individuality may be socially caused, so that persons are social products, then must we not reject the contention that persons are autonomous? And if we sacrifice autonomy, then are we not undermining the conception of the liberal individual, which is at the core of our answer to those who would reject morals by agreement as the pseudo-morality of economic man?[61]

From the above quotation, we understand that thinking about individuality as a product of some social histories or cultural values demeans autonomy. Thus, the concept of autonomy requires a belief in nothing other than self-chosen values, nothing external is able to determine the individual's mode of being in the world. This position is developed on certain idea of the self. However, to some, the conception of identity that stems from it is inadequate.

The question about identity, as posed in Advaita philosophy, is directed at the core of the individual's constitution. First of all, the question goes thus, who am I? The answer to the question, from the standpoint of the Upanishad, is '*Tat Tvam Asi*'. The English equivalence of '*Tat Tvam Asi*' is 'Thou art That'.[62]

---

[61] David Gauthier, "The Liberal Individual" in Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit (ed.), *Communitarianism and Individualism*, p. 157.

[62] There are four great sayings (*mahavakhya*) in the Upanishadic scriptures which illustrate Atman-Brahman identity. They are: Consciousness is Brahman (*Prajnanm* Brahman), it occurs in *Aitareya Upanishad* of the Rg Veda. That art Thou (*Tat tvam asi*), found in *Chāndogya Upanishad* of the Sāma Veda. This self is Brahman (*Ayam ātman* Brahman), contained in *Māndūkya Upanishad* of the Artharva Veda. I am Brahman (*Aham Brahma Asmi*), in *Brhadāranyaka Upanishad* of the Yajur Veda.

Simply speaking, the phrase 'Thou art That' confirms that the constitutive consciousness, that is, the consciousness which contains the distinctive identities or the mode of being of all individuals in the world, is Brahman.[63] The question of whether the phrase refers to the merger of individuals at the ultimate level of existence has been variously answered.

---

[63] The statement 'Thou art That' can be explained from three linguistic usages. The primary or direct usage (*vakyartha*), the implied usage (*lakshana*) and the suggested usage (*vyangyārtha*). The primary usage of the 'That art Thou' statement can be grasped from two perspectives; the relation of duality (*bheda- samsarga*) and the relation of non-duality (*abheda-samsarga*). In the former, an understanding of difference is conveyed in the relation between the 'That' and the 'Thou'. Shankara rejects this position because it does not, at the highest level of reality, tally with the identity of Brahman and Atman. See Vensus A. George, *Self Realization* [*Brahmaanubhava*] *:The Advaitic Perspective of Shankara*, (Washington, D.C. : The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001) pp. 44 – 50, see also, Sadananda Yogindra, *Vedaantasaara* (*The Essence of Vedaanta*) *of Sadananda Yogindra,* transl Swami Nihilananda, (Calcuta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968), and A. N. Bhattacharya, *Essence of Vedānta*, (Delhi: Durga Publications, 1986), pp. 47 – 51.

I do not intend to dabble into this discussion since it goes beyond the limit of my discussion. [64] The question at hand dwells on how the notion of identity is explored in Advaita philosophy. I mentioned earlier that the exploration of the question of identity in Shankara's philosophy centers on knowing who I am. This question is related to the other ones raised initially i.e. is my identity chosen by me or given by the community?

---

[64] Ramanuja refers to the passage of the scripture which says "all that consists in this" as a simplified meaning of the identity thesis. In his interpretation, the words "all that" includes all separate beings in the world ranging from intelligent beings to non-intelligent ones, and "this" refers to Brahman as the soul of the world. Ramanuja disagrees with Shankara's analysis of the connective terms in the *mahavakhya* statement. To him, the term 'art' denotes something that is distinct although the grammatical analysis of 'Thou' and 'That' may yield the notion of a single reality, there can be no denial of the fact that reality exists in different modes. In the *Chandogya Upanishad*. See *Chandogya Upanishad*, VI. Viii. 7. Brahman, Ramanuja contends, is described as the "all that consists in this". What this means, in Ramanuja's view, is that Brahman stands as the soul of the empirical *jiva* which exist in different modes, a figurative interpretation upon which the Shankarite notion of illusion hangs is self nullified from the view that individuals exist in distinctive varieties. Ramanuja supports this point with the fact that varieties of individual representation is expressed in the notion of 'all that', however, the only fact being that the 'all' have their very soul in Brahman. Shankara replies that the statement "all that consists in this" can yield three possible explanation of the identity connection. The first explanation describes the connection between the 'that' and the 'this' as having identical substance or locus (*samanadhikaranya*) but this understanding entails the notion of time difference in which the 'that' is situated in the time past and the 'this' in the present. This cannot be applicable to Brahman because it "cannot be said to have arisen in time, to be subject to the "present," or to have an end in time-for all such sayings apply only to that which is relative and conditioned". Cited in Eliot Deutsch, "The Self in Advaita Vedānta", in *Indian Philosophy, A Collection of Readings*, edited with introduction by Roy W. Perrett, (New York, London: Garland Publishing Inc., 2001), p. 7. The second explanation indicates that the two words 'that' and 'this' qualify one another by referring to a common object (visheshanavisheshyabhava) however, the words display certain mutual qualifications which is untrue of Brahman. The third understanding shows the relationship of identity by stipulating the 'that' and the 'this' as identical, it eliminates the notion of past and present time associated with the two terms, giving the implied meaning of the 'this' as identical with the 'that'. The time difference being eliminated brings about the consideration of identity exclusive of temporal differences. It is through this understanding alone that Shankara believes the Vedantic aphorism tvam asi can be uncovered. In rendering the 'That art Thou' statement, all the conflicting imports, namely, immediateness, remoteness and differences, are given up, and the absolute, pure consciousness which is common to both 'That' and 'Thou' is retained. This understanding implies knowing the principle of doing good to all as if doing it to oneself. This is the unchanging principle which ought to guide human actions and it is from this medium that one should judge whether his/her actions are good or not. In all, Shankara's position stipulates that the utmost identity of individuals may be read from the standpoint of certain social and local particularities, the individual is indeed not ultimately tied to them.

However, there is an interesting difference between the two questions and this must never be overlooked. [65] The way that the question about the given or chosen of identity is posed and answered presupposes that the identity that is given or chosen is not different from the ultimate identity of the individual. I mean here that both views, i.e. the position that represents identity as a given and the other that says it is chosen, see no difference between the ultimate self and the form of its appearance in the world. Let us note that the confusion occurs from the misrepresentation of the forms of the self with the self itself. Back to the philosophy of Descartes, the foundational self is depicted as something that is exhaustible by the mind. In Kant, we understand the individual as a transcendental subject. But the form of this subject in light of Kantian and Cartesian philosophies can be wholly exhausted by the mind. This is why the mind gains the ultimate role in self definition. The self that is totally exhausted by the mind is not identical with the real self that Shankara defends in his philosophy. At best, this self can be equated with Shankara's lower self. For Shankara, the lower self is the self that can be identified with any image or symbol. This self is the one that is possible of being exhausted by the mind. Shankara claims that the logical representation of the self in this way is shallow and indisputably, it cannot lead any person to a deep understanding of her self.

> One should not fix the idea of the Self on symbols, because an aspirant cannot think of the separate symbols as himself. The reasoning is hollow

---

[65] Yoshitsugu Sawai makes an interesting distinction between Ramanuja and Shankara in the following, "In Shankara's theory, there is ultimately no ground for a polarity of beings in the world, for the only ultimately existent being, the *nirguna-brahman,* is non-dual, impersonal, inexpressible and relationless; all other things are assumed to exist within the *nirguna-brahman* and thus are not ultimately real. For Ramanuja, however, the *saguna-brahman* includes the world of the individual finite souls and of finite matter: the diversity of the world is real. Accordingly, the relational polarity of *saguna-brahman* with the individual finite souls and things is fundamental. See Yoshitsugu Sawai, "Ramanuja's Hermeneutics of the Upanisads in Comparison with Sankara's Interpretation", *Journal Of Indian Philosophy*, 19, no. 1 (1999): 90. This interesting distinction shows how Shankara perceives the individual utmost identity as the container of all forms. In practice, Shankara's position calls us to pursue how to realize the extensive capacity in us that can enable us to show a kind of compassion that perceives human understanding to the whole of creation.

that the symbols being forms of Brahman are Brahman itself, and hence are the same as the Self; for that would lead to the brushing away of all symbols. For it is only when the names etc. are deprived of their transformed states (as names etc.), that one arrives at Brahman which is their essence.[66]

Incidentally, Shankara's argument shows that the kind of reflection which the person in the above picture engages in in order to understand her self is not significantly deep. This claim supposes that the above method does not capture the correct way to probe our true being. When the question, who am I, is raised, we go deeper until the depth of the formless self is reached. Here, the question is as follows: what is my real identity? I am asking about that thing which makes me to be in the first place. The answer, as seen above, is Brahman. Upon securing the answer, I step ahead to inquire about that which makes me different from others. The question here, we need to understand, is not how my nature is different from others' nature for I know that there is only one true nature, namely, Brahman. My question is about how this nature makes me appear differently from others. This is not about ultimate difference, it is about my worldly difference which is temporal, in the sense that the difference which though appears in me truly and is associated with my physical identity is not a permanent characterization of my ultimate identity. I can reevaluate it, subject it to critical reflection and possibly choose an alternative identity if I feel like. However, no matter how deep and valuable the kind of life I feel pleased to be identified with, I am aware that it is not identical with my ultimate nature. My worldly identity is indisputably my choice. I do not deny that the community influences me in certain ways and that this influence helps me to articulate my preferred identity among the many alternatives that are prevalent in the

---

[66] BBS. IV. i. 4.

community. However, this influence will not necessarily determine who I ought to be, for my inmost idea of the good may eventually vary from that of the community. There is a give-and-take kind of exchange in this conception of identity. I am presented with a particular way of living upon arriving in the world, I am to adopt this way of life in the manner I am pleased with. For me to deny that this form of identity is completely chosen by me is to be insincere. To also deny the fact that I internalize it and act it out in my own way is incorrect. What is presupposed in the question of identity, as framed here, is the need to know Brahman which is the reality that both makes me to be and to be distinct.

Having known that that which makes me to be is that which makes me different, I will explore my difference in the world not from any premonition of division. I am sure that I am morally connected with others regardless of my different identity. What I am trying to explain here is extensively discussed by Raju in the book *Spirit, Being and Self, Studies in Indian and Western Philosophy*. Raju identifies one major distinction between the individual and the particular individual. To Raju, the idea of individuality and particularity may be used interchangeably in ordinary linguistic parlance, but when such usage enters into the domain of philosophy, it loses certain insights which are gained by classical philosophers of India. The category of the particular is introduced into Indian philosophy by Kanada, the founder of Nyaya School. Kanada describes the particular as that "which differentiates the absolute similar".[67] This definition is supposed to show that the individuality of the ultimate individuals, such as atoms and spirits, is only made possible by 'the possession of the particular'. Finest spirits or ultimate atoms could not be differentiated by any special qualities but by the categorization of their particularity. The

---

[67] See P. T. Raju, *Spirit, Being and Truth, Studies in Indian and Western Philosophy*, (New Delhi : South Asian Publishers, 1982), p. 210

particular is the material principle that distinguishes individuals from one another, without the particular no individual can be differentiated from the other. The particular is not the same with the individual which is identified with special qualities; the particular lacks qualities of difference and for this reason it is only an ultimate differentiator and not an ultimate difference.[68] So, what the particular does is to differentiate things but itself is not differentiated. The idea of the particular here fits into the idea of Brahman. The particular cannot be differentiated from that which it differentiates. It is not separate from it. Raju says, it is always inward to the individual transcending its individual content. In Raju's view, this is the freedom of the particular, escaping the content that it individuates. The interchangeability of the particular with Brahman (the ultimate nature of the individual) supposes that individual's identity transcends whatever definition that the community gives her.

Raju highlights two characters, namely, constancy and activity, as the best characters that define the inward transcendence of the particular.[69] These characters are paradoxical. If they are not carefully explained, they may be taken to be opposite. When the particular is depicted by constancy, it means that it identifies itself with the content of its individuation. For example, when I refer to myself as a student of philosophy, that I am sitting down and writing my PhD Dissertation, that I am doing my PhD degree at the National University of Singapore and that my nationality is Nigeria, and that I am specifically from the Yoruba tribe, the particular here individuates me and constantly identifies itself with each of the contents of its individuation. In each of these contents, we should note that the particular is represented as a constant. However, it is different

---

[68] For further study on the idea of ultimate differentiator as conceived by the Nyaya, see Sukharanjan Saha, *Perspectives on Nyaya Logic and Epistemology*, (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi and Company, 1987), p. 33.
[69] P. T. Raju, *Spirit, Being and Truth, Studies in Indian and Western Philosophy,* pp. 210-211.

from the constant because it is the active force which unites the different constants and makes it the 'I' which is my ultimate identity. The 'I' belongs to each of the different categories represented above. No single category can be said to exhaust my ultimate identity. [70] What is exemplified in this notion of identity is, as claimed by Raju, that identification and transcendence are the inherent nature of the particular and this is clear in the case of the 'I'. So, the 'I' is the particular which differentiates the individual but itself is not differentiated. It is this 'I', that is, my ultimate identity which also articulates, evaluates and redefines my worldly identity. The nature of the 'I' is the nature of Atman, which is identical with Brahman. This is the supreme consciousness which reflects on the immanent condition of the individual in the world. Its transcendental nature cannot be curtailed by any community ideal. This 'I' is the ultimate which determines and assimilates everything in me. When I say that the 'I' determines everything in me, I refer to that which I am directly aware of, the transcendental subject which is the core of my being as an individual, that which I can only use for none other than myself. In differentiating this 'I' from the 'me', Raju says "I can use the term "I" only with reference to myself and to none else. When I use the term "the I" in the third person, I no longer speak of myself. When I use the term "me" as in "You misunderstand me," I am referring to myself as I appear to you but not as I am to myself. There is, therefore, only one object in the universe for which I can use the term "I" … but in all contexts I can use

---

[70] Amartya Sen observes that in our normal lives "we see ourselves as members of a variety of groups-we belong to all of them. A person's citizenship, residence, geographic origin, gender, class, politics, profession, employment, food habits, sports interests, taste in music, social commitments, etc., make us members of a variety of groups. Each of these collectivities, to all of which this person simultaneously belongs, gives her a particular identity. None of them can be taken to be the person's only identity or singular membership category. Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* : *The Illusion of Destiny*, pp. 4-5.

the term "I" only with reference to one object. The "I" is, therefore, the only particular of which conscious human beings are directly aware".[71]

We find similarity in Raju's and Shankara's analyses. The 'I' is for both philosophers that which is directly perceived as the content of the concept 'I'. Going by the fact of the transcendence of the 'I' as something that is higher than its individuating content, we see that the depth of the 'I' is beyond personal ego. The other interesting fact about the 'I' is that its stretching beyond the ego or its social context does not engender its consummation, rather, it expands its horizon. The possibility of the expansion correlates with its true nature as the atman-Brahman. This possibility indicates that the self as an expansive substance is not really lost when it transcends personal interests to the interests of the community and from the interest of one particular community to the interest of the universal community. Conversely, it shows that the expansive substance of the self is not limited to any particular community. This explanation typifies the kind of enlightenment that individuals ought to possess before they can actually realize their inmost nature. Parthasarathy remarks that the whole explanation seems to be a case of enlightenment, a call to the individual to constantly remember that the Being of her being is Brahman.[72] From a systemic perspective, Shankara reveals the in-depth nature of the individual as something that is so deep and so high that it defies all categorical definition. Therefore, the identity question espouses the infinite nature of the individual and calls the finite individual to the realization of her infinite nature. It is a call to the individual as the lower atman to rise up to the task of meeting the higher Atman (the all pervasive subject). Understanding the notion of identity in Shankara's philosophy demands that one follows

---

[71] Ibid. p. 209.
[72] A. Parthasarathy, *Vedanta Treatise,* 3rd edition, (Bombay: Vedaanta Life Institute 1989) p. 330, as quoted from Vensus A. George, *Self Realization*, p. 44.

his dialectics in which the real identity of the person is impossible of being exhausted by any community values or norms. Vensus expresses this dialectics as something that progresses "from the ontological level of particularity to another of universality and yet to another of unity. When the latter state of unity is attained, the distinctions in the former are negated. One begins with the individual consciousness, passes on to the universal consciousness that overcomes the separate reality of both the individual and the universal".[73] Will this entail a fusion of individuals within the community? We shall attempt this in the next section as we consider the congruence of morality and individuality in Shankara's philosophy.

---

[73] Vensus A. George, *Self-realization* [*Brahmaanubhava*] *: The Advaitic Perspective of Shankara*, pp. 49-50.

II

MORALITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

> The path of freedom is one of purification and disassociation from the not-self, from the false or superficial aspects of the self. Cognitively, it is a case of enlightenment or insight into the nature of things. We may call it a negative process, since it is a case of divestification of the encumbrances with which we have cluttered ourselves in life's journey. It is not a negative result. For what we are left with is nothing, but our real being in its innate immediacy. Also, the path's being characterized in negative phraseology does not mean that we are to be inactive or that it is easy of accomplishment.[74]

In this section, I will discuss the moral implications of Advaita's view of identity for the individual. Among other issues that will be examined, we shall see whether the Advaita person is necessarily subsumed under the moral meanings of his community or whether he is the sole originator of his value systems. Neither of these positions is socially desirable. To regard identity definition as a thing that could be exhausted by the moral meanings of the person's community is to imply that the person's humanity can only be achieved by imitating the lifestyles that are dominant within her social group. Thus, the life of the individual will be characterized by dogmatism or even a blind conformity to some beliefs. This is contrary to a life of independence and liberty. The worth of the person will thus be defined by the degree of her conformity to the actions approved by her group. Self assertion will be seen as selfishness and independent decision making will be perceived as disobedience. This is inconsistent with the view of the person as a subject, a view that entails that the person ought to choose the way of life she believes will make her achieve her deepest feelings. Since the individual who operates under this

---

[74] T. R. V. Murti, "The World and the Individual in Indian Religious Thought", in C. A. Moore, *The Indian Mind: Essentials of Indian Philosophy and Culture*, p.328.

ideal will necessarily be expected to concentrate on those virtues which are specified by her group in order to gain creditable moral identity, she will be required to pay close attention to her every action and be sure to comply with the overall moral principles under which she operates. Without much disputation, it will be correct to agree that such a life will be difficult and boring.[75] In line with B. K. Ramanujam, this ideology cannot encourage the development of 'a cogent adult role'. The question we are set to answer is whether the Advaita philosophy's conception of the subject avoids the above problems.

Before I proceed to the discussion of the Advaita notion of the moral subject, I should allude to one possible way of construing Shankara's philosophy and this makes the philosophy undesirable. This construction presupposes that the background motivating principle of self realization in Shankara's philosophy lays a severe burden on the person. This, critics would argue, requires that the individual detach himself from the empirical conditions of her circumstances, counting them as unreal. The person ought to separate himself from the result of actions and hold on to the ideal self which can never be realized through actions. Another criticism against this philosophy suggests that it

---

[75] A reflection on the ill effects of the above position is contained in Susan Wolf's well written article "Moral Saints". In this article, Wolf argues that moral sainthood is desirable neither in one's self nor in others. She says "I don't know whether there are any moral saints. But if there are, I am glad that neither I nor those about whom I care most are among them. By moral saint I mean a person whose every action is as morally good as possible, a person, that is, who is as morally worthy as can be". Wolf's thesis is built on the primary assumption that individuals have the right of self choice. She believes that people ought to freely choose the way of life that could lead them to realize their deepest feelings. Wolf mentions that virtues that are expected to dominate the character of the moral saint will surely make her life dull. She believes that the ideal of moral sainthood demands that one necessarily concentrates on those virtues which are specified by one's community. Ultimately, it implies that the moral saint must dedicate his life to meeting others' needs. Wolf is not saying that meeting others' needs is inherently problematic. But when this dominates the life of the individual to the point that she cannot attend to her own interests then, there is a problem. According to Wolf, the ideal of moral sainthood demands that she pays detail attention to every of her action and be sure that she complies with the overall moral principles under which she operates. Referring to the Kantian saint, Wolf says that she will be too good to be good for herself. This is because she must pay careful attention to those stringent rules which demands her attention independently of her physical or psychological inclinations. See Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints" in Tammy Roberts, Mical Moser, Don LePan, Craig Lawson, Julia Gaunce and Jane Britton, (eds.) *The Broadview Anthology of Expository Prose* (Canada: Broadview Press, 1975), p. 294.

encourages a hard (ascetic) life, the kind that discourages the cultivation of some personal interests which might be legitimate aspects of a good life. I will argue in this section that the above claims result from a misinterpretation of Shankara's philosophy. My position is that Advaita philosophy supports the pursuit of the inmost feeling, a kind of feeling that does not devalue the person's good and the good of the community. Shankara, as I will argue, believes that the realization of the inmost feeling is the only requirement for experiencing a good and flourishing life. What is suggested in the foregoing is that any construction of identity that merges individuality within some given community or exclusively makes it a thing that is chosen independently of the community will certainly not make peoples' lives rich and flourishing. Then, one will be unable to lead her life inside out. The important thing we wish to accomplish here is to see how Advaita philosophy depicts the way to lead such a life. The discussion will come under three headings, namely, the Advaita conception of the subject, the reason for action and value of self detachment.

The Advaita conception of the Subject

The first concept that is synonymous with morality in the Vedas is *rta*. *Rta* refers to the course of things. All things, god, human and non-human objects abide by rta. *Rta* is the inner essence of all. It is that which is behind the order in the universe. The idea of *rta* later changes to dharma. Dharma is conceived as the universal cosmic law which is eminently fair to all. Dharma is the inherent principle in everything. Dharma is conceived as a way of life of things. Understood from human social relations, it is that which determines how the ideal or the good life ought to be lived. The body of knowledge called the *Veda* is the repository of dharma. The *Veda* is divided into two sections. The

first section, called *Pravrtti dharma*, teaches activity-based dharma. The second section, called *Atman-dharma*, teaches how to withdraw from activity through knowledge. Both the first and the second sections of the *Veda* exemplify how the individual ought to live as a member in the community and how not to be subsumed under the community meanings, that is, not taking the community meanings as something that define perfectly her moral identity.[76] This explains the importance that the *Veda* places on the individual's immanent and transcendental nature. In the second section of the *Veda*, Atman, the core being of the individual is identified not as the agent of actions. On a more focused level, this section dwells on the person's identity which is more inward than outward. The two portions of the *Veda* teach how to find one's true identity as one gets involved in the world and as one withdraws from the world. The individual with this knowledge will be able to utilize her power of self choice rightly.

The nature of dharma is expressed in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* as follows, "Verily, that which is Dharma is truth …".[77] Dharma, being the truth, has an identical nature with Brahman. By implication, Dharma's nature is congruent with human nature because the nature of the individual is congruent with the nature of Brahman. The

---

[76] The source of dharma has been variously contested. The Indian rationalists argue that reason is the source of dharma. The materialists reject reason, they argue that experience is the source of dharma. Notable among the materialist school is the 'enlightened' (Susksita). Although, the Susksita School accepts the distinction between vice and virtue as valid, it contends that the distinction derives its validity from empirical grounds. Kumarila rejects both the rational and empirical sources of morality, he claims that none of them could procure the basis of the *dharmic* law, "at best, its attainment will remain but a probability … the utmost that we can have is only relative assurance". Shankara develops this argument, he claims that all attempt to understand the *dharmic* law by the mind will end in developing morality on certain presuppositions. Hiriyanna rejects the idea of moral relativity. His position is presented in the following, "to rest one's conduct therefore on the ethics of mere relativity, at least in the case of the majority, that is, the very people who need moral training, is sure to result in expediency, leading to what may be described as moral drifting". See M. Hiriyanna, *Indian Conception of Values*, (Mysore: Kavyalaya Publishers, 1975), p. 162.
[77] Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.14.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says knowing Brahman implies knowing the truth and speaking the truth implies speaking the dharma,

> … a man who speaks truth, He speaks the Dharma, … a man who speaks the Dharma, He speaks the Truth. Verily, both these things are the same .[78]

Apparently, the moral law is accepted in the Indian tradition as congruent with human nature. We may now ask how Advaita philosophy exposes this idea. On the one hand, Advaita agrees that speaking and living truly within one's experiences are identical with displaying one's nature or, to put it differently, one's dharma. This is stressed in Shankara's affirmation of our distinctive nature and how we ought to truly live it out. However, Shankara argues that the innermost identity remains unrealized if we stop at the level where differences reign. We should go deeper until we get to the point where differences of identities relapse into the absolute self, namely Brahman. Both of these aforementioned points are very crucial if we are to enjoy the true nature of our humanity, that is, as people who are unique and at the same time sharing from the same reality. What is entailed in this context is that our moral identity cannot be perfectly explained from the viewpoint of those particularities which prevail in our community values or beliefs. Our identity is revealed in two possible ways. The first is the higher identity which, when properly characterized, is found to be independent of any context. This is the identity that does not share in the contingencies of the world. Its nature is unaffected by what the world happens to be.

> Like ether, though abiding in all beings, I am free from [all] the faults of beings; I am the witness, the Observer, the pure, atrributeless *Brahman*; so I am alone.[79]

---

[78] Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.14.

.

[79] *A Thousand Teachings The Upadesahasri of Sankara*, p. 126.

Although the inmost identity of the subject is said to be independent of the community, this identity can only be known as one partakes in the community experience. It follows that any identity that is abstracted from community life or explicable independently of community life is faulty. It is obvious that Advaita respects the higher or the transcendental nature of the person. Respect for this nature amounts to a respect for the worth of the person. Ultimately, Advaita believes that the definition of identity ought to be predicated on this higher nature. However, Advaita position presupposes that this does not entail that the moral subject care less about the community, though he should be given the freedom to exercise his choice in the kind of life he lives. However, he is well informed if he acknowledges the fact that this choice will necessarily be constrained by certain community ideals. Firstly, the recognition of this constraint and the knowledge of how one ought to respond to it are essential in the demonstration of one's true worth. In a sense one can say that Advaita agrees that any construction of identity which trivializes the community is insignificant. Identity should not be isolated from experience, Advaita holds. As a moral subject, Advaita philosophy suggests that individuals should take seriously the challenge that the reality of our transcendental nature brings to us. The acceptance of this nature ought to lead one to acknowledge one's roles within the community and one should largely respect them. These roles, however, are not to be performed like mere actors who are dancing to the tune of a play writer but as someone who is convinced of the reasons for acting. The moral subject, as expressed in this philosophy, should not be credulous in the sense of holding to any belief or claim to knowledge without sufficient evidence or good reasons for doing so. This is what the

statement "know that Atman alone and abandon other modes of speech" points to.[80] And, from the standpoint of Advaita, the most plausible reasons for action are those which unite us rather than separate us. Thus, one demonstrates a higher responsibility when one abandons those worldviews which suggest that one's identity is exhausted by the values of the community that one belongs to. The advice that one should abandon any theoretical simplification of one's identity does not follow that one's identity cannot be expressed at all. Rather, it calls one's attention to the fact that there is no possible expression of this identity that can exhaust its depth.

> I am one alone; No other than that [*Brahman*] is thought to be Mine. In like manner I do not belong to anything since I am free from attachment. I have by nature no attachment.[81]

Advaita methodology highlights the inconclusiveness of the divisive identities which tend to separate people on the basis of culture, religion, race etc. Our identities in the world can be many, each of which takes a certain degree of relevance in different circumstances but none of which could possibly exhaust our profound nature. The possession of this knowledge is inestimable as it puts the subject in a position to always cultivate her profound and extended self. The identity of this self extends to the others. This extensive self is not properly articulated in most western account of individuality. Advaita claims that the particularities of the lower self are not contradictory to the free nature of the higher self. Knowing this should make individuals accept and explore their contingent identities and live with the others in harmony. To live by the contextual prompt of the lower self alone is to misconstrue one's reality. Then, one associates her real self with a false self. Shankara maintains that reflection on what defines life's

---

[80] Mundaka Upanishad, 11. 2. 5.
[81] *A Thousand Teachings The Upadesahasri of Sankara*, p. 120. Author's parenthesis.

meaning for us must not stop until they are apprehended as having their basis in Brahman.[82] In practical terms, it means that the basis of what determines one's worldly identity must always be examined.

To reiterate what we have said earlier, the identification of the individual's nature with Brahman or Dharma makes her neither to be entirely separated from the community nor entirely dependent on the community. This emphasis is important because it shows that Advaita approves that the transcendental nature of the person does not make her identity prior to the community. Regardless of Shankara's belief that the nature of the individual is beyond community meanings, her philosophy does not repudiate the particularities of the community which individuals, at different times, find appropriate to define themselves. The articulation of identity which pictures the individual on a zero ground, in terms of social, historical and cultural constructions, and she is denoted as possessing the ultimate knowledge of the good, is unacceptable in Shankara's philosophy. Shankara gives crucial importance to the community. His allegory that "when one has traversed the forest of "this" (non-Atman) which is contaminated with anxiety, delusion, and so on, one arrives at one's own Atman, just as the man from the land of Gandhava [arrived at Gandharva]" supports this claim. It is legitimate to argue that Shankara shows, with this allegory, the importance of the social meanings of the community.[83] These are the instructional materials needed for one to be correctly guided to one's real being. A similar idea is contained in the dialogue between Uddalaka and his

---

[82] In this passage, Shankara gives the analogy of a student who is unreservedly loyal to his teacher. Shankara says, it will be said of such a student that he 'adores his teacher'. Also, a woman who constantly meditates on her husband who is 'on a sojourn' is also described in the above sense. Shankara claims that even though these people maintain a regular meditation about their substance of knowledge, the scripture uses the verb *vid* or know to describe them. The point Shankara is making is that meditation on one's worldly experiences as Brahman is a non stop activity. See BBS IV. i. 1.
[83] *A Thousand Teachings The Upadesahasri of Sankara*, p. 108.

son Svetaketu in Chandogya Upanishad VI, 14, 1-2. Here, the question about how the self can be known is raised. Uddalaka answered that this happens when one is guided appropriately. Uddalaka explains what this means through the metaphor of someone who was blindfolded and left in an isolated place. He says that this individual could still arrive at her destination regardless of her condition. The essential thing is guidance. This shows the relevance of one's culture, history, and others of its kind. These are essential in self knowledge.

Understanding this fact, it is not difficult to see how Advaita's subject will respond to community practices and institutions. Shankara's individual will take an integral approach to the investigation of community institutions and practices. He will evaluate community values with the understanding that his ultimate nature is independent of them. However, since the immanent nature is entrenched in them, and it is through this that the higher nature is apprehended, the Advaita subject will appreciate these institutional values and practices. He will seek to extend their frontiers. The individual with the above understanding apprehends communal values as something that is not forcefully imposed on him. Shankara observes:

> The man who is devoted to the self and is satisfied with the self and content in the self alone, has no obligatory duty.[84]

Alternately, the values will be engaged as something that is useful in the realization of the authentic life. These cultural materials are not to be willed off as if doing that will enable one to reflect genuinely on oneself. Contrariwise, they are to be embraced as part of what constitutes one's worldly identity. However, they must be thoroughly reflected upon until their essences are discovered to be universally consistent. What this implies is that the

---

[84] BBS. IV. i. 2.

values that one approves of must be consistent with one's nature. These values must not inhibit the freedom of others. We understand here that the individual has certain crucial part to play in identity formulation. Her part is not to step out of the community but to participate in the reconciliation of the logical inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in community's beliefs. In doing this, she should find better alternatives that promote the best interest of all individuals. The Advaita subject acknowledges the usefulness of the social institutions which grounded her self identity in the world. However, this person knows for sure that the identity she carries in the world is different from her ultimate identity. This philosophy is remarkably interesting as it emphasizes the importance of social, psychological, historical and cultural experiences in the investigation of identity. In this way, individuals are truly represented as they are in their respective communities. If we overlook this in our investigation, we overlook one important fact about ourselves, the fact that we are grounded in the community aspiring to realize our ultimate nature which indisputably goes beyond community. In what follows, we shall examine reasons for action. We shall investigate what Advaita believes ought to be the background principle for action. How ought men to act? What is it exactly that the person longs to realize when he engages in action?

The Reason for Action

Two popular theories attempt to answer the question of how human beings ought to act. On the one hand is non-consequentialism which says that human beings should act only from the standpoint of duty and not because of the rewards that will result from action. This philosophical position conceives the rational subject as having the capacity to cause himself only to act under the overall principle by which good actions can be

performed. Hoewever, the good of any actions must not be sought in the outcome of action but in the background principle which motivates the action. An act is good if it is accounted to be good by the rational subject. The rational subject is the one that wills and defines the good act. It is said that the rational deliberation is good purely on its own. Its goodness is independent of what the circumstances of the world happens to be. It is independent of the specific good of the community. To be sure that one is acting freely, one must only listen to the intuitive command of the rational subject. And not until an individual is certain that her action is not motivated by empirical conditions, natural inclinations and sentiments can she be sure of acting freely. Ultimately, individuals ought to act not because of what the circumstances of the community happen to be but because the duty to act takes preeminence.

The other philosophical position, namely, consequentialism, finds the above to be inconsistent with human practical conditions. Consequentialism holds that it is senseless to make duty prior in action without a due consideration of the circumstances of the actor. The will to act is not active until it is prompted by the object of practical reason. To the consequentialist theorist, human beings do not just act but for certain end which they set to achieve. This end is not calculated to be right purely by formal principles. Alternately, the rightness of an act is calculated from the standpoint of community values and in terms of what the actor or the community derives from it. Thus, the determination of the good act ought to be based primarily on the community values, which gives it meaning, and on the ends of the actions. Going by the former position, the performance of one's duty is not to be based on any experience of pleasure or pain which may be prior to the act or which may result from the act. These are empirically grounded and, as such, do not

represent the autonomous decisions of the moral subject. The latter position rejects this idea. For instance, a person will be justified not to act if the end of her action is calculated to have some unfavorable consequences on the higher number of persons in the community. The difference between the two philosophical positions is obvious: one takes the community life as having no essential input in the categorization of good acts, the other does not. Though both philosophical positions attempt to show how human beings ought to act in view of their nature, they do not seem to represent the most fundamental reason why we engage in actions. Doing one's duty dispassionately may be a good way to live - Advaita advocates this way of life - but there is a way that this can be done and the individual will still retain her sense of fulfillment.

Advaita attends to the question of how we ought to act in a manner that avoids the problems that are typical of non-consequentialism and consequentialism. These problems appear in two folds. The first, which is associated with non-consequentialism, depicts the background principle which motivates action as something that is entirely independent of the human worldly conditions. The second problem, notably associated with consequentialism, suggests that actions are motivated by ends which are largely quantifiable in terms of the happiness it brings to the community. The conclusions reached by the two positions are not surprising as they spring from their conceptions of the ultimate self. When a question as this is raised, one is tempted to answer that the differences stem from the duos' controversial conclusions derived from the binary representations of the individual as a personal self with ontologically prior marks of personhood and the culturally or collectivist construction of the individual. Advaita maintains a middle line approach to this issue. It begins by associating action with the

lower self. The main reason for action is for the lower self to discover its true reality. This means that the motivation for action comes from the person's longing to realize his ultimate identity. To put this in a characteristically Advaita way, it is to attain oneness with one's innermost nature. Shankara acknowledges that this nature underlies the deepest feeling of the individual, feeling that is purely described as not this not that. This is a feeling that transcends what experience or reason could exhaust. For Advaita, the person acts in order to realize her blissful nature. This is the fundamental purpose which stands as the background principle for action. However, we should be careful not to confuse the inmost feeling with natural feelings. I will return to this point shortly.

Granted that this feeling remains the background principle for action, Advaita philosophy suggests that the right act cannot be delineated in the distinguished senses that are highlighted previously. Firstly, Advaita maintains that individuals cannot be said to have the right knowledge of what motivates them to act if the background principle is entirely disconnected from experience. The inmost feeling which is represented by the individual as the good that is worth pursuing cannot be entirely cut off from the idea of the good which is prevalent in the world. However, this inmost feeling is deeper than any worldly good. The inmost feeling enables the individual to cherish her group but the transcendental nature of this feeling helps her to avoid the illusion which binds her to the good of the group. The prompt of the deepest feeling makes one respond positively to the good of all. This is the ultimate good and it is firstly experienced in one's community. The joy of service which one experiences by participating in the community is supposed to prompt us, channeling us to display our moral identity as revealed in our intuition that we all share the same humanity. Therefore, the individual ought to live in the community

as a moral participant and hopefully extend her moral identity beyond the frontier of her affiliated community. This point, as I have mentioned before, is crucial because it allows individuals to live as rational and moral choosers. But, in Shankara's view, the individual needs to be aware that while engaging in the service that benefits humanity at large, the good that she is actually seeking is not contained in anything external. She is working towards union with her own self. It is ignorance that makes individuals to attach their inmost beings to the form of the good represented in the world. This attachment makes people seek their identity not from within but in action. This is incorrect as shown in the following passage:

> In oneself should one see *Atman*, the inner *Atman* which is denoted [the word] "Thou". Thence one sees all to be *Atman*-that is, the One Apart which is meant by the sentence ["Thou art That"].[85]

The idea that Atman should be sought within oneself implies that one's genuine identity lies inside. Thus, one needs to act from the inside in order to be authentic.

The injunction to look inward in order to discover one's self implies that one should peep into the depth of the all permeating self and act from the standpoint of our ultimate oneness. Atman is the 'one apart', so it cannot be merged within the moral identity of any particular community. The question that may be asked is whether this will not put some heavy burden on the person. As it is apparent in Susan Wolf's discussion of Kantianism and Utilitarianism, these philosophies make a heavy demand on people, the kind that overshadows any concern to sustain good feelings. Can Advaita philosophy, especially the kind that Shankara advocates, be freed from this charge? Going by the main concern of Shankara which is the sustenance of the inmost feeling that motivates

---

[85] *A Thousand Teachings The Upadesahasri of Sankara*, p. 195. (1. 18. 220).

action, it could be correctly maintained that Shankara's philosophy is free from the above criticism. Shankara describes right actions as the ones that aim at the sustenance of the inmost feeling of the person. This feeling is the feeling to be in harmony with all. All actions stem from the motivation to remain in union with others. This motivation is also identical with the motivation to be in union with one's innermost being. The individual must never allow anything to hinder her from being true to this inner feeling. She must always bring himself to a position in which he could cause himself to act in order to bring about this end. What is deeply desired within the individual must also be expressed openly and truly. Thus, one ought to act in accordance with the sympathetic and compassionate responsiveness of the inmost self. This is the way to realize one's inmost identity. But Shankara warns that people should be carefully guided so that they will not think that the realization of the inner feeling comes by attaching oneself to action. Alternatively, the experience of self fulfillment comes as we detach ourselves from the life of action. Mahendranath Sicar's discussion of the place Shankara gives to action in self knowledge explains this point better.

> The performance of sacrifices, the observance of austerities, the regulated course of moral and spiritual life-all help us in dispensing with the materialistic cast of mind and in opening the door to knowledge by clearing and purifying the heart and removing obstacles from the way … Knowledge can remove ignorance, Karma is internally incapable of removing ignorance, for, that which is opposed to ignorance can destroy it. Moreover, it is pointed out in the Prameya Sangraha, if the life of action had been conducive to knowledge, one could not have been asked to renounce it.[86]

As it is apparent in the above passage, the materialistic mind is that which conceives the self as an agent of action. This mind deceives the person to believe that the core of

[86] Mahendranath Sicar, *The System of Vedantic Thought and Culture*, (Calcuta: University of Calcuta, 1925), p. 235.

identity is realizable through action. This materialistic mind must be dispensed with if the individual will ever come to terms with the roles of action in self knowledge. A strict attachment to action in self knowledge is demonstrated in Kantian deontological philosophy in which a strict reliance on the performance of duty regardless of its consequence is the sole criterion for authentic self expression. Here, the focus is on the performance of actions though Kant suggests that the outcome of action is not so important. But Shankara holds, in the first place, that the attainment of knowledge destroys the thinking about the self as an agent.

> Therefore, after the knowledge of the meaning of the sentence [has been realized], there cannot be any injunction to action, since two contradictory notions, "I am *Brahman*" and "I am an agent", do not [co-]exist.[87]

Firstly, the individual's nature is presented above as something that is free from worldly contingencies, not in the sense that Kant abstracts the authentic knowledge of the self entirely from the outcome of action but in the sense that actions actually confirm the fundamental reality of the self, a thing that is complete on its own which, nonetheless, is still presented as something that needs to be realized. To think of oneself as Brahman and at the same time as an agent do not co-exist because the latter necessitates that one depends on action to realize its real nature. What is entailed in the foregoing is that the identity that the person longs to realize cannot be attained by a dependence on the life of action. This position is further elaborated in the way Advaita discusses the scriptural idea of action in inaction. I will discuss this idea below. Of course, Shankara shares certain commonalities with Kant. Kant's view that the nature of the person is free from worldly contingencies is shared by Shankara. However, Shankara's person may not experience

---

[87] *A Thousand Teachings The Upadesahasri of Sankara*, p. 195. (1. 18. 22).

the struggle which, in Susan Wolf's view, is associated with the Kantian individual as she engages in her moral obligation. Wolf maintains that the action of the Kantian subject may be unhelpful not only to her acquaintances but, to her as a person. The problem stems from the level at which the real self is apprehended. One will not be mistaken to think that the Kantian person may not be informed properly about the nature of the deepest impulse which Shankara believes should pervade the physical expression of service. This impulse is supposed to give the performance of an act its real face, that is, the human touch. Then, it will matter if one's action does add to or subtract from the community's happiness. A careful consideration ought to be given to given to this end in order to take seriously the real motivation for action.[88] We are motivated to act because we want to achieve our innermost being which is in union with others. If we neglect this feeling in action, the end will certainly not be satisfactory. For this reason, it seems right to think that anyone who makes Kant's moral guiding principle its action guide will be under some moral dilemma. Actions can bring different consequences on people. Mohanty contends that actions "which when performed within the mundane structure, binds, may be a road to freedom if performed with 'non-attachment'".[89] Although, Kant emphasizes that actors should not consider their sentiments and the consequences of actions in the determinations of the worth of actions, this is not the same with Advaita's view of detached actions. An action that is performed without attachment proceeds from

---

[88] Let us imagine the kind of gesture which an individual who successfully performs her duty and stands to witness the end of her action needs to put forward. This is very important in consideration of our humanity. We expect certain gestures to transpire between the actor and the recipient and the absence of this is sufficient to make life dull and boring. A good way to understand this is to think of the difference between a service done by a cheerful and loyal person and the one done by a robot. That of the robot may be timely but, it surely will not be compared to the one performed by the individual because it lacks the human input. An action that is performed only from a strictly formal sense of duty will likely not be received with much enthusiasm especially when the individual will have to dissociate her feelings from it.

[89] J. N. Mohanty, *Essays on Indian Philosophy, Traditional and Modern*, p. 77.

the right knowledge of the self as non agent. This knowledge is different, in some respect, from the one possessed by the Kantian rational subject.

