

# African philosophical humanism assignment

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AFRICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT:  
AN ETHICAL PARADIGM By Alloy S. Ihuah PhD. Department of Religion and  
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08034017856; 08026242031 (i) Introduction African indigenous knowledge  
system expressed in proverbs, names and songs etc. are conscious  
reflections on specific situations, events and experiences in the lives of the  
people. For the African, observation and experience are sources of  
knowledge that have immediate practical results in such areas as  
agriculture, medicine, crime prevention and remedy among others.

It is no longer fiction that, our ancestors, whose main occupation was  
farming, knew of the system of rotation of crops; they knew when to allow a  
piece of land to lie fallow for a while; they had some knowledge of the  
technology of food processing and preservation; and there is a great deal of  
evidence about their knowledge of the medicinal potentialities of herbs and  
plants ??? the main sources of their health care delivery system long before  
the introduction of Western Medicine. Even today there are countless  
testimonies of people who have received cures from ' traditional' healers  
where the application of western therapeutics could not cope) (Gyekye,  
1997: 26-27). Although western scientific thought similarly acknowledge  
observation and experience as sources of objective knowledge. It depends  
on the adoption of a linear monistic conception of reality, which goal is  
analysis and demonstrative procedures.

Here understood, western civilization lacks the principle of self-limitation in  
terms of size, speed and violence and has in the process killed more than  
healed humanity and the environment. The work argues that any civilization  
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that claims immunity from error and confers on itself authority over other cultures is to say the least no civilization. Every culture has its basic assumptions about nature and the method of arriving at trustworthy knowledge of reality. It is posited further that a value system that aims at having more instead of being more dominates man and empties his being.

The work argues in conclusion for a new vision of reality, a worldview that is holistic; ' functional and humane, a value system which restores meaning and wholeness, not just in the African human community, but in the entire cosmos. Such is the corpus of African humanistic value system, the oral corpus of African indigenous knowledge system that ensues concern, care, co-operation and co-existence and ensures sustainable development. (ii)

African Culture: Culture, like every other word in common use, can be variously defined.

It entails a people's integrative conceptual framework of reality. It is the totality of indigenous knowledge and behaviour, ideas and objects, that constitutes the common heritage of a people. This understanding of culture so described means a people's world-view or outlook, a conceptual model of reality that enables a people to develop a strong sense of belonging to a community of shared beliefs i. e. religion, politics, economics arts, morals, science and philosophy etc. Understood as such, African indigenous knowledge system is the outlook of an African on the created world.

It is the African conception of reality in its totality and from which every other life index find its bearing. It is a product of the African experience in the world as distinguished from the experiences of other peoples. Such

distinction, properly defined, constitute what is described as the African mindset, which, its modes of perception, its normative theories and social organizations contra-distinguish the western modes of thought. The African reality has a unitary view, so, man is man because of other men, and life is only life with others. Unlike the western civilization of analysis, mathematics and mechanics which translates to the individualistic conception of man, the African treasures moral and spiritual well being which quality of human life find self fulfilment in the community. In what appears to be a summation of the corpus of African cultural identity as distinguished from the west, Ezekiel Mphahlele writes: Africans gravitate toward people, not toward things as Europeans do... External nature exists as a symbol of the deeper meaning of life. It is not there to be tamed or be looked at for any lofty purpose, but to yield what it can for man's subsistence (Mphahlele, 1972: 112).

This understandable element of African culture most obviously defines in very positive way how the African relates with and uses nature. Man and nature are important to each other although, nature exists for the good of man and remains so. When therefore man construes his leadership of nature as a manipulator who dominates nature, he destroys himself and the entire earth. This is not in the character of African culture, undergirded by the philosophy is holism; man is what he is because he lives in the company of others and in harmony with nature.

In this characteristic African thinking, any conception of our environment that perceives only ourselves, and our dispositions is necessarily flawed from the point of view of essential human nature. This position suggests that reality is culture bound. This is what K. C. Anyanwu calls Cultural

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Standpoints. Generally, he says: there have been cultures that developed the religious or the spiritual aspect of life, or the material aspect of it. But no culture seems to have developed the spiritual and material aspects of life all at the same time (Anyanwu, 1983: 55)

The reason here is that, the manner in which each culture consciously or unconsciously approaches the contradictory factors of human experience would determine its mode of thought and normative theories. So it is that the western, Eastern, Asian, and African culture differ from each other according to how each of them approach the duality of experience i. e. the contradiction between the self and the world, the contradictions we experience in life, the contradiction between freedom and determinism, reason and sentiment, the one and the many, individuality and universality arise from self-contradiction.