The concept of action in inaction will help us explain the Advaita reason for action further. Inaction itself is action as we should understand. The concept of inaction refers to action of the real self. Here, the self that is in action is the 'I' that transcends the empirical domain. This is the self that acts from the good will, dispensing goodness to all regardless of their differences. But this self manifests in such a pleasant manner, empathizing with the conditions of others, listening to them patiently and caring for them in the same way she will do to her own self, rejoicing or sorrowing with them in their different experiences of life. Certainly, this individual will be concerned with the consequences of actions. Action done from the standpoint of non-attachment is that which "rises above the results of pain and pleasure and enjoys bliss even in the midst of actions".[90] This does not eliminate the truest feeling of the individual, a thing that is necessary to demonstrate a worthwhile life in the community. The Kantian individual can act for duty's sake with a sense of attachment and this may come from her perspective of the moral law. What I intend to show here is that this individual is attached to the moral law. She understands the moral law as something that forcefully demands her necessary obedience. Painfully, she moves on to fulfill her moral obligation. This may make her promise to visit a friend unchangeable when the need to save a dying mother for instance comes up at the same time. But an action that is prompted from the depth of the person's inmost feeling differs because the individual actor maintains a state of equilibrium, giving careful consideration to the consequences of her actions on others. Since it is the real self that manifests its very nature in this kind of action, the person sees everyone as

---

[90] Cited in Michael Zammit, "Morals and Society in the Light of Advaita Vedānta, A Reflection", p. 111.

equally connected with his self. The difference between this individual and the Kantian individual is that the rational and emotional aspects of her being are in a calm and controlled condition. Unlike the Kantian individual, she understands that her action must project her inmost nature whose end is to achieve a true state of harmony.

Shankara's individual understands that action does not engender the realization of the self but rather aids it. Knowing this, she will act intelligently and lovingly when dealing with others in the community. The important thing is that she does not detach her deepest feeling when performing her duty. Shankara contends that the idea of the self as an agent is still very much established in the life that is attached to works. In other words, the individual is, at this stage, not free. For this reason, he says that the life of work will intensify the desire for knowledge as it can only open before us the highest course of life which is the good. The Sruti which says that "the Brahmin wills to know Him through sacrifices, penance, charity, austerities and fastings" is, according to Shankara, confirming that the life of work can only present the truth as something that is in view.[91] In the life of work, we understand our identity as the ultimate good, we apprehend it as something that is not within our reach, we pursue it with an awaken interest viewing it as something that is drawing us permanently to itself. But the life of work is distinct from the life of knowledge which knows the truth of our identity with the being of all. In the life of knowledge, we understand that the search for the good which characterizes the life of work is the search after our inmost being. The life of knowledge makes us act from inside out, living out our entire being which is the self.

The ideal of authenticity that is espoused here suggests that the individual decides to identify with something but what she is identified with is much more relevant to the

---

[91] Cited in Mahendranath Sicar, *The System of Vedantic Thought and Culture,* p. 234.

community as it aims at preserving the integral nature of the individual and the community. This ideal of authenticity seeks to promote the virtues of peace and social harmony. This is one of the merits of Advaita philosophy. The articulation of identity in this philosophy goes so deep that it frees the person from the uncontrollable commitment to act in view of one's conviction even if the heaven will fall. Following this way of thinking, one becomes committed to something whose object is less relevant, at least in relation to community, as long as one does it with intensity and passion. Reasoning from this perspective, it becomes evident that the ideal of authenticity which Advaita proposes does not approve that individuals should recoil from the society in order to gain the self. What it involves is the need to be a reflective individual who takes to that which is worthwhile within the social contexts of the community.

Thus, Shankara's philosophy makes it possible for anyone seeking her identity to do so in view of her specific status in the community. Finding one's identity in this wise helps the individual to appreciate what is worth doing. But Advaita takes the matter one step further by showing that the individual must never take the community context as the fixed path to knowing what is truly worthwhile. To be able to know the good that truly represents one's inmost nature, one's attention must be directed to Brahman. This is the only thing that can destroy ignorance which identifies the good of life with the particular good of one's community. Acting in accordance with one's communal beliefs will therefore mean that one has sufficient evidence or good reasons for doing so. The ultimate evidence is apprehended in one's moral identity as it is in union with others. When one gains true knowledge one sees all as atman. At this point, one comes to terms with the illegitimacy of the attachment which makes people feel good when they distance

themselves from other communities or when they consider it good to eradicate these others. Advaita stresses that none of the particular good of our communities exhaust our real identity. Those who hold to the contrary position misrepresent their ultimate identity with the particular meanings of their community. This is due to ignorance and ignorance can only be destroyed by knowledge. Shankara describes the kind of knowledge that can destroy ignorance as the one that makes the individual to realize first and foremost the limit of the good of her community and secondly, the good of the values held by other communities. The conceptions of the good may vary from one community to another. However, their underlying reality is Brahman. Since Brahman is the basis of all knowledge, it becomes evident that the many goods that are associated with different communities stem from the same source. Obviously, Shankara is not arguing that certain things which are denoted as good in some communities may hamper the cultivation of identity. His idea that the false conception of the self leads to bondage and suffering supports this claim. However, Shankara's rendition presupposes that the various goods in different communities do not perfectly exhaust our moral identity. As such, the divisive ways of classifying identity which is often found in some theories of the self is erroneous. The implication of this philosophy to our study is that self understanding is not only provoked by the structural meanings of one's community. The worldviews that prevail in other communities can stimulate a deep understanding of the self in us.

Shankara's position cautions anyone who holds that self understanding begins and ends with the community that one belongs to. Consequently, the idea that we cannot escape the constitutive consciousness from where our identity is discovered without loosing the sense of self that we have is unfounded going by Shankara's explanation. Our

attachment to the community we belong to may be crucial because the self is known through our experiences in this community. The memory of our participations, in whatever respect, in the community life enlivens the reality of our identity as deeply webbed with the community, but this attachment should not be taken to the extreme, thus making us forget that others are as much related to us.

> The renunciation of all actions becomes the means for discriminating the meaning of the word "Thou" since there is an [Upanisadic] teaching, "Having become calm, self-controlled, […, one sees *Atman* there in oneself]".[92]

Entailed in the above passage is the claim that though the self may be known from one's belongingness and participation in the community, its transcendence comes to the fore when one reaches the equilibrium state where its intimate connectedness with all is clearly revealed. Then, the basis of the good that affiliates us with our particular community becomes known as Brahman. Furthermore, the communal presuppositions which support the good also find its ultimate grounding on Brahman. Therefore, we note that this good is not altogether a bundle of nonsense and that for us to act in accordance with the good is right. As the guiding principle for communal identity, this good gains primacy but its status becomes secondary when it comes to living one's life as it is in reality. Succinctly put, Shankara believes that the individual's nature is more than what the community can exhaust. His words in the following passage shed light on this point.

> "When the self and the non-self are commonly unknown, why should effort be made only to know the self" … "Although, the non-self also is to be known, it does not require a separate knowledge other than that of the self, because it is by knowing this self alone that one knows all this non-self and others arising from it.[93]

---

[92] Ibid, 1. 18. 221.
[93] Sankara on *Brhada*, 1. 4. 7, as quoted in K. N. Upadhyaya, "Sankara on Reason, Scriptural Authority and Self-Knowledge", p. 122.

Here, Shankara holds that the knowledge that can give anyone a good grasp of the lower self (what he calls the non-self) is the knowledge of the self itself. What this entails is that the knowledge of the self as something that is different from what obtains in the world will better help the individual to apprehend her lower nature as that which is not identical with her higher nature. Much more, it will make her apprehend her nature as the extensive reality which permeates all. This is underscored in Shankara's claim that by knowing the self one knows all the non-self as arising from it. The benefit of the knowledge is that it tends to develop the sympathetic impulse of love for all in the individual. This is remarkably interesting as it reveals that the human nature longs toward the attainment of the good. The person is deeply motivated to do good to her own self and since this self is deeply connected with the self of others, she is to seek everyone's good.

The import of this philosophy on the community is very interesting. Firstly, it makes education an important aspect of conduct. The individual must first understand the nature of action. Rather than being a blind follower of some traditions, the person will be in control of the circumstances that surround her. And we should bear in mind that the individual is not seeking to control the circumstances for self interest. This cannot be so because she knows that the self is not realized through action. Her actions are based on the knowledge of her shared identity with others in the community. Hence, she will control her actions in the face of many challenging alternatives, always wanting to act in the best interest of all. Apart from the fact that the philosophy puts the individual on a better position to comprehend the significance of universal oneness, it encourages the

individual to cherish and cultivate her emotion knowing that these sentiments demonstrate the nature of the good which is contained in the one universal self.

Reading Shankara's moral philosophy, one becomes unsettled with the one sided expositions of moral concepts such as duty, obligation and right which dominate the mainstream ethical theories of modern time. These concepts are emphasized not as much as they are able to develop the wellness of the individual. What is accountable for this is the loss of insight into the deepest motivation which underlies human actions. Michael Stocker directs our attention to this problem when he says that modern ethical theories fail to "advance our understanding of the relations between reason and motive".[94] In Stocker's view, ethical theories ought to approach life not independently of the consideration of 'duty', 'obligation', 'rightness' etc. However, these should not be dwelt on as if that is all that needs to be known about human interactions. The motive of the actor is also important if we are going to strike a balance in our account of human conducts.[95] In the last section I will discuss Shankara's view of duality. Shankara's position tends to show that actions that are performed under the imposition of duality will fragment the community. This is because it operates in the realm where the ego is dominant. Reasoning alongside Shankara's thinking that human beings act for the ultimate purpose of attaining the good which is identical with the self, we understand that actions taken in accordance with the knowledge of identity is the only action that can hold the community together. Therefore, if the true identity of individuals is to be realized, the consciousness of the ungraspable and infinite source of life, the origin and dissolution of all things, must never be detached from their contemplation. This will

---

[94] Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories" in *Virtue Ethics*, (eds.) Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 66.
[95] See Ibid, p. 67.

make everyone live together in truth. Lack of mutual truthfulness in the way we live has, in Stocker's view, been the cause of the inability to achieve the integrated unity which we desire. Stocker remarks that the life that many live is "uncomfortable, difficult, or even untenable … making us and our lives essentially fragmented and incoherent".[96] Everyone is armed with the idea of right that appears more like a battle tool to engage the other. The emphasis of the right of self choice as a kind of empowerment and particularly a kind of thing that empowers individuals against themselves cannot bring about the bonding which the human soul is longing after. The most probable thing it may achieve is to engender distrust among individuals, groups, nations etc. What we need in this contemporary time is to be educated about how the pursuits of rights could procure our oneness. This is not to say that individuals should not pursue their rights, but this ought to be done in a way that befits our dignified nature, that is, in a way that will not hurt others. This will win their trust and the commitment to strengthen the bond of friendship will heighten.

Advaita enjoins us to pay attention to knowledge as we lead our lives. The wholeness of this thinking has been acknowledged with respect to the positive impacts it has on its adherents. Nancy Bauer remarks that Vedanta system is able to uphold the individual in different "conditions … without falling into despair".[97] This, undoubtedly, is one of the chief aims of normative ethics. That the individual is not existentially uncomfortable in following the Advaita Vedanta system is perhaps due to its focus on the pursuit of a well rounded life. This finds support from the manner in which the system of Vedanta focuses on individuals' physical, social and spiritual wellness, and therefore

---

[96] Ibid.

[97] Nancy F. Bauer, "Advaita Vedanta and Contemporary Western Ethics", *Philosophy East and West*, 37, no. 1 (1987): 45.

avoids the state of imbalance which characterizes the emphasis of one over the other. Prem Lata alludes to this merit saying that Shankara's philosophy does not separate good works and spiritualism, one being the starting point and the other, the end point.[98] Before we conclude this section, let us comment briefly on the Advaita notion of detachment and its moral implication on identity.

Detachment and self achievement

To lead the authentic life, it is essential that one live by those values which according to one's belief are good. But, the achievement of authenticity requires a great deal of critical reflection about the good that is held in the community. One should be able to identify the overarching principle which is able to give one the experience of self fulfillment. Essentially, one will need to know her true nature in other to lead the authentic life. Advaita ethics is believed to unfold in a systematic manner the sure paths that lead to the understanding of human nature. However, the question is whether this is a safe route to genuine satisfaction. Advocates of Advaita have no worry in answering this question positively. One easy answer may be that the Advaita system aims, chiefly at the deliverance of people from bondage to illusion. Ultimately, Advaita is seen as helping people to find true inner satisfaction. But not everyone thinks that the paths set by this philosophy are effective. Followers of Advaita philosophy may be understood as leading ascetic lives. This kind of life, it may be maintained, hinders the pursuit of some legitimate personal interests which are important in the development of a good life. This criticism may be supported by the Advaita position which suggests that everything in the world is false.

---

[98] Prem Lata, *Mystic Saints of India: Shankaracharya*, (Delhi: Sumit Publications, 1982), p. 127.

Let us start by saying that the above position merely suggests that the mundane is incapable of procuring the in-depth experience of bliss which is entailed in the knowledge of the ultimate self. But this would not imply that the mundane could not point to this inner bliss. As such, the mundane is not entirely unreal. It provokes us to reflect on the nature of our inner reality. This explanation may not suffice as critics may allude to the lifestyle of the *jivanmukta* or put differently, the knowledgeable individual, to support the fact that the life of the enlightened person is extremely difficult and undesirable. The way of life of the *jivanmukta* is supposed to be one in which the will has been eradicated. Due to limited space, I will not be able to attend to the Advaita conception of the world as false and the positive implication that this view has on self understanding. I shall concentrate on the latter objection by examining what the eradication of will implies in Advaita construction of identity. From all that we have mentioned earlier on, it is obvious that the eradication of the will would not mean that one abandons the determination to live in the light of her own self knowledge. One should be determined to live in such a way that the connection between one's inner and external states is maintained. This kind of life is driven by the sympathetic prompt of the inner nature, making us pay important attention to our basic moral impulse.

The will to abide with the inner voice which calls us to participate actively in the world, investing into the life of others and the entire community, cannot be what Shankara wants us to eradicate. However, there is a kind of will that is motivated by a false idea of the self. The knowledge of this self may be derived from memories of one's past involvements or the calculative image which one has about oneself in the future. Both of these images are presented in the mind. In both instances, the real self is falsely

taken to be identical with what may be called symbols. This false idea of the self and the will to be attached to its images is what Shankara wants us to eradicate. This point is illustrated in the passage below.

> The knowledge "I am *Brahman*" is not sublated by [the knowledge] "[I am] an agent" [and] "[I] have desire and am bound" which is derived from the fallacious means of knowledge.[99]

The above passage indicates that the individual's reality cannot be substituted by the consideration of the self as an agent. The idea that one is an agent is derived from a 'fallacious means of knowledge', Shankara argues. This entails, among others, the need to willfully detach our real self from anything that can limit its highest expression. When we think of our self as the agent of love, we tend to be attached to the actions of love that we demonstrate. When this happens, we become susceptible to seeing the false self as the real thing. For this not to happen, we ought to develop our mind to cognize the self in its pure state. The impact of this knowledge on us is tremendous. It purifies us to such extent where we are able to demonstrate the true sentiments of love, joy and service to everyone. This pure nature characterizes our inmost self. Shankara does not argue for a willful eradication of this nature. And this is the kind of life that can bring about the experience of true bonding in the community. When summed up, Shankara's position shows that this way of life engenders, in a comprehensive sense, self understanding.

Of course, no one will deny that we can understand ourselves from memories of the good experiences which we, at any particular time, had shared with our neighbors and the linkage we hold with our ancestors among others, but we will be lacking the fullest

---

[99] *A Thousand Teachings The Upadesahasri of Sankara*, p. 195. (1. 18. 223).

understanding of our being if we define our moral nature only in terms of these experiences. Let me refer to what Mahendranath Sicar says on this point,

> Vedantism does not shrink from giving a value to the empirical order and interprets it as the Lila of Brahman. In fact, the joys of love, the purifying influence of grief and the inspiration of service are all accepted as higher forms of sentiments but Vedantist take care to add that they do not represent the deepest feelings. The blessedness it affirms which results from the perception of identity can have no comparison with anything of the empirical order.[100]

It is certain that Advaita Vedanta does not deny the fact that the good memories of service are noble expressions of the self but it shows why we do not need to be attached to those particularities which produce the sentiments in us. Instead, Vedantism suggests that we should always look forward to the real thing which the particular events of our lives intend to show us. This real thing is nothing more than Brahman, the essence of the self. Hence, we should see these particular features of our lives as leading us to the peak of ultimate knowledge. And what this implies is that we represent any experiences as possible means of reflecting on the atman that we are. This will make us cherish the values and the sentiments of the society, engage them in critical dialogue in order to find a higher and consistent pattern in which the ideal of the community can rest. Not only this, our wellness will be guaranteed because we know how to be associated with the community life without being enslaved.

It is on this basis that the Advaita person will treasure the multiple identities within and beyond her community. She will relate with them from the perspective of their essence. Her knowledge makes it possible for her to live a difference-less attitude in the society. On how she will react to the institutions in the community, she will relate with

---

[100] Mahendranath Sicar, *The System of Vedantic Thought and Culture*, p. 315

them with the understanding that they are intended to develop an atmosphere that encourages self reflection and freedom of self expression. On the legitimacy of the central authority in the community, Shankara's individual will agree that central authorities are necessary to develop an environment where individuals can develop their free nature. This will also mean that individuals will have equal access to the resources in the community. What is evident is that the philosophy of Advaita supports the individual's involvement in the community. However, the individual participates to seek the best good for all. So, the notion of detachment from the world that seems initially negative is not so. *The Bhagavadgita* says that detached actions are "performed not out of selfish interests but out of altruistic motives of '*loka samgraha*'".[101] A detached action is one that is not motivated by the ego. Memories of such actions are hard to erase. A willed decision to turn against a loving and ego-less mother, or teacher, or lover will most probably engender a damaged personality. What brings about the damage is the inability to eradicate the force that motivates the action. In precise terms, this force is the real self. Its disposition of love, that is, the release of its real character in action is impossible of being willed off. Interestingly, the manifestation of this character permeates the whole of creation. Advaita philosophy aims to unleash the depth of compassion which dwells in the individual's heart. What appears before, like self consummation, can now be seen differently. The ideal life is no longer to be lived in selfish tendencies, rather, it should be lived for the prosperity of all. Jesus Christ refers to this as the fullness of life. He says that the fullness of life is actually derived from sacrificial life. This is the idea behind the saying "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die,

---

[101] Ibid.

it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit".[102] The individual is fulfilled as she sees others' progresses. She operates on the maxim "I apprehend the fact that I am in all, I am true if I live my life according to that apprehension". It becomes evident that the pursuit of Advaita person is not predominantly private.

Advaita philosophy describes the worth of life in terms of giving. In *The Gita*, it is said that the one whose mind is affected by desire and aversion cannot reach to the level of things as they are. He misses the knowledge of the external world as underscored by the prime reality.[103] The individual cannot discover the worth of life until she has overcome selfishness. When selfishness is eradicated, the individual discovers the bliss in her utmost being, the "all pervasive … indwelling Self of all".[104] The dharmic injunction says "Do your duty, always; but without attachment. That is how a man reaches the ultimate Truth".[105] Plato mentions something similar but related to the inmost concerns of the individual. He says, "in reality morality … is not a matter of external behavior, but of the inward self and of attending to all that is, in the fullest sense, a person's concern".[106] The two passages do not discriminate against seeking personal goals but that all actions should be motivated from the presupposition of the truest concern of the person. This point displays the transformation that the individual needs to undergo. It involves "a letting-go of the individual ego and a (re-) unification of "action," in the most metaphysical sense, with its purpose".[107] This 'letting go' of the ego is according to Bhattacharya a loss of 'finitude to find infinitude'. It does not imply the letting-go of life.

---

[102] *The Holy Bible*, John 12: 24.
[103] See *Gita Bhashya*, 7 : 27.
[104] See *Katha Upanishad* 1. iii. 4, see also BSB 1. i. 4
[105] Cited in Bart Gruzalski, "Modern Philosophical Fragmentation versus Vedānta and Plato" in (ed.) Ashok Vohra, Arvind Sharma, Mrinal Miri*, Dharma, The Categorial Imperative,* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd. 2005), p. 351.
[106] Cited in Ibid, p. 353.
[107] Nancy F. Bauer, "Advaita Vedanta and Contemporary Western Ethics", p. 45.

What happens is that "the finite self dies to live as the universal self".[108] As we journey to the last section of this chapter, we will see the interesting way that the death of the lower self leads the individual to partake in the being of the universal self. When finitude is eradicated, the infinite takes control, then duality is no longer seen in its superficiality and the non-dual Brahman glows as the ultimate self. Knowing this as the self, as we shall see, makes one partake in what Huxley calls the mind of the universe which, among other things, is the peace that passes understanding.

---

[108] A. N. Bhattacharya, *One Hundred and Twelve Upanisads and their Philosophy*, (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1987) p. 59.

III

DUALITY AND IGNORANCE

> The realization of one's true nature has a lot to do with the eradication of duality as it is involved in our day to day experience. Duality arises out of ignorance and because of its illusory nature it prevents the seeker from knowing her true nature. Removal of ignorance is the first condition for the actualization of *Brahmanubhava*.[109]

> Moreover, the mind of the universe is, among other things, the peace that passes understanding. Man's final end is the realization that, in his essence, he is one with the universal mind. But, if he would realize his identity with the peace that passes understanding, he must begin by living in the peace that does not pass understanding-peace between nations and groups, peace in personal relationships, peace within the divided and multiple personality.[110]

This last section will examine Advaita's contributions to the philosophical discussions of alterity. In our discussion of alterity, we shall see how Advaita philosophy attends to how the question of difference and otherness ought to be entertained. Advaita philosophy reflects extensively on how difference itself is constituted and how this ought to guide our understanding of what it means to be different. Shankara's conceptions of duality and *avidya* highlight the practical problems inherent in certain conceptions of identity and otherness, in particular, the violence these views encourage. Our focus will not be on the ontological dimension of alterity; we are concerned with its epistemological and social dimensions. Thus, we shall examine the concept of *avidya* alongside its social implications in Advaita philosophy. In the Advaita worldview, living the authentic life is

---

[109] Vensus A. George, *Self-realization* [*Brahmaanubhava*] *: The Advaitic Perspective of Shankara*, p. 75.
[110] Aldous Huxley, "Indian Philosophy of Peace" in Christopher Isherwood, (ed.) *Vedanta for Modern Man*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1952), p. 296.

characterized by an attitude of acceptance and toleration of diversity. This way of life comes easily for those who have been able to eradicate *avidya* which is the root cause of duality. The idea of duality is used synonymously with difference. By nature, duality is illusory.

Avidya is a Sanskrit term for ignorance. Metaphysically, *avidya* depicts the finite mind as lacking the capacity of penetrating into the core of reality. Consequently, *avidya* hinders the individual from perceiving her true nature. The mind that is affected by *avidya* is veiled from apprehending the true nature of reality, instead of seeing the ultimate essence of all things as the highest reality. It erroneously limits the ultimate reality to the dual forms which appear to the senses. Metaphysically speaking, the eradication of *avidya* leads the individual to reality. Reality is accessible only to those who have been able to eradicate *avidya*. To these sets of people, appearance is illusory. The effect of this knowledge on human relationships is tremendous. Aldous Huxley highlights this point in the paper "Indian Philosophy of Peace". He submits, contrary to casual understanding, that the end of duality is unity. The way to get to this end, Huxley suggests, is by participating in the 'mind of the universe' which, among other things, is revealed in the 'peace that passes understanding'. Huxley echoes one of the fundamental propositions of Advaita philosophy, namely, the assumption that the mind that contains the differences in the world is the blissful and impenetrable Brahman. The process of realizing the true bliss of Brahman transcends what the finite mind can articulate and this is probably why Huxley claims that the way to participate in the unity that underlies duality is to engage in the mind that passes understanding. This mind is the universal mind. Huxley's statement reminds us of the classical Indian conception of difference.

Generally, the Indian philosophical traditions largely agree that a dignified life is such a one that accommodates and show respect to others regardless of their varied identities and experiences. This attitude springs from the understanding that all people regardless of culture, race, religion etc. owe their existence to Brahman. The different ways that people identify themselves are to be respected. Thus, self worth is partly demonstrated in the way that individuals relate with difference. The conception of duality as illusory typifies the fact that the person has the inner capacity to apprehend the true nature of appearance. Consequently, the individual who has truly gained this insight is believed to be capable of leading the tolerant life in the community. Though it is stated that the only way to attain one's truest identity is by eradicating duality, this does not denote practical extermination of differences. The acceptance and toleration of different identities is not problematic in this philosophy because it does not agree that we must first of all be formally alike before we can be different. This means that we need not accept a similar logic about reality before we can live together in harmony. Incidentally, it turns out to mean that our logical standard can be many instead of one. If the view that argues for only one way of apprehending reality will aid the life of tolerance at all, it will be the imperfect type. Certainly any deviation from the logically structured ways of living the real life will be tolerated with dissent. The reason is that a universal system which indisputably exhausts the ultimately real is believed to have been exhausted. The achievement of a harmonious and peaceful social context where individuals can develop their potentials genuinely requires a basis where differences can flourish. Differences will flourish without any threat to the society if individuals are acquainted with the nature of duality. Not until people possess this knowledge will they be able to relate truly with

others. This last section will discuss Shankara's theory of duality and ignorance in relation to this end. I will examine how Shankara's individual views difference and the implication of her knowledge on the community.

Advaita Conception of Avidya (Ignorance)

As shown in the previous section, Vedanta philosophy begins by acknowledging the fact that the community contains a number of values or norms which could influence, positively or otherwise, the thinking of the individual about the ultimate good. This is the good that enables the individual to live in an atmosphere of peace. Hence, she is able to create a suitable identity for herself from her personal conception of the good. At the same time she concedes the good life as the way of life that allows others to create their own self identity. In this philosophy, there is no need to separate individuals from their communal particularities in order to come to terms with the basic universal principle that could aid individuals to co-exist in peace. The important thing that individuals must do is to eradicate *avidya*.[111]

Avidya, properly speaking, does not refer to individuals' ignorance. Rather, it refers to the ignorance that is inherent in human mind. The real meaning of *avidya* has been hotly debated among classical Indian schools of thought. The Nyaya takes the prefix '*a*' as a negation. Thus, the prefix '*a*' negates '*vidya*' which is knowledge. For the Nyaya

---

[111] *Avidya* is synonymously used for *maya*. Shankara holds that *maya* is part and parcel of Brahman. For Shankara, it is impossible to create a thing out of a no thing, because Brahman is the only eternal reality, it is reasonable to infer that *maya* emerges out of it. On the nature of *maya*, Shankara says it is indeterminate. The form of *maya* cannot be predicated as real or unreal. On the question of why *maya* assumes a form that is different from Brahman, Shankara says it is a mystery that nobody can unravel. In the Advaita philosophy, *maya* is explained from six facets; it is *anādi* i.e. it is beginningless thus having the same status with Brahman but not identical with Brahman only in its form. A conception of Brahman from the standpoint of *Saguna* (qualities) may render this position thus, *maya* is the creative power of Brahman. *Maya* is also explained as that which terminates after the right knowledge (*jnāna-nivartya*) has been achieved. It veils (*āvarana*) and projects (*viksepa*), indefinable, having the nature of a positive existence (*bhāvarūpa*), and located in Brahman or *jiva*. For further detail, see John Grimes, *A Conscise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy*, p. 203.

school of thought, ignorance is a negation of knowledge. Where ignorance is operating, knowledge is lacking. One will have to take its turn and let go for the other to occur. The analogy of the snake rope experience illustrates this point better. The rope that appears like a snake is for the Nyaya an example of how ignorance can negate knowledge. When the snake appears to the cognizer, the knowledge of reality i.e. the rope, is negated. When reality is unfolded and it is discovered to be a rope, the false awareness of the snake is negated. Thus, for the Nyaya, there is no compatible ground between a claim that is false and the one that is true. The Nyaya argument is contained in the following,

> We, thus, feel justified in holding that the defective reasons do not represent logical fallacies but imply the existence of wrong ideas and hence deviations from rules and norms that ought to be followed if we are to have knowledge of things on the basis of arguments about the premises of which there should be definite *knowledge*.[112]

The above passage explains the Nyaya view that it is possible to exhaust the nature of reality simply by following certain rules of logic. The position which argues that reality cannot be thus known arrives at such a conclusion because it does not follow the rules of judgment properly. The Nyaya School believes that when a defective reasoning is held unto, false claims are regarded as knowledge claims. Certain ways of reasoning will be deemed to be defective if they do not fall within the Nyaya categorization of good logic. This conception of knowledge presupposes that all persons must acknowledge certain logic as the universal logic. Although this claim will not imply that when people accept this formal way of reasoning, they cannot adopt different values in their choices. The application of the formal standard of reasoning or what is otherwise called the categories of universal thought to one's experience is not considered

---

[112] Sukharanjan Saha, *Perspectives on Nyaya Logic and Epistemology*, p. 223. Author's emphasis.

illegitimate. The essential thing is that all people must first adopt this universal way of thinking. This becomes the license to knowing how to lead the authentic life. In fact, the application of the Nyaya position presupposes that individuals will be able to reflect adequately on their true identities only when they are capable of evaluating their chosen values on the platform of their universal applicability. This position may seem to privilege an individual's choice in self determination. Furthermore, it may be said that its emphasis on individuals' sensitiveness to universal rules encourages toleration. However, as one reflects on the criterion set by this philosophy, one begins to wonder whether it lays a sufficient ground for effective toleration. On the one hand, the position necessitates our sameness in logic before we can be different. This necessitation highlights a paradox in the practice of toleration. It seems that it will surely be difficult if not impossible for any individual to willingly accept the values of others especially when such do not fall into the stipulated universal formal paradigm of thought.

The difficulty is much more pronounced when this universal logic is claimed to be able to disclose with absolute certainty what is civilized, that is, the way of life that ought to characterize us as human beings. The willingness to admit the possible validity of alternative values or beliefs of seemingly contradictory viewpoints is doubtful in this scenario. Real toleration is manifested when an individual willingly admit the possible validity of others' values even when they seem to be contradictory to the one she holds. It remains unclear how the delineated guideline of the Nyaya can produce this effect. This philosophy, at best, allows a variety of forms of practicing dissent as against the approval of diversity or moral pluralism.

The classification of knowledge that is typical of Nyaya is rejected by Shankara because it does not respect the real experience of the individual who is aware of the snake. According to Shankara, we cannot deny the fact that the individual who perceives the rope as a snake has a definite knowledge which is true. What Shankara points out is that the operation of *avidya* does not eradicate knowledge. To Shankara, both the individual who claims that she perceives a snake and the one who says she sees a rope are making claims of knowledge. Shankara maintains this view because "it is preposterous to affirm the existence of a thing without presupposing the revelatory knowledge. The knowable can never exist without knowledge i.e. without being known".[113] Shankara's claim seems to show that if we are patient enough, we will realize that the individual's experience is true though there may be another experience which is truer. In order for us to arrive at a truer explication of reality, we need to acknowledge first and foremost that differences in our belief systems do not necessarily depict any lack of knowledge on the part of those who hold the beliefs. If this is granted, it will be consistent to concede that any belief system that is upheld in any particular community is based on certain revelatory knowledge. This belief will be meaningfully decoded if analyzed from the viewpoint of its internal logic. The rationale for holding the belief cannot be decoded by any hypothetical rules whose basis is foreign to the culture in context. On this ground, Shankara applauds the community vision. However, as noted previously, Shankara's philosophy does not support the strict communitarian stance which advocates that the meaning of life can only be realized within the domain of the beliefs and values held in one's community.

---

[113] BBS. I. i. 1, as quoted in K. N. Upadhyaya, "Sankara on Reason, Scriptural Authority and Self-Knowledge", *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 19, no. 2 (1991): 126.

The foregoing implies that the representations of individuals in their social, cultural and religious experiences ought not to hinder them from cognizing the true platform upon which the basis of universal relation ought to lie. We do not need to adopt identical ways of life and a standard way of thinking before we can truly live in social harmony. The idea of the universal community in Shankara's philosophy is largely interesting because it anticipates the differences of others and expresses that each of these others ought to flourish in their distinctiveness. However, the interactions between the others should be predicated on the ultimate background knowledge of Brahman as the inexhaustible but the supreme reality that harmonizes differences. Thus, cultural traditions should be construed as means of understanding the different faces of the universal self. In essence, it should allow for harmonious living. Shankara's philosophy suggests that in order to get to the peak of the universal knowledge, we should follow the dialectics of thought which progresses from the level of the particular to the universal and from the universal to the ultimate unity. Each of these stages is notably true but they are to be negated until the highest level of ultimate unity is realized. The philosophy opposes the point that holds that a single ideal captures the essence of the universal self and as such gains preeminence over other varied ideals. For Shankara, the ultimate universal (Brahman) is impossible of being entirely conceptualized. When *avidya* is at work, knowledge is very much present acting underneath. *Avidya*, Shankara claims, is not antithetical to knowledge as the Nyaya would like us to think. Shankara explains the prefix '*a*' as false. Thus, *avidya* refers to a kind of knowledge that is false.[114]

---

[114] See A. Parthasarathy, *Vedanta Treatise*, third edition, (Bombay: Vedaanta Life Institute, 1989), pp. 322-323.

Borrowing from what we said in the first section of this chapter, the kind of knowledge that is obtainable in the world can only be categorized as *mithya* (falsity). Worldly knowledge is false not because they are untrue but because they are intermittently corroborated in the light of new evidences. On this ground, they do not meet the standard of ultimate knowledge. From Shankara's position, we understand that it is incorrect to condemn any cultural experiences as nonsensical. If a higher experience has not shown its belief systems to be misdirected, it remains valid. However, it should be mentioned that the higher experience that can possibly rectify certain assumptions which are held in any cultural tradition needs not spring from within the tradition itself. Other practices in a different culture may throw light on why certain practices are wrong. This point is not contradicting what we have said earlier in the sense that both of these cultural principles stem out of lived experience. Hence, the impetus for change ought not to be sought or limited to one culture as if it is a closed entity. If any aspect of a culture's belief diminishes individuals' capacity of choice, such aspect should be corrected. Shankara accounts that,

> Human behavior, conforming as it does to all right means of valid knowledge, cannot be denied so long as a different order of reality is not realized; for unless there be an exception, the general rule prevails.[115]

Any community paradigm which makes it difficult for any individuals within the community to develop their free and equal nature needs further adjustment in the light of the essential principle upon which the idea of Brahman is based. It is in light of this understanding that Shankara critiques the practice of the caste system in his time.[116]

---

[115] BBS. II. ii. 31.

[116] Shankara composes the Manisha Panchaka in five slokas each ending with the identity thesis (*tat tvam asi*). The identity thesis refutes the inequalities and unfair treatments that are associated with caste practices.

Shankara discourages repression and dogmatism. A close mindedness that refuses to admit the possible validity of the viewpoints of others is rejected by Shankara. Apart from the fact that this consideration promotes tolerance in a crucial sense, its implication on the exercise of self determination is quite interesting and it attests to the point that individuals' personal knowledge ought to stand as the essential criterion for the choice of identity.

Furthermore, Shankara's consideration for the different layers of human experiences presupposes that the sense of personal identity or the definition of the 'we' is much more complex than what the community can exhaust. Individuals' loyalties are conceived to be varied and profound that they can transcend any identity described in any particular community. Undoubtedly, this point approves the rights of the individual above the community but it poses no threat to the continuity of the community. This is because it does not erode the sense of the community which makes possible a politic from where the individual develops the social nature. The philosophy emphasizes why the idea of personal identity must be construed from a broad perspective. Shankara's ideal focuses on the important standard which every individual must learn to meet, this is the fact that as human beings our moral identity transcends our local community. Therefore, Shankara challenges us to develop our moral capacity until it begins to radiate its unattached nature. He calls on us to understand that the difference which is projected in duality does not need to engender separation. But individuals should appreciate their distinctive experiences and tolerate each other in a sincere manner. Though Shankara confines worldly knowledge within the realm of falsehood, he is very much willing to grant every experience some degree of reality as long as it has certain impact on the individual.

Against the Nyaya view which holds that 'definite knowledge' about the world can only be validly obtained by following certain ways of reasoning or some legitimate rules of thought, Shankara argues that reason can only be useful in the validation of truth if it is grounded on experience. In Shankara's opinion, reason will function arbitrarily once it goes beyond the boundary of experience.

> It is seen that an argument discovered by adepts with great effort is falsified by other adepts; and an argument hit upon by the latter is proved to be hollow by still others. So nobody can rely upon any argument as conclusive, for human intellect differs. If, however, the reasoning of somebody having wide fame, say for instance, Kapila or someone else, be relied on under the belief that this must be conclusive, even so it surely remains inconclusive, inasmuch as people, whose greatness is well recognized and who are the initiators of scriptures (or schools of thought)- for instance, Kapila, Kanada, and others-are seen to hold divergent views.[117]

This position is better in that it recognizes the fact that human intellects differ and that different people have certain ways of perceiving the world, the effect of which shows in the way they are in the world. However, Shankara does not encourage a relapse into moral relativism when it comes to the validation of the good life. He makes a crucial distinction between reason that is used in relation to experience and reason that is used in pure speculation. Shankara recognizes the former as a form of inference. Consequently, he grants it as a valid means of knowledge. But, he undermines the latter sense on the ground that it is mere speculative. His distinction between speculative reason and inferential reason appears below,

> This being the case, people should have no divergence when they have true knowledge, whereas the difference among people whose knowledge is based on reasoning is well known from their mutual opposition. For it is a patent fact of experience, that when a logician asserts, "This is indeed the true knowledge", it is upset by somebody else. And what is established by

---

[117] BBS. II. i. 11.

the latter is disproved by still another. How can any knowledge, arising from reasoning, be correct, when its content has no fixity of form?[118]

True knowledge for Shankara results from common experience. Different people have different perspectives on how life ought to be lived even though they may be operating on similar basic assumptions about reality. However, for the success of the community, each perspective about reality ought to be deliberated upon carefully such that it abides by the public standard of the good life. By this, I mean that it does not threaten community life. Therefore, the true measurement of authentic living is that one's life must lead people to the true reality on which the basis of the community lies. This conclusion denounces the utmost individualism that sprouts from an atomic conception of the person. Shankara applauds the fact that any good identified as the community good must be subjected to interpersonal scrutiny. This is because no single individual regardless of the level of her intelligence is capable of exhausting the consciousness of all people. In consideration of the constitution of the human body and the continual mutation of human desire, Shankara's position shows in greater depth why tolerance is essential to cooperative associations. It is evident that the same thing will not always cause the same appetite in all people and people may not consent in their desires but when human beings understand the relation of the self that is based on physical or emotional needs and the ultimate self that transcends these needs, they will be more willing to tolerate themselves. This philosophy escapes the charge of individualism which breeds excessive conflict and war. This encourages the dominance of some image that appeals to one as the self. This is dangerous to communal existence. For Shankara, the association of any image with the real self is false. This stems from illusion. To posit a false self as the ultimate self has

---

[118] Ibid.

some negative implications on the individual. We shall examine these implications in what follows.

Advaita on the Illusory Self

Reading Advaita philosophy, it becomes obvious that what many commentators present to us as the real self is nothing other than a superimposed self. The superimposed self is false not in the sense that it does not depict in any sense the individual's mode of being in the world but because the kind of image it projects in the world does not capture the true identity of the person. We need to go beyond this image, detaching its forms and names, to capture its reality. In Shankara's words,

> … even when the idea of Brahman is superimposed on a name (e.g. 'om'), the idea of the name persists and it is not negated by the idea of Brahman.[119]

Brahman, as the purest being of the individual, may truly be perceived in certain forms, but the perception of Brahman as the pure being is prior to the forms. This is the first knowledge that confirms the fact that 'I am'. The 'I' that is in the 'I am' is the ultimate self, or the pure formless being. But forms are ever present with it. This explains Shankara's argument that when the idea of Brahman (pure being) is superimposed on a name (its form), the idea of the name persists. But the persistence of the name does not mean that it is identical with Brahman. Going by this position, we see certain confusion in the works of some commentators between the self with names and the name-less or ultimate self. The latter is superimposed on the former. This superimposition brings about the conclusion that identity construction is independent of the community. This claim is untrue. But the image of the self that is associated with forms could be pursued and such

---

[119] Ibid.

pursuit will be legitimate. However, it must be understood that the image is contained in Brahman, the highest self. Thus, this image ought to be taken as object of meditation. The individual must not count herself to have attained ultimate identity until the image of the self that rests on her mind coalesces into the absolute. This point is illustrated in the passage below.

> One should not fix the idea of the self on symbols, because an aspirant cannot think of the separate symbols as himself. The reasoning is hollow that the symbols being forms of Brahman are Brahman Itself, and hence are the same self as the Self; for that would lead to the brushing away of all symbols. For it is only when the names etc. are deprived of their transformed states (as names etc.), that one arrives at Brahman which is their essence.[120]

The superficiality of identifying the self with any particular form is noted in the above passage. We may ask why Shankara takes to this position. His reason is that the consciousness of this image is presented by a higher consciousness. The existence of this higher consciousness can only be posited as it is not cognized with any specific forms. This is the ground of all consciousness and it is indisputably the highest self of the individual. This self is known without forms. The confirmation that it is the reality in all is grounded on its indisputability. In order to arrive at this self, all symbols are to be 'brushed away'. By implication, we should steer clear of depicting any worldly images as having identical nature with our inmost self. This has the negative influence of hurting our true nature from blossoming. In particular, it has the tendency of curtailing our moral identity within the social meaning of our community. Ultimately, this may hold us back from co-existing with others. We ought to live in peace with all people, accepting their differences as other ways of knowing the self. We are morally responsible to treat these differences respectfully. But this would not imply that we can't engage them.

---

[120] Ibid. IV. i. 4.

Interestingly, we are back to Huxley's assertion that the mind of the self is the universal mind. In this universal mind, we are told, is the peace that passes understanding. The idea of the universal mind presupposes that our reality is inextricably webbed with those of others. Thus, our life should be guided by loving union, friendship with all people irrespective of their local contexts. The ignorance of the fact that the real self differs from the image on the mind makes one lose focus on the fountain of being. Then, one will concentrate singly on the ideas of the mind in order to find the self. These ideas dwindle over time. Patter comments that these ideas cannot be the real self because they are "limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is".[121] Reliance on this false self produces in one the kind of identity that constantly fades away. Consequently, the life one leads will be artificial and fragmented**.** The violence that has accrued from clinging to this false self is several, the countless marriages that had hit the rock because the self could not be disconnected from some images of the ego, the mistrust and awful treatments of friends because of some past mistakes which could not be overlooked, the crisis that results from religious intolerance because the self is fixed on some past experiences etc. All these result from attachment to the false self. Yet, the real self remains persistent, stable and unmoved. This is the reason for the saying, "Brahman is known to him to whom It is unknown, while It is Unknown to him to whom It is known. It is unknown to those who know and known to those who do not know".[122] This Brahman, it is said, is different from the ego which reflects "the consciousness of

---

[121] Cited in Carol T. Christ, *The Finer Optic*, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 107.

[122] BBS. I. i. 4.

the Atman, glows through the activities of eyes and so on, manifesting itself through egoism and pride of the 'me' and 'mine'. It is the ego, not the eternally blissful Atman that takes pride in being an agent and enjoys or suffers with pains or losses".[123] In sum, we are introduced to the essentiality of considering others as we lead our lives in the community.