This duality of human experience more readily find expression in the thought of the westerner whose cultural assumption posits that the subject and object are two separate entities, hence the self and the world body and mind are two separate entities. K. C. Anyanwu further posits that: The west reduces the duality of experience to a dualism, that is, to two incompatible realities. The world is said to exist independent of the ego and the ego to exist independent of the world. Man is separated from nature on the one hand and subordinated to material process on the other (Ibid, 58).

This typical expression of the western mind-set promotes and protects an ideology of either/or theory of reality which today is found in the subjective and objective divisions of reality prevalent in the western culture. Thus,

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reality for the west is either subjective or objective, mental or material, empirical or rational, and scientific or metaphysical. The African mind-set, for which culture is holistic makes no such clear-cut distinction between the ego and the world, and assumes that man is inseparable from nature.

Like Protagoras of Abdera, the self for the African is the centre of the world, it animates the world, and the spirit or mind becomes in some way the spirit or mind of the world. Reality is here said to depend on personal experience, and the world has meaning, order and unity by virtue of the living experience of the ego. It must be restated here that human experience is the determinant of our standpoints. That is why the European or western mindset approaches and promotes reality in a way that is diametrically opposed to the African mindset.

Thus, science, that is, material science is nothing but the manner which the European culture intellectually perceives the world, and that the materialistic and rationalistic assumptions governing it did not originate in all cultures. Science in this context is a religion. But for the non-western cultures (African) whose assumptions are not that, the real is the material process in space and time, science is not a religion, not a spiritual necessity, but a tool borrowed from the west. This tool can be learned, but the materialistic spirit governing the scientific impulse still remains the prerogative of the western culture.

This is precisely the point at which a distinction can be made in favour of the African spirit which is developmental in content as against the western spirit which is individualistic, materialistic, and hence dehumanising. For the

African, natural events and human actions affect human experience. Argued as existentialism in western philosophical tradition, the Africans identify such literary goal as that of humanism, i. e. an orientation to improve the conditions of man. Obviously the difference between western, scientific thought and African culture, is clear.

It thus amount to naked ignorance to assume knowledge of a culture from without. One thing that comes out clearly is the direction of each of these two cultural worlds in respect of development. The western scientific thought no doubt promotes growth but excludes development while the African cultural heritage is essentially developmental. This is, however, not to define culture as specific mode of thought in the sense in which this is synonymous with a biologically determined epistemological stance. The point at issue is that, man as a thinker, everywhere in the world, seeks an understanding of nature and the events of experience.

While one particular group may wish to understand nature as it physically functions, another may seek an understanding of how such natural functions and human actions relate to and affect human existence. So, while not slipping back into the conceptual errors of the likes of Anyanwu and Senghor in arguing that African metaphysics and epistemology are unique because they result from a peculiar biological species of a racially distinct mind-set, it suffices to say here that, what truly defines African intellectual culture is communal justice, which relates experience to human existence, (not necessarily a religious one), to nature.

Its goal is the search for interpretations meant to show how natural events and human action affect human existence; to improve the conditions of man. It is thus argued here that scientific alternative is neither superior nor inferior to African humanism. Rather, they are two distinct cultural endeavours, and each is valid and inevitable for human development. But this is only to the extent that the two spheres interplay, which activity, the scientific endeavour is subordinated to serve the human sphere.

Such is perhaps why Oluwole states unequivocally that: To adequately interpret nature and experience and relate these to human interest and existence, a vast and thorough knowledge of the nature of man and our experience are imperative while the terms in which factual knowledge and their understanding are expressed are not determined in any apriori fashion, no interpreter should feel safe threading on undefined, unanalysed, or unknown ground (Oluwole, 1996: 121).

It may be argued here that, the western pursuit of science has yielded results that no nation in the world can dismiss or ignore if that nation truly wants development. So also the African pursuit of humanism as a concern for human behaviour and existence is its greatest cultural heritage to the whole world. If it is underplayed and ignored because it does not follow the fashion of science, then we misunderstand it and so miss the important better half of what it makes human existence meaningful.