Advaita philosophy will agree to a large extent with what certain communitarian calls community of memory. Community of memory stands as a prominent constituent of our identity. Community of memory is characterized as one of the essential sources of identity which cannot be exterminated. The idea here is that our natural integration and participation in the community create the sense of the community in us and our peculiar relation to it. The cheerful and painful memories of the different activities of the members of the community, the peculiar and permanent impressions that the various narratives that are attached to the community life are, among others, the kind of things that this theory believes will develop some legitimate bonding in the members of the same community. This bonding is deeply ingrained into the very life of the individual that it cannot be consciously willed off without the actor having the experience of damaged personhood. The feeling of bonding by all the individual members of the community is not only described as legitimate, it is given the status of sacredness because of the intimate fellowship which members share and values which are well accepted to play some crucial role in the understanding of life's meaning. Community of memory is important because of the intimacy that members of the community enjoy. Members are open to themselves, individuals' rights are not construed on individualistic basis. This

---

[123] Cited in *Vivekacūdāmani*, verses 102-5, as translated by S. Madhavananda, (Calcuta : Advaita Ashrama, 1921).

crucial role that community of memory plays in self understanding will not be disputed by Advaita philosophy, but Advaita will reject the idea which seems to imply that it is legitimate for individuals to be tied to their constitutive memory as if it exhausts their ultimate nature. How Shankara will react to the above can be deduced from his understanding of superimposition as "an awareness similar in nature to memory that arises on a different (foreign) basis as a result of some past experience".[124]

Shankara reasons that the superimposed self and the self that is recalled in memory arose from similar sources. Both of them occur as a result of some past experiences. However, Shankara says that the superimposed self results from a different basis. What he means is rendered explicit by Eliot Deutsch. Deutsch describes Shankara's notion of superimposition as the apparent presentation to consciousness, by way of remembrance, of something previously observed in some other thing. In other words, superimposition takes place when the qualities of something recalled in memory are given to or projected upon another thing that is presented to consciousness and identified with it.[125] Essentially, the imposition of certain qualities on another which is different from it occurs in superimposition. That which is not part of the nature of the self is falsely imposed on it as it is being remembered. In Shankara's view, this idea of the self arises on a 'foreign' basis. What is conveyed in this position is that, under superimposition, the real self would be falsely taken to have arisen only from within the community. This self is predicated on certain sentiments. The recollection of the sentiments is also believed not to be different from the recollection of the real self. Following this belief, it becomes legitimate for the individual to cherish these sentiments. In a very crucial respect, the

---

[124] Cited in Vensus A. George, (ed.) *Self- Realization [Brahmaanubhava] : The Advaitic Perspective of Shankara*, p. 77.
[125] Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*,(Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1969), p. 33.

identical relation that this reading gives the sentiments and the ultimate self makes it legitimate for the sentiments to be given some eternal identity and subsequently defended fanatically. The legitimacy of this defense is questioned in Advaita philosophy. Shankara insists that it is erroneous to superimpose the sentiments of the lower self on the real self. Of course, the experience of superimposition is necessary if the real self is to be known. Superimposition is not antithetical to the real self and the real self will surely not negate it when it happens. The real self persists under every instance of superimposition. It remains underneath, ascertaining itself as the reality which contains it and yet different from it.

> Where the idea of one of the two things is superimposed on the idea of the other even while the individual idea of the latter is not substantiated; the idea of the thing on which the idea of another thing is superimposed persists even when the superimposed idea of the latter is in evidence.[126]

The superimposed self does not gain the status of the ultimate self even though the ultimate self is presumed to be underneath. Just like a mirage on the highway will usually disappear and give way to the real thing, that is, the road, under careful scrutiny, the superimposed self will give way to the ultimate self to unveil itself during self introspection. Characteristically, the superimposed self attracts attention to itself by posing some false qualities as its ultimate identity. The mirage on the high road often distinguishes itself at any particular location where it falsely occupies, but when its false nature is apprehended and reality gains supremacy, its false character coalesces into that which is real. Then, the highway is realized to be one undivided piece of land. When we dig deeper into the source of the so called community of memory, we will realize its main source and thus be free from the passion which wants to attach us to the community and

---

[126] Ibid.

where possible, turns us against members of other communities. The respect that Advaita philosophy accords to our communal experiences is very interesting, knowing that the identity which I pick from my community defines my self is a right thing but to think that this identity exhausts my reality is misplaced. This is implied in some commentators' theory. Bell, for instance, says that when I stand to define my self from the viewpoint of my communal experience, say my nationality, I can only say a few things after which I will be exhausted and yet understand that the self is left unexhausted because the real essence of my self is beyond definition.[127] I find it practically impossible for me to bring the self that is known to me in my consciousness out in words.[128] Asking Bell why this is so, he would say that it is because the non defining essence, that is, the consciousness of the community, that which we are born into, constitutes my being.[129] Indeed, the consciousness of the community constitutes the larger part of the way I am in the world, but this consciousness does not exhaust the possibilities of my real being. If this were to be the case, I would not be able to take my distance and reflect on it as in my reflecting on some cherished values of the community. Moreover, it will be impossible for me to experience some of them as disgusting.

I am aware that this answer may not suffice in the light of Bell's explanation that my reflection will only follow the mode of thinking which has been inbuilt into me in the community. So what really happens is that I am engaging in a kind of enterprise which will only carry further the aspirations of the community. There is nothing that fundamentally sets me outside the community even when I undertake this reflective enterprise.[130] Bell's point makes sense only if the idea of the community is conceived

---

[127] Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 90 – 123.
[128] See Ibid, pp. 98 – 112.
[129] Ibid.
[130] See Ibid.

from the ontological level of reality. In this regard, the all embracing consciousness, the source of the community life, becomes the essence of community meaning. No one can set himself aside from this all embracing consciousness. Following this line of reasoning, Bell's point is incorrect. The idea of the community that is described in Advaita tradition paints a better picture. This community is built on the ontological nature of the highest reality. In this account, the kind of identity that community gives does not perfectly define individuals in line with their ontological nature. The identity that Bell associates with the individual is limited as it stems from the limited consciousness of reality that a particular community might embrace. On this note, the consciousness which underlies the reality of the person is not limited to any particular community. Although it may take some distinctive form in, say, community A, the distinctiveness cannot subsist at the ultimate level of self investigation. Example of this community, as I have shown, is found in the Upanishadic scripture where Brahman is depicted as the one that appears in the many. The Advaita typification of community presupposes that we view the physical world of difference as one that lacks the nature of difference at the ultimate level. This entails the understanding of the world as something without strict partitioning. Although cultures may differ from one place to another, the difference should not constitute any barrier to harmonious relationships. The world ought to be seen as a space where the consciousness of Brahman is given diverse interpretations. But this will not imply that the internal experiences of a particular community is not unique and demands cautious development in line with its internal logic, but it will mean that the differences that are manifested in each of these communities should not threaten the existence and development of people and other communities.

Although one may not deny that rationality is an essential nature of the individual, the ideal of rationality that seems to tie the person to the community and the other one that sets her entirely free from the community seem deficient. If rationality means reflection and reflection only occurs in the presence of something else, then an atmosphere where this something else is present becomes a necessary condition for reflection to occur. This means that the rationality that will lead to self discovery requires the presence of the community. Furthermore, when we reflect on something that is present before us, our reflection follows from the way we view the world. We do not reflect on anything using categories of thinking that we develop from pure abstraction: we adopt the tradition that is familiar to us, in order words, the style of thinking which we are accustomed to. Although it is not being denied that one's uniqueness is represented in the peculiar way one thinks about the world but it is incorrect to say that this uniqueness is not structured by the linguistic tradition of the community. For instance, from childhood, I have developed gradually the concepts that enable me to relate with the external world. These concepts, we must not forget, derive their meanings from the ways they are used in my community. Hence, the concepts that define my peculiarity in terms of how I view the world are based on the meanings of my community. The question of relevance is whether it is possible for me to eradicate these concepts and yet have a rational sense of self? If only I am able to do this will it make sense to agree with the conception of the rational self which is founded on ideas independent of community. But this is not only a difficult project, it is an impossible task, for it will require that I uproot the consciousness that informs my being. This is like destroying my inner being in order to find a new being. Since I cannot cut off my being and continue with the task of finding

another being, for I need to be in order to accomplish the project, the task of finding a being that is independent of the community seems impossible. Thus, we see the sense of the position that argues that theories which set individuals apart from community will end in creating split or damaged persons. This advances the thinking that the idea of individuality, viewed from a holistic perspective, cannot be disconnected from its constitutive consciousness, that is, the community meaning. On the other hand, the position highlights the error that is contained in the thinking that the individual is nothing more than what community makes her. The capacity of reflection which stands above community meanings and essentially defines the person as autonomous subject, affirms our inner being as something that is not bound within community meanings. Thus, it is not the case that the entire being of the individual is exhausted by community meanings. Contrarily, it shows that once the basic intuition of what it means to be an individual is set by the constitutive consciousness of the community, the individual should strive to establish her own identity. That is, she should grow to establish her peculiar mode of being in the world.

Being in the World

In one of his earlier works on Advaita philosophy, Raju highlights an interesting paradox which Advaita philosophy seemingly displays. He observes that the paradox creates certain moral incongruity between Advaita theory and practice.[131] Raju's observation shows how interested readers can get to the core of Advaita propositions. Apparently, Raju believes that Advaita Vedanta contributes greatly to our knowledge of the world and our life as it ought to be lived. More importantly, how we ought to deal

---

[131] P. T. Raju, "The Advaita and the Moral Pradoxes", *Vedanta Kesari*, xxvi, (May 1939 – April 1940): 252 – 257.

with the paradox acquainted with our existence in the world. Any new comer into the philosophy of Advaita is likely to be baffled with its stark description of the world of appearance as false or unreal. But when the reader understands that the philosophy proceeds in this manner to direct attention to the link between the reality of the world and the individual, she will be willing to get to the heart of the main idea which the paradoxes are supposed to illustrate. Earlier on, we mentioned that Advaita philosophy focuses mainly on how individuals can realize their inmost being. Shankara develops this largely from a metaphysical perspective. Anyone who is familiar with Shankara's metaphysical conception of the self may wonder at first how this philosophy can contribute to the discussion of identity. As the study may be challenging to some, there is no doubt that some will certainly be curious about the suitability of Shankara's philosophy to the subject of identity. Having shown Shankara's relevance to the subject matter of identity, some may like to know whether Shankara demonstrates the virtues of the community. Of course, some may say that the quality of a piece of philosophy has nothing to do with the way of life of the philosopher, but it cannot be denied that the life of a philosopher and the social circumstances that prevail at the time of his or her work may contribute to our understanding of the work. In a certain sense, this method has proved to be useful. For instance, any efforts to associate Descartes' philosophy with the community, especially a constitutional democracy where all persons are deemed equal, may likely face some cruel criticisms. Apart from the contention that finds justification on theoretical ground, critics may allude to certain of Descartes' practices. His discrimination against women may be a useful argument. The lives of great thinkers like Locke, Hobbes and Kant to mention but a few have been carefully examined in order to arrive at a reasonable conclusion about

their ideas on toleration.

On theoretical ground, it is common for people to remember Shankara for his adamant rejection of duality. But it will not be an exaggeration to add that Shankara does not only reject duality theoretically, he leads his life in accordance with this philosophy. Topmost in his ambition is to direct human attention to the knowledge of the one true reality. Shankara believes that any knowledge that will set the human heart free from illusion must be free from stereotypical beliefs which warrant nepotism and favoritism. Vensus George comments that Shankara's mission is to guide humankind to the truth, elevating them in their beliefs and practices so that they will reach the supreme understanding of the One Reality [Brahman] .[132] This knowledge encourages the need to live our lives in unity and the bond of peace. It intends to lead us to the peak of self realization where we see everyone regardless of religion, nationality, race and gender as members of our family. We come from the one true and original substance (Brahman) and we become authentic only as we live in light of this knowledge. The ideal of Brahman underlies every system of thinking that promotes freedom and equality of individuals. Following this reasoning, Shankara enjoins every person to critically examine any sets of beliefs until they realize that the differences that flourish in them find their unity in the supreme reality. This liberal way of life comes from the apprehension of Brahman as the constitutive consciousness of the various systems that humankind evolves to give meaning to their lives. Shankara's liberal philosophy sees, through the differences in the world, the ultimate unifying principle. Shankara's philosophy

---

[132] Cited in Vensus A. George, (ed.) *Self- Realization [Brahmaanubhava] : The Advaitic Perspective of Shankara*, p 17, 19. Author's italics.

enlightens the individual better on how to deal with the multiple identities that are associated with the self in the world some of which appear conflicting.

Shankara's practical commitment to the moral good of everyone is reflected in, among many others, the attention he gives to the complaint of the Chandala whom he meets on the way when he wants to take bath in the Ganges. Shankara's disciples are reported to have discriminated against the Chandala by commanding him to clear off the road. The Chandala retorts, 'O venerable Guru, you are a preacher of Advaita Vedanta and yet you make a great difference between man and man', how is this consistent with your teaching?[133] In this story, we learn of the way Shankara responds to this inquiry: Shankara observes that Lord Siva probably assumes that form to teach him the lesson of identity. At once, he composes the Manisha Panchaka in five slokas each ending with the identity thesis (*tat tvam asi*). Shankara says "he, who has learned to see the existence of Brahman everywhere, is my Guru – be the brahmin or chandala".[134] Shankara describes, in this statement, one important truth that holds in all cultures, the fact that all individuals have the capacity of apprehending Brahman as the reality of all. However, the attainment of the knowledge requires learning and practice. Moreover, we learn from this story that the relative condition of individuals in the world is not a license to discriminate against them. The Chandala is from this viewpoint seen as having the same identity with the Brahmin. What a respect for the equality of individuals! Shankara acknowledges that discrimination against persons on the basis of caste identity is inappropriate and dangerous to communal order. He seems to be perfectly contented that the deprivation of

[133] Sri Swami Sivananda, "Sankara", *The Divine Life Society*, October 17, 2004, http://www.dlshq.org/saints/sankara.htm.

[134] See Swami Atmananda, "Sri Shankara's Teaching in His Own Words", in K. M. Munshi and R. R. Diwakar, (eds.) *Bhavan's Book Library*, vol. 52, (Bombay, Baratiya Vidya Bhawan, 1960).

individuals from earthly goods and civic rights on the basis of caste identity is unjustified.

Therefore, we see that the concern raised by critics about Indian belief concerning the possible contamination of identity through interpersonal relationships finds no basis in Shankara's philosophy. For Shankara, individuals are to mingle freely in secular affairs. On his commentary about religion and religious propositions, Shankara's ideas remain consistent with the above claim. Religion remains significant because it is a useful medium to realize one's inmost identity. Incidentally, religion is supposed to lead the individual to the understanding of her unity with the essence of others. Thus, religion is to encourage the intercommunications of individuals and the way they function in public life for physically sufficient life. The same reasoning that makes Shankara to insist upon absolute sovereignty in the choice of identity leads him to approve the choice of individuals with regard to the philosophical or religious ideal they hold. During the course of his career as a guru, Shankara engages a lot of eminent scholars in dialogue. Systematically, he unfolds to them why the philosophy of Advaita is the best philosophy that anyone can live by. His disciples are converted through dialogue. There is no record, in my understanding, that shows that Shankara forces any individual to follow his doctrines. This remains an important lesson for those of us who lived in a plural society today.

Social peace is always uppermost in Shankara's mind. His concern about independent dogmatic beliefs is noted in the way he seeks his mother's approval about his chosen life plan. Shankara has a clear picture of the kind of person he likes to be. He chooses the way of dialogue even when his mother stands in his way. His idea of

individual's rights is overly non individualistic. His uppermost belief is that one's identity can still be realized when one tolerates the views of others. This is probably why Shankara will not even adhere to his conceived plan at the expense of any negative effect that such will have on his mother. Firstly, he explains his desire to his mother and when it seems that she will not let him have his way, he leaves the matter until circumstances work it out.[135] Shankara believes in peaceful coexistence and remains consistent with the true nature, living the meaningful life from the standpoint of his peculiar experience. Eventually, Shankara obtains his mother's permission with the oath that he will come back to perform the last burial rite for her. His decision to perform the burial rite after his mother's death raises a lot of controversy. The Nambudin Brahmins and his relatives refuse to be involved because, according to the tradition of the time, Shankara, being a Brahmin, is not supposed to be actively involved in the burial. But Shankara's reaction exemplifies his idea of traditions as the raw materials with which identity is to be defined. Respect for others, especially one's parents, is here displayed as appropriate and morally consistent with our nature. Not only this, the thinking that tradition could exhaust our identity is also proven to be false. We see the possibility of tradition falling short in showcasing moral identity. Bearing this in mind, the individual is supposed to act in accordance with the idea of the overall good. In line with this principle, Shankara considers his promise to his mother more important than the existing communal tradition.

---

[135] One day as Shankara and his mother go to take their bath in the river, "Sankara plunged into the water and felt that a crocodile was dragging him by the foot. He shouted out to his mother at the top of his voice: "O dear mother! A crocodile is dragging me down. I am lost. Let me die peacefully as a Sannyasin. Let me have the satisfaction of dying as a Sannyasin. Give me your permission now. Let me take Apath-sannyasa". The mother immediately allowed him to take Sannyasa. Sankara took Apath-sannyasa (the adoption of Sannyasa when death is near) at once. The crocodile let him go unharmed. Sankara came out of the water as a nominal Sannyasin. He again repeated his promise to his mother. He left her under the care of his relatives and gave away his little property to them. He then proceeded to find out a Guru with a view to get himself formally initiated into the sacred order of Sannyasa". See Sri Swami Sivananda, "Sankara", *The Divine Life Society*, October 17, 2004, http://www.dlshq.org/saints/sankara.htm.

Certainly, the will to fulfill the promise is not backed by the motivation to fulfill one's duty, i.e. to fulfill a promise irrespective of what the consequence may happen to be both on himself and the community, but Shankara seems to have in view what is morally appropriate for any person to do in such a circumstance. Shankara's action attests to the fact that we could extend through our actions the frontier of our shared meanings. Shankara sets the model that any individual in his circumstance ought to follow. In this particular instance, he demonstrates how our moral nature demands that we honor our parents both in their lifetime and after. This is the duty of all individuals.

It is instructive to note that Shankara's individuality is revealed in his important works which are grounded on the *Brahma Sutra*, the *Upanisads*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. These works remain one of the greatest philosophical works produced in India till date .[136] The works reveal that the alleviation of human suffering is uppermost in his heart. His interpretations of the scriptures are, remarkably, an "expression of the sovereignty of individual choice".[137] His is an example of a mind that is not coerced, "resting upon nothing more than the freedom of the individual to do what he or she pleases, and the autonomy of the human imagination to construct and invent whatever linkages or associations it finds to its liking".[138] Indisputably, Shankara practically exemplifies the attitude of an individual that is capable of making right choices. At the expense of the prevailing beliefs of his time, Shankara chooses what he considers to be the truth. To think along with Raju that the Advaita scheme of thought is indeed paradoxical might be right when one considers the worth of such a philosophy to human life, a philosophy that

---

[136] These three works form what is heard; the revealed scripture or direct assertion about reality. The Vedas are called the *struti*; the divine word which is heard by the seer and which constitutes the immemorial truth. The Vedas are the (means of valid knowledge) *pramanas, they* set the criteria for true opinion.
[137] See an account of individuality conceived from a theological perspective in A. E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 1. (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), p. 20.
[138]Ibid.

seeks to put an end to the split between the real me and the masked personality could not at the same time condemn individuality as unreal.[139] This is what Raju's later writings express. His comments show that the paradox in Advaita Vedanta philosophy is only superficial. Its main intention is to challenge a deeper reflection about our separate existence.

Shankara's philosophy suggests that no propositions are to be accepted as true until it has been carefully analyzed and if found to be contrary to the truth of identity, it must be rejected. Paranjpe remarks that this way of thinking is set to empower individuals in making right moral choices.[140] Shankara encourages the individual to pursue life goals with a single minded devotion. This is also one of the essential principles which make him to be ranked above many of his contemporaries. Indich says he "is an interpreter of most sophisticated skill and subtlety whose prime concern is the exposition of a particular and in many ways quite unconventional vision".[141] In terms of his influence on Indian elites and culture, Potter writes that Shankara is not only successful in turning the hearts of ordinary folks to the knowledge of the one supreme reality (Brahman), his success accumulates so much that the term 'Vedanta' is frequently used to depict Advaita Vedanta.[142] How much more can the virtue of individuality be demonstrated in a man who provides a culture, "Indian culture, with a good portion of its intellectual inspiration by tapping into some of the basic and vitally important traditions

---

[139] Shankara's literature can be classified into three groups; "the commentaries (*Bhaashyas*), books dealing with fundamental concepts of Vedanta (*Prakriya Granthas*) and hymns and meditation verses (*Stotras*). Apart from his commentary on the three canon of the Hindu literatures, he wrote commentaries on *Sree Vishnu Shahasranama* and a few others. The following books; *Viveeka Chudamani, Atmabhoda, Upadeshasahasri* and *Mohamuduharam* are among the writings of Shankara.

[140] A. C. Paranjpe, *Self and Identity in Modern Psychology and Indian Thought*, (New York: Plenum, 1998), p. 173.

[141] Cited in W. M. Indich, *Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980) p. 2.

[142] K. H. Potter, "Introduction to the Philosophy of Advaita Vedanta," in K. H. Potter, (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, vol. iii (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), p.6.

which nourish that culture and which provide it with its distinctive, as well as universal, components"?[143] Reading through the works of those who perceive him differently, we see again a clear reference to Shankara's individuality. Chakravarthi remarks, "when he took upon himself the role of the commentator, he had no right to forget his position and foist upon the Upanishads a philosophy of his own".[144] As we read through the philosophy of Shankara, what we see is a reflection of the individual as the Brahman that is in me and Brahman, as the individual that is.

What then does individuality connote in this philosophy? It means knowing that I am a person with physical and psychological histories, that these are associated with me from birth to death. This constitutes my relative self. In addition, it means knowing that the idea of my individuality is informed by the subject of awareness that is aware of itself. This differentiates 'me' from an object of awareness, that of which there is awareness. The subject of awareness is not curtailed by communal experiences. Rather, it validates them and makes them uniquely mine. The uniqueness is confirmed by my approval of those experiences but when I disapprove of them I stand out and find a way to alter or replace them. Nevertheless, my replacement must aim at continuing the unity which is exemplified in my consciousness, the consciousness that reveals the self as the 'that' which differentiates me from the community and at the same time involves me in it. Swami Krishnananda explains this consciousness as the self. He writes: "when we say the Self, we mean the logical inwardness of that which is all-comprehensive. This knowledge of That is by That only, which includes us all. It is to be attained by the melting down of all extrovert impulses of consciousness imagined in space and time. This is called self-

---

[143] Cited in W. M. Indich, *Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta*, p. 2. (Emphasis is mine).
[144] Cited in Vensus A. George, *Self- Realization [Brahmaanubhava] : The Advaitic Perspective of Shankara*, p 13. (Italics mine.)

control. This is self-restraint, this is Tapas".[145] Thus, individuality is properly focused

when it accommodates the context of the framework of meanings provided by experience

and from time to time engages it in a dialogue. Now, I will proceed to a critical

discussion of Yoruba philosophy. Other comments about the application of Shankara's

philosophy to the community life will come in the last chapter.

---

[145] Swami Krishnananda, "Self-Realisation, Its Meaning and Method", *The Divine Life Society*, http://www.swami-krishnananda.org/self/self_3a.html.

CHAPTER THREE

A CRITICAL EXPOSITION OF YORUBA PHILOSOPHY

I

THE WORLD IN YORUBA NARRATIVES

> Part of the narrative consciousness of a culture is its *aesthetic consciousness*, and the aesthetic consciousness is itself a reflective consciousness-one step removed from the immediacy of sensible experience. An aesthetic consciousness orders sensible experience to express human hope and wholeness.[146]

This chapter will discuss the Yoruba conception of identity in relation to community from the background of the original self known as *Emi*. Let me mention now that I will attempt an overall reconstruction of Yoruba notion of identity. I shall retrieve some sets of concepts which are peculiar to classical Yoruba thought and these will be used in the reconstruction exercise. *Emi* is the ultimate ground of identity. *Emi*'s nature is different from anything that may be apprehended physically. Yoruba believes that self knowledge is essentially personal in the sense that only the individual has the privileged access into the content of her inner self (*emi*). However, in the quest for self actualization, Yoruba gives importance to the shared experience of the people in the community. I will deliberate more on this point below. Yoruba position acknowledges the importance of rationality in self determination but it rejects the idea that articulates identity as mere systems of rationality. This conception tags all social and cultural particularities

---

[146] Richard H. Bell, *Understanding African Philosophy, A Cross Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues*, (New York, London: Routledge, 2002), p. 119.

irrelevant contingencies and suggests that they should be de-emphasized in self determination. The professional school of thought in African philosophy is associated with this particular way of thinking.[147] These philosophers critique a number of works produced by some Africans and some western trained anthropologists, sociologists and ethnographers for merely documenting what they regard to be a peculiar way of thinking of Africans and term it African philosophy[148]. Such works are arguably considered inappropriate because they lack what the professional philosophers acknowledge to be the standard formalism that is required in any genuine philosophical materials. African Philosophy, these philosophers claim, must articulate issues in the pattern of formal science. This means that any conceptual beliefs that will qualify to enter the philosophical arena must pass the universal test and what this implies is that it must be independent of any social contexts.

For our purpose, this theory suggests that a piece of work which sets out to describe, for instance, the self and the world, from the perspective of the deepest

---

[147] The debate about the nature of African philosophy starts along this line of thinking. Attempts to distinguish between traditional African philosophy and contemporary African philosophy finds division between scholars who argue that most of the works called traditional African philosophy do not meet the standard of true philosophy. For the universalist philosophers or those known as professional philosophers, the reason why these works need to be rejected is because their content is not systematic, coherent, rational and enunciate issues that are of universal relevance. These philosophers argue that philosophy is a particular way of thinking, reflecting, reasoning, that such a way is relatively new to (most of) Africa, and that African philosophy must grow in terms of the philosophical work carried out by Africans. Among these philosophers are, P. O. Bodunrin, Kwasi Wiredu, Henry Odera Oruka. Other philosophers hold a contrary view, these are named ethno philosophers. Ethno philosophers hold that the substance of African philosophy ought to be gotten from African myths, proverbs, oral traditions etc. They hold that the issues that are contained in African myths, oral traditions etc. show African peculiar way of knowing the world. They argue also that this way of knowing is not substandard in any way to other ways of knowing regardless of the methodology these others imbibe. Some of the prominent philosophers who defend this view are, Paulin Hountondji, Barry Hallen, Campbell S. Momoh, Sophie Oluwole.

[148] Instances of these works include, Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, (Paris : Presence Africaine, 1959), A Kagame, Marcel Griaule *Conversation with Ogotomeli : An Introduction to Dogan Religious Ideas*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), William Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967), John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Leopold Senghor, *On African Socialism*, (London and New York, 1964), Julius Nyerere, *Ujaama: The Basis of African Socialism*, (Oxford University Press: Dares Salaam, 1968) and Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, (London, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964) among others.

convictions of some people, is unqualified to be tagged philosophy in the real sense. This has a serious effect on the idea of identity in the sense that any view of identity that is philosophically sound must be cut off from the particular attachments to any specific community. The position of the African Professional School accords the historical, cultural, religious etc. values which constitute the particular form of the self irrelevant. Though the ideal of the self that is advocated in the ancient Yoruba philosophy accepts some of the African professional school premises, it rejects the conclusion that the true knowledge of self identity can only be determined by the kind of formal systems emphasized in its theory. Yoruba starts the discussion of the self with the presupposition that *Emi* is the ultimate reality. *Emi* is the basis of individuality and community. *Emi* underlies all categories of human shared experiences. *Emi* renders the ways of life in the community meaningful. It is through *Emi* that the shared notion of good comes to be. Thus, *Emi* forms the basis of social cooperation. On the other hand, Yoruba argues that *Emi* is the sole reality to be acknowledged when individuals engage in the social life of the community. Subsequently, there is no shared experience that can possibly exhaust *Emi's* nature. *Emi* is that intricate reality whose real face is masked through the social life of the community. The point is that individuals alone can have knowledge of their self identity.

It is important to mention that Yoruba philosophical ideas about individuality are partly contained in Yoruba proverbs, oral tradition and myths, some of which are not yet documented. Generally, Yoruba proverbs are concise and are often dressed in images that describe the specific background that evokes it. The common saying, *owe lesin oro, oro lesin owe, bi oro ba sonu, owe la fi n wa* (proverbs are horses on which words travel,

words are horses on which words ride, when the meaning of a word is imprecise, we search for it through proverbs) shows the significance of proverbs in Yoruba thought. [149] Dzobo gives an illuminating interpretation of the above proverb. He describes a proverb as "a horse which can carry one swiftly to the discovery of ideas".[150] Proverbs are devised to preserve Yoruba suppositions. The imageries used in proverbs are carefully coined to guide users in future references. These images serve two purposes. Firstly, they are meant to preserve the contexts which lead to the occurrence of the proverbs. On this note, they are point of reference to historians, sociologists, anthropologists etc. Secondly, they are developed with a kind of profundity that encourages abstract thinking. This is highlighted in Dzobo above. Indeed, proverbs are meant to provoke reflections about issues or ideas of all time. This point is also emphasized in Robin Horton as follows:

> Indeed, if verbal imagery has any one function in the speech of traditional Africa, it is that of supplementing and making more digestible use of literal language. As the Ibo say, 'proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten. This conveys a nice sense, both of the primacy of literal language, and of the way in which symbolism helps it.[151]

---

[149] Some scholars have conducted some studies on some aspects of Yoruba proverbs. Each of these scholars has his/her specific focus. In "Ewi ni Yoruba", Olokun, 6, (1967): 13-16, J. F. Odunjo discusses the origin of Yoruba proverbs with reference to natural phenomena and human relations. B Gbadamosi and U Beier examine, in *Yoruba Poetry: Traditional Yoruba* Poems, (Ibadan: Ministry of Education, 1959) some collected proverbs extracting the Yoruba views about right, morality, knowledge, and others. Y. K. Yusuf in "Women Speech in Yoruba Proverbs", *Proverbium*, 11, (1994): 283-291 examines the ethical value of women's speech in Yoruba proverbs. In the introductory remarks of, *A Grammar and Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language*, compiled by Rev. S. Crowther, (London: Seeleys, 1852), pp. 1-38, O. E. Vidal researches into some Yoruba proverbs with reference to its Hebrew similarities. J. B. Agbaje discusses Yoruba proverbs in "Proverbs: A Strategy for Resolving Conflict in Yoruba Society", *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 15, no. 2 (2002): 237-243, with respect to conflict resolution in Yoruba society. A Sobande in "Awon Owe Ile Wa", *Olokun*, 7, (1967): 25-29 attempts the classification of Yoruba proverbs according to their sources and dates. She recalls those that are derived from Islam, Christianity and Contemporary songs. Also she mentions those which refer to human body parts.
[150] N. K. Dzobo, "African Symbols and Proverbs as Source of Knowledge and Truth", *Person and Community*, *Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, 1 (Washington, D. C. : The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2004), p. 95.
[151] Robin Horton, "The Romantic Illusion: Roger Bastide on Africa and the West", *Odu, A Journal of West African Studies*, 3, (1970): 90.

The second sense is useful in philosophical deliberation. From the standpoint of our study, proverbs are useful because they aid self understanding. Proverbs assist the thinking individual to conceptualize the good that is worth living for. In this regard, proverbs are part of the constitutive consciousness of the community and not mere neutral medium of communication. Characteristically, proverbs are flexible. In most cases, they are derived from human experiences and used to depict the flexibility of the awareness of the community at any particular time. The principle behind the formulation of proverbs in Yoruba tradition expresses the Yoruba assumption that community identity is never rigid or fixed.

I mention all this to show that the philosophical ideas of Yoruba can be gotten in proverbs as much as it can be gotten in texts. We may now proceed in our discussion of individuality and community in Yoruba philosophy. This section will focus on Yoruba conception of identity. I will entertain three subjects. Firstly, I will examine the basis of individuals in the world. Secondly, I will reflect on the Yoruba position on the basis of the community and lastly, I will show how self identity is developed in Yoruba philosophy. Our focus is to see whether the conception of individuality in the Yoruba philosophical tradition merges the individual with or separates her from the community.

Emi: Basis of Individuality

To comprehend the subject matter of identity in Yoruba philosophy, we should understand how Yoruba construes the world. I should mention as a matter of clarity that there are many worlds in Yoruba philosophy, one of which is the actual world. Our discussion centers on this actual world. This world is defined by two Yoruba words *Ile* and *Aiye*. The term *aiye*, when translated as *ai ye*, refers to something that we do not

understand. This translation highlights Yoruba position about appearance and reality. There is a striking difference between the world of appearance and the world of reality. Reality underlies appearance and not until one probes deeper into appearance, it reveals itself as the real. The compound words *Ile-Aiye* suggests that one should probe deeper into appearance and only then will its exact nature be realized. In its stricter interpretation, *Ile* stands for house, *Aiye* stands for life. The two words represent the world as a house of life. The first syllable, *Ile* (house) reflects the Yoruba typification of the world as something that contains individuals. This may be understood in the literal sense that a house contains different individual things. However, the second syllable *Aiye* (life) illustrates Yoruba belief about the fundamental constituents of these individuals. This is evident in the interchangeability of the term life and *emi*. When I say, for example, *aiye mi* (my life or my self) I refer to the kind of knowledge about myself that I alone am privileged to have. The term *emi* thus refers to my ultimate identity. Looking at it from this perspective, the fundamental reality of individuals is *emi*.

For Yoruba, the world contains *emi*. Each individual thing has its own *emi* which she derives from the ultimate *Emi*. It should be observed that a number of commentators do not subscribe to this way of thinking. This is due to their thinking that its presupposition leads to the understanding of the world as something that contains mere spiritual things.

This conclusion is reached because the term *emi* is synonymous with spirit. [152] Furthermore, the similarity between *emi* and spirit warrants the criticism that religion forms the all governing principle of life for the Yoruba. If we are to go by the above understanding, then for the Yoruba, the natural world contains only spirits i.e. beings without material qualities.[153] Bastide, for instance, writes that the African (the Yoruba inclusive)

> sees in everything which is given to his senses something other than he sees-he decipher the Other, that is to say the sacred, through the mineral, the vegetable and the animal.[154]

Shanathan maintains a similar position about the Igbo of Nigeria. To Shanathan, Igbo views existence

---

[152] The idea of spirit in African philosophy has mostly been discussed from the perspective of religious experience. This follows the belief that Africans are deeply and perhaps incurably religious. Bolaji Idowu, among others, seems to suggest that the only way to understand the thinking of Yoruba, for example, is to understand their religion. He mentions that "the keynote of their life is their religion. In all things, they are religious. Religion forms the foundation and the all-governing principle of life for them. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity; their own part in the matter is to do as they are ordered through the priests and diviners whom they believe to be the interpreters of the will of the Deity". Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief*, (London: Longman, 1962), p. 5. The content of the above passage presupposes that the idea of the individual as an autonomous subject is strange to Yoruba thinking. The need to see one's life in one's hand and the determination of one's destiny by one's real acts seems to be lacking in the articulation of human identity. The truth of this position is called into question when one examines some of the philosophical narratives of Yoruba which sheds light on the Yoruba account of individuality. In view of the contrasts between these narratives and the dominance of the so call religious thinking in the life of the Yoruba people, certain philosophers have contested Bolaji's claim. Olusegun Oladipo calls for a critical reflection on the traditional belief systems of the African people in other to understand better their thought systems. With specific reference to Yoruba thought system, he says, "thus, it seems to me that, although the Yoruba may be described as being religious on the basis of the fact that they acknowledge the existence of a supreme being who is the ultimate reality and on whom human beings are believed to be dependent for their existence and also recognize some divinities as his ministers, there is obviously no ground for contending that religion pervade all their activities". Olusegun Oladipo, "Metaphysics, Religion and Yoruba Traditional Thought", in P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux, *The African Philosophy Reader*, second edition, (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 207

[153] Hallen and Wiredu caution against the misleading interpretation of "spirits in the quasi-material sense (i.e. spiritistic entities) as spiritual. They are not; they are in conception, largely physical. Spiritual entities are supposed to be totally non-physical, immaterial. See Barry Hallen and Kwasi Wiredu, "Science and African Culture" http://www.princeton.edu/~hos/Workshop%20II%20papers/Hallen_Wiredu.doc.pdf .

[154] Cited in Robin Horton, "The Romantic Illusion: Roger Bastide on Africa and the West", p. 89. Parenthesis is mine.

in terms of the spirit rather than of flesh. He was not materialist. Indeed nothing was further from his mind than a materialistic philosophy of existence. It makes no appeal to him.[155]

Reading Bastide and Shanathan, one is likely to conclude that Africans, and in our case, Yoruba give no significance to the study of individuals, especially in the sense of representing them from the standpoint of their distinctive qualities This is so because spirits, read from the western perspective, are the finest substances which lack material qualities. It is interesting to note that this observation has largely been considered to be the background basis for explicating the notion of identity in African philosophy. The idea is that since the world contains only spirits, the determination of individuals' nature must necessarily stem from the perspective of the spiritual. The idea of the spiritual is used to contrast anything that is physical. As it will be shown shortly, this is the bedrock of the socially constructed individuals, but I argue differently from the standpoint of Yoruba classical sources. This invites the conclusion that the respect which ought to be given to individuals as autonomous choosers is devalued. Here, critics stress the point that individuals' nature cannot be properly exemplified by a philosophy that subscribes to the primacy of *emi*.

Basically, the objection raised above highlights one important fact, namely, that primacy must be given to the freedom of self expression in the study of individuality, that is, the nature of the individual must never be determined by an external agent. We are left to see whether *Emi* can be said to be external to the individual in Yoruba thought. Overall, we shall see whether the philosophy of *Emi* gives room for the kind of individual construction that is advocated above. The doubt concerning the possibility of unfolding

---

[155] Cited in Chukwudum B. Okolo, "Self as a Problem in African Philosophy" in *The African Philosophical Reader*, second edition, edited by P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 211.

the genuine nature of the individual under an idealist tradition (a tradition that the philosophy of *emi*, properly characterized, belongs) is reflected in Okolo's writing. In the paper "Self as a Problem in African Philosophy", Okolo claims that the status of the individual is in Africa vitiated. In his thinking, this way of knowing the individual reduces her autonomy.

> This cognizance of an individual, unique self notwithstanding, the truth remains that violence is done to its status as an individual, as an independent self-consciousness. Self remains dominantly opaque, seen from the 'outside', so to speak, and in relationships with others. Consequently, 'social' is the main category for understanding self, as indeed for all reality in African philosophy. It is the only authentic mode for the African to answer the all-important question in African philosophy.[156]

Okolo's position suggests that the idealistic thinking of Yoruba will surely have a demeaning effect on individuals' power of self choice. Owing to the fact that identity is construed from the outside and not as it is known to the individual herself, the choice of life which the individual prefers is denied him. Interestingly, Okolo's point echoes the worry that the determination of individuality from community meanings blurs the identity of the individual. This occurs from the presupposition that the collective identity of the community exhausts the person's genuine nature. This observation reflects some of the difficulties which the philosophy of *emi* shall have to overcome. The question that concerns us is not whether Yoruba believes in the reality of individuals as they appear in the world, although this may be implied, going by the literal conception of *emi* as a pure spiritual substance. Okolo mentions in the beginning of the quotation that there is no philosophy in Africa that denies the reality of the world and the individuals in it. But the belief that individuals really exist as they appear in the world is not sufficient in self

---

[156] Ibid, p. 214.

determination. The individual is a subject, not an object; her power of self choice needs to be given valuable respect and any worthwhile philosophy needs to delineate on how this can be achieved. Such a philosophy must support a suitable environment that will enable liberty of self expression. Thus, the question is how a philosophy that subscribes to the supremacy of *emi* can achieve this end.

Yoruba does not dispute that something is known to be the ultimate constituent of the world. Firstly, this establishes that something can really be known in the world. Subsequently, it confirms that something is known about individuals in the world. This is the fact that *Emi* is the only reality which instantiates individuals in the world. Of course, this confirms that Yoruba does care about people's physical presence in the world. But the question remains: how much this is useful in the Yoruba thinking about self realization. To begin with, though *emi* is regarded as the innermost substance of the individual, it is not a thing that is elusive. Yoruba argues that *emi*'s nature can be observed externally. Through actions, Yoruba is able to establish the *emi* of a person. Someone who is hot tempered is considered as *elemi gbigbona* and the person with *emi suuru* is gentle. The *emi* of any person is classified on the basis of some external actions but Yoruba maintains a skeptical position about the accuracy of any identity that is based on external actions. From Hallen's discussion with the *Onisegun* (the sage), we understand how Yoruba links the knowledge of personal identity with behavior. The *Onisegun* argues:

> It is the self (*emi*) which makes man behave (*hu iwa*) as he is. It is the self (*emi*) which makes man behave in a good manner or in a bad manner. As you come to see me now, it was your self (*emi*) which made you think of

coming to see me. It is the self (*emi*) which causes (*mun …*) people [to do good or bad].[157]

The *Onisegun* continues,

> Before you can identify a bad person (*eniyan buruku*) you must see their acts (*ise …*). You cannot know them until you see (*ri*) the work of their hands.[158]

Yoruba belief about the possibility of observing *emi* externally is confirmed in the above passages. However, Yoruba acknowledges the difficulty of delineating the true identity of people from their external behavior. "It is very difficult to identify (*mo*) … bad people because we don't know (*mo*) what their [innermost] thoughts (*ero*) are".[159] Here, the *Onisegun* defends the view that identity can be articulated correctly when people's inmost thoughts are known. It is impossible for an outsider to have access to this knowledge. This establishes Yoruba accession to the privacy of self knowledge.

This further highlights the strict connection between the concepts of *emi* (I) and *emi* (the ultimate substance of the person). *Emi* (I) refers to the firsthand knowledge of the person about herself. This knowledge identifies the truest status of one's *emi*. This knowledge depicts the privileged knowledge of the individual about herself. When it is used, it refers to the ultimate identity of the person in question. Apparently, the consideration of *emi* as the ultimate reality of the individual does not imply total ignorance about the individual's distinctive nature. So, when Yoruba says that *Emi* is the reality of the individual, it means that the knowledge of identity is essentially private. This warns us not to confuse individuals' appearances with their reality. As I will argue

---

[157] Barry Hallen, *The Good, The Bad and The Beautiful, Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 45.
[158] Ibid, p. 41.
[159] Ibid, p. 47.

in this chapter, Yoruba position agrees with the thinking that individuals ought to choose their own lives.

People's appearances are mere forms. The only unalterable knowledge that could be derived from the perception of these forms is the fact of their being, the content of which is not disclosed to anyone else. The certainty of being cannot be disputed when the physical form of the person is perceived but no one apart from the person himself is sure about its content. The individual alone has this privileged knowledge. In other words, the real identity of individuals cannot be determined by what appears externally. This idea is further emphasized by another *Onisegun* using the allegory of the snake and its skin.

> Nigbati ejo ba bo ofo ti atijo sile, yio kuro ni ibe lo si ibo miran pelu ara sibesibe. Bi eni ti ko ba laya ba ri ofo ejo eni yen yio sa nitoripe a ro wipe oun ti (*sic*) ejo. Bi ofo ejo ti o bo sile yi se jo ejo gan bee ni ti ara eni to oti ku. Awa eniyan gba wipe oku eniyan ni eyi je, sugbon si emi eyi je ara ti o baje ti o si gbe sile.