The two are necessary for human development. (iii) African Humanistic Heritage Africa, it must be said, has bestowed to the world a humanistic heritage, which the entire world order could only ignore to its peril. It is



sensitive to human feeling, proceeding from a mind-set unique to Africans, and largely existent in literary works such as oral traditions; proverbs, names, folklore and songs among others, but without identical beliefs about every aspect of human life and experience.

This humanistic spirit is foundational to everything African: whether it is politics, religion, economics or social relationship, there is an acknowledgement of the unique personality of the Africans whose family and kinship values, along with their cosmology and historical evolution should be taken into consideration. On the whole, African humanistic heritage parades a man-centred philosophy of life which argued position is that the dialectics of social engineering is aimed ultimately at achieving true dignity and development for the whole of humankind.

Julius Nyerere captures succinctly this idea as he beautifully states the expectations of Tanzanians, to the extent that we in Tanzania succeed in the struggle to which we have committed ourselves, so we shall be taking our place in the match of humanity toward peace and human dignity. This indicates that the human person is the paramount creation from whom everything begins, and to whom everything gravitates and in whom all things in the world have meaning. Thus, unlike western humanism (or shall we call it existentialism) which acts as an alternative to the supernatural interpretation of life.

African humanistic heritage essentially interprets nature and experience and relates these to human interest and existence; it preserves the African person - centred society. As Kaunda himself argues, " the human being is

above ideology and above institution... we must continuously refuse to tie the human being to anything... society is there because of the human being, and whatever we undertake to do, we have got to remember that it is the human being that is the centre of all human society". He declares further:

The high valuation of MAN and respect for human dignity, which is a legacy of our tradition, should not be lost in the new Africa. However modern and 'advanced' in a western sense this young nation Zambia may become, we are fiercely determined that this humanism will not be obscured... for it is in this regard that what might be described as African civilization is embodied and indeed if modern Africa has anything to contribute to this troubled world, it is in this direction that it should be (Kaunda, 1979: 103). It is to be acknowledged here that such fundamental principles as are found in traditional African society, which we here refer to as African humanistic heritage, remains the greatest cultural heritage to the world. As earlier on posited, if it is underplayed and ignored because it does not follow the fashion of science, then, we misunderstand it and miss the important better half of what makes human existence meaningful. Fundamentally, this is the issue along which African philosophy teaches the world order to live according to divinely established values, that holism is the cardinal principle of the biosphere.

Our well-being spiritually, economically, and physically, is determined by our awareness of the quality of our relationships with animals, plants, the soil and the whole of nature, as well as with each other. Life is one, and even its humblest forms enshrined in divinity. The underlying mentality here is that our (African) ancestors developed religious traditions based on a largely

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symbiotic relationship and spiritual communion with the natural world. This itself is founded on the fundamental assumption that every existing thing or reality is a life force or that every reality possesses life force.

As a result, everything has something in common by virtue of life force.

Anyanwu justifiably posits here that, “ the African maintains that everything is similar and shares the same qualities in spite of visible differences as well as an endless multiplicity of forces” (Anyanwu, 1983: 62). It, thus, means for the African that, the interaction of one with another life force should be done in the spirit of live and let live. This is also to say that African humanistic heritage instructs a wise and gentle use of the earth’s creation (i. e. he demigod powers). Science and technology, with their argued philosophy of neutrality, dismiss reverence for trees, animals, the soil and waters etc as pagan pantheism ??? use these powers to recreate the natural world into its own image of industrial utility, communication and information super-highways, directing the evolutionary process of earthly creation to satisfy man’s own pecuniary ends. Such secular materialism; the mutant belief system which turns homo sapiens into homo technos: technocratic man, kills nature and humanity. This is a legacy of Aristotelian rationalism and Cartesian dualism. African humanistic heritage acknowledges creatures on earth as sacred entities and processes, and not a collection of potentially exploitable objects and resources. Today, the side effects of the activities of the technocratic man are almost always visibly everywhere. Humanity now rules over a dysfunctional, technologized world where the life-support system of the planet ??? its atmosphere, its climate, oceans, forest, and life-sustaining soils and ecosystem are becoming dysfunctional and starting to deteriorate.

Further more, as biological diversity is obliterated by industrialism, so cultural diversity is lost in the homogenizing process of global consumerism, with the consequent effect of the disintegration of the global economy, security of nations and integrity of communities. This attitude of the technocratic man underscores the question of “ what is the human person in relation to the power that rules the universe? ” This question is central to the corpus of African humanistic heritage.

To this question Bolaji Idowu in his *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (1962: 171) acknowledges the presence of ori the inner person in the human being and that the inner principle in the human being is orisa the ‘ Head source’ Olodumare (God) himself. This identification of the human personality to Being itself, underscores the exalted place the human being has in the universe. Such etymological identification of the human person to Being as acknowledged by all ethnic groups in Africa is perhaps the greatest contributions Africa offers towards human understanding and development.

J. S.

Mbiti is more explorative in his discussion of the place of the human person in creation. He says that “ Africans have their own ontology... but it is an extremely anthropocentric ontology in the sense that everything is seen in terms of its relation to man” (Mbiti, 1970: 15). The human person is the champion of the religious universe. God is seen as the originator and sustainer of the human being; the animals and the plants and their natural phenomena constitute the environment in which the human being lives. This same idea is very lucidly expressed in Tiv tales with animals given roles that interplay with human beings in the achievement of the ommon good of

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natures. So it is, that the Tiv would say humorously that Aondo Gba banyam m, an u umache sha a chi u ve lu onuv mba dyako mba tar ne i. e. God created human beings and animals as heirs of the created world. This piece of orature implicitly commands the human agent who is unarguably the master of God's creation to treat animals humanely, giving them citizenship legally and morally because they are part of the same life community and creation as we and are thus worthy of equal and fair consideration.

While not slipping back into the Asian spiritualism which argues that the material world and life in this world are illusions, and that the real is the spiritual, not the individual spirit as such, but the universal spirit or mind which the individual can embrace through ascetic discipline and meditation, the African humanistic heritage whose key principle is human feeling, offers the key to new ways and new days by pointing us away from the nemesis of Homo technos, and toward the way to heal ourselves by healing the Earth soul or anima mundi.

Such is the role which the African plays that quantities him/her as the centre of the universe. Mbiti's work acknowledges this role thus: African people consider man to be the centre of the universe... He sees the universe in terms of himself, and endeavours to live in harmony with it. Even where there is no biological life in an object, African people attributes (mystical) life to it in order to establish a more direct relationship with the world around them.

In this way the visible and the invisible parts of the universe are at man's disposal through physical, mystical and religious means (Mbiti, 1975: 39)

Placid Tempels, more critically captures this philosophy in his identification of the Muntu as the centre of Bantu thought; the idea which include excellence, plenitude of forces etc. He writes: The Bantu see in man the living force; the force or being that possesses life that is true, full and lofty. Man is the supreme force, the most powerful among created beings. He dominates plants, animals, and minerals.

These lower beings exist, by divine decrees only for the assistance of the higher created being, man. (Tempels, 1959: 66) African humanistic heritage which seeks to make human existence meaningful, posits its inherent virtue that, for benefits to be realized, allocation and distribution of resources require some ethical orientation in the light of near universal shared aims and values which are said to be “ wholesome human relations among people; respect for elders; community fellow-feeling... hospitality, (Sofola 1973 chapt 4), and concern for the Earth.

Elements of these humanistic heritage are richly found in abundance in African names, proverbs, songs etc which reflective attitude hinges on the fact that life is only life as it is lived in association with others and with nature i. e. the individual's identity makes no sense except in reference to the community. Perhaps, this idea distinguishes the African view of man from the view of man found in western thought.

Menkiti says of this that, A crucial distinction (thus) exists between the African view of man and the view of man found in western thought: in the African view it is the community which defines the person as a person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory (Menkiti, 1984:

176). Any act of man by commission or omission therefrom, resulting out of his intelligence or works of his hands that affect humanity and nature negatively, is anti-African humanistic heritage.

Elements which are discussed above find more detailed documentation, analysis and interpretation in the oral corpus of the African peoples, whose underlying philosophical motif or wisdom ideal is the immense dignity and overwhelming superiority of the human person, over and above material wealth, and his or her central position of honour amidst the rest of creation.

(vi) African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) The Tiv wisdom literature argues out a philosophy of life thus, *uma ka orjime*, that is, life in its existential meaning is human fellow-feeling.