> When the snake drops off the old skin the real snake still exists somewhere else, still in a body. At the first sight of such empty carcass of a snake a timid person can flee believing to have seen a snake. As the carcass of a snake resembles exactly a snake so also does the dead body of a person. To we human beings the corpse is a dead person, but to the emi it is merely a worn out garment.[160]

What I should point out in the above passage is the difference between the knowledge gained from perceiving the form of an individual and the knowledge gained by the *emi* of the individual. The former knowledge is not certain as it is reflected in the word '*gba*' in the passage. The concept of '*gba*' depicts the kind of knowledge that other people have about the individual in question. The passage indicates that this knowledge is not conclusive by contrasting it with the knowledge of the person's *emi*. While it is not being

---

[160] Cited in Barry Hallen, "Phenomenology and the Exposition of African Traditional Thought", in Sophie B. Oluwole (ed.,) *Readings in African Philosophy*, (Nigeria: Masstech Publications, 1989), p. 86.

disputed that the perception of the external form of persons could give some hint about their identity, Yoruba takes time to add that further inquiries need to be made about whatever impression we have about people before we can legitimately claim to know them truly. Whatever knowledge we infer about an individual due to the form of her appearance is not sufficient to yield the certain knowledge of her identity. This knowledge is only available to the *emi* (self) of the individual. Whereas appearance can be articulated differently by others, the *emi* of the individual is all the time sure about its status. Hallen puts it differently in another text,

> The importance Yoruba discourse attaches to the personal element of experience means that the knowledge I have of my own character (*iwa*), as arising from my conscious self, is privileged. When it comes to others I may have to rely upon verbal and non verbal behavior. But for the self that I am, consciousness privileges me with introspective awareness. My behavior follows upon thought, and my thought originates in my conscious self, my 'inside' or *inu*.[161]

Emi is the subject of awareness which is ever certain about its unique identity. Hence, the Yoruba assumption that *emi* is the primary content of the world suggests firstly, that individuals with definite identity exist in the world, secondly, that the appearance of the individual leads to the confirmation of their ultimate self namely *emi* and thirdly, that unmistaken identity can only be determined by the subject of awareness, that is, the *emi* of the individual. Yoruba submits that human worldly forms can only yield a probable degree of knowledge about their innermost identity. External actions confirm the fact of existence or the fact of being and the idea of being refers at the ultimate level to *emi*. The only thing that is inferred from the worldly form of a person is the indisputability of the reality of spiritual reality. As mentioned previously, there is a

---

[161] Barry Hallen, *The Good, The Bad and The Beautiful, Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture*, p. 43.

link between people's *emi* and their external characteristics. This link is illustrated in the original meaning of *iwa*, a concept that is used interchangeably for character and being or existence in Yoruba worldview.

> According to Abimbola, the original meaning of *Iwa* is the "fact of being, living or existing". So, *iwa* means existence. *Iwa* as character is therefore a derivative from this original. In its original meaning, the perfect ideal of *iwa* is *aiku* (immortality). Hence, the saying *Aiku pari iwa* (Immortality completes existence or immortality is perfect existence) do not just have a homophonous relationship; they are also related by etymology and one appears to be a derivation of the other.[162]

The person's character confirms the indisputable fact of her existence. It does not make available to others the epistemological status of her identity. Individuals alone have the unmistaken awareness about the contents of their being. This is implied in Gbadegesin in the following text: "*Iwa* is the handiwork of the Deity, the originator of existence, and her beauty as well as her character are expressions of her existence as an individual being … Existence is primary, then, and character is derivative, based as it is on human ideas of morality".[163] Contrary to Okolo and others, it is obvious that self knowledge is not determined from the outside in Yoruba philosophy. The individual alone has the privileged access into her own identity. I will return to this point later to show its relevance to the community. We should proceed to the discussion of the constitutive basis of the community. This will prepare us in the understanding of the socialization process which goes along with identity formation.

Emi: Basis of Community

---

[162] Cited in Segun Gbadegesin, "Individuality, Community and the World Order" in (eds.,) P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux, *The African Philosophy Reader*, first edition, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 303.
[163] Ibid, p. 304.

A number of works have appeared on the ontological structure of reality and its implication on the community in African philosophy.[164] Most of these works show that there are striking similarities in the ways Africans think about the structure of the community. The ontological structure of reality in African philosophy is particularly interesting because it depicts the person as a dignified subject, showcasing her as the central figure in the maintenance of the order in the universe. The individual is not there in the world as a brute fact, neither is she depicted as someone that is ignorant of the reason for being there. Her being in the world is delineated with meaningful focus; she is not an aimless wonderer; her goal is to create order and harmony. We may ask how the individual assumes this position. As Yoruba reflects on the hierarchical structure of reality, the individual comes on the topmost position. She is discovered to be the only creature with the capacity of consciousness, a useful tool for evaluating, shaping and planning the self and the world. In her original position, the individual is exemplified as deeply related or participating in the essence of everything else. The individual is not ultimately dissociated from these others. For this reason, knowledge of identity is explicated from a relational standpoint. How this idea remains consistent with the Yoruba assertion that self knowledge is exclusively known to the individual will be discussed

---

[164] See Paulin Hountondji, *African Philosophy Myth and Reality*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2002), Kwasi Wiredu, *CulturalUniversals and Particulars: an African Perspective*, (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1996), Augustine Shutte, *Philosophy for Africa*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), Innocent Chilaka Onyewuenyi, *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy*: *An Exercise in Afrocentrism*, (Nigeria: University of Nigeria Press: 1993), John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Campbell S. Momoh, (ed.) *The Substance of African Philosophy*, (Nigeria: African Philosophy Projects' Publications, 1989), Segun Gbadegesin, *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen (eds.), African Systems of Thought (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), A. T. Dalfovo et al. (eds.), *African Metaphysical Heritage and Contemporary Life in the Foundations of Social Life*, (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research and Values in Philosophy, 1992), C. S. Bird and I Karp, (eds.), Explorations in African Systems of Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), Albert G. Mosley, *African Philosophy Selected Readings*,(Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

further in section three. For now, we need to state that Yoruba believes that the status of the person is shown in the kind of life he leads. The person must excel in making intelligible choices and lead a life that transcends personal interests. The ideal of self actualization must follow the dynamic but harmonious principle which is inherent in *Emi* or the ultimate essence of all. Self actualization should aim at progress and harmony, the reason being that the whole of creation is integrally related.

The basis of this relationship is *Emi*. Momoh describes it as the chief "vital force", the force of existence itself, the Being which transcends all beings.[165] Prior to the existence of the actual community, the timeless community exists with pure vital force (*Emi*). In Unah's view, the nature of the vital force is the original knowledge which Africans seek in order to apprehend the knowledge of the "over-all process which penetrates every possible experience".[166] Whereas it is *Emi* in Yoruba, it is *NTU* in Rwanda. Alexis Kagame writes,

> *NTU* is the universal force as such, which, however, never occurs apart from its manifestations: *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu*, and *Kuntu*. *NTU* is Being itself, the cosmic universal force, which only modern rationalizing thought can abstract from its manifestations. *NTU* is that force in which Being and beings coalesce.[167]

The philosophy of *Emi* as the basis of the community presupposes that all individuals in the world are members of one family and, just as the family has no separate existence of its own but finds its existence in the life of the individuals in the family, these individuals also know that their lives are intimately connected with the being of the family. The

---

[165] C. S. Momoh, "African Philosophy, Does it Exist?" *Diogene*, 130 (1985,) p. 104. Vital force describes that which is inhered in every object and makes its presentation possible. The idea of vital force was first introduced by Leopold Senghore.
[166] Jim I. Unah, "The Nature of African Metaphysics," in *Metaphysics Phenomenology and African Philosophy*, pp. 339-340.
[167] Ibid, pp. 341-342.

community is derived from the operation of the functionally distinct parts each of which works towards the well being of the whole and with a crucial dependence on one another. As I will show shortly, this interdependence requires the inclusion of a large private conception of the good. The representation of the community like the family makes it assume the status of a whole or an individual entity whose members are jointly participating and sharing in its resources. But as each member functions to strengthen the family bond not by doing anything for any individual that is notably called family but by working towards the development of family members, each member of the community concentrates on the development of some special art or capacity for the ultimate purpose of contributing to the good of everyone within the community. No individual member performs her function in isolation, rather members function in the context of and in relation to other elements of the civil community. For Yoruba, the community exists for the primary purpose of advancing the well being of its members. Augustine Shutte describes the African community using the peculiar African picture of the family below:

> The family has no function outside itself. It is a means of growth for its members, and the interaction, the companionship and conversation, between the growing and fully grown members is also an end in itself … Because of this no-one is a stranger. The world is our common home, the earth the property of all. Because human life only exists by being shared, all that is necessary for that life, for living and living well, is shared by the family as a whole.[168]

One important factor to be noted in the above representation of the community is that, for Yoruba, the original description of the community highlights the pure principle by which individuals ought to lead their lives in the community. Firstly, the individual is typified as having free nature in the sense that they are not characterized on the basis of

---

[168] Augustine Shutte, *Philosophy for Africa*, p. 50.

what appears to us in the world. In this regard, the identification of the human nature is free from the particularities of the actual world. The original background of the individual presupposes that freedom, fairness and equality ought to be the driving force of cohabitation. Drawing from the original state of the person's nature, individuals would have to live intelligibly and make moral choices but the limit of the choices and the content of the rationality that ought to guide life remains imprecise in the hypothesis of the person's nature. Therefore, this position merely states the overarching principles which men of free and equal nature must observe. It presupposes that such principles must be adaptable to the specific realities of different people. In addition, it must pass the universal test in the sense that it does not constrain the cultivation of others' identities. I will come back to this point in section two.

The individual that is armed with the knowledge of her real nature will know that there is an all permeating essence which ties her with other individuals. Also, this way of knowing the self leads one to one's transcendental nature which compels us to see our identity as something that is not limited to a particular domain of the world. African ontology subscribes to the transcendental reality of the person. But, instead of the transcendental nature dividing individuals on the basis of their different aspirations and goals, it is presented, in the manner of Advaita philosophy, as the instrument of unity. In fact, the way the person's nature is presented shows that she ought to be responsive to the plight of all humankind regardless of the differences of culture, religion, race etc. This is a subtle warning against the view of the world as that which contains individuals who are entirely disconnected from one another. More importantly, it cautions against the pursuit of pure private interests. In reality, individuals share intimate ontological relationships.

Bantu expresses this view in the following way: "created beings preserve a bond with one another, an intimate ontological relationship".[169]

But the structure of Being in African metaphysics is not left without its own problems. The hierarchical structure which is believed to characterize reality is further associated with community. The community is defined in terms of classes in which case the lower classes are subordinate to the higher classes. The division of community in the foregoing sense would not have generated any problem in respect of the conception of identity but for the fact that certain readings make the dominant values of these classes the sole criteria of identity definition. This peculiarity is believed to be common to African philosophy. This methodology denies individuals liberty of self choice. This appears to be a flaw in the articulation of individuality. Here, the liberty of self choice is primary. The relevant question is whether Yoruba philosophy of life force is able to meet this challenge. Some commentators think not. To these commentators, the knowledge of being as the fundamental knowledge of all informs the idea of African socialism where each person's identity is primarily defined in terms of communal stratifications.[170] As much as some of the observations of these critics cannot be said to be incorrect, there is, undeniably, certain exaggeration in their arguments part of which is revealed in their thinking that one's inclusion in the strata of the community will necessarily make one lead a life of conformity. Truly, one finds some sense in the thinking that a life of

[169] Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, p. 58.
[170] See Leopold S. Senghor, *On African Socialism*, (trans.) Mercer Cook, (New York: Praeger, 1964), pp. 93-94. Kwesi A. Dickson, *Aspects of Religion and Life in Africa*, (Ghana: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1977), p. 4. John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 108. Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought", in (ed.) Richard A. Right, *African Philosophy, An Introduction*, (Lanham, Md.: University Press of Americas, 1984), pp. 171-180. Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, (New York: Vintage, 1965), p. 297. Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism – Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution* (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 73.

conformism subdues the individual as a subject. A conformed life relegates the essential capacity of thought of the individual to the background in the sense that it hinders the individual from reevaluating the good of the community and possibly stand against it if it is conceived to contradict the kind of life that she would like to lead. When emphasis on individuals' social responsibilities comes at the expense of her right to self determination, her autonomy is curtailed. Okolo mentions that this way of construing the self disrespects the intrinsic dimension of our humanity.

> Man has an intrinsic dimension to his being. He cannot be reduced merely to a set of extrinsic relations. He is a subject, not simply an object; an end in himself, not merely a means; self determined, not merely other-determined; and so on. But the very opposite appears to be predominantly stressed in African philosophy.[171]

I do not pretend that theories which characteristically fall into the above domain may be used and indeed has been used to humiliate persons' liberty of self choice. My argument is that Yoruba theory of being does not necessarily entail this conclusion. I hold that any theory of individuality which springs from the divisive standpoint in which individuals are only identified with certain groups misrepresent the ultimate nature of persons. Thus, contrary to Okolo's conclusion, I believe that the problem lies not in the principle of African philosophy itself but with the kind of interpretations given to it. In the Yoruba case, the concern about how to explore one's distinctive nature is attended to after the fact of one's being as the being of all is ascertained. If we observe from the passage I lifted from Hallen, it is evident that only the individual knows her self correctly. And she is expected to do something with the knowledge. Individuals do not know their potentials only to be left inert. The saying *falana gbo tire, tara eni la n gbo*

---

[171] Chukwudum B. Okolo, "Self as a Problem in African Philosophy", p. 215.

(Falana, face your project, that is the duty of individuals) supports this claim. The Yoruba will revert to this saying in order to redirect the focus of any individual who is merged in the social world of others. The term Falana represents the individual as the ultimate definer of her life. Semantically, the concept is derived from two Yoruba words. *Ifa* and *lana*. *Ifa* is the custodian of knowledge and *lana* means to pave the way. Hence, the concept comes as a reminder to every individual about the need to recognize the fact that no one else can possibly know what is best for one and that one should choose accordingly. Roughly speaking, it means do not be a conformist. Thus, Yoruba philosophy does not devalue the individual's power of self legislation. Each self is arguably thought to contain certain unique potentials which are meant to be cultivated in the world. Let us recall that we mention in chapter one that *emi* contains the dynamism for growth. Thus, the being of the individual that is identical with the being of all the others in the community is also different from the being of these others because of its unique content. This position finds support in Idoniboye's claim that the *emi* that is constant also individuates itself in diverse forms in the world.[172] This is the idea of Spirit in Yoruba philosophy, it is the "supreme principle of individuality, plurality and unity".[173]

There is another conception of the world as a market in Yoruba philosophy which highlights also the importance that Yoruba gives to self choice. Yoruba says *oja ni aiye* (market is the world). This expression depicts the world as a place that individuals come purposely to choose their lives through skillful negotiation. In choosing one's life one needs to engage others. Each individual must utilize his negotiating skills in order to maximize his self worth. The negotiation principle is very essential for it is through this

---

[172] See D. E. Idoniboye, "The Idea of an African Philosophy: The Concept of Spirit in African Metaphysics", pp. 84-85.
[173] See Jim I. Unah, "The Nature of African Metaphysics," p. 349.

that the face of the self becomes defined. In fact, the primacy of carrying out one's ideal through careful negotiation with others, as we shall soon see below, comes out vividly in Yoruba conception of self rebirth. The idea of the world as a market also aligns with the typification of the world as a community in the sense that both represent life as sharing. Just like the individuals in the family need to share their lives and be fair about it in order to ensure the continuity of the family, the ideal of the world as a market typifies the need for individuals to be fair in their dealings with one another. The essentiality of negotiation is showcased in the synonymous usage of *aiye* (world) and *oja*.(market). The aphorism *oja ni aiye* may also mean, in its literal interpretation, market is life. This interpretation comes from the understanding of *aiye* as life. This aphorism further reveals the importance of communication, consent, dialogue etc. in identity articulation. Community, it is presupposed, cannot be developed on a rigid identification of the good. Just like the prices of the commodities in the market fluctuate due to some economic forces, so also must the good of the community be adjusted to the needs and current realities of the members. This interpretation suggests the possibility of self development. The possibility of life being enriched through the negotiating skills of individuals in the community is further stressed in this conception of the world. So, the statement *oja ni aiye* thrives on the thinking that being has the possibility of growth. The being of the person can never be exhausted by group identities no matter how pleasant they may be. Gbadegesin comments,

> An existence, by virtue of its source in the Deity, is good and to be appreciated. It is good to exist. Existence itself is beautiful. But, however beautiful a thing is, there is always room for improvement. There are degrees of beauty. Thus an original beauty of existence could be improved upon by adorning it with character. The difference between one form of

existence and another would then be located in the quality of its adornment, that is, the quality of its character.[174]

By conceiving the world both in the like of a family and a market, Yoruba shows that the world consists of free individuals who have special commitments to one another. This commitment is to ensure that none of the individual members inhibit others' development. Hence, Yoruba points out that the world is a place where individuals come to choose their lives but within the peculiar social meaning which has accumulated and stand to define the good of the community over a period of time. This social meaning has come to represent the cultural whole to which members look forward to in self understanding. It has become the constitutive meaning which dictates how we should relate and adjust our inclinations and desires in our involvement with others in the community. The underlying assumption is that the individual has the capacity to control her natural impulses in light of the shared consensus about the good of the community. It is the history of this adjustment that ultimately defines authentic individuality.

Self Identity: The Socialization Process

A good way to approach the question of the formation of identity in Yoruba philosophy is to start from the meaning of individual in Yoruba thought. The term individual is formed from two Yoruba words *eni* (one) and *yan* (choice). *Eni* refers to no certain individual. When a certain individual is intended as the point of reference, the Yoruba will say *eni yen* (that person). *Eni* is used to represent the class of human individuals in contrast with the class of other individuals such as animals, trees etc. *Eni* cannot be used for these other classes of things. All individuals in the class of human individual have the capacity to choose among varied alternatives. The person, Yoruba

---

[174] Segun Gbadegesin, "Individuality, Community and the World Order", p. 304.

affirms, is a rational subject though the rationale of the choice associated with individuality has not been free from criticism. I will return to this shortly. The consideration of choice as the important nature of the individual seems to imply that anyone who is unable to display this capacity has lost out from the class of the human individual. Hence, the saying *eni to yan to ye lo yanju* (the person that chooses and chooses successfully is the fulfilled person). Any individual who fails to demonstrate this capacity is said to *wa sa* (be in vain).

The term *wa* is literally used for being. Yoruba does not use any other word to represent the being of the human individual and the non-human individual. Everything that is is said to *wa* (be). However, Yoruba does not spare any entity which, due to sheer negligence, refused to perform its function the appellation of *wa sa* (be in vain). Anything or any person who is tagged as *wa sa* is represented as not utilizing its essential nature. When used for any person, it indicates that the person is not utilizing her rational and moral capacities. Therefore, it could be legitimately said that the concept of *eniyan* refers to something that ought to make choices. I will show shortly that this idea of choice making does not exclude the choice of one's life plans. Before I do this, let me mention that the procedure of the choice of life plans that is articulated in Yoruba philosophy has been variously discussed. Some say that the rationale of the choice associated with *eniyan* in Yoruba philosophy entails a support for determinism. We shall attend to this argument in section two. The other camp thinks differently, arguing that the choice that is associated with *eniyan* depicts the Yoruba belief in soft determinism. My position is that the analysis of the choice associated with individuals in Yoruba philosophy describes the Yoruba belief that self determination is possible only within the structure of community's

social meanings. This implies that authentic choices can only be made from within the sets of alternative goods that are available to the individual as a member of the community and within the social structures of the community. Consequently, identity is valuable within the particular set of community social meaning. It may be said that this position will tie the individual to the community. I will show how the Yoruba position escapes this end. At this juncture, I should mention that Yoruba position shares certain similarity with Walzer who thinks that individuals as members of the community "do the choosing, in accordance with our understanding of what membership means in our community and of what sort of a community we want to have".[175] In Walzer, we understand that the end of the community dictates the idea of the good of the individual member. Walzer thinks that this does not amount to the marginalization of the individual who, in the first instance, is only able to make sense of her self from the prevalent social life of the community. A similar view is echoed by Coetzee.

> Non-contextualized accounts of moral agency alienate agents from their autonomy because they alienate them from the conditions that enable them to claim their lives as their own and to comprehend moral situations through their own self understanding.[176]

Now, let us attend to the question raised previously. To what extent can it be said that the Yoruba individual is a free chooser? We shall reflect on this by considering the implication of name on the individual in Yoruba philosophy. [177] Usually, a child is identified with the community on the seventh or eight day when she is given a name.

---

[175] Michael Walzer, "Membership" in *Communitarianism and Individualism*, p. 66.
[176] Pieter H. Coetzee, "Particularity in Morality and its Relation to Community", p. 288.
[177] For detail discussion into the role of the parents, extended family and the community in child naming, see Segun Gbadegesin, "Individuality, Community, and the Moral Order", p. 292. Barry Hallen, "Phenomenology and the Exposition of African Traditional Thought", p. 83. P R McKenzie, *Hail Orisha: A Phenomenology of a West African Religion in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, (Netherland: Brill Academic Publishers, 1997). For a comparison of the Yoruba in Trinidad, see, Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Trinidad Yoruba: From Mother Tongue to Memory*, (USA: University of the West Indies Press, 1999).

Prior to this time, the new baby is welcomed into the family as "*ayo abara tintin* (a little thing of great joy)".[178] Before I proceed on this discussion, it is important that I explain the idea of '*abara*' as entailed in Yoruba worldview. The term '*abara*' is commonly used to depict something that is unique or original. This thing may be strange, attractive or appalling but it is unique and in most cases rare. For example, some people with certain special abilities are identified as '*abara meji*'. This means that they have certain potentials which make it possible for them to do certain things which others could not do. But every person is identified as '*abara*' at birth. The term refers to the originality of persons. Any child is distinct and for this reason members of the family and the larger community are joyful because the little tiny thing endowed with certain distinctive potentials will soon blossom and enrich the community life. Everyone looks forward to the naming ceremony where the identity of the child is to be disclosed. Name is crucial among the many ways the Yoruba provokes self understanding. There is a strong indication that Yoruba develops the naming system as a way of bringing people's attention to their responsibilities in the community. Firstly, name is used to highlight how people's identity is associated with immediate family. Names are also coined in a way that identifies the extended family and community that an individual belongs to. The names Akintayo, Oguntayo, Adeolu represent each of these individuals as belonging to certain distinctive communities. The prefixes Akin, Ogun, Ade are symbols of strength, courage and royalty respectively. Thus, Akin is commonly used to identify anyone with a community of warriors, Ogun for courageous people and Ade for people from royal lineage. But Yoruba goes beyond the symbolic attributes of names because names do not exhaust the identity of persons. It is not uncommon to see someone whose name depicts

---

[178] Segun Bbadegesin, "Individuality, Community, and the Moral Order", p. 292.

say X function performing the function of Y in the community. A child's name may be known prior to the time she is conceived or born, but it is impossible to apply any name to any child unless she is actually born. This means that the physical presence of the child and the community she belongs to are necessary factors in naming. Also, identity becomes meaningful partly through the family and the community one belongs to. A person is first identified as a son or daughter of someone else and part of the individual's identity is the family she comes from and so on. Viewed from this end, personal identity is a product of the social meaning of the community. On the other hand, the identity of the individual is not limited to the community meaning. Name is conceived as a creative power of the individual. It is like a magical power of ordinary speech and evokes a kind of energy in the person to engage the world.

The idea of name in the latter position is suggested by the Yoruba view of name as a descriptive concept. In this sense, name is a description not merely of gender or community but a rough description of the essence of life that an individual comes to lead in the world. This is why name is understood as a symbol of self understanding. On a common notation, the mere mention of some people's name gives some clue about the circumstances that prevail in their family, prior to and during their birth. More significantly, names indicate the possible path that an individual ought to follow. The system of divination plays a crucial role in this respect.[179] But prior to the determination of the futuristic identity that is associated with name, every child is respected and loved. This owes to the Yoruba belief that human beings are the most valuable entities in life.

---

[179] Philip M. Peek defines divination as "a standardized process deriving from a learned discipline based on an extensive body of knowledge. This knowledge may or may not be literally expressed during the interpretation of the oral message. The diviner may utilize a fixed corpus, such as the Yoruba Ifa Odu verses, or a more diffuse body of esoteric knowledge". Philip M. Peek, " "Divination": A Way of Knowing?", in (ed.) Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *African Philosophy*, (USA, UK: Blackwell, 1998), p. 171.

The person contains some immeasurable possibilities which should be realized as she engages the world. The divination system assists the family of the child to apprehend the correct name to be given to the child. This quest amounts to the quest for the meaning of being.[180] The divination process also takes into consideration the family history, the social and natural conditions that obtain prior to and during the birth of the child. I take this space to explain this in detail in other to show the relevant steps that lead to the derivation of what may be called preliminary identity in Yoruba philosophy.

The question that may be raised from the above discussion is whether there is a strict relation between a given name and the life that individuals must lead in the world. In other words, is it the case that a given name must determine necessarily the life that the bearer of the name ought to lead? For example, the name Adepetu refers to someone from the royal family, in particular, those who ought to take leadership responsibilities in the affairs of the community. But is it the case that the given name is a sufficient condition for this individual to fulfill this responsibility? Are there other conditions which this individual must meet before she can be qualified to occupy this office? What is reflected in the above queries is whether identity is given from outside i.e. by the community which creates the name. Two issues are entailed in this conception of identity. Firstly, it presupposes that identity is a given but secondly, if identity is notably considered to be a given, is it given from outside? The latter is not the same as the former because if the life plan articulated for the child is already contained in her being, it will be difficult to ascertain that the identity delineated for her is from the outside.

---

[180] See Emmanuel Chuckwudi Eze, "The Problem of Knowledge in "Divination": The Example of Ifa" in (ed.) Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *African Philosophy*, p. 174.

So, what is it about name in Yoruba philosophical system? Does a name necessarily freeze the individual to a particular end? How does name enhance the chances of the individual to structure her way of life as she likes? These questions are engendered in the association of identity with name in Yoruba philosophy. If names are believed to define, without remainder, the identity of the person, it will mean that once an individual is named, she is destined to become what is delineated in her name. Then, she is irredeemably lost under the practices and values which ought to guide her given name. Thus, Oguntade must lead her life solely by the principles and practices of the religious community, namely, Ogun. Now, assuming in adult life, someone discovers that the values and practices associated with her name are contrary to those things she would have chosen personally, will this not imply that the identity is coerced on her from outside? Embedded in this observation is another issue which dwells on whether the identity that is suggested by a name is fixed. Before we attempt these questions, let us allude to Robin Horton on Yoruba's view about name.

> The magic which is so prominent a feature of African and other pre-industrial cultures turns out in nearly all cases to be an extension of this belief in the creative and controlling power of ordinary speech. Sometimes, human magic is explicitly linked to the operations of the creator-as when Yoruba say that the secret of sorcery is the discovery of the hidden 'real' names of things that the supreme being used in creating them ... Their function is not to 'say' something that words cannot. Rather, it is to give the ephemeral words of oral speech an increased durability and power of penetration, and hence to increase their creative and magical efficacy.[181]

To start with, name does not freeze. On the contrary, name creates. Name identifies the raw content of being. Name is devised to have a creative and controlling influence on the individual. Through a name, the individual is reminded of certain life mission. Name

---

[181] Robin Horton, "The Romantic Illusion: Roger Bastide on African and the West", pp. 90-91.

points to an end but it does not determine how the end is to be reached and whether the end will surely be reached. In name, the 'being-yet-to fully become' of the individual is perpetually kept in view. Hence, name contains the being even as the being contains the name. Name is a symbol of self understanding. Name assists the individual to reflect on her inner being as it finds reflection in her external form, when this external form develops from time to time, the individual sees herself as moving towards self actualization or the accomplishment of her real name. Let me point to one objection that may be raised at this juncture. We may think that this explanation contradicts our previous claim. We observed earlier that only the individual has a privileged access into the content of her being. But, here, our claim is that the identity that is represented in name is determined by a system of divination which actually decodes the meaning of an individual's being. The only way to grant this possibility is by acknowledging that someone else has access into the content of the individual's being. How can a person elucidate the meaning of another person's being if she does not gain insight into the content of the being? This is an interesting point as it suggests that others can have access to the inner content of one's being.

Let us attend to this observation by distinguishing between someone else having insight into the content of A's being and A having an unmistaken self knowledge. A hypothetical case of A involving in a ghastly accident may help us drive home the point. A seeks the assistance of C who is a medical doctor. C is able to gain some insight into A's problem through certain device on C's computer. We may ask whether what is displayed on C's computer is identical with A's pain. Certainly, what is displayed on the computer is the form of the pain, the real pain is only known to A as contained in her

being. In the same vein, it is the form of the content of the individual's being that is apparent to the diviner. And when the information is given, it is not specific, it is given like a concealed truth which the individual herself needs to thrash out in life. Certainly, what is contained in the being of the individual is not precisely or clearly known to the diviner.[182] It needs to be mentioned that whatever knowledge that the diviner professes only belongs to the domain of *igbagbo* (putative belief). I will say more on this point in the last section. We said initially that while the being (the *emi*) of the individual is capable of growth, the different stages of growth which the being must pass through is unknown to the diviner. In fact, the diviner is not sure of its end. Another point we need to note is that the issue of identity is not finalized at this point; it is the starting point. It is like a kind of initiation into the social world of the community. The individual needs to step into this world to define her own identity. This explains why Emmanuel Eze wants us to understand Ifa divination as a system that facilitates 'deep self understanding'.

> *Ifa*-work, is therefore, a quest for discovery of meaning and direction in life, personal or communal, through rational discernment and liberation. I want to argue that, from a theoretical point of view, *Ifa* should be understood as a practice of "deep understanding" (*uche omimi*). This search for deep understanding, I believe, is of philosophical nature, because it is a reflective process of seeking knowledge about human life and action – by way of established discernment and epistemological processes.[183]

The Yoruba furthers the question of identity by noting that the identity associated with name is preliminary. This means that authentic identity is not defined by any given

---

[182] See Yemi Elebuibon, *Iyere Ifa (Tonal Poetry, the Voice of Ifa) an Exposition of Yoruba Divinational Chants*, (USA: Ile Orunmila Communications, 1999), pp. 206-225. Olufemi Taiwo, "*Ifa*: An Account of A Divination System and Some Concluding Epistemological Questions", in Kwasi Wiredu, (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, (USA: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 304-310.
[183] Emmanuel Chuckwudi Eze, "The Problem of Knowledge in "Divination": The Example of Ifa", in Kwasi Wiredu, (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, p. 174. Ifa is a system of divination that reveals certain facts about individuals' life. It is a means of self understanding.

name but by a process of self redefinition also known as self rebirth (*atunbi*). This is expected of any mature Yoruba person. This is the adult role in which the individual herself plays a dominant function in deciding what she conceives to be her best self interest. Here, the individual determines herself to be the important factor that is necessary to bring about the end she conceives as the best good. She conceives of herself as the cause of her actions and that the end she aims aligns with her inmost being. Although this being has roughly been defined at birth, the principle behind self redefinition says that the individual ought to determine her own end by the law of her own causality, the law of doing something for the sake of the end that one deserves. Part of what the idea of self redefinition allows the individual to do is to constantly engage the social meanings of the community from time to time. The Yoruba saying *bi a bini, ko to ka tun ara eni bi* (natural birth is not as important as self rebirth) illustrates this position. The concept of *atunbi* (self rebirth) emphasizes the necessity of self redefinition. Usually, each member belongs to a particular social status in the community. Hence, self redefinition occurs from an engagement with the particular contingencies of one's social group. In some important respect, the individual will need to follow decision procedures which comply with the particular contingencies of her group, but this does not mean that the procedural rules are fixed. Therefore, a name that is given at birth only qualifies the individual as a member of the community. The individual needs to prove the worth of the given name by redefining it in line with the current challenges that face her within the community. The model for determining the value of a redefined identity consists of the contributions it makes to the community at large, the family and finally, the individual's life. The good of the individual is not left out in the determination of identity. However,

her dignity is revealed by the amount of her consideration for the good of the other members of the community. Thus, we see that the initial name given to the individual is intended to enlist her as a potential member of the community, someone who is qualified to redefine her identity through the social structures of the community. One advantage of this philosophy is that it makes the freedom of the individual more realistic and the individual is able to appreciate her choices better if done within the community. But what is the extent of this freedom? Is it absolute in the sense that it can erode all the values of the community and define its own values? Our investigation of the nature of the moral subject in relation to the specific rules of the community in the next section will answer this question. The constitutive consciousness of the community has a lot to do with the determination of identity in Yoruba philosophy. The question is whether this concession ties the individual to the community. Let us journey into the next section to see how Yoruba goes about this problem.

II

MORALITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

> In the communitarian moral universe caring or compassion or generosity, not justice-which is related essentially to a strictly rights-based morality-may be a fundamental moral category. In a moral framework where love, compassion, caring, friendship, and genuine concern for others characterize social relationships, justice-which is about relations of claims and counter-claims-may not be the primary moral value.[184]

We have argued that Yoruba depicts the individual as having the essential capacity for choices. This is the primary understanding of *eniyan* (individual) in Yoruba language. This notion of individuality essentially underscores the primacy of self choice in identity categorization. The destiny of the individual is not in the hand of anyone else: she is the master of her fate. This fact, as I will show below, is exemplified in the role that the community plays in Yoruba construction of individuality. This section will extend the notion of identity that is explicated in the previous section especially as it relates to the issue of morality. To be specific, I will concentrate on the moral implications of Yoruba idea of identity on the individual. Let us proceed by exposing some of the moral implications of the main narratives which discuss individuality in Yoruba philosophy. Previously, we argue that the capacity of choice is the essence of individuality and that any person who refuses to demonstrate this capacity gives others the chance to doubt her humanity. The issue that will attract our attention now is the degree to which identity is considered a choice in Yoruba philosophy. Is the individual an absolute chooser? In other words, are her choices entirely independent of the state of the community? Or, are her

---

[184] Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 70.

choices guided solely by community good? How does Yoruba philosophy explain the limit of the community good on the choice of the individual? What kind of respect does Yoruba philosophy give to the good of the individual if it is contrary to the community good? These, among other related issues, will attract our attention here. Our discussion will proceed under the following headings: Yoruba on the idea of the subject, community as the locus of duty and detachment and self achievement.

Yoruba on the Idea of the Subject

We come to the point where we should discuss Yoruba myths about the moral subject. A lot of things presented in the myths are very much in agreement with our earlier position that Yoruba predicates individuality on the idea that the person has the freedom of self choice. In particular, Yoruba argues that the individual has the capacity to determine her own good prior to the particular conditions that prevail in the community. Yoruba believes that the idea of the good exists in the mind prior to the time we join the community. This belief construes life as purposeful and insists that individuals ought to be determined to realize that which is conceived as the ultimate aim of life. In the like of the liberal person, the Yoruba individual is not an aimless wonderer in the world. However, Yoruba does not subscribe to certain things which liberalism upholds. The myth of *ori* as developed in defense of individuality will now be discussed to illustrate Yoruba viewpoint. *Ori*, to the Yoruba, is the symbol of individuality.[185] The English equivalence of *ori* is 'head'. But *ori* does not refer to the physical head. Rather, it refers

---

[185] Different translators have attempted the English equivalence of *ori*. See, A. B. Ellis, *The Yoruba-Speaking People of the Slave Coast of West Africa: Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Language, Etc.* (London: Curzon Press, 1974), p. 127. S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, (ed.) O Johnson, (London: Routledge, 1921), p. 27. P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of their History, Ethnology and Languages*, (London: Frank Cass, 1961), p. 283. J Olumide Lucas, *The Religion of the Yorubas*, (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 283. Bolaji E. Idowu, *God in Yoruba Belief*, p. 170. Wande Abimbola, "The Yoruba Concept of Human Personality" in *La Notion de Personne en Afrique Noire*, (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1971), p. 80.

to the ideas in the mind. This is why it is also called *ori inu* (the inner head). *Ori inu* is also used to depict the self.[186] For brevity sake, I will adopt the term *ori* for *ori inu* (inner head). *Ori* contains the idea of the good. This good is schematically portrayed to be prior to the community in the sense that the individual has got the idea of the good prior to her becoming a member of any particular community. She only joins the community to unleash this good. Hence, she needs to abide by the precepts of *ori* if she will actualize her ideal self. What does this imply? It means that the individual will only need to conform to the ideas which are contained in her *ori*. This explains why *ori* is the final arbiter in self determination.[187] Yoruba says *ori eni lawure eni* (one's *ori* is the source of one's success).[188]

Three interesting narratives in ancient Yoruba philosophy show how *ori* comes to be the custodian of life plans and why *ori* is the ultimate arbiter in decision procedure. We shall discuss these narratives alongside the relation of the individual to the community. I need to mention, at this juncture, that the three narratives support the hypothesis that the individual knows her life plans before joining the physical community. However, the question remains whether they are able to conceive the meaning of the good independently of the community. The accounts that we are about to explore show that these individuals are already living in a kind of communal setting that is beyond the world before they join the physical community. From the outset, Yoruba

---

[186] Barry Hallen, *The Good, The Bad and The Beautiful, Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture*, p. 46, 45.

[187] We may wonder whether this does not align with the theory of unextended self or, to put it differently, the pure individualistic theory of self which claim that the self is nothing more than the ideas on the mind. This kind of self is common to the Cartesian self. But, if this claim is true in the Yoruba position, it will raise a tension between its metaphysics and epistemology. In this regard, the metaphysical notion of the self that goes deep into the most fundamental level where everything there is comes together as the one true self will be contradicting the epistemological account of the self.

[188] Ibid, p. 116.

position highlights the importance of the community. The idea of the good cannot be articulated outside the boundary of some community. We will return to this shortly.

One of the narratives, *akunleyan* (something that is chosen while kneeling) claims that the individual kneels at the presence of Olodumare choosing her life plan. This is contained in the *ori* that the individual chooses. According to Yoruba philosophy, there are two kinds of *ori*- good and bad- one of which must be chosen by the individual. The individual is not aware of the good or bad *ori* neither is she given any clue on how to detect the good *ori* from the bad ones.[189] But whichever one she chooses will be her lot in life. We may be puzzled about the kind of choice that is presented before the individual in this account. We wonder whether this is a choice at all. At the moment, we need to note that the individual knows only that a choice was made prior to her joining the community but as to the content of what has been chosen, she is ignorant. What is stressed is the capacity for choice. As for what is chosen, that is left undetermined until the individual becomes an active participant in the community. I will show later what Yoruba uses this to illustrate about the idea of the good that is known prior to the community. For now, we understand that the individual's capacity for choice is prior to the community. The second narrative, *akunlegba* (something that is received while kneeling) simply says that the individual receives her life plan while kneeling in the presence of Olodumare prior to her joining the community. Here, identity is construed as something that is given. Again, what is given is unknown until the individual joins the community. The third narrative, *ayanmo* (affixed choice) says that the individual kneels before Olodumare narrating her life plans seeking Olodumare's approval. At the end of the narration, Olodumare will put the final seal on them. It is outside the jurisdiction of

---

[189] Ibid, p. 34.

Olodumare to alter whatever life plan individuals set for themselves. One question to be answered later is whether there is any room for this plan to be revised, reshaped or even cancelled by the chooser. The difference in the third narrative is that it portrays the individual as someone that is autonomous and reasonable. The latter quality is added because the narrator needs to lay down her life plans step by step. I will show later that the three narratives are out to demonstrate the limit of reason in the choice of identity especially if it is not situated within some cultural context. This highlights the futility of the thinking that the rational conception of the good life is independent of the community.

But, before then, it is important that we reflect on why Yoruba sets three different narratives to articulate the ways identity is obtained. On the superficial level of analysis, two of these narratives claim that identity is chosen. One holds a contrary position, depicting identity as a thing that is given by Olodumare. What can we discover from these seemingly contrary or inconsistent positions about identity? One easy way to answer the question is to argue that the narratives are developed by different classical Yoruba thinkers. But this answer will not suffice because what appears contrary in the different narratives can be resolved at a deeper level of analysis. All the narratives are pointing to one essential fact about the choice of identity. The point of emphasis is that reason can only be a useful guide in the choice of identity when it is utilized in the context of some language users. Yoruba belief about the ultimate status of individuals in self choice is revealed in Olodumare's role. The capacity to choose the good is independent of the community but not the knowledge of the good. This is why

Olodumare is only present to respect the choice of the individual.[190] The idea is that whatever an individual chooses to become shall be. The will to be is what is being stressed and this will must be exercised in the community. This essential nature of the individual is not going to be compromised by Yoruba. The nature exists in the person prior to her joining the community. And this makes the issue of self definition something that is infinitely undetermined by anything external to the person. It is not a matter that can be completely defined by the community. However, Yoruba adds that no choice of the good life can really be said to be significant or meaningful until it is actually placed within the context of the community. The good life or otherwise can only be defined in a social context, Yoruba position illustrates. It further shows that one cannot claim to be a rational individual except by demonstrating one's capacities for critical reflection within a body of culturally transmitted norms and beliefs. I will support these claims with cases of individuals who choose their life plans before Olodumare below.

Let us revisit the dilemma that is raised about the choice of identity as presented in the above narratives. To some, the idea of choice that is presented in the narrative is insignificant and ultimately, the narratives depict Yoruba support for determinism. This claim, we should note, originates from the idea that what the individual chooses and approved by Olodumare will forever be. Wande Ambimbola presents the deterministic position in the following,

> A man's destiny, that is to say, success or failure in life, depends to a large
> extent on the type of head he chose in heaven. The choice of a good ori
> ensures that the individual concerned would lead a successful and

---

[190] See some possible reasons why Olodumare's presence indicates that the choice of *ori* the is the sole responsibility of the individual in M. A. Makinde, A Philosophical Analysis of the Yoruba Concept of Ori and Human Destiny", pp. 64-65.

prosperous life on earth while the choice of a bad *ori* condemns the individual concerned to a life of failure.[191]

In Wande's account, the life of any person is, according to Yoruba, determined solely by the kind of *Ori* chosen in the primordial world. This position shows that the individual is determined, inevitably, to be what she chooses to become in the world. But going by the understanding that the individual does not even know what she chooses, the conclusion that Yoruba supports determinism lacks any plausible grounding. According to the narratives, none of the individuals knows exactly the content of the *ori* presented before them. The people are just making blind choices and this makes the choices trivial. Even the narratives that claim that individuals narrate their life plan step by step before Olodumare support this point as we shall see below. But assuming the critics argue that the knowledge of the choice is not what makes it deterministic, but the fact that the person is bound by what she chooses. If this position is taken, the idea of determinism that will be legitimate to attribute to Yoruba philosophy will look like this: the choice of the individual determines her to become something and this something is unknown to her until she reaches the community. If this is the case, the argument of the determinist breaks down. How significant will this idea of determinism be? For a person to be determined by a kind of choice of life whose content is unknown to her is trivial. Let us suppose that the critics' reply that it is typically the case that one can be determined without knowing. Our response will be that the Yoruba philosophy also takes this to be trivial. The triviality becomes evident when the person is given the choice of altering this choice of life if she deems fit. That Yoruba condemns this way of reasoning is

---

[191] Wande Abimbola, *Ifa : An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus*, (Ibadan : Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 79-80.

exemplified in the opportunity given to individuals to re-define their lives. Some commentators like Makinde have argued that the deterministic implication given to the three narratives is inappropriate in view of the fact that the individual can change her chosen life plan upon joining the community.