Expressed as such, the Tiv oral corpus presents a representative philosophy which holds that life is solidarity among persons. Human existence, according to this philosophy, is organically embodied in a series of associations and life thus appears to have meaning and value only in those close ties. John Mbiti describes this idea of community as one of the most vital features of the African heritage. It is perhaps in the same spirit that Chinua Achebe writes that: A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving.

They all have food in their homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so (Achebe, 1959: 55). It is to be said here that the idea of community living prevalent in Africa has intrinsic value; it is a product of African humanism

which is concerned with the preservation of life because life is his or her ultimate concern, and that life can only grow in relationship.

This ultimate concern for life very vividly find expression in African orature; names, proverbs, songs folktales and legends among other traditions and customs. Names: In names, the Shakespearean rhetorical question “ what’s in a name? ” is most likely to be proudly and authoritatively answered; “ Everything”. Names in Africa teach, instruct, motivate and inspire generations after generation in the religious and philosophical truth that help in the promotion of human development. In the words of Sofola: To us (Africans) names are cultural.

They tell us who we are, what our thoughts and aspirations are. They express our relation with our maker. Above all they represent our attempt to understand the universe and ourselves, our place in the universe and our attempt to achieve order in our human midst (Sofola, 1973: 117). Names give meaning to existence, and so like other elements of African oral tradition, they are expressions of the wisdom and knowledge of elders which are used in small or large measure, consciously or unconsciously in the formation of their religious attitudes and behaviours, in working out their scale of values and in making their every day choices. It means then, that, ones name constitute who one is; without which one is not a person. Thus, African humanism is truly expressed in names; the product of African humanism. Kenneth Kaunda justifies this assertion thus: (the people of Africa are rich in names) It is the product of their humanism. To be known by name is to be dependent, linked with the one who utters it, and to know all a man’s names is to have a special claim upon him. Kaunda, 1979: 45). A classical <https://assignbuster.com/african-philosophical-humanism-assignment/>



example is found in the shona name purombomunhu, meaning even the poor are human beings, which is an expression of African humanism at its peak. It tells the story of a poor, barren, fifth wife of a shona man who is an object of abuse and derision from the hands of other women. Whereas other women have a wide choice of children to use in the name-game, her only possession is a dog, which she defensively calls purombomunhu. This is no doubt reminiscent of the most cherished principle of the sanctity of life.

That, life originates from the divine Being, and that, life which makes a human being, argues out the equality of human beings; rich or poor, with or without children. Among the Tiv of the Middle-Belt of Nigeria, names not only express the dignity of the human person, they in fact express life itself. Such names like Uma (Life), Ishima (Heart/Life) among others, express a very comprehensive philosophical notion of human life which, on the one hand includes the world, the universe, creation, with all its grandeur, including the non-physical forces which constitute the cosmic reality.

On the other hand it refers to human existence and ultimate meaning.

Similarly, the name shaagee (By-Power) is rooted in the Tiv understanding of the uneven struggle between God and lesser beings, for human existence which the understanding of the human person as the master-piece of God's creative genius, the crown of creation, who gives the entire cosmos and all it contains, cannot surrender. The implication here is the overwhelming power of God amidst lesser spiritual and physical beings, whose attempts to devalue or undermine human existence cannot surpass.

Thus, the Epira will sum up this philosophy of life as OZOVEHE (oza o vi ehe ni) meaning the human person is life (Ehusani, 1991: 143). Similar names with deep human fellow-feeling and or supremacy of life abound in Africa. The Yoruba have such names like, Omololu i. e. children are supreme/children are lords, Omolade i. e. children are the crown of life, Owootomo i. e. Money is not as valuable as children etc. Among the Igbo, such names as Maduka, i. e. the human person is greatest; Ndubuisi i. e. Human life is first; Ndubueze i. e. Human life is King; etc most prominently express life as man's essence; an order from the supreme Being.

The Etsako people have similar names like Oyone ??? the human person is greatest; Oyarebu ??? the human person is strength; Omoyetse ??? children are the essence of life etc. Clearly, life cannot be quantified or compared with some other material thing(s), and so any material gain(s) of whatever quantity or quality is not, and cannot be a substitute for life. Life for the African is great and another life in addition (children) confer glory (Omoleye) and so the crown of life. Proverbs: Proverbs are another aspect of African oral texts which serve as the store house, and medium of African indigenous knowledge system.

This form of African wisdom literature expresses the people's observations and reflections in condensed form on human life, human relationships, human society and human destiny. This conclusion is reflected in Orji's work on Igbo proverbs when he writes, " the proverbs tell bitter truth about us, our lives, unsavoury events and situations which have been transferred to humour and summarised into philosophy of which depicts the attitudes and beliefs of Igbo (African) people and their outlook to life" (Orji, 1984: v).  
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Whether it is among the Yoruba, Igbo, Tiv or Edo, proverbs are channels through which human communion and communication is made possible or horses for searching for truth, and meaning in existence. Human life or existence find expression in proverbs as supreme in the divine creative act. So it is that human fellow-feeling in relationship is cherished above any quantity and quality of material acquisition. Thus if one has to put up with stupid or foolish neighbours, that situation is a lot better than the misery of living alone.

Among the Epira therefore, such humanistic expression find relevance in the following proverbs (Ehusani 1991: 156). (i)Irehi ondu o dahi hu irehi avuta ni (a house of fools is better than a house of lizard) (ii)Oza o ma si oza mo enyi re (one does not use a human being to measure a river) (iii)Eyi Ozas goro-goro vi uhuo (the very presence of a person is a knife/sword) In these and many other proverbs that abound in Epira land, human beings are understood in unmeasurable quality with material things.

Life is here said to be worthless and meaningless without other human beings. Thus, the human being is uniquely important and so must be guarded and not to be used as a means to the realization of an end, no matter how glorious or desirable the end might be. Such is perhaps why they say the human person has something that even the lion and the elephant do not have ??? the human person is a spiritual force, he has a divine spark in him. The Yoruba of Nigeria similarly recognise human worth above any thing else and express same in proverbs.

They say (i) "Fifun ni owo fun, ko to enia iyi" (Money and material may shine and glitter, but they do not amount or match human worth). (ii) "Amo rere ni Olorun fi mo awon eda" (It is good clay that God used in moulding human being) Among the Tiv, "Or u kpila uon kpe ga" meaning, one surrounded by a multitude of children never dies". While for the Igbo man, life means interaction between himself and his fellowmen, among the living, the dead and the gods as well as the interaction between other animate and inanimate forces of nature.

Thus, reality for the Igbo consists in the mutual interdependence between natural and supernatural forces in which man must find a peaceful place if he is not to endanger his own existence. Using the symbolic breaking of the kolanut which for the Igbo is life, man calls all beings and forces to communion by saying: He who lives above, the giver of life, we thank you, Ani (the earth Goddess) come and eat kolanut, Amadioha (God of thunder), come and eat kolanut, may the river not dry up and may the fish not die; we shall live (Momoh 2000: 372).

All these are expressions of African knowledge system and are deliberately guarded acts to manure human society for unhindered human development. Tiv metaphysics captures this vision of life and the nature of reality when they speak about death after a long and happy life thus, Or u been Yor (Tamen or) Kpen ga kpa ov a ov u wan kilim sha achi u mzehemen u tar. (The passage (death) of an old man is like a fungus that transforms to manure the younger ones i. e to rejuvenate society which has grown in its place. )

Similar allusions are made by the Yoruba of Nigeria as frontally captured by Oluwole (07: 3320-34; 55) K'a ma tete ku, awo ile alayo Aiteteku o se, awo ibanuje Bi' ku bade ka yin Oluwa l'ogo, awo Olooto Eese ti iku fi n pani, Ire ni Amuniwaye fi iku se Omi ti ko san si' wa ti ko san s'ehin A a di omi ogodo Ogodo, omi ibanuje, omi egbin Omi n gbe wa lo rere Omi n gbe wa bo rere Olokunrun ka re'le lo gbawo tuntun bo wa ye (Death after a long happy life is glorious If we live too long and die in poverty and disgrace We achieve nothing but sorrow

But if death comes prematurely, the faithful should accept And give thanks to God for a life well spent Why should man suffer death after all? The Creator bestowed death to human beings as a blessing Life is a stream that flows out and flows back When it flows out; we call it death When it flows back; we call it rebirth A stream that does not flow out and flow back Becomes a stagnant pool full of impurities that threaten good health Without death there can be no rebirth Death carries us away; rebirth brings us back We die as invalids but return in new found health).