> There is always a role an individual, as a person, has to play in shaping or reshaping his destiny through a readjustment of his 'inner head' by means of appropriate sacrifice or propitiation.[192]

In Makinde's view, the possibility of changing life plans makes the claim of hard determinism inappropriate. This reaction is right owing to the fact that hard determinism accounts that everything, "including everything that we do, has been definitely booked from any earlier date you like to choose. Whatever is, was to be. So nothing that does occur could have been helped and nothing that has not actually been done could possibly have been done" .[193] Hence, Wande concludes that the narratives, properly investigated, entail the belief of the Yoruba about soft determinism rather than hard determinism. Wande presents a truer account of individuality in Yoruba philosophy. The three narratives subscribe to the thinking that individuals are capable of making choices. On this ground, the ultimate power of self choice is given to none else than the individual. Even Olodumare is not allowed to intervene. He is represented as a mere observer and approver of individuals' decisions. This confirms the respect that Yoruba gives to the individual as a moral subject.

Furthermore, the narratives are devised in order to illustrate the importance of the community in the exercise of autonomy. The three narratives altogether show that meaningful choices can only be made within community contexts where some

---

[192] M. A. Makinde, "A Philosophical Analysis of the Yoruba Concept of Ori and Human Destiny", p. 66.
[193] Gilbert Ryle, *Dilemmas*, (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1954), p. 15.

preferential systems exist. In the first narrative, the individual is clearly represented as someone capable of making choices though the content of the choice is unknown to her. The fact that the content is unknowable to the individual illustrates the triviality of the choice. Any choice that is made outside some preferential system is meaningless. Any claim to a meaningful choice in such a system is false. The possibility of changing or revising life plans attests to the consistency of Yoruba position. Yoruba philosophy suggests that the community is the place where individuals can choose meaningfully. Hence, the first narrative states the necessary condition for meaningful choices. Makinde consents that the choice of the individual in this narrative is insignificant. He says,

> It does not seem to be a choice at all. Now, all choices presuppose preferences. Given the fact that human beings are rational, they do not make a choice outside a preferential system.[194]

The second narrative reveals the limit of external authority (including the understanding of community institutions and practices as rigid authorities) in self determination. In this narrative, we understand that individuals' life plans are given by Olodumare. This account is inconsistent with the idea of *eniyan* in Yoruba philosophy. Going by the nature of the individuals, it is obvious that the account demeans the individual's autonomy. It represents the identity of the human individual as something that is wholly determined from outside. Olodumare, the supreme deity, is the supreme giver of identity. But Yoruba support for the supremacy of the person in self choice appears in the rejection of the given life as the ultimate identity. This life, Yoruba maintains, can also be altered. The third narrative illustrates the triviality of rationality which is not grounded within any particular language game. The three narratives consent that the identity that is chosen

---

[194] M. A. Makinde, "A Philosophical Analysis of the Yoruba Concept of Ori and Human Destiny", p. 59.

prior to community context is thin and trivial. This highlights the problem with identity constructions whose premises are based on the rational cognition that is abstracted from the contingencies of the community. Whereas this account supposes that the rational individual can make intelligent and meaningful choices independently of the community, the Yoruba thinks that such choices are impossible. Yoruba emphasizes the social nature of the individual. It shows the need for us to be sociable.

To buttress our thinking that the narratives illustrate the need of the community in self choice, I will allude to two cases which are prominent in the literature. The first case refers to Afuwape who receives the invitation to choose his life plan before joining the community.[195] Knowing the enormity of the task, his friends warn him to go straight to the house of Ajala where the choice is to be made. However, Afuwape declines his friends' counsel on the ground that seeking the elders' advice before heading to Ajala's house is more important. Afuwape believes that the advice of the elders can assist him to make right decisions. We are told that Afuwape picks the 'good' *ori* having abided by the elders' instruction to perform some sacrifice. I will not discuss what the idea of sacrifice may mean for lack of space. The second case relates to the story of a young man who is joining the community for the first time. Gbadegesin relays the story in the following passage,

> He recited his destiny for the approval of Olodumare, the Supreme Being. His destiny was to go into the world, live a youthful age, have a girl friend, fix a date for the wedding, and, on the wedding day, go into the bush to relieve himself, and be bitten by a poisonous snake.[196]

---

[195] See the detail of the story in Segun Gbadegesin, "Toward a Theory of Destiny", in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, p. 313.

[196] Ibid. p. 319.

The two cases do not disprove the fact that these individuals are reasonable. Afuwape's reasonableness is highlighted in the way he handles the choices before him, namely, his ability to prioritize his personal reflection over his friends' counsel to go straight to Ajala's house. The person who is coming to the world for the first time is also reasonable because he lays his project step by step before Olodumare. But what we need to pay attention to is the triviality of this person's rationality compared to that of Afuwape. It is doubtful if he understands the significance of his choice. Having achieved some success in life including the blessedness of courtship, one wonders why this person will think that the right action to take is to end his life on the very day of his wedding. Moreover, one would expect that if the significance of the decision on the yet to be wife and the extended families of both parties is well known to the chooser, he will probably think otherwise. What the Yoruba is illustrating is that reason is trivial if it is not situated in a given experience. Outside a particular context of meaning, human thoughts, feelings and behavior become incoherent and meaningless.[197] This finds support in the following remarks by Taylor.

> My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame of horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.[198]

Afuwape's case supports the need for the community in self choice. As a reasonable individual, it is possible for him to make his choice independent of the elders' advice but because the elders are quite experienced and knowledgeable, he thinks that their advice

---

[197] See Daniel M. Savage, *John Dewey's Liberalism, Individual, Community, and Self-Development*, p. 42.
[198] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 27.

will be useful. That Afuwape rates the experience of these elders higher reveals the importance which the Yoruba places on community experience in self understanding. The reasonableness of Afuwape's action is illustrated in the passage below.

> For as a matter of moral psychology, no longer of logic, people are often confronted with complexities in trying to live according to their conception of a good life, but they find themselves unable to resolve them. These complexities arise because the conventions of their moral tradition provide inadequate guidance about how they should respond in some particular situation. They recognize that their intuitive responses have become unreliable, but they do not know how to find a reliable response because they are wanting in knowledge, commitment, or reflectiveness. This is the situation in which people feel the need to rely on the judgment of others. If they are reasonable they will rely on those whose lives and conducts are better than their own and who therefore can be supposed to have a greater extent the qualifications which they themselves lack. If they receive the help they need because the people to whom they turn have the qualification to provide it, then it is justified to recognize them as moral authorities, with all that such recognition entails.[199]

On the issue of identity, Yoruba sees the community as a need, but not in the sense that the community can define the entire possibilities of the good which the individual is capable of imagining. The imaginative capacity to conceive one's own identity in anyway that one deems best is depicted as transcending the boundary of the community, but how one could identify a plausible identity is to think of its consequences on others in the community. The fact that Yoruba claims that any individual can alter her life through certain efforts indicates that the choice of identity is ultimately left in the hand of the individual. However, this does not demean the importance of the community. This claim is corroborated by the literal meaning of Afuwape. The name Afuwape means a person with a wholesome character. This kind of life is generally regarded by Yoruba as

---

[199] John Kekes, "Pluralism and Moral Authority", in Kim-Chong Chong, Sor-hoon Tan and C. L. Ten, (eds.,) *The Moral Circle and the Self Chinese and Western Approaches*, (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2003),p. 90.

one that respects the freedom of others. By implication, it means showing respect for the freedom and equality of others in the way one conducts his life affairs. Fundamentally, such a life is lived by respecting what others believe as the good, it involves listening patiently, attentively and with the willingness to see how the conception of the good held is consistent with that of the universal community. The individual has the priority in the choice of identity; this is why the Yoruba says *mo iwa fun oniwa* (know and respect each people's way of life). But the community remains a valuable entity which aids the individual to adjust in relevant respects. To further support the idea of the community as a need, Yoruba argues that the conception of the good which any individual has prior to the community can only be validated by active participation in the community. Hence, it is the life in the community that authenticates any conception of the good that is prior to the community life. The idea here is that the presence of the community is a necessity in the determination of individuality. Individuality is not a thing that is complete prior to the community. However, Yoruba does not deny that the individual's view of the good can transcend the good of a particular community because the community derives its existence from the existence of the individual members.[200] Each of these individuals is autonomous. The fact remains that they agree to operate by the constituent of the communal structure. This is what reduces the freedom of the individual. It is what Yoruba intends to show by introducing the notion of soft determinism in the articulation of individuality. The idea is that the society has a kind of soft influence on individuals through its moral traditions. This consideration shows that people come to undertake genuine moral autonomy not just from an abstract possibility but from pressing practical

---

[200] See Gyekye Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought" in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, (eds.,) *Person and Community*, *Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, p. 105.

need. This is not to imply that the autonomous individual does not have some control over her own development within the community but her conception of the good is not complete as if it is a thing that transcends time. The freedom to choose one's life is not denied but the delineation of this choice as good or bad requires the community's presence. Failure to construe oneself as a moral chooser in line with community facts leads to the disintegration of individuality. Why is the community so important? It is because that is where the individual's authentic development as a continuous process of growth takes place. This is the reason for action and this, we shall see, does not necessarily tie the individual to the community.

Community as the Locus of Duty

We have presented the idea of the self whose source of identity is freely known and yet has a communitarian face. The choice of identity is free in the sense that only individuals have the privileged access into their inmost nature. Consequently, this makes the individual's nature transcend the community. However, our thesis shows that the means of self development is largely social. This is because the capacity for moral choice and development can only be exercised in certain social settings. By implication, the human nature which Yoruba acknowledges to transcend the boundary of the community meaning is the uninhibited intelligible force, that is, *emi*. But since this intelligible force is the inmost reality of all, its nature cannot be asocial. It follows that though the individual is not limited to the community, she cannot lead a balanced life if she lives without a careful intention to preserve the order of the community. This is why she ought to appreciate the institutions and practices of the community which define the common good. In other words, it becomes very crucial for her to understand that the idea of the

common good in the cultural structure in which she belongs defines the substantive conception about the good life. Without much disputation, the individual's choice of way of life will, to a large extent, be influenced by the cultural tradition in which she is situated. However, the problem occurs when her chosen lifestyle is ranked solely from the point of view of what it contributes to or detracts from the common good. The difficulty in the above position lies not in the fact that the individual can lead her life differently from what is commonly accepted in the community as the way human beings ought to live. Her new ideals may further the community conception of the good life, it may even contribute to the flourishing of the members in the community. But a problem ensues when the idea of the good life in the community is fixed such that it cannot accommodate any new ways of living. Yoruba does not agree with the latter view. However, regardless of the right of the individual to choose her own life, Yoruba maintains that it is mistaken to conceive that this right can be exercised on an individualistic basis. Yoruba subscribes to the idea that individual's right and the conception of justice all depend on the cultural tradition of the community. Therefore, the community becomes the locus of duty and the focus of the individual before acting.[201]

One important question that may be raised from the foregoing (a question that liberalism takes to be crucial) is whether the dignity of the person as an autonomous subject is duly recognized. As a subject, the individual's right to live and choose what she considers good ought not to be inhibited by any specific good set at the community level. The above submission that the community becomes the focus of the individual before acting is a communitarian ideal and I surely agree with it. It implies that the person is born into an existing community and indeed into human culture. As a dignified subject, it

---

[201] See Pieter H. Coetzee, "Particularity in Morality and its Relation to Community", p. 279.

is legitimate for the individual to pursue her rights but this must be with an unwavering determination not to infringe on others' freedom. Up to this point, there may not arise any disputation but the central issue that needs to be addressed is how the individual can possibly exercise the right of self choice within the context of this thesis. Advocates of individualism may reject this ideology on the contention that it pays scant attention to the rights of individuals. Such position may be said to devalue human dignity. Since we propose that the reason for action is to realize the good which is inherent in the individual, how will the individual realize this good in case the community good contradicts her own good? This is the point. It is an insistence on the individuality of the person within the community and the Yoruba does not dispute that this should be appreciated. This claim finds support in our initial position that the individual is a unique being and that her identity is determined by her privileged access into the inner content of her being. Advocates of individualism go by this means of self identification. Consequently they hold that the good should be decided on a personal basis rather than communal basis. My argument is that this conclusion is mistaken. What does the position of the individualists imply? It surely implies that the determination of the good of individuals by certain central good is inconsistent with the conception of individuals as free choosers.

Yoruba describes two senses of identity, one that comes with given name and one that is associated with self redefinition or self rebirth. The two senses of identity are means of self understanding. The individual under the former identity is passing through a process of social transformation until she attains the full status of a person who can reconstruct her given identity. The community plays a vital role in this process. The

individual must forever be mindful of the part that the community plays in her self definition. At this stage, the right to be introduced into the conceptual categories of the community meanings belongs to the individual. Right is acquired by virtue of one's place in the social structure of the community. The objective of the socialization process is to gradually lead the individual into the mature stage where she will be able to further the course of self development on her own. At first, the individual is merely introduced to the institutions and practices of the community. At a later stage, she is tutored on the rationale of the institutions and practices. This tutorship is meant to prepare the individual for self achievement. The role of language in this preliminary stage is crucial. Language presents the particular outlook which has shaped the ways of life of the community. It is in language that individuals understand the various histories behind the traditions and practices of the community. Through language, members understand their relatedness to their kins and ancestors. Language is a valuable tool of identity formation in this regard. The accumulation of the linguistic content of a culture does not happen for mere preservation of the culture, but for the purpose of acquainting the individual with practical reason which will aid her understanding about the distance between practice and reasonable living. The need for an indepth understanding of language is very necessary. This finds much emphasis in Yoruba culture because of the huge role it plays in the discovery of private good and community good. The importance of this training is reflected in the Yoruba saying, *ile ti a fi ito mo, eri ni n wo* (the house that is built with spittle will be destroyed by dew). Furthermore, any individual who is unskillful in the epistemological and moral traditions with which matters of community and personal import are driven is immature and can only belong to the category of the *alaimo* (roughly,

ignorant). The community is a place to argue out one's conception of the good, and this conception will gain acceptance if it aligns with the image of the community self. Let us note that the community self as determined by the accumulated culture of the community is not fixed. Though this self is abstracted and depicted as the defining principle of the individual's mode of being in the world, in this regard, it appears like an independent entity but this is not truly the case. It is not a rigid entity that defies change. It is only a symbol which helps individuals to understand themselves.

But once the individual has been integrated into the social structure of the community, she is expected to redefine step by step her own identity. As a mature member of the community, the individual stands in a dialogical relation to the community and this involves meeting various obligations ranging from the ones she owes the immediate members, extended members and non members of the community. The moral identity which reflects her humanity is contained in the cultural tradition of the community. For example, a husband and perhaps a father is morally obliged to provide for the needs of his household. Failure to do so implies a loss of moral identity. Yoruba believes that anyone who refuses to fulfill her moral obligation without any conclusive reasons has failed as a human being. The status of humanity will be stripped from the person. Yoruba will usually refer to such person as *kii se eniyan* (he is not a human being). But the individual is also a bearer of right as a social member of the community. Her right depends on the particular place which she occupies in the social structure of the community. Assuming a person is unable to fulfill her moral obligation for certain valid reasons, she will be assisted by other members of the society. This person will

legitimately recur to the society to demand the right other members of the community owe her. I will discuss the idea of rights further in the next section.

Why is it that the individual conception of the good ought to be consistent with the cultural structure of the community? The reason is that the very idea of the good which the individual holds is nurtured by the cultural material of the community. The maintenance of the cultural meaning becomes prior in self pursuit in a similar sense that the maintenance of the foundation of a building is prior in the maintenance of the building. Here, the thinking is not that the individual must conform to the traditions which have been handed down over the ages, but encountering them with the aim of reconstructing them through deeds and thought, rethinking those ones which no longer meet current realities. Hallen notes,

> But knowledge about traditions, and being an accurate source of information generally, need not imply that such persons are regarded as relatively passive repositories, sort of living libraries. It also implies being able to discriminate among traditions and information to choose whatever is particularly relevant to a situation, and being able to reason on the basis of that information, being able to apply that information, so as to determine what would be the best thing to do.[202]

This is the expectation from every individual as a part of the larger community. Individuality is respectably demonstrated through wholesome reflection. The expectation for critical reflection and argumentation begins as early as possible in Yoruba society. Even children are not spared from this exercise. When a child is not demonstrating ingenuity in family discussions for instance, his inability to show productive reflections is greeted with the expression, *omo eni iba jo ni a ba yo*, (one would rejoice if one's child resembles one). The thinking here is not intended to encourage conformism. It challenges

---

[202] Barry Hallen, *The Good, The Bad and The Beautiful, Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture*, p. 47.

the individual to contribute ideas which can rejuvenate the cultural material by which the family or the society at large conducts its affairs, that is to say she is expected to achieve a creative personality which is able to produce a productive life. This negates Menkiti's view that the child is not considered as an individual in African belief systems.[203] Yoruba believes that creative ideas can bring about productive relationship.[204] Thus, good thinking is seen as a precedent to productive action. The ultimate goal of action is to preserve the order and the harmony of community.

Individual goods differ in certain respects and sometimes the differences may cause conflict in the community. When this occurs, conflict is resolved by the consideration of the overall utility which each good can yield. Practical reason is the means of deciding how a consensus can be reached. The parties in dispute present their cases before a third party, sometimes an institution provided by the community. The Yoruba legislative procedure starts with the premise that one individual cannot be entirely wrong while the other is entirely right. Hence, both parties are treated as suspects in the sense that they are both right and wrong. Interestingly, the same position is maintained at the resolution of the dispute. What underlies this conclusion is the idea that both parties have misunderstood the ultimate end which human beings seek in action. Individuals are encouraged to pursue private goods but these must be consistent with the overall interest of the members of the community. What is sought mainly in conflict resolution is where both parties have misunderstood the idea that the good ought to be determined by the overall interest of the community. Without denying the affective mood of the disputants, the adjudicator invites them to understand where their dignity lies.

[203] See I. A. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought", in Richard A. Right, (ed.) *African Philosophy, An Introduction*, (Lanham, Md.: University Press of Americas, 1984).
[204] N. K. Dzobo gives a similar idea in the essay "The Image of Man in Africa", in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, (eds.,)*Person and Community, Ghanaian Philosophical Studies* p. 131.

Individual dignity lies in being able to transcend personal interests for the good of the community. Thus, the umpire reflects on the arguments of each party and carefully reason with the disputants about the implication of their positions on themselves and the community. As much as the disputants are given ample opportunities to demonstrate the strength of their arguments, the umpire is out to discuss the consistency of their position in line with the shared experience of the community. The goal is to redirect the attention of disputants to the ultimate end of self pursuit which is the realization of the overall good of the community.

The position of these parties may bring about the restructuring of the communal systems. The end which every striving individual must bear in mind is communal unity and harmony. This is the ultimate end of being itself. Every conception of the good and its consequent pursuit must bear this in view. What needs to be reiterated is the fact that the communal traditions which stand as means of self understanding is not fixed. This is why critical reasoning can take place within such a system. The inhabitants of the community structured roles are interpreters of the social foundation which determines their moral obligations and rights. The only important character which every member is expected to demonstrate is respect for other people's views and ways of being. This is why the harmony sought is reached without confrontation. This is the difference between the traditional individual whose ultimate good is not separated from the good of the community and the modern individual who is chiefly concerned with atomic good. But how fulfilled is the individual who leads her life by the overall interest of the community? This will take us to the last discussion in this section.

Detachment and Self Achievement

One of the important presuppositions of Yoruba is that the human person is the most valuable thing in life. And one important way in which the respect for human value is demonstrated in the Yoruba worldview is by entertaining the individual's inner consciousness which contains her perceptions, interpretations and feelings about the external world. But what will likely strike the modern mind is how a life that is supposedly treasured can be so entrenched in the good of the community? The agenda of the modern economic person attests to the fact that her concern for the community is only little. The pursuit of private interests dominates her thinking. This is the result of the thinking that self actualization comes from an unwavering commitment to personal goals. To the modern mind, what typifies self realization in the Yoruba context amounts to self loss. The value of life, the modern mind conceives, can be preserved only when it is within the boundary of the individual who owns it. What I mean here is better illustrated in the following text.

> To be human, on this view, is to be a self contained, bounded individual, a center of experience and will, with no essential or defining relations to anything or anyone outside oneself. Philosophers have labeled the self so regarded as a *subject*. To be human, according to the modern way of thinking, is to be a subject, a sphere of subjectivity containing its own experiences, opinions, feelings, and desires, where this sphere of life is only contingently related to anything outside itself.[205]

The modern position thrives on an erroneous conception of the self. This conceives the self as a thing that is wholly divided. It is a unit of its own and its content is strictly unconnected with the content of other unitary selves. This position depicts the human individual as an atomic agent. Yoruba thinks differently: the self is mostly revealed in its intrinsic connection with other selves. To the Yoruba, the self retains the greatest value

---

[205] Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 108.

and this is mostly cherished in the mode of being of the person. Being is intrinsically beautiful and this intrinsic nature is reflected in character. This is the idea behind the saying *iwa lewa* (being or life is beautiful). Those who are alive are partaking in the beauty of being and the only way to demonstrate this beauty is to reflect it in character. This is what the maxim *iwa lewa omo eniyan* (character is the beauty of the human individual) intends to convey. The Akan expresses this view thus: *su nkwa na mma nsu adze* (cry or pray for life and not for things, because it is the most important of all things). Because life's value is depicted in sharing, the value of the self is best expressed through its social relations in the community.

The beauty of life is further reflected in its dynamism and its extensive capacity to contemplate with others' interests. This capacity, in Yoruba viewpoint, reflects the important nature of the self. The prompt of sympathetic identification with the interests of others is exerted as the manifestation of the true self. In order to demonstrate the worthwhile status of a human person, one needs to follow this prompt. Hence, the saying *iwa rere ni eso eniyan* (good character is the value of the human person). The good life is one that is founded on the dynamics of being. This kind of life works towards wholeness and synthesis.[206] The development of this life, in Wiredu's view, leads to a possession of the "frame of mind which facilitates the mind's ability to contemplate with equanimity the possible abridgment of one's own interests in deference to the interests of others".[207] Not until an individual has developed this mind, it will be difficult to lead an authentic life, pursuing those things which are worthwhile. Contrary to seeking the good life in pure personal interests, the realization of the good life is believed to be entailed in

---

[206] N. K. Dzobo, "Values in a Changing Society Man, Ancestors and God", in (eds.,) Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, *Person and Community*, *Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, p. 227.
[207] Quoted from Peter H. Coetzee, "Particularity in Morality and its Relation to Community", p. 282.

detachment from private interests. This ideal finds justification in the conception of *emi* as a dynamic life force which works towards wholeness and creative development.[208] Although the idea of authenticity involves turning inward, discovering what lies within one and truly expressing it, the authentic life for Yoruba is more than just having a clear focus about what one wants to achieve for oneself as one participates in the society. This shows certain remarkable difference with the modern conception of authenticity. Authenticity in the modern sense involves having a well calculated focus, which aids one to participate in public affairs with a degree of courage. In this sense, authenticity is considered a virtue that is predominantly concerned with personal fulfillment. The motivation for being authentic is mainly to be true to oneself in one's actions and living in line with one's feelings, desires and belief. Inevitably, the authentic life becomes a kind of life that sets issues of personal interests as the topmost in self realization. Yoruba maintains a different approach in the notion of the authentic life. The need for the individual to consider her inmost worth in order to lead the authentic life is regarded as crucial but the authentic person will focus on those things which only are worthwhile. One may want to know how anyone could determine the kind of things that are worthwhile. This is by reflecting on one's way of life and dwelling on those things which will contribute positively to the social whole.

Yoruba describes the self not in isolation. The kind of subjective awareness which is instantiated singularly and distanced from everything else because they are external is foreign to Yoruba ideology. Since the basis of self awareness is the non divisible, unifying substance, the social orientation characteristically referred to as the 'we orientation' plays a significant role in self definition. The moral space of Yoruba self

---

[208] N. K. Dzobo, "Values in a Changing Society: Man, Ancestors and God", p. 227.

extends to the whole of creation and the person must readily cultivate this profound space in order to appreciate her moral identity. The whole of creation is included in this extensive process. Human beings are respected as the only creatures having the dynamic consciousness which could preserve the unity of all creation, hence they occupy the center position in the scheme of things in the universe. Individual members of the community are deeply respected and treasured more than every other elements of nature because they are capable of exercising the virtue of 'consent'. Individuals are able to preserve it where it is found and have the capacity to create the condition that will make it to occur where it is absent.[209] Yoruba elevates this virtue simply because it is the essential feature of our humanity. The true mark of humanity is revealed firstly in the ability to reach consent in the midst of varied notions of the good. Our dignified nature shows forth when we respect the free nature of others. Yoruba says *eniyan laso mi* (human beings are my clothing), and this implies that human beings who have the capacity for reflective thinking are best of all acquaintances. Money, status, properties etc. cannot fill the part that the person occupies at any time. Hence, the individuals are to be treasured above everything else. The need to seek the development of each individual in the community is thus prior in view of the interrelatedness of each member of the community. Dzobo mentions that the awareness of this mutual interrelatedness as stemming from the vital force leads to the perspective of the individuals' sense of life mission with the mission of the others in the community.

> This awareness is responsible for the unique indigenous social orientation which may be characterized as the "we- orientation." In the we orientation life is comprehended not from the perspective of 'I' or 'they' alone, but from that of both which unite to become 'we'. This 'we' comprehension

---

[209] I borrow the term 'consent' from Weil who uses the same to express human ability to form a constitutional democracy.

of life is given expression in various forms of speech, greeting and action.[210]

The 'we' orientation characterizes our moral identity from the perspective of the essence of all. This essence is the essence of the universal consciousness. The consciousness of one's individuality in it is not entirely taken to be a separable entity. In this thinking, the ultimate purpose of life is construed from the standpoint of one's responsibility to humanity and the entire universe. What does this suggest? It suggests that the will to be is the will to employ the dynamics of being for the proper development of the entire universe. This is the picture of Yoruba individual. This is the picture of humanity as driven by the ultimate purpose for living.

In Yoruba philosophy, the society is never viewed as a collection of individuals without ultimate purpose. Individuals are not just thrown into the world: every person comes with a sense of mission and the end of every individual mission is to be cooperatively worked out in the community. Individuality is rated according to the response of the collective consciousness which makes each person to seek the others' development. It is interesting to note that the idea of the social individual occupies the center of discussion in the medieval period where the term individual means 'inseparable'.[211] This idea is generally used to define any individual in relation to the characteristics she shares with a group. The group identity of the individual is not thought to demean the autonomous identity of the particular individual in question because the idea of autonomy itself finds meaning in the group. This idea continues to be cherished in the works of Rousseau, Hegel, Bosanquet and others. In *Ethical Studies*, Bradley, for

---

[210] N. K. Dzobo, "Values in a Changing Society: Man, Ancestors and God", p. 229.

[211] John D. Greenwood, "Individualism and Collectivism in Moral and Social Thought" in (eds.,) Kim-Chong Chong, Sor-hoon Tan and C. L. Ten, *The Moral Circle and the Self Chinese and Western Approaches*, p. 168.

example, argues that the individual is little, if anything, apart from the intellectual and moral membership in society and the community of values. He holds that "the 'individual' apart from the community is an abstraction. It is not anything real".[212] These philosophers see the community as a need in that it is the vital force upon which individuals are to seek moral development and sense of life mission.

We may now consider one important issue that this social theory will need to attend to in order to escape certain challenges which may be brought against it. This is related to the kind of group that the individual will need to direct her affection and whether this will be at the expense of other groups. Since groups are constituted by different ideologies and beliefs, the individual may be defined by one and not all of these group beliefs. How is she going to treat or relate with all the other groups? Must she see herself as bound in her own social group and other groups should be seen as non-member groups? So, if the others are not regarded as members, then it will be justified not to take sufficient care of their interests? This problem only occurs when a group identity is accounted to be complete. This point has been earlier critiqued as inaccurate. This same idea engenders the belief that the constitutive consciousness of a particular community exhausts the identity of the individual. Once this position is maintained, the group identity is fixed and it becomes the false criteria by which individuality is measured. The guiding principle that defines individuality in Yoruba philosophy does not limit identity to any particular group. The basis for the discovery of any group identity is the consistency of its principles with universal principle. This does not mean that the cultural structures of all communities must follow the same pattern categorized as the universal

---

[212] Cited in William Sweet, "'Absolute Idealism' and Finite Individuality", *Indian Philosophical Quarterly,* xxiv, no. 4 (1997): 433.

pattern, but that none of the contents of these different cultural structures must threaten the existence of other individuals as well as other groups. The saying *bi a se n se nile yi eewo ile miran* (what we take to be our manner of life in this land may be forbidden in other land) testifies to the Yoruba belief in diversity.

In order to attain the self, the person should learn how not to be emotionally attached to any group to the extent that its moral affiliation with other groups becomes blurred. We are all, on the overall basis, human beings. Our reality is compared to a single ocean that flows in different directions. This idea is represented in the saying *omi leniyan*. What Yoruba wants to illustrate with this is that we should attend to our differences with a kind of openness and, in no time, we shall be able to find the rationale for other ways of life and we can adopt, at any time, those ones that we are pleased with. Following this belief, Yoruba does not set any rigid identification which is limited to any particular cultural structure as the ultimate determination of individuality.[213] Although one is not asked to pay less respect to the cultural community one belongs to, one is expected to sustain her culture as long as one can but there is no shame or humiliation in escaping one's group in order to take on the identity of others. The respect of Yoruba for the non members of any particular cultural community is further revealed in Yoruba conception of hospitality. Before any Yoruba person enters into the house of her neighbor she will say *mo ki onile ati alejo kin to wole* (I greet owners of the house and strangers before entering). The same respect that is given to members of that community is given to

---

[213] The importance of an 'other' in Yoruba notion of the self features in the work of an African-American writer James Baldwin in his presentation in the 1987 New York City exhibition. Baldwin discusses, in his piece labeled Yoruba Man with a Bicycle, the mutual interactions which exist between forces of different categories makes it possible for the individual to have a deeper sense of self. His piece, according to Richard H. Bell, describes "the integrative and accommodative way in which African culture expresses itself". See James Baldwin, "Fifth Avenue, Uptown". *Esquire*, June 1960, reprinted in *The Price of the Ticket*, (New York: St Martins Press, 1985).

non members. However, because affection for people that one has been living with and from whom one has received treatment of love and charity often grows deeper than someone that one is not in constant interaction with, the object of moral concern that is intended to be channeled towards the whole race of humankind is to start from one's immediate group and gradually extend to others in the degree of their nearness and similarities. The idea behind this kind of belief can be illustrated in the following,

> What matters in the end for any person is what his or her psychologically potent social group prescribes as its object of moral concern, and the only way to promote the expansion of that object beyond the confines of the membership of any social group is to *work for its expansion from within that social group*. This suggests that if you want to promote universal concern and fellowship, don't aim for the world brother-and sisterhood or the society of nations. Aim rather to persuade your families, friends, colleagues, or co-religionists, and co-politicals to extend the boundaries of heir moral concern. There does not appear to be any other way, East or West.[214]

---

[214] John D. Greenwood, "Individualism and Collectivism in Moral and Social Thought", p. 171. Author's italics.

III

DUALITY AND IGNORANCE

> When … we meet those whose conduct and professed beliefs are markedly different from ours, our own accustomed standards are challenged, and we become concerned. In our irritated reaction we may turn away in loathing or try to exterminate the strange abomination. But when a regime of outer toleration of differences is established, men must intellectually adjust themselves in some way.[215]

The merit of Yoruba communitarianism consists in its reliance on the original knowledge which enables us to understand ourselves as we are partly constituted by our various cultural traditions. But, the original knowledge is markedly interesting as it defines us beyond the purview of our cultural traditions. This knowledge is espoused in a peculiarly striking dimension that shows that the human capacity for choice goes beyond any cultural boundary. The depth of this human nature is so deep that it sees human moral capacity beyond any group interests. On the one hand, Yoruba establishes the freedom of the individual, and surely this springs from the conception of the freedom of human nature, that is, as something that is not bound or subject to any preconceived ways of life. More importantly, the tradition presupposes that once an individual deliberates on her real identity, at least from a careful and well considered reasoning, taken the best alternative way of life that ought to characterize the person, she begins to see that she is not enclosed within any particular community. Here lies another merit of the philosophy, its advocacy gives important recognition to tolerance. Entailed in the original knowledge is the idea of our essence as something that is inextricably webbed with the self of all. This enhances the knowledge of our identity in two inseparable dimensions, one of which

---

[215] Richard Kroner, *Culture and Faith*, (Santa Barbara: The University of California Press, 1949), p. ix, as quoted in K. C. Anyanwu, *The African Experience in the American Market Place*, (USA: Exposition Press Inc., 1983) p. 23.

is our essential connectedness and the other is our differential identities. The intensification of the original knowledge has a crucial positive effect on human social consciousness. The individual realizes first and foremost that she has the all engulfing consciousness in her and next that this engulfing consciousness defines who she is in relation to some particular contexts. Here, one's peculiar mode of being is grasped as a means of self understanding, i.e. understanding one's life in comparison with others. One lives her life not in isolation; one becomes involved in what Dzobo refers to as the 'we orientation'. But, this progression is not into a kind of fusion where differences are lost or marginalized but a kind of interface where differences become the medium of apprehending our real self. We live in accordance with our mode of being and at the same time appreciate the others' ways of being. We are armed with the tolerant attitude which is willing to learn from these others. We assimilate the first principle which presupposes that the fundamental reason for self development is harmony and progress. This is the African mind, the foundation of the thinking 'I am because we are'.[216] We realize that life is incomplete except in the life of our fellow brothers and sisters worldwide. This is the anchor on which Yoruba communitarianism hangs.

There is an increasing doubt as to whether this kind of philosophy can stand as a secure base for human unity. Topmost on the list of challenges facing this position is how it can protect individuals' rights. Again, topmost on the list of rights is the right to choose one's life. This must never be curtailed, else the liberty of the person is vitiated, the argument suggests. We understand here that the choice of one's life is essentially private, even the common values that prevail in the community are external in the understanding of one's life. This claim has been interpreted to mean that the life that people share

---

[216] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 108.

together and the values by which they identify themselves as human beings are insignificant in the exposition of human nature. This nature is essentially characterized with freedom and each person has the privilege to choose her own life the way she likes. Something is fundamentally wrong with unchosen lives, this position assumes. This is an insistence on individualism. This emphasis gains momentum from the halting of the engulfing or the all pervasive nature of the self. Here, the vital force which binds us into a universal community is overlooked, the false self with its notably assuming character (the flagrant attitude to control and marginalize other faces of the self) is uplifted as the real self.[217] However, Yoruba philosophy claims that this results from *aimo* (ignorance) about the nature of the individual. *Aimo* makes us lose the insight into the core of our own nature. It makes us to forget, on the one hand, the importance of the cultural materials which identify us as we are in the community and, on the other hand, help us to know that the different ways of being in the world actually summon us to an adventure where we find out, ultimately, that our ultimate identity is not limited to any cultural tradition. This is the core of Yoruba philosophy and this explains why Yoruba defends a unitary view of reality.[218] In this last section, we shall explore Yoruba conception of duality as it facilitates the philosophical discussion of alterity. The idea of rights will be discussed in relation to Yoruba conception of human dignity. Three important subjects will attract our attention, namely, analysis of *aimo* (ignorance), self dignity: rights and the communal

---

[217] The false self is characterized with fear, anxiety, anguish etc. According to C. Solomon, this experience is developed from frustrations about the self's inertia. Solomon remarks that peculiar experience of suicide is an attempt to point to the frustration of the self that lacks the vital force. Suicide in this instance may not necessarily imply dwelling in any relationship, which is, of course, close to death but that "the ego, rightly or wrongly, is felt to be an extremely dangerous, dubious and doomed germ of nature; that he is always in his own eyes exposed to an extraordinary risk, as though he stood with the slightest foothold on the peak of a crag whence a slight push from without or an instant's weakness from within suffices to precipitate him into the void". See C. Solomon, *Existentialism*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 109.
[218] See K. C. Anyanwu, *The African Experience in the American Market Place*, p. 25.

structure and being in the world.

Analysis of Aimo (Ignorance)

The term *aimo* has two interrelated meanings, one epistemic, the other moral. In the epistemic sense, it is roughly rendered 'ignorance'. *Aimo* is derived from two compound words, *ai* and *mo*. *Ai* is usually used as a negation, for example, *ailoye* means 'not having wisdom'. Literally, *mo* means 'to know'. When thus used, it usually refers to someone who knows something. For example, *emi nikan ni mo mo ero okan mi* (I am the only one who knows my inner thought). Following this usage, *aimo* is used to negate a knowledge claim. This, we should mention, is different from negating knowledge itself.[219] The Yoruba word for knowledge is *imo*. *Imo* can never be negated for that will imply the negation of *emi* (self) which is the subject of awareness in the individual. *Emi* is that which knows and its cognition is true independently of what the state of affairs happens to be. *Aimo* does not stand for lack of knowledge. So, it should be understood differently from the English term, ignorance. When articulated correctly, *aimo* refers to a kind of knowledge, but this knowledge cannot be verified publicly. Strictly speaking, *imo* is used in Yoruba language to refer to the subjective awareness of the individual. My inmost awareness about myself, for example, will ever remain my *imo* even if the conditions in the objective world oppose it. Hallen describes *imo* as firsthand knowledge.[220] He contrasts *imo* with *igbagbo* (putative belief) which is secondhand knowledge. *Igbagbo* is derived from the root words *igba* and *gbo*. *Igba* means 'time' but when it is written as

---

[219] See a varied understanding of *aimo* in J. A Isola Bewaji, "Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture", in Kwasi Wiredu, (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, p. 400. The author is more interested in the ethical and social implication of *aimo* on the individual and the community. Our positions are similar in this regard. However, I share a different view with his claim that *aimo* is used by the Yoruba in the same way that ignorance is used in the English language.

[220] Barry Hallen, "Yoruba Moral Epistemology" in Kwasi Wiredu, (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, pp. 298-300.

gba it means 'receive'. *Gbo* means 'heard'. *Igbagbo* then stands for knowledge that is received in some time or context and from some sources other than one's immediate *imo*. The trustworthiness of *igbagbo* depends on the sources of its origin. When that which we *gbagbo* (believe) cannot be validated objectively, it is rejected and counted as false. We need to note that *igbagbo* needs objective validation to gain the status of objective truth whereas *imo* is ever true to the knower. But when *imo* is communicated, it needs to be proved for then it has come to the public domain. If found wanting in the sense that it does not acquaint with reality as understood in the community, it will be classified as *aimo*. The *imo* (knowledge) is that of the individual herself. No one can claim that what she knows in her immediate consciousness is untrue. But, for the community, it is false and cannot be categorized under *igbagbo*. All the informal education that individuals receive prior to their mature stage is categorized under *igbagbo*.

> The distinction made in Yoruba-language culture between "*imo*" (putative "knowledge") and "*igbagbo*" (putative "belief") reflects a similar concern about the evidential status of firsthand versus secondhand information. Persons are said to "*mo*" (to "know") or to have "imo" (knowledge") only of experience they have witnessed in a firsthand or personal manner … "*imo*" is said to apply to sensory perception generally, even what may be experienced directly by touch is more limited than is the case with perception. "*Imo*" implies a good deal more than mere sensation, of course. Perception implies cognition as well, meaning that persons concerned must comprehend that and what they are experiencing.[221]

It is not the case that the individual who operates under *aimo* does not know that she is aware of something but the interpretation she gives to the awareness does not correspond to what is objectively taken as truth. When the claim associated with *imo* is verified and confirmed to be false the Yoruba does not categorize the awareness itself as

---

[221] Barry Hallen, *The Good, The Bad and The Beautiful, Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture*, p. 15.

false. However, the content of the awareness which could have become *igbagbo* is notably rejected. Hallen puts it thus,

> In other words, we both may have witnessed the same event, making whatever we saw *imo* and *ooto* for each of us individually. But when it comes to agreeing that we saw the 'same' thing, that agreement amounts to *igbagbo*[222].

As indicated in the above passage, while the *imo* (knowledge) and *ooto* (truth) of the two individuals are not the same, their *igbagbo* may be the same. Here, *imo* refers to the content of awareness whereas *ooto* (truth) refers to the different individuals' perceptions of the scene. What is beyond dispute to the two individuals is the fact that they saw something which upon further probing corresponds to something that we have named so and so in the community. This knowledge is categorized as *igbagbo*. *Igbagbo* is not absolutely true: it may eventually turn out to be false. A similar idea is illustrated in Wiredu's discussion of truth.

> Whatever is called the truth is also someone's truth. For a piece of appellation to be awarded the appellation "true", it must be discovered by, known by, defended by, human beings somewhere, sometime. Furthermore, what human beings defend as being "true" can prove to be false. Therefore whatever is called "truth" is more accurately described as *opinion.*[223]

Once the *imo* of an individual is communicated, it becomes *igbagbo* for others. That which is *imo* for a person is *igbagbo* for another person and not until the *imo* is carefully verified and found to be true, its degree of truth remains low. *Igbagbo* cannot gain the status of absolute truth. Hallen writes,

> What makes it different from the English-language "believe" and "belief" is that *igbagbo* applies to everything that may be construed as secondhand

---

[222] Ibid, p. 26.
[223] Cited in Ibid, p. 27.

information. This would apply to most of what in English language culture is regarded as propositional knowledge: the things one is taught in the course of a formal education, what one learns from books, from other people, and, of particular interest in the special case of the Yoruba, from oral traditions. Whereas English-language culture decrees that propositional or secondhand information, since classified as "knowledge," should be accepted as true, Yoruba usage is equally insistent that since classified as *igbagbo* (putative belief), it can be accepted as possible (*o se e se*).[224]

Imo is the only certain knowledge and it is certain only to the knower. It is important that we note that though Yoruba philosophy acknowledges the fact that individuals do have certain knowledge of their inner awareness, the philosophy goes further to point out that the knowledge that is derived from firsthand information (*imo*) can be verified by public criteria and perhaps modified in the light of more convincing evidences. The worth of the individual lies in her ability to appreciate other people's view and adjust to the most compelling position which serves the interest of the community better.[225] This is contrary to the individualist position which makes individual's knowledge primary at the expense of public knowledge. In Yoruba worldview, the important virtue which human beings need to demonstrate is consent. Human relation is thus inclined to follow a cooperative model where each person needs to "listen attentively and tirelessly; to pick up the essence of each word spoken; to observe every look, every gesture, every silence; to grasp their

---

[224] Ibid, p. 16.
[225] Hallen's study of the Yoruba concepts of *imo* (firsthand knowledge) and *igbagbo* (second hand knowledge) yields the important criteria for exemplifying the humane nature in Yoruba society. Hallen identifies four important positive behavioral values that the Yoruba count to be significant in the moral identity of the human person. Hallen says, "with specific reference to moral epistemology, at least four positive behavioral values are emphasized: (1) being scrupulous about the epistemological basis for being a good listener, with the emphasis upon cognitive understanding rather than a polite respectful demeanor: (3) being a good speaker, with the emphasis upon speaking in a positive, thoughtful, and perceptive manner rather than merely having beautiful elocution: (4) having patience, with the emphasis upon being calm and self-controlled in judgement and intellect rather than merely in manner and demeanor". Barry Hallen, "Yoruba Moral Epistemology" in (ed.) Kwasi Wiredu, *A Companion to African Philosophy*, p. 302.

respective significance … and to elaborate … arguments to counter … unjust positions and/or to re-affirm or reinforce correct positions".[226]

Implied in Yoruba philosophy is the thinking that the individual is herself and not another person when she apprehends and articulates that which is given to her in her subjective consciousness. However, Yoruba maintains that the firsthand knowledge of the individual needs to be explored with others and not until the point of commonality is reached, the knowledge is trivial. Part of why this is so has been explained earlier on. The idea that is being expressed in Yoruba position is that the individual is a social individual. Hence, no single individual can claim to have the imaginative capacity upon which the whole community is to be guided. The moral ideology by which the community is to be orchestrated is to be reached by dialogue and this is why once an *imo* is communicated, it becomes *igbagbo*, i.e. something that needs to be deliberated upon. A similar idea is expressed in Dewey's construction of the community.

> Community is created by and consists in *communication*. "Society not only continues to exist *by* transmission, *by* communication, but it may fairly be said to exist *in* transmission, *in* communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community by virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge-a common understanding like-mindedness as the sociologists say".[227]

From Yoruba position, we see a conception of authenticity from its social perspective, a remarkable blend between the traditional and modern views of

---

[226] See E. Wamba-dia-Wamba, "Experience of Democracy in Africa: Reflections on Practices of Communalistic Palaver as a Social Method of Resolving Contradictions among the People". An Unpublished paper presented in the Department of Theory and History of State Law, Faculty of Law, University of Dar es Salaam, 17 May 1985, p. 31.
[227] Cited in Daniel M. Savage, *John Dewey's Liberalism Individual, Community, and Self-Development*, p. 34.

authenticity. In the latter context, one is guided by the social experience of the community and the life that one leads become acceptable only when it is in accordance with some laid down traditions. But, in this context, the choice of the authentic life takes an outlook in which one's responsibility to others and the choice of life becomes fundamental. As much as it is important for the individual to take note of the circumstances of her birth, local community and status in that community, she is also responsible for discovering the alternatives that are presented to her in the world. These will enable her to have a profound insight into her own interests, desires and needs. To Yoruba, the position which gives primacy to the awareness of the individual as a subject over the awareness of the community fails to apprehend the essential nature of human sociability. It erroneously conceives the individual as an absolute and this conception is self defeated as it does not take into account the fact that the individual's disposition to lead the good life is socially determined. Although it is not being denied that the individual needs to choose among the many goods available in the community-she can even transcend these goods-yet in all of this, the individual's conception of the good is not entirely independent of the community. Yoruba position acknowledges the important presence of the community without submerging the individual within its social world. Firstly, it shows that the knowledge of the good is only as apprehended by the individual. Secondly, it agrees that the body of knowledge which constitutes the cultural tradition of the community belongs to the domain of *igbagbo*. Thirdly, it categorizes all the informal training which the individual acquires from sources such as parents, family and the larger community under *igbagbo*. This shows the status of the individual within the community. The individual that understands her cultural tradition as something to be *gbagbo* will be

able to come to terms with the fact that the tradition is a kind of cultural material which is necessary for self construction. Though the knowledge of the good may be contained in the individual's *imo*, the significance of this good is determined by consensus. Once an individual's *imo* is communicated and it denies the agreed moral identity and by implication violating social identity, it cannot become *igbagbo*. However, individuals are able to engage the cultural tradition by proposing the varied ideas of the good that can better serve the overall interests of the members of the community. Yoruba philosophy accords significant respect to every experience regardless of its background. Each family group, religious and ethnic identities come together to share their *imo* so as to reach consensus on the good of the community.

The central point of Yoruba philosophy is that individuals have certain essential attributes which are not created by the community. The capacity for choice is not created by the community; neither is the essence of the individual's rationality made by the community. The community only discovers and nurtures them. In return, the individual is morally responsible for the continuity of the community.

Self Dignity: Rights and the Communal Structure

How does Yoruba espouse the concept of human dignity? I raise this question because of the important connection that it has with the concept of individual rights. Rights belong to the individual. A right is necessarily the right of some individual. This idea ought to be given due regard in political philosophy because the respect for human dignity entails the respect for his rights. Rights, Rawls wants us to see, are associated with individual's nature i.e. someone whose intrinsic worth stems from the capacity for moral autonomy. This capacity defines the individual as someone who is free from the

social particularities of the community. Immanuel Kant identifies this capacity as what makes the individual an end and not a means to be used arbitrarily by some external will. In Yoruba philosophy, human worth is exemplified in the ability to consider others' interests alongside one's personal interests. Yoruba position thinks that the conception of rights on individualistic basis does not articulate the proper meaning of human dignity.

The individual's conception of the good can only be validated by the common good of the community, Yoruba observes. The good of the individual is linked with the good of the community but there is no community that could legitimately be referred to as an independent entity except the one jointly defined by the shared understanding of the participating members of the community.[228] What is implied here is that the community has no rigid independent structure which articulates the natural rights of individuals prior to their shared agreement to form the community. Hence, rights are construed in such a way that allows for membership participation in decision procedures that affect their lives. This gives members the privilege to redefine their rights in light of their new awareness and the statuses of each group in the community. Rights are acquired by virtue of the position that one occupies in the group. Whereas this conception of rights allows the flourishing of the moral virtues of love and compassion because they are taken as 'intrinsic to satisfactory moral practice in the Yoruba communitarian society', it is difficult for such values to develop in the individualist rights-based society. Bell explains why it is difficult to cultivate these virtues in the following,

> There are no obligations to be kind or generous or compassionate-though the liberal ideas of fairness and equality may provide some motivation for generosity and charity. For example, if a friend is being mugged, I may believe it is the right course of action, morally, to intervene and prevent or

---

[228] Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought" in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, (eds.,) *Person and Community*, *Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, p. 105.

stop the mugging. But, on a "right based" liberal view moral ambiguity creeps in. There is no intrinsic "right" that a person be helped, and there is no "positive" right that obligates me to help. Or if I see poverty, I am under no obligation to be generous. Because my notion of a good and any life-plan I may have to realize the good may be different from yours and everyone else's goods and plans, I am in no way compelled to agree with your course of action. I may criticize your good and your plan, but I will be inclined not to choose to interfere so that I do not invite your interference with my good and plan. You can see the easy slide into moral relativism or moral neutrality.[229]

To Yoruba, the idea of self liberty which is espoused in the individualist rights-based society lacks the essential virtues that it needs to acquire the human face. Though Yoruba approves the need to choose our lives because the capacity for choice is our essential nature, this essence of life must be maintained for our humanity to remain progressive. Moreover, it is this capacity that really makes us demonstrate our real worth. However, when we grasp our inmost self as that which is essentially connected with those of the others, the focus on our personal interests begins to decrease and the compassion and love for others heighten in us. In other words, the confinement of natural right to an individualistic category demeans human nature, Yoruba holds. On this basis, Yoruba philosophy finds it more appropriate to explicate right as a moral concept rather than a legal concept. Contrary to the conception of right as a legal concept, the moral conception of right lays emphasis not on its individualistic tone but the communal tone. From the moral perspective, the spirit of truth and love gains pre-eminence in the exercise of rights. Here, the individual pursues her rights with the intention of preserving the bond of unity which exists between people sharing their lives together. Weil distinguishes between right as a legal concept and right as a moral concept.

---

[229] Richard H. Bell, *Understanding African Philosophy, A Cross Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues*, p, 71.

The notion of rights is linked with the notion of sharing out, of exchange, of measured quantity. It has a commercial flavor, essentially evocative of legal claims and arguments. Rights are always asserted in a tone of contention; and when this tone is adopted, it must rely upon force in the background, or else it will be laughed at. Justice consists in seeing that no harm is done to men … [it is associated with the cry] "why am I being hurt?". The other cry, which we hear so often: "why has somebody else got more than I have", refers to rights. We must learn to distinguish between the two cries and to do all that is possible, as gently as possible, to hush the second one, with the help of a code of justice, regular tribunals, and the police. Minds capable of solving problems of this kind can be formed in law school. But the cry "why am I being hurt?" raises quite different problems, for which the spirit of truth, justice, and love is indispensable. The spirit of justice and truth is nothing else but a certain kind of attention which is pure love.[230]

In Weil, we see right as a restorative tool. In a similar vein, Yoruba construes right as a restitutive tool of justice. Rights, Yoruba believes, needs to be exercised in the spirit of truth and love. This is the essence of human dignity. It entails that each individual in the community is accepted and valued as he or she is (see the example of this in the myth of Iwa below). Yoruba position regulates the exercise of rights by the emphasis it lays on sharing and co-responsibility, and mutual enjoyment of rights by all in accordance with their positions in the community. In Weil's as well as in Yoruba views, the obligation to participate in the common tasks of the public value takes precedence over right.[231]

What obtains in Yoruba philosophy is that rights as acquired from the community ought to be utilized as a corrective and restorative moral tool. One point to be noted is that this idea of rights recognizes the fact that people can refuse to fulfill their duties in the community. When this happens, it becomes legitimate for the members that are affected to demand their rights. Yet, the ultimate goal that is entailed in the pursuit of

---

[230] Quoted from Richard H Bell, *Understanding African Philosophy A Cross-Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues*, p. 68
[231] Ibid.

one's right is to correct the defaulter and restore her to the community. The importance of restoring the errant individual back into the humanity threshold is highlighted by the saying *omo eni o ki n buru titi ka fi fun ekun paje* (one child cannot be so bad that we give her to the tiger to devour). Along this line of thinking, Yoruba does not see the need to encourage individuals to insist on their rights. The ultimate reason for living is to create harmonious and productive relationships. Members of the community owe one another the duty to preserve themselves. It is possible to raise an objection against the Yoruba position saying that the modern world cannot be ordered with such an idealistic or simplistic paradigm.[232] But this argument suffers in view of the fact that the modern world is also governed by certain ideological construction of the self. As a matter of fact, the modern ideology lacks credit in terms of its ability to organize the inner aspirations of both individuals and the community. This communitarian model, on the other hand, fares better because it gives a better account that allows individuals to actualize their potentials and at the same time preserve the community as an utmost need. Yoruba communitarianism presupposes that when we adequately understand ourselves as the *eniyan* who is capable of choosing the good that aligns with our nature, i.e. the good that aligns with the good of others, then we truly manifest our moral identity.

This is what Yoruba considers as human essential nature: we owe one another certain reciprocal obligations, which, when we fail to observe, our humanity comes to be doubted. Yoruba does not strip the identity of humanity from a person merely because she is hot tempered (*oninu fufu*), weak (*alailokun*), impatient (*ainisuuru*) etc. But if any individual refuses to fulfill her obligation as dictated by the place she occupies in the

---

[232] See Robert J. Condlin, "Bargaining with a Hugger: The Weaknesses and Limits of a Communitarian Conception of Legal Dispute Bargaining, or Why We Can't All Just Get Along?", *University of Maryland School of Law*, 2005, http://www.law.umaryland.edu/recent_scholarship.asp

structure of the community, her humanity will be subjected to doubt. At this point, the worth of the person is called to question and her existence is taken to be worthless i.e. unproductive. Gbadegesin argues:

> The question, 'What is your existence for?' (*Kini o wa fun?*) is not always posed. It is posed when a person has been judged to be useless to his/her community. It is therefore a challenge, a call to serve. It presupposes a conception of human existence which sees it as purposeful, and the purpose is to contribute to the totality of the good in the universe. This is achieved by a life of selfless devotion and sacrifice to the communal welfare.[233]

What is abhorred in Yoruba delineation of individuality is selfishness. Selfishness stems from (*aimo*). A selfish person is referred to as *eni ti o mo tara re nikan* (someone who knows her own good). Here, the selfish individual is not denied of knowledge (*imo*). She is construed as knowing her own good alone. The problem here is not with the good known by the individual but that the good does not comply with the kind of good that allows for the development of others' nature. This knowledge is self destructive and the Yoruba is keen to urge everyone to desist from it. It demeans human dignity. As a person, others should be able to share from one's knowledge, understand it, estimate it and evaluate it in line with the overall utility it procures for the community. This is the standard a creditable knowledge must meet. It must be productive and creative.[234] The idea of the good that the individual will be liable to pursue will be the one that she consciously articulates and rationally endorses to be the guiding principle for everyone in the community. For this to happen, the individual must be sure that her conception of the good does not inhibit others' development. Among other things, the individual must make sure that the pursuit of the good she embarks upon does not slight, discredit or

---

[233] Segun Gbadegesin, "Eniyan: The Yoruba Concept of a Person", p. 191.
[234] N. K. Dzobo, "The Image of Man in Africa," p. 128..

marginalize the freedom of others to do the same. This will make everyone to be mindful of the constitutive meaning of the community by which self understanding is structured.

I need to mention that this criterion for self determination is so important in Yoruba philosophy that even the first child of Olodumare (the utmost god in Yoruba belief) is not spared when he was found wanting. The myth, as recorded in *Ifa* literary corpus, goes thus,

> *Iwa*, the daughter of *suuru*-the first child of *Olodumare*- was married to *Orunmila*. *Iwa* was extremely beautiful, but lacked good behavior and character. When *Orunmila* could no longer accommodate her bad disposition, he sent her packing. However, he later experienced a terrible plunge in his fortunes which had been made possible by *Iwa's* presence. He therefore decided to seek out *Iwa* again, even if it meant selling all his property. He eventually went looking for *Iwa*, singing the praise names of *Iwa* along the way: "*Iwa, Iwa l'a nwa, Iwa. Kamuragba taragbaa, Iwa; Iwa, l'a nwa, Iwa*" etc. He got her back finally; but he (not *Iwa* and her misbehavior) was blamed.[235]

The above myth depicts the need to show respect to others. Respect must be shown to our associates, recognizing and respecting their moral autonomy. In this passage, Iwa is merely portrayed as living her life inside out and Orunmila is expected to adjust and accommodate her and his failure to do so makes him guilty. Orunmila is convicted because he fails to respect *Iwa* for who she is (*mo iwa fun oniwa*).[236] The point is that individuals have the moral right to be respected as an end. The myth also stresses the importance of mutual understanding in cooperative association. Interestingly, the myth supports the pursuit of personal interest. This explains why Orunmila is not accused of selfish motivation when he journeys around to recover Iwa. It is obvious that he wants Iwa back because Iwa is the secret of his fortune. But this pursuit is not discouraged as it

---

[235] Cited in Segun Gbadegesin, "Individuality, Community, and the Moral Order", pp. 304-305.
[236] See Ibid.

does not entail using Iwa as a means to an end. As an end, *Iwa* needs to be loved and respected by Orunmila. Iwa has the right to be loved and respected. We may ask why Orunmila and not Iwa is the one called to adjust his lifestyle. By this, we think that it is legitimate for *Iwa* to readjust her ways of life having noted that she is the bad person. The concession to Orunmila's change of attitude shows firstly, that no matter the degree of virtue that is demonstrated in the life of an individual, there is still room for improvement. Secondly, the position shows that the badness that is associated with any individual based on some personal idea of morality can be changed. Iwa may actually be hot tempered, impatient, indiscriminate in the way she attends to Orunmila and his acquaintances but this does not make her essentially bad. A little patience, an understanding attitude, a display of love, in sum, a selfless love from Orunmila may probably change Iwa for the better. This idea is maintained by Gbadegesin.

> *Agba to ni suuru, ohun gbogbo loni* (The elder who has suuru (patience) has everything). *Suuru* is the source of gentle character (or *Iwa pele*) and good character (*Iwa rere*). A demonstration of *iwa pele* is to be mindful of the individuality of others, to treat them gently, to be tolerant and accommodating of the peculiarity of others' existence. the Yoruba expression *Iwa l'ewa* depicts their understanding of existence itself as constituting beauty, while the cognate expression *Iwa rere leso eniyan* (Good character-good existence-is the adornment of a human being) depicts the significance attached to good character.[237]

Therefore, we understand that the kind of life we lead ought to be characterized by a kind of love that is not responding to the qualities that one only perceives in the beloved. One's love springs from the recognition of the value of the being of the person. Being is valuable in its own right. Although this does not deny that there may be certain characteristics of the beloved which is notably attractive to the lover and perhaps

---

[237] Ibid, p. 304. Parenthesis is mine.

something that motivates their mutual friendship, but the love that values the human person on the basis of intrinsic worth is to be given the ultimate place in relationships. This is the moral responsibility that Yoruba challenges every individual to display. The need to live one's life to support and motivate the growth of those virtues and characteristics which attract one to one's beloved is further expressed in Orunmila-Iwa relationships. One's choice of love is not to be determined purely by the characteristics possessed by the beloved alone for the same or higher degree of such characteristics may be found in someone else and one will not on that basis think that it is right to substitute this other individual for one's beloved. This is how the idea of rights is connected with the person's moral identity in Yoruba philosophy. Rights are understood as corrective and preservative moral tool. Rights are exercised in order to preserve the order of the community and the ultimate goal is to restore any errant soul to her specific social position. This is the ultimate purpose of life, the idea behind the thinking since we are, therefore I am.

Being in the World

Unlike some of the existentialist philosophers who think that human beings are thrown into the world without any essential purpose, Yoruba argues that human existence is purposeful. If the Yoruba person is asked about why we live, the anticipated answer will probably be that it is to create our own story. The individual exists in the world to define a remarkable identity by which she shall be known forever. The stories behind the individual's identity will later become some historical monument which later generations will use as some kind of model to define their own identity. The life that anyone lives at any particular generation, if it makes a very significant contribution to the world, it will enter into the historically extended constitutive memories which later generations will look up to for meaningful existence. Yoruba philosophy, like most African philosophies, delineates the position of humankind as oriented towards creativity. Dzobo describes this in a brief but interesting way,

> The individual therefore is to grow in the development of a creative personality and to develop the capacity to maintain creative relationship. He is to see his individual life and that of his society as fields that are sown with life's experiences and which should yield fruit.[238]

The ultimate purpose of life as maintained in the above passage is productivity.[239] This echoes the charge given to the Yoruba ancestors who undertake, in the beginning, the task of world reordering. Aramfe, we are told, enjoins his sons to make the world a living home.[240] Specifically, Aramfe instructs that important attention must be paid to

---

[238] N. K. Dzobo, "The Image of Man in Africa", p. 130.

[239] The need to be productive permeates every aspect of life in the Yoruba society. For example, someone who deliberately refuses to procreate is considered immoral. Except in the case of infertility, the dignity of the human person will be stripped off from the person. The reason is because of his/her deliberate refusal to extend his/her family lineage.

[240] See "Ile-Ife Forum", *Encyclopedia of Myths*, 2006, http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Ho-Iv/Ile-Ife.html.

human wellness and advancement. This, to Yoruba, is the right of humankind. Each person must be responsive to this moral intuition. The essence of life is sharing and our primary mission on earth is to live for the wellness and advancement of all individuals. It is very crucial that any individual who chooses not to follow suit is not fit to be called a human individual. The charge that Aramfe gives his sons before their departure to the world is as follows:

> My son, your day approaches. Far-off, the haze rests always on the outer waste which skirts. Our realm; beyond, a nerveless Mass lies cold 'Neath floods which some malign unreason heaves. Odúwa, first-born of my sons, to you I give the five-clawed Bird, the sand of power. *Go now, call a despairing land to smiling life above the jealous sea, and found sure homesteads for a new race* whose destiny is not the eternal life of gods. You are their judge; yours is the kingship, and to you all gods and men are subject. Wisest of my sons, Orísha, yours is the grateful task to loose vague spirits waiting for the dawn—to make the race that shall be; *and to you I give this bag of Wisdom's guarded lore and arts for man's well-being and advancement*. And you, my younger sons, the chorus and the dance, the voice of worship and the crafts are yours to teach—*that the new thankful race may know the mirth of heaven and the joys of labour*." Then Odúwa said: "Happy our life has been, and I would gladly roam these hills for ever, your son and servant. But to your command I yield; and in my kingship pride o'ersteps sorrow and heaviness.[241]

Odua's task is to develop a conducive and progressive home for humankind. Odua is the head of the team, accompanied by Orisha who possesses the art of wisdom. Orisha is to use the given wisdom to guide humanity to their wellbeing. From this preliminary exposition of the idea of the community, Yoruba highlights that the emergence of the community requires the development of social cooperation among individuals having different gifts and talents. The community, as highlighted above, has so great a differentiation and hence the need for ordering of its parts is essential. Orisha is the generic name for the deities. Here, we have no clue as to which of the deities is the point

---

[241] Ibid. Italics is mine.

of reference. However, other similar narratives give an indication that it is Ogun and Odua is Obatala.[242] The youngest of them all is supposed to teach the art of music so that the heart of humankind will be drawn to the 'mirth' of heaven. Each of them is equipped with the necessary virtues or powers to accomplish the given mission. The intercommunication of functions is supposed to be the goal of each member of the community and the ultimate function of each member is the well-being of the whole community rather than simply its narrow self-interest. From the context of the Yoruba ancestors, they are expected to maintain a team spirit that will ultimately lead to the production of a lively and progressive home, i.e. the world. This is the image of the human individual in the world. The human nature is not an asocial nature, Yoruba stresses.

This is how far Yoruba will go in every account of the world and human relation to it. The important thing to understand is that human beings are equipped with the capacities to make the best possible world and that they must work together in order to realize the good. But whether this will surely happen or not depends on how the capacities are utilized. The blue print for the good is contained in individuals' *ori* (inner head), Yoruba believes, but its actualization lies solely on how each person is able to tap the potentials in her *ori*. This is the reason for the saying, *alagemo ti bimo re tan, ai mo jo ku somo lowo* (the chameleon has given birth to her child, the cultivation of the art of

---

[242] Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*, pp. 18-29. For further studies about the relevance of *orisha* to the social structure of the world see Olatunde Bayo Lawuyi, "Ogun: Diffusion across Boundaries and Identity Constructions", *African Studies Review*, 31, no. 2 (1988): 127-139, N. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press: 1970), J. Gleason, *Orisha: The Gods of Yoruba Land*, (New York: Atheneum, 1971), Karin Barber, "How Man Makes God in West Africa: Yoruba Attitudes Towards the "Orisa" " *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 51, no. 3 (1981): 724-745.

dancing is however left to the child) .[243] The proverb relays the character of the chameleon to suggest that identity is self made. Conformism to any external will other than the one the individual argues out in the community to be good is off the context of this philosophy. The imagery of the chameleon suggests that individuals possess great potentials which when properly utilized can make them adapt and survive all odds. Much as the Yoruba will like to encourage people to adapt to various circumstances, emphasis is laid on the maintenance of one's distinctiveness. To survive an odd condition is, for the Yoruba, not to be swallowed in that condition. The individual, like the chameleon, must always define the condition, in her own authentic way. She must maintain the consistency of her self worth while engaging others in the world.

Let us return to the mission of world reordering to further support this point. Having received the different charges from Aramfe, the Oosas proceed to the world to accomplish the assigned mission. Obatala is supposed to take the leadership role while others follow. But the baton of leadership changes as Obatala becomes drunk on the way. Obatala loses the focus and the work of world reordering is finally going to be halted. Ogun can't wait to see this happen and he takes the initiative to lead the group. We understand that Ogun meets with many strenuous challenges which, in my opinion, require the assistance of Aramfe. I succumb to this view because the world of Aramfe and the actual world are not far apart at this period.[244] But this is not the case. Aramfe is not going to engage in any rescue mission. It seems that the intervention of an external agent in self defining mission is enough to nullify the worth of one's originality. The idea

---

[243] See Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief* , p. 20 for further explanation about the role of the Chameleon in the Yoruba account of creation.
[244] See Ibid, pp. 21-22. Also, Kwasi Wiredu, "Death and the Afterlife in African Culture", Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, in (eds.,) *Person and Community, Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, pp. 138-140.

is that Aramfe has accomplished his own portion by giving the children what they need to determine their own identity.

This has become a perpetual symbol of self provocation in Yoruba community. A Yoruba woman will naturally refuse to intervene in her child's problem in order to stimulate the will for productivity in the child. Her attitude does not stem out of hatred but rather, she seeks to provoke the child to unleash the vital force of creativity and progress that dwells in her. Ogun understands this and engages his problems courageously. Soyinka remarks that only "Ogun experienced the process of being literally torn asunder in cosmic winds or rescuing himself from the precarious edge of total dissolution by harnessing the untouched part of himself, the will".[245] Ogun is a symbol of individuality in Yoruba land till date. Ogun redefines his given name by rupturing the order given by his father, Aramfe. Not until he has successfully accomplished this mission can he win the title of a human individual.

> Yet none of them, not even *Ogun*, was complete in himself. There had to be a journey across the void to drink at the void of mortality … But the void had become impenetrable". For this void between the divine and human worlds was also the "abyss" of lacking being, the "disintegration of consciousness", where Orisa-nla was originally shattered. Ogun, however, "with an instrument which he had forged from the ore of mountain-wombs, … cleared the primordial jungle, plunged through the abyss and called on the others (the various orisas) to follow.[246]

Ogun's individuality, according to Soyinka, is first expressed in his decision to take over the task of world reordering. The originality of this individuality is further expressed in his technological proficiency by which he creates implements which he uses to further the course of creation. In Soyinka's words, the "shard of original oneness which

---

[245] Cited in Mark Pizzato, "Soyinka's Bacchae, African Gods, and Postmodern Mirrors", *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*, 2, no. 1 (2003): 52.
[246] Ibid.

contained the creative flint appears to have passed into the being of Ogun, who manifests a temperament for artistic and creativity matched by technological proficiency".[247]

This illustrates Yoruba notion of independence in self choice. This independence is not the kind that makes the individual to be insensitive to the condition of the community. Contrariwise, it is the independence that makes one to explore problems with every talent that one has and the prior aim is to contribute the best good to the world. The Yoruba individual is not supposed to conform or submit blindly to any constituted authority. This is highlighted in the act of Ogun against the order of Aramfe. There is no indication that Ogun receives any specific command from Aramfe to take over the task of world reordering. The unusual respect that Yoruba philosophy gives to the individual as an autonomous agent is demonstrated in most Yoruba narratives. Abraham claims that these narratives are primarily intended "to guide will and plan".[248] Gbadegesin says it is a form of pedagogical instruction which Yoruba philosophers use to identify the meaning and purposes of existence.[249] James Bode Agbaje depicts narratives as important means of conveying truth in Yoruba society by saying that narratives are not only limited to verbal communication, they can be set in motion through music, through designs on cloth, on walls, on the staffs of elders and through behavior.[250]

We need to mention that the idea of self legislation that is warranted by one's engagement with the world does not necessarily mean that the Yoruba individual will be obsessed with how to face the challenges that will make her achieve the true mark of

---

[247] Ibid, pp. 51-52.

[248] W. E. Abraham, "Sources of African Identity" in K. Wiredu and K. Gyeke, (eds.) *Person and Community : Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, p. 41.

[249] Segun Gbadegesin, *Aspects of Yoruba Tradition: Importance, Richness and Limits in the Context of Unfreedom*, *Isokan Yoruba Magazine*, 3, no. 3 (1997). Available at http://www.yoruba.org/Magazine/Summer97/File4.htm.

[250] James Bode Agbaje, "Proverbs: A Strategy for Resolving Conflict in Yoruba Society", p. 238.

individuality. This is not the case as there is no specific time or test that is readily set by the community by which the identity of the individual is to be defined. Experiences of life come and go in their natural ways. The individual's way of coping and shaping her life plans within these natural occurrences will determine her overall identity. However, the point is that no one should submit to fate, everyone must stand up and define her self in the way she deems fit, utilizing her inner capacities. There is room for improvement and people can always start again even though they fail at some point. The case of Obatala readily comes to mind: though he seems to have failed in the mission of world reordering, he proves his worth in some other involvements and later becomes a very significant deity in Yoruba society. Because of Obatala's significant achievement, both his initial mistake and his subsequent success become a kind of defining monument for all his adherents. What of Elegba who is formerly respected as 'a phallic divinity' but later becomes a representation of evil? Originally, Ifa is the 'god of fecundation' but later he is known as a foreteller of the future. All this shows that failure or success at any particular time in life matters little; what counts most is the need to be responsive to future challenges and to bear in mind the moral intuition that defines our humanity. The important thing is for everyone to stand up to the test of time with the consciousness of engaging one's real experiences, seeing them as opportunities for self development and this must necessarily take the community into consideration. Yoruba construction of self actualization stems from a free, relaxing engagement with the world believed to be an *Ile* (home). Therefore, the individual operates on the basis of this knowledge taken the others that she dwells with as vital part of her being. The Yoruba individual is never expected to give up to fate. She must always see life from its many ramifications, fighting on till the

end desired is realized.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTEXTUALIZING ADVAITA AND YORUBA CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY

> Every descriptive finding pertains to a certain region of phenomena. Speculative philosophers sometimes generalize it to some other regions, far beyond the limits within which it had originary intuitive support". [251]
>
> However, there are two basic factors of human experience – the duality of the ego and the world, or the subject and the object. All peoples in all cultures face this question of the duality of experience, and the manner in which different cultural groups of people approach it would determine or expose their basic assumptions about the nature of reality. [252]

As indicated from the outset of this study, we target the notions of identity in Advaita and Yoruba philosophical traditions and their implications on the community. In the introductory chapter, we highlighted two opposing views of identity. These schools of thought take radically different stands regarding the source of identity. We maintained that both philosophical positions thrive on two extreme positions that require important adjustments. Common to the first political theory is the claim that the fundamental value that ought to guide the articulation of identity is liberty. Advocates of this philosophy resent the views that establish identity articulation on community rather than individual choices. To them, this way of conceiving identity necessarily hinders individuals from flourishing and ultimately, sacrifices autonomy. [253] But the other political theory contends that the advocacy of the former school detaches individuals from the reality of

---

[251] J. N. Mohanty, *Transcendental Philosophy*, p. 15.
[252] K. C. Anyanwu, *The African Experience in the American Market Place*, p.57.
[253] See, for example, David Gauthier, "The Liberal Individual" in Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit (ed.), *Communitarianism and Individualism*, p. 157.

experience. This detachment, this school argues, stems from the theoretical exposition of the self as something that is "antecedently established, fashioned prior to the choices it makes in the course of its experience".[254] Interestingly, the ideas of these political theories stem from certain understanding of the self, the main subject that gains attention in the philosophies of Advaita and Yoruba. We delineate on the subject of identity in Advaita and Yoruba philosophical traditions. We explore the profound assumptions that guide the constructions of the self in Advaita and Yoruba in order to see the roles that the philosophies give to the individual in self determination. Consequently, we examine whether the two philosophies take individuality as antecedent to community or immersed in the community's social world. The implication of the latter position as reflected in our study is that it subjects identity exclusively under the group that the person belongs to. The former position frees the individual from the community. This chapter will now set in a comparative style the various ways in which Advaita and Yoruba attend to the three main issues (the articulation of identity, its moral relevance to the community and the philosophical problem of alterity) that are associated with identity construction in this study.

I

Advaita and Yoruba philosophies make the subject of self their central focus in order to guide humanity on the path to successful life. The common presupposition of these philosophies is that anyone who knows the real self will be equipped with the knowledge of authentic living. We may ask why this will automatically be so. This is because the utmost knowledge is embedded in the real self. This knowledge opens the mind of persons to the harmony that exists among the manifold realities of the world. The

---

[254] Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 21.

possession of this knowledge enables people to discern the linkages that permeate manifoldness. Not only will this knowledge enables us to apprehend the link between our plural identities, it will also enable us to apprehend how we are linked with others regardless of their differences. Essential to the realization of the authentic life is the need to lead life in light of the connections that exist between the many faces that we carry.[255] This will help us appreciate the fact that we are all human beings and live together seeking the fair development of everyone. On the one hand, the knowledge of the self that is enunciated in Advaita and Yoruba philosophies frees one from any slavish attachment to community. On the other hand, it reveals one's responsibilities to community. Advaita and Yoruba expositions of self show why people ought to embark on inner searching, pulling themselves back from the entanglements of the social life, refusing to go with the flow except when an internal approval is found. This is when the 'I' (the subject of one's individuality) is in perfect agreement with it. The 'I' will be in perfect agreement with our actions when the motivating principle for the actions supports the development of others' free and equal nature.

This impulse for action is largely revealed in the way Advaita construes the ultimate nature of the person's identity. On the question of the nature of our identity, Advaita has but one profound answer, which is '*Tat Tvam Asi*' (That art Thou). This is the original background of self knowledge and it suggests that the individual is essentially non-different from others. Firstly, primacy is given to the equality of our essential nature. Moreover, this essence is also revealed to be indivisible. Brahman, the

---

[255] One interesting similarity between Advaita, Yoruba and western liberal philosophies appears here. Rawls, for example, argues that our nature presupposes that we are first plural and then unified. The three traditions seem to suggest that the person has an essential nature that is able to make her engage in a co-operative venture in the society. The difference of Advaita and Yoruba with Rawlsian position however lies in the kind of emphasis Rawls gives to the plural nature of persons.

essence of the person, remains the fundamental essence which we must always bear in mind in identity delineation. Its preeminence, we should understand, does not submerge the reality of our plural nature as evident in the statement "That art Thou".[256] Back to the original nature, Brahman, as the essence of unity, gains primacy because it is the fundamental principle that embraces the reality of all and yet different from all. It is the overseer, the one that watches itself in actions yet not an agent of actions. Brahman's nature cannot be increased or reduced by actions. What does this illustrate for us who live in the world today? The original background of self knowledge predisposes us to take as uppermost our free and equal nature. Free because our innermost identity surpasses what may be revealed in the world and equal because we have the moral capacity to engage in a system of fair co-operation regardless of our differences. This philosophy believes in the reality of our distinctiveness but, at the same time, it argues that emphasis ought to be placed on the development of the moral capacity which is able to make us respond to differences in the right manner. Right from the outset therefore, the philosophy of Brahman puts in view the reality of our plural nature and set an ideal background principle by which this plural nature should function.

Thus, Brahman being the unifying essence of all presupposes a notable recognition of duality. The Advaita person understands that duality is real and that it culminates in the ultimate Brahman. Hence, the idea of Brahman sets the basis for co-operative association. It situates members in an environment where the good of all becomes elevated to the topmost. Members work together with the ultimate goal of preserving the bond of unity that exists among other members in the community. The idea of one's identity being fixed to a group is not supported by this philosophy. Each

---

[256] See a fuller explanation in the first section of chapter two.

person is free to join any class, group, associations etc. which could enable him to cultivate his natural talents. As the underlying reality of the person is Brahman, unity is prior in this philosophy, the reason being that it is the sure path that opens us to the reality and richness of our individuality. To understand ourselves better, the philosophy of Brahman presents, at the basis, the state of equilibrium where every person can function in fair terms. Brahman is not at once separated from the person's experiences. The community experiences therefore remain important in the knowledge of one's identity. However, dwelling on the very nature of Brahman, the notion of the good which is supposed to cement the community is not tied to any of the values upheld by any particular groups. Brahman transcends them all. And even though Brahman contains all the differences that are revealed in individuals, it does not prohibit them from flourishing. Thus, it becomes evident that the thriving of one's individuality is also prominent in the idea of Brahman as the basis of social co-operation. One may wonder how this will happen when the unity of individuals in the community ought to be preserved.

Advaita directs us to understand the fact that our nature is not exhausted by anything that we may be affiliated with in the world. This implies that anything which identifies us externally as this or that person does not hold an eternal grip on us. Therefore, we are free to re-evaluate our lives and choose that which aligns with our moral nature. We are beings capable of making reasonable choices. Regardless of how complex a matter may be, we are capable of thrashing it out and reach consent. Representing this moral capacity of the person as it is, Advaita philosophy suggests that our freedom is not revealed unto us prior to our joining the community. We only come to know that we are free beings as we begin to participate in community life. Our choices in

life depict the fact of our freedom. This point stresses the interesting role that community plays in the understanding of our selves as free beings. But, more importantly, it reveals the positive aspect of our freedom in self understanding. Against the narrow assumption that the freedom of the self to choose privileges individuality over community, Advaita theory suggests that our individuality commands us to choose with the aim of contributing to the development of others' free nature. Ultimately, this is a respect for the continuity of the community. In particular, the exercise of this freedom deepens the knowledge of our moral identity. We would be able to see beyond our limited affiliations, comprehending the many-dimensional nature of diverse human beings the reality of which we all share.

The Yoruba notion of individuality is close to the Advaita position. For Yoruba, *Emi* is the basis of individuality. *Emi* is the ultimate permeating consciousness which contains all things. *Emi* is also regarded as the ultimate differentiator, that which differentiates things but remains undifferentiated. Originally, *Emi* contains everything within itself. In this regard, *Emi* stands as the basis of community. The original state therefore stresses our essential unity rather than our plurality. In the original state, our real being is presented in its purest form. What is apprehended in this primary state is *Emi*. Firstly, the account of human subjectivity is described from the perspective of the ultimate unifying principle (*Emi*). But, like the Advaita philosophy, this presupposes human plurality (our distinctiveness). Interestingly, the plural nature becomes meaningful only from the standpoint of its relatedness to community. The realization of our pure nature lies in a systematic cultivation of the plural nature. Now, since the community refers to no one entity but the conscious principle by which people agree to lead their

lives, and because this community consciousness is not regarded as fixed, any account of the unity of human subjectivity in Yoruba philosophy also presupposes plurality. The knowledge of our unity invites us to seek the development of our equal nature. Also, our plurality suggests our freedom. It demonstrates that as the *eniyan* (persons capable of choices) that we are, we have the capacity to engage in mutual relationships.

Since Yoruba argues that the basis of community is *Emi*, its idea of community also flourishes on the free and equal nature of individuals. The intuitive idea of community is developed on the moral capacities of persons. Yoruba argues that these are essential for the development of a harmonious and progressive society. Community is thus likened to a family in which a fair system of co-operation between family members becomes dominant. This is highly valued in modern conception of democratic society. The typification of community as a family forbids the viewing of the community as a fixed structure, or some institution justified by certain fixed laws. Just as the family lacks any existence of its own outside the members, community existence is based on the social co-operation of its members. So, community good is formed from the mutual consensus of members. However, this good changes with the awareness of members of the community. The chief goal of the community good is to enable each member to maximize her distinctive nature. It is in this respect that it must not coerce people in their choices except when such threatens the development of others. Thus, Yoruba argues that the development of the community on mutual co-operation is a fruitful ideology for identity construction.

Like Advaita philosophy suggests, Yoruba holds that the reality of our identity transcends what any community good can exhaust. Individuals are responsible for the

development of their identity, but within the community and as revealed to them by their *Emi*. The individual needs to develop her nature for this is like a seed that needs to be nurtured in order to grow. This is one major difference between *Emi* and Brahman as exposed by Shankara. The *emi* of the person is capable of further development whereas Brahman is self complete. But the *emi* that contains the possibility of development is like the spark of the supreme *Emi*. Yoruba believes that this *emi* dwells in the individual but it is not disconnected from its very origin which is the permeating essence of all. This difference between Advaita and Yoruba describes the diverse ways that both philosophies construe the roles of actions in self actualization. The Advaita subject only looks inward and seeks to be connected with the inmost feeling, that is, the good that is not realized in physical actions; the Yoruba subject connects the inner content of his being to his physical development. While both the Advaita and Yoruba subjects will need to connect to the inward feelings in order to lead the authentic lives, there is no serious fear that they will adhere to some personal interests the end of which can fragment the community. Due to the belief that *Emi* is capable of further development, Yoruba describes identity construction in two phases, one of which is preliminary, to be accomplished by the community and the other permanent, to be accomplished by the individual herself. The latter is given utmost significance on the ground that only the individual knows how it should grow and this should be in accordance with her own self knowledge. Thus, the person is conceived as having the priority of self choice. The identity that is constituted by the community is articulated as a kind of raw material with which she should define her own distinguished identity. The right to determine one's identity within the community stems from the Yoruba understanding of the *emi* of the individual as the

ultimate awareness of the individual's good. For the individual to lead a fulfilled life, she must engage the community meanings and not just conform to its tenets without personal consent. This consent comes from a critical reflection on the good proposed as the community good. The individual is here articulated as having the capacity to choose the principles that are definitive of her own will. However, this choice, Yoruba contends, will be meaningful when it is exercised within some social settings.

The concepts of Brahman and *Emi* share certain commonalities. Topmost of these is that they are the ultimate grounding in self knowledge. Brahman and *Emi* underlie the consciousness of any person's identity. Our distinctive identity is brought into our knowledge by the subject of awareness denoted by the two philosophies as Brahman and *Emi* respectively. Like Brahman, *Emi* is the indivisible consciousness which individuates itself in the world. Although Brahman and *Emi* are identified with the physical entities of the world, they are none of these things. Though Brahman and *Emi* underlie the operation of the finite thought, they transcend what the mind can comprehend. The mind cannot conceptualize them and articulate them completely. No language can exhaust the nature of these two realities. They are not identical with anything that we perceive in the world. But we should be careful not to take this to mean that Brahman and *Emi* are entirely antithetical to mental and physical entities. These entities are only different from them in their temporal forms. Again, we should note that this does not imply that Brahman and *Emi* are nothing in the sense that they are non-entities.

Both the realities of Brahman and *Emi* are confirmed by individuals' experiences. The philosophies of Brahman and *Emi* agree that the contingent particularities of individuals are very crucial in the understanding of their identity. Advaita philosophy

223

holds that the ultimate identities of individuals remain true independent of what the world happens to be. These identities are different from the ones that individuals are associated with in the world. However, the ultimate identity becomes comprehensible to the person as she engages the contingencies of her world. She comes to the realization that her very nature is not limited to any community meanings. The group identity which she shares with the community only reveals her ultimate identity as something that is in view. Unless the person comes to the point where she knows that the supreme consciousness which constitutes her true identity is not limited to any group consciousness, she will remain under the delusion of the lower self. The point is that the individual is more than what the community meaning can exhaust. Yoruba argues that the ultimate identity of the individual transcends what the community can define. Community consciousness is able to stimulate its direction to a particular stage after which the individual herself needs to take over. The constitutive meanings of the community, for Yoruba, are like the raw materials which individuals need for permanent self redefinition. The originality of self redefinition is often showcased when any individual is able to rupture the community status quo, like Ogun did, creating a new order through the faculty of intelligence. Yoruba believes that human capacity of choice and reflection is not limited to community.

In Yoruba philosophy, one's real identity (the *eniyan* that one is) is exemplified by the demonstration of one's capacity of choice. It is by choosing one's life through one's causal actions that one's real identity is formed. But, for Advaita, the structure of our identity is exemplified through a kind of rigorous reflection on what is given to us in the world until we apprehend that its truest essence is the Brahman in us. What is

suggested in the Advaita position is that any form of identity which we imbibe in the world must constantly be examined and remain open to new interpretations. We must keep reflecting on the manner of life, and perhaps the cultural meanings that we have chosen and we must never relax until we have reached the point in which we are sure that our choices do not impair others' development. We know our own self truly when we know it not to be different from Brahman, the self of all. Advaita philosophy describes the process of identity in a radically stimulating manner which suggests that we need to remove all those structures of the community which hinder us from seeing our connectedness with the universal community. One thing that we may worry about at this juncture is what the implication of seeing cultural meanings as possibilities of self understanding will likely be on the individual. There are two ways to attend to this. On the one hand, we may say that it will prompt the individual to hold that cultural meanings are impermanent. Hence, the individual will likely conceive her freedom as absolute. This will mean that she can acquire any identity that works for her as she is not bound by the notion of the good that is upheld in her community. Moreover, since the good of the community is taken to be contingent, she will probably think that she does not have any obligation to be subject to any standards other than her own. This reaction may be considered as the weakness of the communitarian model that Advaita and Yoruba defend. But if it is possible for the individual to free herself from the contingency of her cultural community and yet maintain her loyalty to the culture, participating in the evolution of her culture, then, it means that she is genuinely free in the sense that her mind is not frozen by her cultural tradition.