Life understood here is like an indestructible atom, and beyond everything. Various called the soul, mind, the Igbos call it Mmuo the Yoruba speak of Emi while the Tiv say it is Uma (heart or soul) whose departure from the body brings about death. Not regarded as definite entities that are immortal or that go to heaven or hell after death, the soul is said to dissolve into collective immortality of the living, into what the Bantu call Ntu; the cosmic universal force, a " thing in itself", which has the capacity to be reborn into another life.

This idea of life argues that any negative behaviour or action on the part of the individual can affect collective living, which will spell doom for the entire human race ??? there is no individual immortality as such because there is no isolated force. But there is the immortality of life force in which the individual life force participates in the advancement of the general common good. The understanding here is that, " life is real, more meaningful when we interact very closely with other human beings.

Such is perhaps the informing African philosophical dictum, " I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am" which find relevant expression among the Tiv thus: Inyon Purugh Kperegh Mon ga (A bird does not fly using one wing). Other forms of African humanistic heritage found in oral texts include songs, folktales, art form and the general African customs. Like names and proverbs, these channels of African humanistic expressions are unanimous in summarizing their basic philosophy, their yearnings, their scale of values into a single proposition, that life is on the top level of their scale of values.

They yearn for life; they are alive to live and live to the full. This most obviously explains why long life is seen as a blessing, and any threat to life is viewed as an aggression against the entire community that must be squarely tackled. We may thus argue like Ehusani (1991: 188-189) that, (i)for the African, human life is the ultimate reality and meaning in creation, and therefore it is something sacred, something to be loved beyond everything else. (ii) the dignity of the human person in the African perception derives from his or her unique relationship with God, and the rest of creation, including the non-physical realities. iii) Africans believe strongly in the <https://assignbuster.com/african-philosophical-humanism-assignment/>

immortality of the human soul ??? a belief that is authenticated by the dynamic relationship the African maintains with his or her ancestor. (iv) the African is prepared to make incredible amount of sacrifice to bring one more human person into existence, to protect a threatened human life, or to share the often scarce spacio-material resources so that one more human person may be. (v) the litmus test of all human behaviour and activity is: does it promote life or does it threaten life? and that human achievement is measured by how much life a person has given, promoted or protected. (vi) making allowance for certain negative elements of African culture and tradition. Such as the treatment meted to childless couples, the fear of, and lynching of witches and wizards etc, would generally find explanation within this preoccupation with human life. It is our belief that the treatment above affords us the philosophical basis for the claim that traditional African culture is decidedly humanistic.

We may add here that, this humanism is buried so deeply in the African psyche that though the raping and pillaging of the African continent in the wake of the slave trade, colonialism, western expansionism and Christian and Islamic evangelism have left contemporary Africa surely wounded, these forces have not succeeded in destroying the humanistic world view of Africans. African communalism is here offered An Ethic of Sustainable Development an alternative axiology to the men and women who today hunger and taste for meaning, who want progress in all regions of human endeavour.

This humanism speaks of human development as the promotion of the good of people, every person and the whole person. Pope John Paul II here speaks <https://assignbuster.com/african-philosophical-humanism-assignment/>

the African mind when he sees human dominion as “ the priority of ethics over technology, the primacy of persons over things, and the superiority of spirit over matter” (John Paul, 1979: 316). A nation is said to be developed when it has succeeded in making its people live together in harmony and unity, in love and justice, in mutual respect, interdependence and peace ??? when it treats its people, especially it disadvantaged group, humanely.

In the African cosmology, the human reality stands in a class of its own, far above any other inhabitant of the universe. It goes without saying therefore that the African sees as utterly degrading, the scientific approach to the human person which sees and treats him as an animal a little separable from the anthropoids. Such understanding of man in relation to issues of development amounts to an abuse of humanity. Thus. he human person in his intrinsic value is not just a bag of flesh and bone, he is a complex being who cannot completely be explained by some laws of physics used to explain inanimate things, and that our world with all its complex and strange phenomena cannot simply be reduced to physics”. Man is more than just an animated lump, mixed with water, he is part of animal, and part of God. The implication of this understanding is that, the African humanistic value system calls for a redefinition of our present notion of development, and a reprioritising of our developmental efforts in a sustainable manner.