The positions that are presented in the philosophical traditions of Advaita and Yoruba make it possible for the individual to experience the latter. For Advaita and Yoruba persons, the cultural traditions which depict identity in the world are contingent but this does not mean that individuals are not obliged to measure up to the prescribed standards. Alternately, they are supposed to understand that their identity is not exhausted by the cultural traditions they happen to share. In this regard, the standards exemplified by the cultural traditions are to be held as subject to review. This position challenges us to extend the possibilities of our cultures and not to close them. The latter is more likely to be experienced when individuals fail to cause their unbounded nature to flourish. This may make the individual either deny that cultures are inadvertently unimportant in the creation of identity or deny that it is the ultimate determiner of identity. When an individual gives some considerable regard to the historical development of her community's cultural principles, she is likely to be rescued from the irony which is involved in the position that says cultural meanings are not binding because of their contingency. This irony is presented in the following:

> Recognizing the contingency of all self-interpretations also opens the way to a stance of irony toward all self-definitions. For if I see that every self-description and self-evaluation is arbitrary, having no basis other than contingent facts about what has popped up in my culture, I will also realize that my own most basic commitments and defining ideals are ultimately up for grabs, temporary resting places on a road of self-creation that ends only with death.[257]

For Yoruba, identity does not terminate at death; it continues as the person joins the ancestral community. Not only does the Yoruba person seek to contribute to the richness of the community culture by the life she leads, she understands that a life that is well lived will gain some merits in the ancestral community. Not only this, the continuity

---

[257] Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, p. 116.

of the ancestral community and in particular the identity of the individual depends to a large extent on the flourishing of the community. This is the essence of the Yoruba saying *bi ko si eniyan, imole o si*. I mention the foregoing in order to highlight that Yoruba persons do not need to shun the cultural community on the basis that cultural meanings are contingent. The fact of death deepens, for Yoruba, the need to lead the authentic life. The life story of the individual from birth to death becomes the permanent identity with which she will be remembered. Yoruba cherishes the community of memory because of its social import. On the one hand, it stands as the life course or the narrative by which others can understand life's meaning, and on the other hand, it allows for the continuity of the person even after death. This continuity is crucial to Yoruba. It is an unfortunate thing for any individual to be forgotten in her ancestral lineage. This is considered as permanent death. Thus, to Yoruba, the fact of death shows the need to own oneself in the sense of owning up to what one wants to become. This means that one will have to identify what is most significant to one in the events of life and then takes a resolute stand on pursuing it. However, all this must be understood from Yoruba conception of individuality as a social concept.

Above all, it is important to mention that the Advaita and Yoruba views of identity rest on the awareness that something other than what can be observed lies deeply within the human individual. This is the reality of the person and everything else in the world. This is the basis for the traditions social construction of self. Before and after the influence of the society on the individual, the self remains accessible in its true form only to the person. Thus, living the authentic life involves that one looks inward, beyond the social purview of the world, in order to find the self. However, whatever one discovers

within to be the self must be possible of being expressed in a social context. When we subject ourselves to social engagements, our inner self will be strengthened and the mutual cooperation and trust that ought to depict our real person will shine forth.

II

To corroborate our arguments against the traditional readings of Indian and African conceptions of individuality, I will analyze a communitarian account of identity and show how some of its features run contrary to Advaita and Yoruba communitarianism. This account claims that the identity that is defined by the community cannot be willed off.[258] We cannot shed off the way we have inherited to think, act or make judgment about the world etc. The individual is automatically bonded within the constitutive meanings of her community. She cannot escape from it no matter how hard she tries. Part of what this argument intends to show is that our identities are constituted by nothing other than the markedly unique traditions, norms and values of our societies. This is the origin of our nature.[259] For us to conduct an enriching investigation about ourselves, we should refer to the raw materials of our culture. We cannot give meaning to our lives outside the boundary of our cultural traditions. This follows that once we step out of the community which defines us, we miss our self orientation. The modes of being that are peculiarly defined by the community are denied as impermanent. They are not the kind of things that can be shed off as in when someone decides to quit an association that she joined voluntarily. Therefore, each constitutive ideology of each community is conceived as autonomous such that escaping from it will imply that one is eternally

---

[258] See Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and its Critics*, p. 124.

[259] See Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, pp. 150-151.

damaged as joining other constitutive framework of other communities will look like putting a square peg in a round hole.

Now, Advaita and Yoruba philosophies will not deny the fact that the community provides a largely background way of meaningful thinking, a way of judging and acting in the world. But to hold that this way of being is deeply and perpetually ingrained into us that without it we are better than nothing as our lives will be trivial, insignificant and meaningless, is to go too far. It is important enough to understand that our lives are given meaning by the community we belong to. Moreover, it is essential to distinguish constitutive community from a kind of voluntary association which we decide to become a member of and which we can, at anytime, quit when we are dissatisfied with its modes of operations. The difference between the community that constitutes us and the association we join voluntarily is that the decision to escape from the voluntary association occurs from our judgment about its operations. When we are dissatisfied with the operations of a particular voluntary association, we can decide to quit. But the case of the constitutive community is not so and the reason is not because we cannot be dissatisfied with the community life but because we cannot escape from the way we have been constituted to think and make judgment about life altogether. One point to be noted here is that the constitutive community, contrary to a voluntary association, makes us what we are.[260] We make the association we join voluntarily what it is. That which constitutes our being is considered to be so deep and varied that there is no way one can possibly articulate it, subject it to doubt and willfully escape from it. For the Advaita and Yoruba philosophies, it is not true that the community makes us who we are if this is intended to mean that the community is a kind of entity out there whose primary function

---

[260] See Ibid.

is to make individuals the kinds of things they are. The community comes into being due to the joint efforts and consent of individuals. It assumes its authority by virtue of human experiences and the various interpretations given to these experiences. Whatever it may be that makes the notion of constitutive consciousness meaningful in any communities will be coherently explained when it embraces the systematization of the ideas of people who at one time or another reacted to their experiences. Now, it is the cumulative reactions of the people to their worldly issues that constitute the community. It should be noted that this idea of the community is not a thing that can be said to be there eternally. Rather, it is brought about by the conscious efforts of individuals. These individuals are regarded as important and they become historical figures that subsequent generations will use as means of self understanding. All this put together says the obvious, namely, it is the people that make the community and not vice versa. It is not being denied that the idea of the community may grow in direct proportion to its social, political, economic, etc. development. Nor is it denied that as people begin to remember the sacrifices of their ancestors, they feel obliged to preserve the good things that have been handed down to them. But despite all this, the Advaita and Yoruba philosophies argue that the truth should be kept as it is, that is, it is the self that creates the community. This paves the way for the respect of persons as choosers above all. This respect includes the fact that the capacity for choice is not bounded within the community, rather it transcends it.

The fact that identity constitution is not as rigid as it is depicted in the above communitarian stance is revealed in our ability to detest anything in our constitutive community. Furthermore, if we are so tied to the consciousness of some particular community, it should be impossible for anyone to find meaning to her life when she joins

other community. But in these two cases we understand that the argument above fails. In real life, people change communities and find new meanings to their lives. This new life cannot be said to be superficial as they acknowledge that it gives them a higher level of self fulfillment. If this is the case, does it not suggest that identity definition ought not to be curtailed within a particular community? Bell illustrates the impossibility of changing constitutive communities with the examples of African Americans, Indian Canadians, etc. He mentions that when we observe these people's ways of being, we are provoked to say, wow, 'they are so American' or 'they are so Canadian'.[261] Bell means that though these people have changed their community, yet their identity remained unchanged. By this Bell refers to certain of their physical features like the way they talk, the kind of food they like to eat, etc. But this argument is logically inconclusive as it is possible to find contrary cases. Not only this, there is nothing that hinders us from using the same expression when such contrary cases are found. Then we will imply basically that these people's judgments about the world and their understanding about the way life ought to be lived have changed radically to reflect their new community. The fact that the change occurs within a constitutive community, though a new one, is not what is being doubted here but the emphasis is on the fact that the way of being that is constituted by any particular community is never permanent. Logically speaking, there is nothing that affiliates one to any community that cannot be overthrown with time.

Nevertheless, this argument does not intend to mean that the significance of life can be realized independently of the community. We agree that the community is significant, but it is not an ultimate definition of identity. The communitarian credit lies

---

[261] Ibid, pp. 124- 136.

in affirming the former claim. The communitarian moral stance which presupposes that we should be committed to the good of the community out of which our identity is constituted is remarkably important. This shows that the human person is a moral subject and that her dignity lies in the ability to work towards the betterment and continuity of her local community. But, more importantly, human dignity becomes much more pronounced when those activities, which are designed to promulgate the local community, respect the ideal of the global community. Again, this suggests that the nature of the person should not be passionately tied to some particular communities at the expense of other communities.

Daniel Bell develops an interesting conception of communitarian notion of community. Here, he reflects on the importance of memory and imagination in the determination of identity.[262] Bell argues, under what he terms 'communities of memory', that our identities have a history in that they are constituted by certain past events which go back into several generations and which have become the salient characteristics of a community of memory.[263] In Bell's position the importance of community of memory can never be overlooked for that carries

> a moral tradition that helps to provide the narrative unity of our lives, which entails an obligation to sustain and promote the ideals and aspirations embedded in their history through memory and hope, linking our destiny to that of our ancestors, contemporaries, and descendants. If individuals fail to nurture their communities of memory, they lose a source of meaning and hope in their lives, and very serious harm is done to their self-esteem and sense of personal competence, not to mention the consequences for future generations when a moral tradition is lost.[264]

---

[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid. p, 125.
[264] Ibid, p. 126.

Bell considers 'national communities of memory' and 'linguistic communities of memory' to be very prominent in the constitution of identity. He says, and rightly, about 'national communities of memory' that the origin of nations matters less than the undeniable fact that the histories of nations are capable of evolving into entities which "command a profound emotional legitimacy" in people.[265] This is a very true saying. By participating in the activities of the community we are able to understand some things about ourselves. When we reflect about our past and turn on those events which mark some defining moments in our lives, we tend to be emotional about them and somewhat tie our self to this past. We become fascinated by these historical moments and attach it to our inmost self, identifying them as things that are secluded and sacred, a kind of identity that is remarkably special and permanent. Going through the philosophies of Advaita and Yoruba, we understand why we should be careful in the way we attach the self to these past sentiments. This has the tendency of clouding the mind from apprehending the depth of the self. As the Advaita theory of superimposition puts it, the depth of our real self transcends anything that may be given to us in memory.[266] When we identify ourselves with the past of any kind, we tend to take the lower self as the ultimate self. We degenerate into accepting the sentiments that we derive from our past involvements in the community, for instance, as the truest expression of our real self. In doing this, we relapse into the shallow region of the false self. This blurs our view of the true self. Our real moral identity, the one that transcends the community, is given the secondary place.

---

[265] Ibid, p. 129.
[266] See a detail discussion of Shankara's theory of superimposition in pp. 103-107.

Now, the histories of our past are very significant. These are not being denied as constituting a significant part in self understanding. But when they are taken to the extreme in the sense that we acknowledge them as exhausting our ultimate identity, we begin to relapse to the dangerous trap of self delusion. Amartya Sen notes:

> Concerns of this kind not only indicate an anxiety and a disquiet, but also point illuminatingly to the positive and constructive importance people tend to attach to a shared history and a sense of affiliation based on this theory. And yet history and background are not the only way of seeing ourselves and the groups to which we belong. There are a great variety of categories to which we belong.[267]

When we fail to consider the seriousness of the plurality of our identity, we may easily resort to fanaticism and begin to act in a way that will obliterate the importance of others. To further our point, the argument about the permanent grip of the community of memory on the individual seems unsound in the sense that what attracts and fascinates someone may not have the same impact on another person. I may be moved to the point of wanting to sacrifice my life for the good of my group because of certain memories which we share together in the group. This does not mean that everyone will have the same affection for the group though we did experience that which evokes my passion for the group together. If constitutive memories do not produce the same effect in all individuals, how are we sure that people cannot get out of any historical memory to find meaning in new communities? The person demonstrates her moral worth when she appreciates her community. However, she must understand that that which makes the community dear to her ought not to blur her moral judgment and responsiveness to the common good of the universal community.

---

[267] Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence*: *The Illusion of Destiny*, pp. 18-19.

This is a lesson we ought to borrow from the Advaita position which says that the highest sentiments of the self cannot be compared to the ones derived from our involvement in our local community. The joy of rendering good service to all humankind regardless of racial or cultural affiliation is immense. Advaita maintains that the deepest sentiment of the self is realized when we act without attachment. To bring in the correct idea of acting without attachment, *The Bhagavad Gita* says,

> Complete inaction is impossible as already established in earlier chapters. The omission cannot be of the enjoined duties even. For this would lead to hell and other evil consequences. Hence it is clear every view of abandoning Karma, if sound, inculcates only the renunciation of fruits and attachment.[268]

This message "to act without attachment" enjoins us to realize the limitation of our social attachments in defining our identity. We relate with everyone in love and cease from discriminating against non-members. It means that we should act in accordance with the purity of our soul, showing our true nature which is in union with all. This message conveys the crucial nature of our oneness and the need to develop our moral capacity which ought to respond promptly to the good of all. On this lies the true worth of the human subject.

Advaita and Yoruba philosophies should be credited for their respect for liberty. These philosophies remain significant in the very sense that they both champion the need to value humanity as an end in itself. More importantly, both philosophical traditions develop the methodology of the self in a way that embraces the communal nature of the human subject. As a result, the advocacies of the two philosophies pay important attention to certain essentials about the notion of human dignity. When it comes to ethical

---

[268] S. Subra Rau, *The Bhagavadgita*, translation and commentaries by Sri Madhwacharya's Bhashyas, XVIII. v.

behavior, the two philosophies emphasize the virtue of selflessness. The basic principles on which this is founded also make it possible for their adherents to sustain good feelings as they act. Unlike the expositions of the self that create a kind of gap between human individuals in that they predispose us as units that have no connection with the others, Advaita and Yoruba philosophies do not curtail our moral responsiveness to one another.[269] Richard Bell remarks that the individualist based conceptions of right blur our moral intuition to respond to the plight of others. Even when we are aware of this moral responsibility, Bell maintains that we are afraid to do it because we are not sure whether we are not interfering in other people's conception of the good.[270]

Advaita and Yoruba demonstrate a notable respect for our humanity by acknowledging the fundamental attributes that we possess, and which should not be devalued by the community. These are our essential capacity for reasoning and moral choices. Advaita posits that the ability to exercise these capacities indicates that we are the highest thing to be treasured. The system does not consider it an abomination when it gives such liberty of life the most sacred and godlike flavor. The philosophy flies off the domain of the worldly in order to depict the value of the human person. The worth of the person is no longer to be conceived from the standpoint of certain endowment that the individual derives from some divine being, but the sacred heart of the divine is itself present in the form of a person. Advaita makes us understand that we really can live together in harmony regardless of our differences, loving ourselves unconditionally. Thus, it ensures a balanced attitude to life by making us recognize that as much as we ought to be loved singly on the basis of our inner worth, we must also prove our worth as

---

[269] Richard H. Bell, *Understanding African Philosophy, A Cross Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues*, p, 71.

[270] Ibid.

responsible citizens of the global world. At the heart of this philosophy is the assumption that the person is god of some kind. The profoundness of the human nature requires that each person be respected as an end. Yoruba philosophy acknowledges the worth of persons from the standpoint of their potential beings. This is the highest value on earth. The person is acknowledged as having the capacity to make intelligible decisions that will advance the wellness of every people in the community and beyond. This capacity is never to be inhibited and one essential way to prevent this from occurring is by seeing community meanings as something that can be revised and possibly repealed. For the two philosophies, the natural membership of an individual in the community must not rob her of her inner worth for that is the attribute that makes us the persons we are. Understanding Advaita and Yoruba positions properly, we realize that there is no entity that is called community which is independent of the members that constitute its form. So, if the members are going to be true to their worth, they must be ready to consent to the collective good that is able to maintain the order of the community. This good must allow everyone to flourish.

For both Advaita and Yoruba philosophies, the individual who understands her moral status will not pursue rights following the individualist principles. The dignity of our humanity cannot blossom when we concentrate on private interests. Our dignity is revealed as we lead our lives with the prime motivation to contribute to the many- sided goods in the world. Rights, for Advaita and Yoruba, are to be claimed with the spirit of truth and love, with a caution not to harm one's neighbor. The moderate notion of identity that is represented in Advaita and Yoruba philosophies is not opposed to individual rights. In a communitarian moral universe of the Advaita model, the right to

choose the principles that are definitive of one's will is not prohibited. Since the person is purged from selfish motivations, her moral vision is to lead a life that promotes human wellness. The Advaita communitarian ideal acknowledges that the success of the community requires the exercise of the unique qualities of the individual. In a similar vein, the Yoruba communitarianism will not deny the individual the right of self choice on the recognition that the capacity for choice is not given by the community.

III

I defend in this study a moderate view of identity which is more suitable to human social nature. This view of identity can be contrasted with the traditional readings of Advaita and Yoruba communitarianism. These readings suggest mainly that the virtues of equality, fairness and freedom as associated with the conception of individuality are devalued in India and Africa. Moreover, the Indian and African persons are arguably conceived as not able to formulate personal goals and demonstrate critical reflections about their beliefs. I have argued here that the above submission is mistaken. My representations of both Advaita and Yoruba philosophies indicate that they do not advocate an unreflective hold to tradition. The ideas of identity that are developed on the concepts of Brahman and *Emi* runs contrary to any position that requires us to be firmly attached to the sentiment of our tradition and be bonded only to the good of our constitutive community. Though this conclusion may be drawn from any social theory which conceives the human nature as nothing more than what the community makes it or as something that is entirely abstracted from the community, Advaita and Yoruba philosophies reject both the views that the human nature is entirely abstracted from the community and that it is discovered only within the community life. For Advaita and Yoruba philosophies, our worth is truly exemplified when we understand ourselves from the standpoint of our community experiences and recognize that these experiences do not exhaust our inmost being. This way of construing identity, in my opinion, is able to guide the person to the realization of a worthwhile life. This quality of life seems difficult to incorporate into the lives of people who are glued to tradition or entirely disconnected from it. This point becomes obvious as we describe the lives of two hypothetical

individuals below. Certainly, these individuals cannot be said to be leading balanced lives.

I will refer to these individuals as the thinking person and the loving person. The thinking person is aware of the importance of exercising the moral powers of self choice. She sets out her plans systematically to meet her desired end. She defines her own principles, evaluating various options and cautiously calculating her gains in interpersonal relationships. After all, the community is meant for mutual gains. She treats those contacts that are able to bring her more gains responsibly and fight against her instinct to respect those who have nothing to contribute to her life. We may ask why she necessarily needs to do the latter. It is because of the priority that the thinking person gives to self interests. The possessive stance that the self wears, which makes nothing other than its own thought of crucial importance in self attainment, adds to the very reasons why the thinking person will need to contend with the moral intuition to consider others equally. The thinking person sees the collective good of the community as secondary. She does not see the community as a need because every person in the community, in her viewpoint, is aiming at personal gains. The value of life is rated purely on personal achievements. Thus, the thinking person is careful not to share her life with just anyone except when the association will yield as much benefits as she gives into the relationship. This way of life reckons the self as a unitary whole. Hence, the belief that self realization needs to take a self centered route.

On the other hand, the loving person does not lay much importance on the exercise of moral powers of choice. She believes that the dignity of the self is demonstrated when one shows loyalty to her community. To the loving person, the will to

be authentic must be guided in a way that will preserve the structure of the community. The inner desires and aspirations of the loving person will be accounted to be true if they align with the aspirations of the community. Mainly the loving person adopts the social rules as the guiding principles. The loving person sees the collective good of the community as primary. She will normally fight against her instinct if it tells her to act in a way that is different from the standard stipulated by the community. In the same vein, she will reject any inner admonition to do anything novel, things that the community is not used to. Her sentiment for community tradition is so strong that she will resist every counter position as incommensurate.

Whereas the thinking person will not tolerate anything that infiltrates into her private conception of the good, the loving person will find anything that demeans the community good inappropriate. In some sense, both the thinking person and the loving person are intolerant. Anything considered external to their conceptions of the good should be abhorred. The thinking person acknowledges her mind as the ultimate arbiter in self choice. Her motto can be summed up as follows: whatever I am able to reason out clearly about myself is what I am. I am what I think myself to be. The instinct of the thinking person may automatically be rejected if it approves something good that ought to be done but the good repudiates her personal idea of the good, an idea that is derived from the so call universal point of view. In Alasdair MacIntyre's view, this requires that we "abstract ourselves from all those particularities of social relationship in terms of which we have been accustomed to understand our responsibilities and interests [so as to] arrive at a genuinely neutral, impartial, and, in this way, universal point of view, freed from the partisanship and the partiality and onesidedness that otherwise affect us"[271].

---

[271] Cited in Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics*, p. 6.

When that which is proposed by the thinking person's instinct gains moral credit, she may likely relapse from acting because she won't want to interfere with other persons' lives. The very desire and the ultimate inclination to be self determined rather than being other determined stands out as the prime motivation of the thinking person. The loving person, on the other hand, acknowledges the mind of the community as the final judge in self choice. "Whatever the community thinks me to be is what I am" characterizes the ideal of the loving person. The loving person takes the willful eradication of culturally laid rules as self distortion. Some externally fixed tradition is the causal or creative mind of the loving person. Whereas the thinking individual is enclosed within her own mind, the loving person is enclosed within the mind of the community.

Both the thinking person and the loving person are motivated by the desire to realize what they take to be the ultimate good, the personal good for the thinking person and the community good for the loving person. The difference between the thinking person and the loving individual is that the former depends solely on her own faculty of judgment. This individual takes her life into her hand, believing that her limited experiences and understanding about the world are enough to furnish her with the know-how with which to achieve the ideal self she chooses for herself. Contrarily, the loving person believes on the judgment of the community, leading her life with the trust that the accumulated experiences of the community are enough to lead her to the path of self fulfillment. Whereas the thinking person shuns the moral intuition to acknowledge the community which contributes to her mode of being in the world and nurtures her moral power of self determination, the loving person shuns the need to stand out and become an authentic individual who defines her life and, by implication, defines the constitutive

meanings of the community. The inability to maintain the equilibrium state in actions by these hypothetical individuals demeans their human statuses. The liberal advocacy presupposes that the loving person is typically foolish by leaving her life in the hand of some external agent. The communitarian moral vision argues that the thinking person is a rational fool, a selfish person whose prime concern is about herself alone. The main problem with both hypothetical individuals is that they are closely attached to their own construed view of the good. The thinking person cannot tolerate any presuppositions that are of external origin, and the loving person considers any presuppositions outside the domain of her given beliefs nonsensical. The loving person does not believe that such proposition can engender a positive understanding of the self. Both individuals are enclosed within their own worlds. Their assumptions about reality make it difficult for them to be able to tolerate others' views. Advaita and Yoruba advocate a position that avoids the extremities in the lives of the above hypothetical individuals. Both philosophies develop their assumptions on virtues that make the person intelligible and sociable.

Advaita philosophy believes that the root of the problem in the above positions stems from a misconception of the self. Both individuals highlighted above are deluded. Ignorance veils their mind from cognizing their true nature. When in operation, ignorance blurs the human mind from perceiving the fact of our relatedness and the need to live together in peace regardless of our differences. Ignorance hinders one from seeing the universal mind through the particularities of world cultures. Advaita depicts the thinking person as holding to the false self. The true self, according to Advaita translation, is the transcendental subject of awareness, the all pervasive being that goes beyond whatever is

predicated of the self in the mind. Going by Shankara's theory, this self is the seat of unity. It defies any possible articulation and categorization. What is implied here is that we need to transcend the finite thought to that which underlies its function in order to get to the self. This does not imply that the mind is not a significant instrument of self apprehension, but rather that the mind is incapable of exhausting the self's inmost nature. The truth of this position falsifies the thinking (the Cartesian model for example) that the foundation of self knowledge must be laid on utterly simple ideas known to the person alone, a view that ultimately suggests that the material foundational to self knowledge must be context independent. Advaita Vedanta concedes that the reality of the self can be meaningfully inferred when the person takes seriously her practical experiences. The idea of self liberty which suggests that one avoids the constraints which one inherits as a result of the structure of the community is here declared false. Community practices and institutions aid self understanding but they are not to be taken as eternally fixed. Advaita argues that we must realize the higher nature if we are to avoid the misidentification which attaches people to the mental components of their community. This position suggests that human nature reveals certain transcendence in which others are accommodated. This finds support in the yearnings of the human person to respond to the plight of people who may even be unknown to us physically. The worth of humanity, we believe, is exemplified when we respond to this yearning.

W. E. Conn, in the paper "Self Transcendence, The True Self and Self Love", says that the desire for separation, differentiation and autonomy without the desire for attachment, integration and relationship is futile and it cannot lead to the realization of

the true self.[272] The desire to reach beyond the lower self to be at one with the higher self is inextricably linked, Conn remarks. He rejects the thinking which suggests that to find my own self I must consider my first person singular alone. This, he says, is the root of sin. In order to find myself, I must learn to go out of myself and in order to live, I must learn to die, this is the paradox of life. Consequently, life is to be lived in sincere love. His conclusion is that in order to find myself, I must find Him, and if I find Him, I find my true Self.[273] A similar idea is also found in Merton's deliberation on the nature of the inner self. He argues that "the wholeness of the inner self is not a part of our being, like a motor in a car, it entails our substantial reality itself, on its highest and most personal and most existential level.[274] Merton likens the inner consciousness of the individual to a fountain with an endless depth. This must constantly be dug. The individual enjoys a limited freshening from this fountain as long as she believes that the part gotten at any time is her full reality. Shankara says that when the source of self apprehension is thoroughly investigated, it reveals no end, split or distinction. It is an ocean of unending bliss. When the being of the self is considered as existence or consciousness, we come to understand that it cannot be viewed as bound.

> When the essence of the knowing subject, the self (Atman) is known, all reality is known, that which is the finest essence … that is reality. That is Atman. Thou art That".[275]

The essence of the knowing subject i.e. the self (Atman) cannot be tied to any cultural form. It transcends any particularities that may be associated with any constitutive

---

[272] W. E. Conn, "Self Transcendence, The True Self and Self Love", *Pastoral Psychology*, 46, no. 5 (1998): 327.

[273] Ibid.

[274] See T. Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation,* (New York: Dell, 1960), see also T. Merton, *New Seed of Contemplation,* (New York: New Directions, 1972).

[275] BBS. III. ii. 28.

consciousness though not in the sense that it is antithetical to it. The self is the ultimate

reality in the individual. It is the 'That' which is aware of its own mode of being in the

world but is never limited to it. This self is the intelligible, finest essence, the Atman that

we really are.

> *Atman*, like the face, is always different [from Its reflection]; but as in the
> case of the face these two [*Atman* and its reflection] are not discriminated
> [from each other].[276]

Yoruba philosophy agrees with the above. The famous dictum, 'I am because we

are' says it all. This dictum calls individuals' attention to their moral duty. The need to be

united and jointly seek the collective good is taken seriously because it aligns with the

very nature of the individual. The conception of one's self as the self that exists

independently of others is, according to Yoruba, a shadow of illusion. This is a

theoretical simplification which strips the self from its inmost virtue. Such simplification

of the self ends in the projection of the illusory self as the true self. It demeans the self by

curtailing its moral responsiveness to the universal community. In the Yoruba tradition,

the identification of one's good in one's subjective knowledge is important but not as

important as when that which one identifies to be good is found to be compatible with the

freedom of others. Not until this takes place will the value of the good gain acceptance.

And only at this point can one genuinely say that one apprehends the true worth of life

and actions that are worth undertaking. To the Yoruba, it is *aimo* that makes anyone pay

less heed to the moral intuition to live compatibly with the good of the community. *Aimo*

is the root of selfishness. It is what prevents the individual from perceiving her

relatedness with others in the community. *Aimo* makes the individual concentrate on

---

[276] *A Thousand Teachings The Upadesahasri of Sankara*, p, 175. 1, 18, 33.

personal good and pay less heed to the good that allows the development of other's free nature.

The moderate communitarian ideal that is articulated by Advaita and Yoruba philosophies depicts that individuality is truly exemplified when one engages others in the community bearing in mind the order of community. When community values start to threaten the virtue of self choice, then people should resort to dialogue and argue out issues that appear problematic. The knowledge of the self that is significant is the one that can practically preserve the worth of our social nature. This reflects, above any other thing, the dignity of our humanity. It represents us as people that are able to make intelligible and moral choices. The achievement of this end lies in our preparedness to engage our traditions, and our willingness to understand those of others, aiming to learn and possibly adjust ours when they seem to be deficient.

IV

Before our discussion on identity is concluded, I should highlight the major controversies that surround the western liberal-communitarian debate about identity. This will help researchers comparing the notion of identity between the west and any of the philosophical traditions discussed in this study as it will bring to light the contrasts and similarities in the assumptions of western liberalism and communitarianism. Moreover, it may open the eyes of interested readers to the areas in which Advaita and Yoruba can contribute to the western debate about identity. The communitarian critique of liberalism occurs in two spheres, one methodological, the other normative. On the methodological criticism, communitarian philosophers hold that the liberal basis of individualism is false. By falsehood, communitarianism refers to the

inaccuracy of the liberal view that the rational individual chooses freely. According to communitarianism, the term rationality makes sense only within a specified context. To be rational is to be reasonable and to reason is to reason about something, not about nothing. What this suggests is that rationality is dialogical. If this is the way rationality functions, it will imply that the rationality which is cut off from the dialogical arena which, to communitarians, is the community, is trivial. This is the criticism put forward by Charles Taylor in one of his many reactions against liberal abstract rationality. Taylor asserts:

> our choices are trivial and insignificant if they are made outside of a context by which we may judge some choices as being more worthy than others. If all of our choices are equally worthy by virtue of being freely chosen … then all difference becomes insignificant.[277]

The idea above presupposes that there is no way we can give a reasonable account of individuals if we do not look into their social, cultural and historical contexts. To discuss individuals, do not sever their communities and communal relationships, communitarianism warns. And when we observe carefully, we shall discover that there is no action that is purely motivated by abstract thought. Durkheim writes:

> When we have repeated the same action a certain number of times, it tends to be reproduced in the same manner. Little by little, by the effect of habit, our conduct takes a form that imposes itself on our will with an obligatory force. We feel obliged to cast our action always in the same mold.[278]

Communitarianism holds that the liberal methodology which seeks to articulate self's meaning beyond the context of what is recognized and comprehensible within some

---

[277] Cited in Daniel M Savage, *John Dewey's Liberalism Individual, Community, and Self-Development*, (USA: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), p. 33.
[278] Cited in Mark S Cladis, *A Communitarian Defense of Liberalism Emile Durkheim and Contemporary Social Theory*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 32.

given social field is inaccurate. Cultural narratives, stories and traditions, the communitarian believes, remain the materials on which our identity construction lies and these are shared with those who are recognized as the members of the community. Moreover, communitarianism claims that the inherent mistake in the liberal assumption engenders an incoherent view of autonomy. Immanuel Kant's idea of autonomy attracts to a very large extent the criticism of communitarians. To Kant, an autonomous individual is the one who is governed by principles unconditioned by "the special circumstances of human nature".[279] The principles that guide the activities of the autonomous individual do not presuppose any particular ends. Kant maintains that natural desires and inclinations as given by nature or circumstances are not fit to be the guiding principles of the autonomous individual. Anyone who lives by them is not governed by self-governing principles. Alternatively, she is unfree, surrendering to contingent drives which ultimately will not allow her to choose freely. She will be unable to exercise her freedom, the type that is consistent with others' freedom. Here, Kant seeks to promote the freedom of the individual but he supposes that this freedom is consistent with the freedom of others. In this way, Kant claims that autonomy implies free will. A will is free if it is good, that is, if it does not base its judgment about the good on what the world happens to be but on pure reason. This is why Kant adds that a good will is rational. Since pure reason is, for Kant, entirely disconnected from experience, the self-governing rules of the autonomous individual is free from social and psychological inclinations. In Kant's view, the individual will only be able to act rightly and genuinely when she follows the rules which she wills through the transcendental subject which is "the subject

---

[279] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 92.

of all possible ends himself".[280] Interestingly, this transcendental subject is a complete entity, a thing that is independent of anything outside itself. By virtue of this characteristic, its identity is prior to the identities shared in the community. This idea of the transcendental subject, communitarianism argues, distances the individual from shared meanings which are prior in matters of personal identity.

Michael Sandel comments that the Kantian conception of the transcendental subject divides the individual from her inclinations, desires, aspirations and others. In his words, the position

> describes first of all the way we stand towards the thing we have, or want, or seek. It means there is always a distinction between the values I *have* and the person I *am*. To identify any characteristics as my aims, ambitions, desires, and so on, is always to imply some subject 'me' standing behind them, at a certain distance, and the shape of this 'me' must be given prior to any of the aims or attributes I bear. One consequence of this distance is to put the *self* beyond the reach of its experience, to secure its Identity once and for all. Or to put the point another way, it rules out the possibility of what we might call *constitutive* ends. No role or commitment could define me so completely that I could understand myself without it.[281]

Sandel argues that the Kantian tradition which stands as the foundation of liberalism is mistaken. In Sandel's thinking, the liberal assumption that self identity can be secured independent of the community is mistaken. The giving of ultimate priority to the self over its aims which is apparent in liberal philosophy is, according to communitarians, artificial. Sandel holds that the possibility of identifying the self without clear cut aims, which are ultimately interconnected with communal ideals, is impossible. Apart from the thinking that liberalism holds an empty conception of the self, communitarian philosophers argue that its position gives rise to morally unsatisfactory consequences.

---

[280] Ibid, p. 89.
[281] Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self", pp. 18-19. Author's italics.

This is the normative sphere of communitarian argument. I will discuss the argument below.

John Rawls attempts to answer the claim that the liberal conception of the self is not sufficiently substantive. One way to go about it, in Rawls view, is to reformulate Kantian transcendental philosophy. Arguing along the liberal tradition, Rawls holds that individuals' nature is not primarily revealed in their aims but by the principles that they understand to preside over the background conditions under which their aims are formed. This prior principle is, according to Rawls, the ideal of the self which is independent of purposes and ends. This is the principle of equality, fairness and freedom which we, as human beings, would find suitable for us to lead our lives. Rawls' intention is to found liberalism on the capacity we have to shape, pursue, and revise our life plans. He also wants to stress the necessity of shouldering the responsibility to respect the same powers of self determination in others. Rawls claims that the right of self determination precedes any good that is defined by the community.[282] Charles Taylor agrees with Rawls on this issue but disagrees with Rawls on other points which will be mentioned shortly. Rawls argues that the fundamental principle of justice in a constitutional democracy does not presuppose any particular end. Rawls' position highlights that the entire nature of the self could be known outside what the communitarian regards as some constitutive ends. What

---

[282] See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 44-45, 53, 314, 564. This is the basis of Rawls' argument against teleological views of the good. Rawls contends that the relation between the individual and the community good should be seen differently from what is contained in teleological doctrines. Rawls condemns utilitarianism for using some as means to the happiness of all. Since utilitarianism conceives the good as something to be determined by the majority, Rawls says it fails to respect each member as an end. Even when utilitarianism sets out to defend individual rights, Rawls believes that its defense will necessarily rest on some calculation, such as, the amount of utility which respecting those rights will procure ultimately. This shows the inadequacy of utilitarianism.

matters is not the end we choose but the capacity to choose them and this capacity should not be inhibited.[283]

In Sandel's opinion, one of the problems with Rawls' theory is that it fails to see that community is not a voluntary one and that the social attachments which determine the self are not necessarily chosen ones. He believes that this is fundamental and that it will undermine any effort on the part of liberalism to develop a consistent basis for the understanding of individuals whose aims and values are not separate from their individuality.[284] Again, Sandel holds that liberalism confuses the ideas of the good life that should be preserved by the state with those ones that should be dismissed. John Rawls' replacement of the good by right on the ground that human aims do not reveal their primary nature is, according to Sandel, inappropriate. The reason given by Sandel is that Rawls' position does not represent the true conditions of individuals, especially as they develop the understanding of identity and self development in their interactions with the community. Sandel thinks that the liberal position flouts the way we think of ourselves as "members of this family or community or nation or people, as bearers of this history, as sons or daughters of that revolution, as citizens of this republic".[285] Moreover, Rawls theory, in Sandel's view, reduces moral choices to arbitrary expressions of preferences. In this regard, he is committed to moral subjectivism rather than an objective view of morality.[286]

---

[283] John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical", in Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit (eds.), *Communitarianism and Individualism*, pp. 196-197.
[284] See Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, pp. 178-179.
[285] Ibid, p. 179
[286] For further discussion on this point, see Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, (UK, USA: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 40-69.

Although Charles Taylor is not out to reject liberalism in its entirety, he holds that some of its central claims are worthy of revision, especially the claim that self identity is chosen independently of the community. In Taylor's view,

> human beings are self interpreting animals, creatures whose identity as persons depends upon their orientation and attachment to conceptions of the good which they derive from the matrix of their linguistic community.[287]

If Taylor is right, any theory which holds the view of the human person as having an antecedent identity independent of communal shared meanings is wrong. To him:

> this is the sense in which one cannot be a self on one's own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way a relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of language of self-understanding – and, of course, these classes may overlap. A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution'.[288]

Taylor implies that the individual is able to understand himself as he relates with others in the community. Language plays a significant role in this exercise. It is by virtue of the community's existence that the individual is able to form a genuine view of personal identity and moral convictions.

This point of view challenges Rawls' position. Rawls' theory of right, read from Taylor's perspective, lacks the essential substance which it needs to be practically relevant. However, Taylor adds that the ideal for self understanding which, indisputably, is derived from the community, is capable of critical evaluation based on wide ranging evaluative frameworks. In this regard, Taylor's position escapes the charge of subjectivism.[289] Although Taylor agrees that Rawls' intention to correct consequentialist

---

[287] Cited in Ibid, p. 102.
[288] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 36.
[289] See Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man", *The Review of Metaphysics*, 25, 1 (1971): 3-51.

idea of the good is laudable, he believes nonetheless that this can be done without invoking a 'thin' conception of the good for human beings. By this, Taylor means that the idea of the good can be decided by practical deliberation on moral matters. In this respect, the good is decided, on a case by case basis, through a careful resolution of inconsistencies or contradictions in practice.

From what has been said so far, it is evident that one of the main points of the liberal-communitarian debate dwells on the primary source of identity. The need to proffer an adequate answer to this question demands that we find the appropriate role of the community in the definition of self identity. The communitarian-liberal methodologies take the duo (individuality and community) as exclusive rather than complementary concepts. The liberal defends the interests of individuals with little or no consideration of the consequence on the community. The communitarian focuses on the community as something that must be upheld as an intrinsic good.

The liberal tradition is developed on the assumption that each individual in the community possesses certain distinctive nature and that each person should be free to develop her nature. This is the background of the individualist based notion of rights. Liberalism argues that individuals have the intrinsic right to develop their inmost potentials. This, as assumed by liberalism, is the end that all constituted authorities and bodies of knowledge must promote. Reflecting on the liberal idea of the innate good, especially as it is prior to any good upheld in the community, they argue that the freedom to pursue one's innate good thus implies ultimate independence on the ends stipulated by the community. Consequently, the need to eradicate all common ends becomes the appropriate thing. On this ground, the society becomes an entity merely constituted by

individuals who seek nothing more than the fulfillments of ends which are primarily individualistic. This, communitarianism argues, is evident in Rawls' thinking. The community exists primarily for humankind to lead their lives purely for themselves the way they want.[290] There is no denying the fact that this account fails to describe accurately the nature of the person. In some specific respect, it neglects or deemphasizes the individual's nature which morally responds to others without any premonition or calculation for some gain. Many people can be judged to be not self centered; we know people who claim to be happy whenever they have the opportunity to render services to others without expectation of any rewards. It may be said that we are unable to determine the motive of those individuals, some of which may be shockingly selfish like the desire to gain some eternal benefit. But this argument, as interesting as it is, seems to miss one important point. That these people deny certain ends at a particular level of reality to achieve another end which they deem higher at another level of reality is indisputable. In one important sense, this is a mark of freedom. The claim that they are happy doing what they are doing, a claim that in most cases are corroborated by their actions, should convince anyone that they are free individuals. This seems to express a truer sense of freedom which when possessed makes the possessor live genuinely, that is, living in compliance with one's inner desires. The individualist theory of rights presumes that the human life as rooted in the social division of labor, highlighting differences of hierarchies in the community as the fundamental and inalienable basis of human association, is artificial. Hence, it should be devalued, shunned or eradicated so that each individual can freely work out her own nature. As we shall soon see, communitarianism believes that the liberal respect for the dignity of the individual requires the acceptance of her supremacy

---

[290] John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical", p. 197.

over and against community institutions, values, and norms. This idea of human dignity is hard to comprehend. The conception of personal dignity outside the sense of the community history and its own conception of the good means nothing or little. This point has been addressed in Advaita and Yoruba.

Certain problems are also envisaged in the communitarian philosophy, especially when viewed from its fundamental assumption that the community necessarily determines self identity. This pictures the shared meaning of the community as something with fixed forms. And, most certainly, any given identity will not be amenable to change upon inheritance. Implied in this position is the thinking that self identity is encapsulated within the boundaries of communal meanings. But the truth of this position will deny individuals the capacity of self redefinition or reevaluation. While some communitarians argue that individuals are not denied the ability to rethink their identity, such enterprise can only be done within the barriers of communal meanings.[291] This answer, though, poses a less stringent approach to the issue of identity. It confirms that self identity is fixed to the community or the class where individuals are nurtured. There is no identity except that which is wholly defined by the consciousness of a community or a class, it seems. What 'I am' is not what I define by myself but what I inherit from the community. Here, communitarianism refers to the 'I am', that is, my way of being in the world, the self whose identity is founded on the practices and norms of the community, as the highest form of my self. Because the way of my being in the world is doubtless an essential part of myself, communitarianism holds that I cannot change this mode of being

---

[291] See Lee Crowley, *The Self, the Individual, the Community: Liberalism in the Political Thought of F. A. Hayek and Sydney and Beatrice Webb*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 214-220.

without experiencing a damaged personhood. In some sense, my self identity that is entrenched in the community is permanent.

V

What divides the liberal and the communitarian philosophers is mainly the primary status of the subject. Communitarian philosophers argue that the problem with liberalism goes back to the Kantian formulation of the 'epistemological subject'.[292] This subject is essentially a thing that cannot be known empirically. But this subject stands as the governing principle behind anything that is known. John Rawls' attempt to rescue liberalism by grounding its principles on 'reasonable empiricism' is, according to communitarianism, a futile exercise. Sandel avoids the normal sociological objection whose main thesis is that neutral identity is impossible. Though it is correct to argue that neutral identity is impossible, Sandel maintains that such claim does not capture the force that underlies the liberal notion of identity. In Sandel's position, "what is neutral about the principles of right is not that they admit all possible values and ends but rather that they are derived in a way that does not depend on any particular values or ends".[293] The liberal idea of neutrality, Sandel believes, "describes the persons' foundation rather than their effect". In saying this, Sandel leads us to think that the main problem with liberalism lies in its foundational thesis.

> The independence of the subject does not mean that I can, as a psychological matter, summon at any moment the detachment required to overcome my prejudices or step outside my convictions, but rather that my values and ends do not define my identity, that I must regard myself as the bearer of a self distinct from my values and ends, whatever they may be.[294]

---

[292] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Second Edition, (transl.) N. Kemp Smith, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1965). Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, (transl.) H. J. Paton, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).
[293] Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 12.
[294] Ibid, p. 12.

This foundational problem, Sandel says, is very much exhibited in Rawls' liberal philosophy. For Rawls, the community must be found on the highest value, namely, justice. Rawls holds that sacrificing justice for the greater good is tantamount to disrespecting the person's worth.

> Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. It does not allow that the sacrifices imposed by a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many. Therefore, in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship are taken as settled; the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests.[295]

Incidentally, that which warrants, for Rawls, the principle of justice is the fact that human beings have different interests. But this fact, Sandel would say, is in Rawls view, also antecedently established.[296] So, for Sandel, Rawls holds that our essential difference "characterized by separate systems of ends, is a necessary presupposition of a being capable of justice".[297]

As much as the nature of the person ought to be respected, the person must also exercise his equal nature. This equal nature, in Rawls view, presupposes that the person is capable of social co-operation.

> The basic intuitive idea is that, in virtue of what we may call their moral powers, and the powers of reason, thought, and judgment connected with those powers, we say that persons are free. And, in virtue of their having these powers to the requisite degree to be fully co-operating members of society, we say that persons are equal … since persons can be full participants in a fair system of social co-operation, we ascribe to them the two moral powers connected with the elements in the idea of social co-

---

[295] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 3-4.
[296] Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 53.
[297] Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 53.

operation … namely, a capacity for a sense of justice and a capacity for a conception of the good.[298]

Apparently, Rawls's position is masked with certain communitarian features. Of course, this is not in the sense in which the basis of identity is given prior to the person's participation in a system of social co-operation. But the communitarian outlook comes in the other sense in which the person is seen as "a fully co-operating member of society over a complete life".[299] The different interests of people of free and equal nature allow them to engage in co-operative arrangements. More importantly, these interests allow them to be 'fully co-operating members of society'. Rawls highlights the importance of community in identity delineation by showing that it aids the exercise of moral identity. In this regard, it could be said that Rawls does not detach the individual from community. His due regard for the person's social attachments and contingent attributes is further stated in the following passage:

> The description of the parties may seem to presuppose some metaphysical conception of the person, for example, that the essential nature of persons is independent of and prior to their contingent attributes, including their final ends and attachments, and, indeed, their character as a whole. But this is an illusion caused by not seeing the original position as a device of representation. The veil of ignorance, to mention one prominent feature of that position, has no metaphysical implications concerning the nature of the self; it does not imply that the self is ontologically prior to the facts about persons that the parties are excluded from knowing.[300]

For Sandel, Rawls reference to co-operative engagements of equal individuals and the imports that such may have on the community life remains unsatisfactory. Sandel holds that in Rawls, unity is not as essential as plurality. In other words, "it is a mistake

---

[298] John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit (ed.), *Communitarianism and Individualism*, p. 197.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Ibid, p. 203.

to accord it an equal priority with plurality; it is not essential to our nature in the same way".[301] This being the case, Sandel claims that the co-operative engagements of Rawls' equal and free individuals will spring from 'selfish motives'. "The point is not that persons co-operate out of selfish motives alone, but rather that our knowledge of the basis of plurality is given prior to experience, while our knowledge of the basis of unity or co-operation can only come in the light of experience. In any particular instance, we just have to see whether or not the basis of co-operation exists".[302] Now, choosing the kind of co-operative arrangements that we want to partake in is what the self is capable of, and Rawls does not mince words when he claims that the basis of our humanity lies in this point. Communitarianism sees this position to be too extreme mainly because it relegates to the background any particular conception of the good that may be associated with community. And, indisputably, it suggests that the community is no different from a voluntary association where members can decide to quit anytime. What then is the implication of this philosophy on community? Communitarianism believes that it sanctions the thinking that the ideal of authentic living must be driven by personal feelings, desires, beliefs etc.

---

[301] Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 52.
[302] Ibid.

Consequently, the philosophy construes the standard way of living as one that is prone to self-absorption.[303]

The privileging of the individual over the community, communitarianism holds, will surely break down the social tie. It will lead to a situation where individuals are isolated from all except those people who share their beliefs. In his notable work on authenticity, Charles Guignon highlights the danger of the above position.

> There is the danger of bull-headed adherence to feelings and beliefs whose sole justification is that one finds through introspection that one feels that way or happens to hold these beliefs. There is the risk of being so carried away by feelings and perceived needs that one turns to actions that are either foolish or monstrous.[304]

But the communitarian theory articulates a kind of 'singular affiliation' which makes people "to ignore altogether all other linkages that could moderate their loyalty to the specially marked herd".[305] The end of this philosophy is also not desirable. In particular, it thrives on division rather than unity and thereby puts a kind of limit on such values as liberty and toleration. Amartya Sen writes:

> The incitement to ignore all affiliation and loyalties other than those emanating from one's restrictive identity can be deeply delusive and also contribute to social tension and violence.[306]

The communitarian insistence that identity can only be discovered within the purview of one's social arena devalues the free nature of the self. The position puts a limit to human

---

[303] Sandel paraphrases Rawls view in the following passage in order to show that Rawls is liable to the above criticism. "No commitment could grip me so deeply that I could not understand myself without it. No transformation of life purposes and plans could be so unsettling as to disrupt the contours of my identity. No project could be so essential that turning away from it would call into question the person I am. Given my independence from the values I have, I can always stand apart from them; my public identity as a moral person 'is not affected by changes over time' ". Ibid. p, 62.

[304] Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, pp. 147 – 148.

[305] Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence The Illusion of Destiny*, p. 21.

[306] Ibid.

liberty in self choice. It presupposes that it is impossible for people to escape their cultural domains. And, ultimately, it misleads us to think that people are incapable of detaching themselves from whatever they do not approve of in their own societies and take to other ones from other societies. Amartya Sen reminds us that the "presence of the conflicting pulls is as real in France, or America, or South Africa, or India, or anywhere else, … The basic seriousness of the disparate pulls-of history, culture, language, politics, profession, family, comradeship, and so on-have to be adequately recognized, and they cannot all be drowned in a single-minded celebration of community".[307]

Both the liberal and communitarian theorists challenge what they take to be extreme in the other's position. Each of these schools of thought believes that the extremities in the position of the other school muddle the nature of the person's identity. Our argument shows that the moderate communitarian model of Advaita and Yoruba do not support either of these extremes. In some important detail, the two philosophies attend to the notion of identity with the aim of showing who we are really, in particular, how our nature extends beyond the domain of community meanings. Consequently, this knowledge will make us the kind of persons we are.

Before I end this study, it is important for me to mention that the two philosophical traditions which we have expounded show some simplified way of understanding identity. For both traditions, human beings will be truly free and acquainted with their inmost nature if they learn how to be connected with the purest substance of the soul. This connection frees people from the deception of the world and the vanity of seeking fulfillment in worldly things. It brings about real freedom which

---

[307] Ibid, pp. 37-38.

makes it easy for people to participate in the right way in the universal mind. Then, they can enjoy what Huxley calls the peace that passes understanding.

Finally, I should point the attention of my reader to the significance of this study. Three important things come to mind in this regard. Firstly, contrary to many commentaries (whose views I have summarized in the introductory chapter), I argue that Advaita and Yoruba deliver a robust view of identity. Secondly, the study is an exercise in comparative philosophy concerned with the Indian and African traditions. Comparative philosophy comparing these two traditions is rare indeed. Thirdly, the study shows that Indian and African philosophy can contribute to moral and political philosophical concerns in the western tradition.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abimbola, W. "The Yoruba Concept of Human Personality." In *La Notion de Personne en Afrique Noire*. Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1971.

———— *Ifa : An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1976.

———— *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifa*. UNESCO: Centre d'Etudes Linguistigue et Historique Pour Tradition Orale, 1975.

Abiodun, R. "Identity and the Artistic Process in the Yoruba Aesthetic Concept of Iwa." *Journal of Cultures and Ideas* 1, no. 1 (1983): 13-30.

———— "Verbal and Visual Metaphors: Mythic Allusions in Yoruba Ritualistic Art of Ori." *Word and Image* 3, no. 3 (1987): 252-70.

Abraham, W. E. *The Mind of Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

———— "Sources of African Identity." *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, 1. Washington, D. C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, (2004): 93-104

Adams, Monni. "African Visual Arts from an Art Historical Perspective." *African Studies Review* 32, no. 2 (1989): 55-103.

Adeney, W.F. "Toleration". In Paul Edwards (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* 8 New York: Macmillan, 1967. pp. 143-162

Ackerman, B. *Social Justice in the Liberal State*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

Adepegba, C. O. "Ara: The Factor of Creativity in Yoruba Art." *Nigerian Field* 48, (1983): 53-66.

Adewale, S. A. *The Religion of the Yoruba: A Phenomenological Analysis*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, 1988.

Agbaje, J. B. "Proverbs: A Strategy for Resolving Conflict in Yoruba Society." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 15, no. 2 (2002): 237-243

Agrawal, M. M. *Aspects of Indian Philosophy*. New Delhi: Shree Publishing House, 1986.

Aithal, K. P. "Review of Advaita Philosophy and Religion." *Bharatiya Vidya* 33: (1961) : 404.

Akingbola, Tunde "Do Witches Really Exist?" *Spear*, (1975): 103

Albert, E. "Folklore and Literature in the African World." In Robert A. Lystad, (ed.) *A Survey of Social Research*, pp. 469-90. New York: Praeger, 1965.

——— "African Conceptual Systems." In J. Paden and E. Soja, (ed.) *The African Experience*, pp. 99-107. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

Albert, Schweitzer. *Indian Thought and Its Development*. (Transl.), Charles E.B. Russell, (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1936).

Allen, R. F. and Menan K. Y. *Pure Principle: Introduction to Philosophy of Sankara*. Michigan University Press: East Lancing Michigan State, Michigan, 1960.

Allison, P. A. "Collecting Yoruba Art." *African Arts* 6, no. 4 (1973) : 64-68

Alper, Harvey. "Advaita Vedanta up to Sankara and His Pupils." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 103, no. III (1981): 663.

Ames, R. T. Dissanayake, W. and Kasulis, T. P. (eds.) *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*. New York: State University of New York, 1994.

Anderson, E. "The Concept of Justice and Morality among the Bakuta in the Congo-Brazzaville." *Ethnos* 37 (1972) : 5-39.

Anyanwu, K. C. *The African Experience in the American Market Place*. USA: Exposition Press Inc, 1983.

Appiah, A. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Apter, A. "The Historiography of Yoruba Myth and Ritual". *History in Africa* 14, (1987): 1-25.

Asutosh, Bhattacharya. *Studies in Post Sankara Dialectics*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1936.

Atmananda, S. "Sri Shankara's Teaching in His Own Words." in K. M. Munshi and R. R. Diwakar, (eds.) *Bhavan's Book Library*. Vol. 52. Bombay: Baratiya Vidya Bhawan, 1960.

Avineri, S. and De-Shalit, A. (eds.) *Communitarianism and Individualism*. New

York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Awolalu, J. O. "The Yoruba Philosophy of Life." *Presence Africaine* 73 (1970) : 79-89.

————— *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. London: Longmans, 1979.

Baldwin, J. "Fifth Avenue, Uptown." *Esquire*. Reprinted in *The Price of the Ticket*, New York: St Martins Press, 1985.

Banerjee, A. K. "Brahmasutra and the Theory of Illusion." *Calcutta Review* 48, (1933) : 28-58.

————— "Planes of Knowledge and Orders of Realities." *Philosophical Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1933) : 322-339.

Banmen, J. "Teachings of Brahman and Atman in Chandogya Upanishad." *Divine Life* 29, no. 6 (1967) : 235-239.

Barber, K. "How Man Makes God in West Africa: Yoruba Attitudes Towards the "Orisa." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 51, no. 3 (1981): 723-745.

————— *I Could Speak until Tomorrow*: "Oriki": Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

————— "Quotation in the Constitution of Yoruba Oral Texts." *Research in African Literatures* 30, no. 2 (1999) : 17-41.

Bascom, W. O. *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.

————— *Sixteen Cowries: Yoruba Divination from Africa to the New World.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.

Bascom, W. R. *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa*. Indiana: University Press, 1969.

Bauer, N. F. "Advaita Vedanta and Contemporary Western Ethics." *Philosophy East and West* 37, no. 1 (1987): 36-50.

Beattie, J. H. M. "Understanding Traditional African Religion: A Comment on Horton." *Second Order* 2, no. 2 (1973) : 3-11.

Bedu-Addo, J. T. "Sense-Experience and Recollection in Plato's Meno." *American Journal of Philology* 104, (1983) : 228-48.

————— J. T. "On the Concept of Truth in Akan." in P. O. Bodunrin, (ed.) *Philosophy in Africa: Trends and Perspectives*, pp. 68-90. Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press, 1985.

Beidelman, T. O. *Moral Imagination in Kaguru Modes of Thought*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Beier, U. *Yoruba Myths*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Bell, R. H. *Understanding African Philosophy, A Cross Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues*. New York, London: Routledge, 2002.

Bell, R. H. "Narrative in African Philosophy." *Philosophy* 64, (1989) : 363-79.

Bello, A. G. A. "Review of Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft." *Journal of African Philosophy and Studies* 1, nos. 1-2 (1988) : 93-98.

Ben-Amos, P. "African Visual Arts from a Social Perspective." *African Studies Review* 32, no. 2 (1989) : 1-53.

Bewaji, J. A. I. "Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture." In Kwasi Wiredu, (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, pp 396-403 USA: Blackwell, 2004.

Bewaji, J. T. "Truth and Ethics in African Thought: A Reply to Emmanuel Eze." *Quest* 8, no. 1 (June 1994) : 76-89.

Bhattacharya, A. N. *Essence of Vedānta*. Delhi: Durga Publications, 1986.

————— *One Hundred and Twelve Upanisads and their Philosophy*. Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1987.

Bird C. S. and Karp, I. (eds.) *Explorations in African Systems of Thought*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.

Blier, S. "Word about Words about Icons: Iconologology and the Study of African Art." *Art Journal* 47, (1988) : 75-87.

————— "Enduring Myths of African Art." In Tom Phillips, (ed.) *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, pp. 26-32. Munich: Prestel, 1995.

Boone, Sylvia. *Radiance from the Waters: Ideals of Feminine Beauty in Mende Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

Bradley, F. H. *Appearance and Reality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893.

Brian, C., (ed.) *Morals and Society in Asian Philosophy*. Curzon: Britain, 1996.

Brooks, R. "The Meaning of 'real' in Advaita Vedanta." *Philosophy East and West* 19, (1969): 385-398

Chakravarti, S.C. *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1935.

Charles, A. Moore (ed.) *Essays in East -West Philosophy: an Attempt at World Philosophical Synthesis*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1951.

Chaudhri, S. C. *Self and Falsity in Advaita Vedaanta*. Calcuta: Progressive Publishers, 1955.

Christ, C. T. *The Finer Optic*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1975.

Christopher Isherwood, (ed.) *Vedanta for Modern Man*. London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1952.

Cladis, M. S. *A Communitarian Defense of Liberalism Emile Durkheim and Contemporary Social Theory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.

Coetzee, P.H. "Particularity in Morality and its Relation to Community." In *The African Philosophy Reader*, (eds.) P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux, pp 275,–91. London: Routledge, 1998.

Condlin, R. J. "Bargaining with a Hugger: The Weaknesses and Limits of a Communitarian Conception of Legal Dispute Bargaining, or Why We Can't All Just Get Along?" *University of Maryland School of Law*. http://www.law.umaryland.edu/recent_scholarship.asp

Conn, W. E. "Self Transcendence, The True Self and Self Love". *Pastoral Psychology* 46, no. 5 (1998) : 3 - 17.

Cragg, W. "Two Concepts of Community", *Dialogue* 25, (1986) : 31 - 52.

Crowley, L. *The Self, the Individual, the Community: Liberalism in the Political Thought of F. A. Hayek and Sydney and Beatrice Webb*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

Das, A. C. "Advaita Vedaanta and Liberation on Bodily Existence." *Philosophy East and West* 4, no. 2 (1954) : 113-125.

Dasgupta, Surendranath. *The History of Indian Philosophy*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975.

Dennet, R. "West African Categories and the Yoruba Language". *Journal of the*

Royal African Society 14, no. 53 (1914) : 75-80,

Deussen, P. *The System of Vedanta*. Transl. Charles Johnson. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co, 1912.

——— *Outlines of Indian Philosophy: with an Appendix on the Philosophy of the Philosophy of the Vedanta in its Relations to Occidental Metaphysics*. Berlin, Karl Curtins, 1907.

——— *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*. New York: Dover Publications, 1966.

Deutsch E. *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*. Second Edition. Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1962.

——— "The Self in Advaita Vedanta." In Roy W. Perret (ed.), *Indian Philosophy, Metaphysics*, New York: Garland Publishing Inc. 2000

——— "The Self in Advaita Vedānta." In *Indian Philosophy, A Collection of Readings*, edited with introduction by Roy W. Perrett. New York, London: Garland Publishing Inc, 2001.

——— "The Self in Advaita Vedanta Philosophy" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (1996).

Devaraja, N. K. "Contemporary Relevance of Advaita Vedanta." *Philosophy East and West*. 20, no. 2 (1970) : 129 - 136.

Dhirendra, M. Datta. *Six Ways of Knowing; a Critical Study of the Vedanta Theory of Knowledge*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1932.

Dickson, K. A. *Aspects of Religion and Life in Africa*. Ghana: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1971.

Drewal, H. J. African Artistry: Technique and Aesthetics in Yoruba Sculpture. Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1980.

Drewal, M. T. *Yoruba: Art in Life and Thought*. Victoria, Australia: African Research Institute, Latrobe University, 1988.

Drewal, M. T. *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

Dumont, L. "Hierarchy: The Theory of the 'Varna'." In Ghanshyam Shah (ed.), *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, pp. 65-89. London: Anthem Press, 2002.

——— "The Individual as an Impediment to Sociological Comparison and

Indian History." In *Religion, Politics and History in India: Collected Papers in Indian Sociology*. The Hague: Mouton, 1970.

——— *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

——— "Caste, Racism and "Stratification" Reflections of a Social Anthropologist." In Robert Bernasconi (ed.), *Race*, pp. 20-43. USA, UK: Black-well, 2001.

Dutoit, B. M. "Some Aspects of the Soul-Concept among the Bantu Speaking Nguni Tribes of South Africa." *Authors Quarterly* 33, (1960) : 134-42.

Dutton, Denis. "Mythologies of Tribal Art." *African Arts* 28, no. 3 (1995) : 32-43.

Dworkin, R. *Taking Rights Seriously*. London: Duckworth, 1977.

Eades, J. S. *The Yoruba Today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Elebuibon, Y. *Iyere Ifa (Tonal Poetry, the Voice of Ifa) an Exposition of Yoruba Divinational Chants*. USA: Ile Orunmila Communications, 1999.

Eliade, Mircea. *Myth and Reality*. (Transl.) William R. Trask, New York: Harper and Row, 1963.

Ellen F. P. Fred. D. M. and Jeffrey P. (eds.) *Natural Rights Liberalism from Locke to Nozick*. Cambridge, UK, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Ellis, A. B. *The Yoruba- Speaking People of the Slave Coast of West Africa: Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Language, Etc*. London: Curzon Press, 1974.

Erassov, B. "Concepts of 'Cultural Personality' In the Ideologies of the Third World." *Diogenes* 78, (1972) : 123-40.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. London: Oxford University Press, 1937.

Eze, E. C. "The Problem of Knowledge in "Divination": The Example of Ifa." In Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, (ed.) *African Philosophy*. USA, UK: Blackwell, 1998.

Fadipe, N. A. "Religion and Morals." *The Sociology of the Yoruba*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970.

——— *The Sociology of the Yoruba*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970.

Falola, T. *Yoruba Gurus: Indigenous Production of Knowledge in Africa*. Trenton,

N.J.: Africa World Press, 1998.

Filmer, S.C. *The Meeting of East and West, an Inquiry Concerning World Understanding*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1946.

Finnegan, R. "How to Do Things with Words: Performative Utterances among the Limba of Sierra Leone." *Man*, 4, no. 1 (1969) : 537-51.

————— *Oral Literature in Africa*. London: Clarendon Press, 1970.

Fotin, N. and Elfstrom, G. *Toleration*. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1992.

Fortes, M and Dieterlen, G. (eds.) *African Systems of Thought*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Fortes, M. "On the Concept of the Person among Tallensi." In *La Notion de personne en Afrique noire*, pp. 283-320. Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1973.

Forth, Andrew. *The Self and Its States: A State of Consciousness Doctrine in Advaita Vedanta*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990.

Gaba, C. R. "An African People's (*Anlo*) Concept of the SouI." *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* (Legon) 3, no. 10 (1971) : 1-8.

Gambhirananda, Swami. (Transl.), *Brahma-Sutra-Bhasya of Shankaracharya*. Foreword by T. M. P. Mahadevan, Delhi: Advaita Ashrama, 1983.

Ganguli, B. N. *Concept of Equality: The Nineteenth Century Indian Debate*. Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1975.

Gates, H. L. Jr. "A Myth of Origins: Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey." In *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, pp. 3-43. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Gbadamosi, B.and Beier, U. *Yoruba Poetry: Traditional Yoruba Poems*. Ibadan: Ministry of Education, 1959.

Gbadegesin, S. "Individuality, Community and the World Order." In P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux, (eds.,) *The African Philosophy Reader*, pp. 271-291. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

————— "Destiny, Personality and the Ultimate Reality of Human Existence: A Yoruba Perspective." *Ultimate Reality and Meaning:*

Interdisciplinary Studies in the Philosophy of Understanding 7, no. 3 (1984) : 173-188.

————— *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*. New York: Peter Lang, 1991.

————— *Aspects of Yoruba Tradition: Importance, Richness and Limits in the Context of Unfreedom. Isokan Yoruba Magazine*, 3, no. 3, 1996, http://www.yoruba.org/Magazine/Summer97/File4.htm

————— "Toward a Theory of Destiny." In Kwasi Wiredu, *A Companion to African Philosophy*, pp. 313-323. USA: Blackwell, 2004.

————— "Ujamaa: Julius Nyerere on the Meaning of Human Existence" *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 17, no.1 (1994).

————— *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*. New York: Lang, 1991.

Geertz, C. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Gelfand, M. "The Normal Man: A New Concept of Shona Philosophy." *Nada* 9, (1965) : 78-93.

George, V. A. *Authentic Human Destiny*: *The Paths of Shankara and Heidegger, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change*. Series III B, South Asia, Vol. I. Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1998.

————— *Self Realization* [*Brahmaanubhava*] :*The Advaitic Perspective of Shankara*. Washington, D.C. : The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001.

Ghate, V.S. The Vedanta: A Study of the Brahma-Sutras with the bhasyas of Samkara, Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhva, and Vallabha, Poona: Bhandarka Oriental Research Institute, 1981.

Gleason, J. *Orisha: The Gods of Yoruba Land*. New York: Atheneum, 1971.

Goody, J. "Religion and Ritual: The Definitional Problem." *British Journal of Sociology* 12, (1961) : 142-64.

————— "Review of Conversations with Ogotemmeli by M. Griaule." *American Anthropologist* 69, no. 2 (1967) : 239-41.

————— "Intellectuals in Pre-literate Societies?" In *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, pp. 19-35. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

————— *The Interface between the Written and the Oral*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Gordon, L. "African Philosophy's Search for Identity." In *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Colonial Age*, pp. 139-48. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997.

Griaule, M. *Conversation with Ogotomeli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Gruzalski, B. "Modern Philosophical Fragmentation versus Vedanta and Plato." In Ashok Vohra et al. (eds.) *Dharma, The Categorial Imperative*, pp. 349-362. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd, 2005.

Guignon, C. *On Being Authentic*. London, New York: Routledge, 2004.

Guenon, R. *Man and His Becoming According to Vedaanta*. Transl. Richard C. N. New Delhi: Oriental Book Reprint Corporation, 1981.

Gundaker, G. (ed.) *Keep Your Head to the Sky: Interpreting African American Home Ground*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998.

Gupta, A. S. "The Meaning of That art Thou." *Philosophy East and West*, 12, no. 2 (1962) : 125-134.

Gyekeye, K. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

————— "Person and Community in African Thought." In P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.), *Philosophy from Africa* pp. 317-336. Johannesburg: ITP, 1998.

————— "The Akan Concept of a Person." In P.H. Coetzee & M.E.S. Van den Berg (eds.), An Introduction to African Philosophy, pp.369-380. Pretoria: Unisa, 1995.

————— "Philosophical Relevance of Akan Proverbs." *Second Order* 4, no. 2 (1975) : 45-53.

————— "The Akan Concept of a Person." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1978): 277-287.

————— *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Revised edition, 1995, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987.

———— *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Halbfass, W. *On Being and What There Is: Classical Vaisesika and the History of Indian Ontology*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

Halbfass, W. "Practical Vedanta." In Vasudha Dalmia, Heinrich Von Stietencron (eds.), *Representing Hinduism the Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, pp. 211-223. New Delhi, London: Sage Publications, 1995.

Hallen, B. "Yoruba Moral Epistemology." In Kwasi Wiredu, (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, pp. 296-303. USA: Blackwell, 2003.

———— *The Good, The Bad and The Beautiful, Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Hallen, B. and Sodipo O. J. "The House of the 'Inu: Keys to the Structure of a Yoruba Theory of the 'Self." *Quest*: *Philosophical Discussions* 8, no. 1 (1994): 3-23.

———— *Knowledge, Belief and Withcraft*. London: Ethnographica, 1986.

Harrison, J. "Utilitarianism and Toleration," *Philosophy* 62, (1987): 421.

Hatab, L. *Myth and Philosophy: A Contest of Truths*. Illinois: Open Court, 1990.

Hervey De Witt Griswold, "Brahman: A study in the History of Indian Philsophy" Cornell University Studies in Philosophy, vol. ii, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1900.

Hiriyanna, M. *Indian Conception of Values*. Mysore: Kavyalaya Publishers, 1975.

Hollis, M. "The Limits of Irrationality." In Bryan Wilson *(*ed.) *Rationality*, pp. 214-20. Oxford: Blackwell, 1970.

Horton, J. and Nicholson, P. *Toleration: Philosophy and Practice*. Brookfiled, VT: Avebury, 1992).

Horton, R. "African Traditional Religion and Western Science." *Africa* 37 no.1 (1967): 50-71

———— "Destiny and the Unconscious in West Africa." *Africa* 31, no. 2 (1961) : 110-17.

———— "African Traditional Thought and Western Science." *Africa* 37 (1967) : 50-71.

———— "The Romantic Illusion: Roger Bastide on Africa and the West." *Odu, A Journal of West African Studies*. 3 (1970): 87-115

Hountondji, P. "The Myth of Spontaneous Philosophy." *Consequence* 1, (1974) : 11-38.

———— "The Pitfalls of Being Different." *Diogenes* 131, (1985) : 46-56.

———— *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, 2nd edition. Bloomington and Indiana Polis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Hume, D. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. London: Dent, 1974.

Huntington, C.W. Jr. *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Madhyamika*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1989.

Idoniboye, D. E. "The Idea of an African Philosophy: The Concept of Spirit in African Metaphysics." *Second Order* 2, (1973): 83-89,

Idowu, Bolaji. *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*. London: SCM, 1973.

———— *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longman, 1962.

Indich, W. M. *Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980.

Ingalls, D.D.. "Sankara's Arguments against the Buddhists." *Philosophy East and West* 3, no. 4 (1954): 291-306

Jackson, M. and Karp, I. (eds.). *Personhood and Agency*. Washington: Smithsonian Institue, 1990.

Johnson, S. *The History of the Yorubas*. O Johnson (ed.) London: Routledge, 1921.

Kagame, A. and Griaule, M. *Conversation with Ogotomeli : An Introduction to Dogan Religious Ideas*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Kant, I. *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. L. W. Beck. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956.

———— *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton. London: Hutchinson & Co, 1964.
———— *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965.

Kaplan, S. *Hermeneutics, Holography, and Indian Idealism*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987.

Kautz, S. "Liberalism and the Idea of Toleration." *American Journal of Political Science* 37, (1993): 610-632.

Kenyatta, J.. *Facing Mount Kenya*. New York: Vintage, 1965.

Kim-Chong Chong, Sor-hoon Tan and C. L. Ten, (eds.) *The Moral Circle and the Self Chinese and Western Approaches*. Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2003.

King, P. *Toleration*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1976.

King, R. "Brahman and the World: Immanence and Transcendence in Advaita Vedanta – a Comparative Perspective." *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 12, no.2 (1991): 107-126

————— "Review of Andrew Fort's; The Self and Its States." *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 12, no. 1 (1991): 65-67

————— *Early Advaita Vedanta and Budhism*. Albany: State University of New York, 1995.

Kirk-Green, A. H. *Mutumin Kirkil: The Concept of the Good Man in Hausa*. Bloomington: African Studies Program, Indian University, 1974.

Kohn, A. *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*. New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1990.

Kokileswar, B. *An Introduction to Advaita Philosophy*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1924.

Krishnananda, S. "Self-Realisation, Its Meaning and Method." *The Divine Life Society*, http://www.swami-krishnananda.org/self/self_3a.html

Kroner, R. *Culture and Faith*. Santa Barbara: The University of California Press, 1949.

Kuckertz, H. "Selfood and Its Reasons to Be." In (ed.) J.G. Malherbe, *Decolonizing the Mind, Proceedings of the Second Colloquium on African Philosophy*, pp. 57-66. Pretoria: Unisa, 1996.

Kymlicka, W. *Liberalism, Community and Culture*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Larsen, S. *A writer and His Gods : A Study of the Importance of Yoruba Myths and Religious Ideas to the Writing of Wole Soyinka.* Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1983.

Lata, P. *Mystic Saints of India: Shankaracharya*. Delhi: Sumit Publications, 1982.

Lawson, E. T. *Religions of Africa*. USA: Harper and Row, 1884.

Lawuyi, O. B. "Ogun: Diffusion across Boundaries and Identity Constructions." *African Studies Review* 31, no. 2 (1988): 127-139

Levy, J. *The Nature of Man According to Vedanta*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956.

Levy-Bruhl, L. *Primitive Mentality*. George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1923.

Lionel, D. Barnett. *Brahma-Knowledge: an Outline of the Philosophy of the Vedanta as set forth by the Upanishads and Sankara*. London: John Murray, 1907.

Lucas, J. O. *The Religion of the Yorubas*. New York: Macmillan, 1948.

MacIntyre, A. *After Virtue*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984.

Mahadevan, T. M. P. *Philosophy of Advaita*. London: Luzac and Company, 1938.

——— *Superimposition in Advaita Vedanta*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd, 1985.

Mahendranath, S. *Comparative Studies in Vedantism*. Bombay: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1927.

Makinde, M. "A Philosophical Analysis of the Yoruba Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny" *International Studies in Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (1985) : 53-69.

——— "Immortality of the Soul and the Yoruba Theory of Seven Heavens (Orun Meje)." *Journal of Cultures and Ideas* 1, no.1 (1983) : 31-59.

Marriot, M. "Hindu Transactions: Diversity without Dualism." In Bruce Kapferer (ed.), *Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior*. Philadelphia: Ishi Press, 1976.

Marriot, M. and Inden, R. B.. "Toward an Ethnoscciology of South Asian Caste Systems." In Kenneth David (ed.), *The New Wind, Changing Identities in South Asia*. Paris: Mouton Publishers, 1977.

Matilal, B. Krishna. *Logic, Language and Reality, An Introduction to Indian Philosophical Studies*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985.

Mauss, M. "A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; The Notion of Self." In Michael Carrithers, Stephen Collins and Steven Lukes (eds.), *The category of Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, pp. 1-25. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Mayeda, S. (Transl). *A Thousand Teachings The Upadesahasri of Sankara*. Japan: University of Tokyo Press, 1979.

Mbiti, J. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London :Heinemann, 1970.

McGrath, A. E. *A Scientific Theology*. Vol. 1. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.

McKenzie, P. R. *Hail Orisha: A Phenomenology of a West African Religion in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. Netherland: Brill Academic Publishers, 1997.

Mendus, S. (ed.) *Justifying Toleration: Historical and Conceptual Perspectives*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Menkiti, I. A. "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought." In Richard A. Right, (ed.) *African Philosophy, An Introduction*, pp. 171-182. Lanham, Md.: University Press of Americas, 1984.

Merton, T. *New Seed of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions, 1972.

Mill, J. S. 'On Liberty.' In *Three Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Milton, S. "Industrial Leadership, the Hindu Ethic, and the Spirit of Socialism." In Milton Singer (ed.), *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization*, pp. 423-454. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972.

Mine, M. "Conceptualizing the Person: Hierarchical Society and Individual Autonomy in India." In Roger T. Ames, Wimal Dissanayake, Thomas P. Kasulis, (eds.), *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*, pp. 317-334. New York: State University of New York, 1994.

————— *Public Faces, Private Voices Community and Individuality in South India*. Berkeley, Los Angelis, London: University of California Press, 1994.

Mohanty, J. N. "Phenomenology in Indian Philosophy." *Proceedings of Indian Philosophical Congress*, (1953) : 253-260.
————— "Phenomenology and Existentialism: Encounter with Indian Philosophy." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 12, no. IV (1972): 485-511.

————— "Consciousness and Knowledge in Indian Philosophy." *Philosophy East and West* 29, no. 1 (1979): 3-10.

————— *Explorations in Philosophy*, vol. 1 edited by Bina Gupta. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001.

————— "A Fragment of the Indian Philosophical Tradition-Theory of Pramana." *Philosophy East and West* 38, (1988).

————— *Explorations in Philosophy*, B. Gupta, (ed.) New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Mohini, M. C. *A Realistic Interpretation of Sankara Vedanta*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1950.

————— *Self and Falsity in Advaita Vedanta*. Progressive Publication,1955.

Momoh, C. S. (ed.) *The Substance of African Philosophy*. Nigeria: African Philosophy Projects' Publications, 1989.

————— "African Philosophy, Does it Exist?" *Diogene* 130, (1985): 73-104.

Moore, C. A. *A Source Book of Indian Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

————— *The Indian Mind: Essentials of Indian Philosophy and Culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967.

Mosley, A. G. *African Philosophy Selected Readings*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995.

Mudimbe, V. Y. *The Invention of Africa*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.

————— *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

Mukerji, A.C. *The Nature of Self*. Allahabad: The Indian Press Ltd., 1938.

Muller, F. M. *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, with an introduction by G. P. Guha. New Delhi : Associated Publishing House, 1982.

Murphy, A. R. "Tolerance, Toleration, and the Liberal Tradition." *Polity* 29, no. 4 (1997): 593-623.

Murthy, K. S. (ed.). *Reading in Indian History*, *Politics and Philosophy,* New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1967.

Murti, T. R. V. "The World and the Individual in Indian Religious Thought." In C. A. Moore, *The Indian Mind: Essentials of Indian Philosophy and Culture*, pp. 199-216. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967.

Nederman, C. J. "Tolerance and Community: A Medieval Communal Functionalist Argument for Religious Toleration." *The Journal of Politics* 56, no. 4 (1994): 901-918.

Nkrumah, K. *Consciencism – Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution*. London: Heinemann, 1964.

Nozick, R. *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books. 1974

Nripendra, K. D. *The Vedanta: Its Place as a System of Metaphysics*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1931.

Nyerere, J. *Ujaama: The Basis of African Socialism*. Oxford University Press: Dares Salaam, 1962.

Odunjo, J. F. "Ewi ni Yoruba." *Olokun* 6, (1967): 13-16

Okolo, C. B. "Self as a Problem in African Philosophy." *International Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. xxxii, no.4. (1992): 477-484.

Onwuanibe, R. "The Human Person and Immorality in Igbo Metaphysics" In (ed.) R.A.Wright, *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, (3rd ed.), pp.183-198. Lanham: University Press of America, 1979.

Onyewuenyi, I. C. *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy*: *An Exercise in Afrocentrism*. Nigeria: University of Nigeria Press, 1993.

Owomoyela, O. *The African Difference: Discourses in Africanity and the Relativity of Cultures*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996.

Pande, G. C. *Life and Thought of Sankaracarya*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994.

Paranjpe, A. C. *Self and Identity in Modern Psychology and Indian Thought*. New York: Plenum, 1998.

Parthasarathy, A. *Vedanta Treatise*, third edition. Bombay: Vedaanta Life Institute, 1989.

Patrrinder, E. G. *West African Religion, A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo and Kindred Peoples*. London: Epworth Press, 1961.

Peek, P. M. "Divination": A Way of Knowing?" In Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, (ed.) *African Philosophy*, pp. 171-176. USA, UK: Blackwell, 1998.

Perret, Roy W. "Is Whatever Exists Knowable and Nameable*?" Philosophy East and West* 49, (1999): 401-414.

Philips Stephen H. "Padmapada's Illusion Argument." *Philosophy East and West* 37, (1987): 3-23

Pizzato, M. "Soyinka's Bacchae, African Gods, and Postmodern Mirrors". *The Journal of Religion and Theatre* 2, no. 1 (2003): 35-49

Potter, K. H. "Does Indian Epistemology Concern Justified True Belief?" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 12, (1984): 307-327

————— "Dharma and Moksha from a Conversational point of View." *Philosophy East and West* 8, no. 2 (1958) 49-641.

————— "A Fresh Classification of India's Philosophical Systems." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 22, no. 4 (1961) : 25-33.

————— "Freedom and Determinism from an Indian Perspective." *Philosophy East and West* l, no. 17 (1967): 113-124.

Prabhavananda, S. *The Spiritual Heritage of India*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962.

Prabhu, D. S. *The Doctrine of Maya in the Philosophy of the Vedanta*. London: Luzac and Co., 1911.

Radhakrishnan, S. and Moore, C.A. (eds.) *A Source of Indian Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University press, 1957.

Radhakrishnan, S. *Vedanta according to Samkara and Ramanuja*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1928.

Raju, P. T. "The Advaita and the Moral Pradoxes." *Vedanta Kesari*. 25, 1940: 252-257.

————— "Comparative Philosophy and Spiritual Values." *Philosophy East and West*, 13, (1963): 211-226.

————— "Indian Epistemology and the World and the Individual (The Vedantic Theory of Language)." *Philosophy East and West* 14, no. III (1964): 311-322.

————— *The Philosophical Traditions of India*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971.

————— *Spirit, Being and Truth, Studies in Indian and Western Philosophy*. Foreword by Eugene Freeman. New Delhi : South Asian Publishers,1982.

P. T. Raju and S. Radhakrishnan, (eds.) *The Concept of Man A study in Comparative Philosophy*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1995.

Ram, P. Chakravarth "Dreams and Coherence of Experience: An Anti-Idealist Critique from Classical Indian Philosophy." *American Philosophical quarterly* 32, (1995).

———— Chakravarth "Dreams and Reality; The Sankarite Critique of Vijnanavada" *Philosophy East and West* 43, (1993): 405-455.

Ramanujan, B.K. "Toward Maturity: Problems of Identity Seen in the Indian Clinical Setting." in Sudhir Kakar, (ed.), *Identity and Adulthood*, pp. 37-55. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Ramchandra, D. R. *A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy*. Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1926.

Rauch E. A. and Anyanwu, K. C. (eds.) *African Philosophy, An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa*. Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1981.

Rawls, J. *A Theory of Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

———— "The Basic Structure as Subject." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1977): 159-165.

———— *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Rockmore, T. *Hegel, Idealism and Analytic Philosophy* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2005.

Rosenblum, N. (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Ryle, G. *Dilemmas*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1954.

Saha, S. *Perspectives on Nyaya Logic and Epistemology*. Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi and Company, 1987.

Sandel, J. M. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Sastri, A. M. *The Vedanta Doctrine of Sri Shankaracharya*. Delhi: Sri Satgun Publication, 1986.

Savage, D. M. *John Dewey's Liberalism Individual, Community, and Self-Development*. USA: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002.

Sen, A. *Identity and Violence : The Illusion of Destiny*. New York : W.W. Norton and Co., 2006.

Senghor, L. *On African Socialism*. London and New York, 1964.

Shutte, A. *Philosophy for Africa*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995.

Shweder R. A. and Vine R. A. (eds.), *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Sicar, S. *The System of Vedantic Thought and Culture*. Calcuta: University of Calcuta, 1925.

Sinha, M. *Problems of Post-Samkara Advaita Vedanta*. Calcutta: Sinha Publishing House Private Ltd, 1971.

Sivananda, S. S. "Sankara." *The Divine Life Society*, 2004.. http://www.dlshq.org/saints/sankara.htm

Sobande. A. "Awon Owe Ile Wa." *Olokun*. 7, 1967.

Solomon, C. *Existentialism*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Stocker, M. "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories." In Roger Crisp and Michael Slope (eds.) *Virtue Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Sweet, W. "Absolute Idealism' and Finite Individuality." *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1997): 431-462.

Tagore, Saranindranath. "India, Europe, and Modernity." In Ashok Vohra et al. (eds.) *Dharma, The Categorial Imperative*. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd, 2005.

Talbot, P. A. *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of their History, Ethnology and Languages*. London: Frank Cass, 1961.

Taylor, C. "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man." *The Review of Metaphysics* 25, 1 (1971): 3 - 51.

————— *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

————— *Sources: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Tempels, P. *Bantu Philosophy*. English Translation. Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959.

The Internet Sacred Text Archive, "Vedanta-philosophy", http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rls/rls20.htm

Unah, J. I. (ed.) *Metaphysics, Phenomenology and African Philosophy*. Nigeria: Hope Publications, 1998.

Upadhyaya, K. N. "Sankara on Reason, Scriptural Authority and Self-Knowledge." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 19, no. 2 (1991): 126-134.

Vinayak, H. D. *Vedanta Explained, Sankara's Commentary on the Brahma-Sutras* (vol.1). Bombay: Bookseller's Publishing Co., 1954.

Vivekacūdāmani, verses 102-5. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1921.

Vivekananda, Swami. *Complete Works*. 8 vols. Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1979.

Walzer, M. "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism." *Political Theory* 18, no. 1 (1990): 6-23.

Wamba-dia-Wamba, E. "Experience of Democracy in Africa: Reflections on Practices of Communalistic Palaver as a Social Method of Resolving Contradictions among the People." An Unpublished paper presented in the Department of Theory and History of State Law, Faculty of Law, University of Dar es Salaam. 1985.

Wande, A. *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifa*. Niamey, Niger: UNESCO, 1975.

Warner-Lewis, M. *Trinidad Yoruba: From Mother Tongue to Memory*. USA: University of the West Indies Press, 1999.

Weber, M. *The Religion of India*. Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958, 1958.

Wiredu, K. (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*. USA: Blackwell, 2004.

Wiredu, K. and Gyekye, K. (eds.) *Person and Community*, *Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 1. Washington, D. C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.

———— *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Wolf, S. "Moral Saints." In Lawrence Becker and Charlotte Becker, (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, (2nd Edition), pp. 1170-1173. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Woods, J.H. and Runkel, C.B. (Transl.) *Outline of the Vedanta System of Philosophy according to Shankara* (2nd ed.). New York: The Grafton Press, 1906.

Yogindra, S. *Vedaantasaara* (*The Essence of Vedaanta*) *of Sadananda Yogindra,* transl Swami Nihilananda. Calcuta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968.

Yusuf, Y. K. "Women Speech in Yoruba Proverbs." *Proverbium*. 11, 1994: 283-291.