Sustainable human development entails a re-humanization of humanity, improving the quality of human life on earth resulting from technology, which new epoch humanity is healed by coming back into its own essence. It is the liberation of man from the negative hold of technology. This is a call for a responsible human environment in which humanity integrates into its

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present actions the responsibility of future generations and the environment. Instead of acting in the tradition of modern science and technology, of exploiting nature in its manner of forcing things to appear which he (man) does not need, instead of dominating nature and ebasing the entire biosphere, humanity could act in the tradition of sustainable development; as sentinels of nature, and help maintain the multifarious delicate webs of the ecosystem that make it function well in a sustainable manner. Thus: We could learn from the bees the manner we serve nature and get its sustenance simultaneously. The more it collects honey from flowers, the more it serves in the propagation of the plants by helping in their fertilization. We could emulate the bees by fulfilling our needs through a similar symbiotic relationship with nature (Kumar, 2000: 2).

Sustainable human development here understood is a cultural synthesis of ideas and values; a morality of human integration, a morality of the full development of the human person in his material and spiritual spheres. It is here referred to as African humanism i. e. philosophy of human development which promotes the good of people, every person and the whole person. It restores meaning and wholeness not just in human community, but in the biotic community. Thus, a scientific civilization qualifies as development when it promotes progress in human personality. (v) Conclusion

We argue in conclusion that, sustainable development ensues when science and technology are consciously nurtured and guided in the spirit of the science of human conduct (i. e. ethics); for science (and technology) without conscience is but ruin of the soul. In addition to material advancement, development has to embrace the soul and spirit of the human person and <https://assignbuster.com/african-philosophical-humanism-assignment/>

the physical environment in which he/she lives and that, ? humanity must therefore learn to organize techno-scientific forces to sustain the complexity and stability of nature while at the same time manage nature for sustainable development. human desires are insatiable though, humanity must be rationally guided to accommodate its desires to the limits nature sets, not to push the limits of nature beyond its capacity for future generation. ? although humanity needs to develop economically and technologically in order to deal with the problem of poverty in which a great majority of human beings still live, humanity, in so doing, must learn to balance short term thinking and immediate gratification with long term thinking for future generations by shifting the balance towards quality rather than quantity.

In addition to material advancement, development has to embrace the soul and the spirit of the human person, of every human person, and the physical environment in which he or she thrives. Development must see the growth and fulfilment of the human person, of every human person, as the goal of progress in science and technology, in economics, in politics, and in religion. Development must be a human fact. It must be more spiritual and cultural than economic and technical.

Development must not just mean “ to have more”; rather it must mean “ to be more”. It must mean an ongoing commitment to advance from the less human conditions of disease, hatred, crime war, racism, poverty, oppression, injustice, corruption, faithlessness, hopelessness, etc, to the more human conditions of health, of love, peaceful co-existence equity, justice, community fellow-feeling, faith and hope. Development must be understood

in its material moral, spiritual, social and environmental dimensions, if it is to be a truly human endeavour.

Thus, the ethic of sustainable development as expressed through African communal ethics presents itself as an alternative axiology to the men and women who today hunger and thirst for meaning in life. The argued conclusion is that, African humanism or African communal ethics is the regulator of scientific technology. The informed position here is that the works of a person's hands should not dominate him or her. As the EBIRA proverb states, Epe o ma godo huna oza ene chire (the okro shrub does not grow taller than the person who planted it).

Yoruba wisdom literature also has it that, A ki i be'gi ninu igbo ki o di oluwa eni, aworan ere ki i n'iyi ju eniti o se e lo (A piece of wood cut from the bush cannot become the master of its carver. An image cannot be more honourable than its maker). The point at issue here is that, the human persons are worth infinitely more, and enjoy an overwhelming superiority over that which they produce or nurture, hence the TIV saying, ka we a tav a kuma zorun atuu ov ga u gber a (if you cannot harvest the okro fruit from the shrub, then you cut it down).

This ethical approach is determined by the full, integral development of the human being as a human being. It is a holistic philosophy of life, of nature which rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in the community whereas his ethics prompts him also to care for,

and cooperate with other members of the biotic community perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for.

For the African, scientific technology is an activity, and as an activity known in Africa (Tiv) as mfe, it is not an uncontrollable phenomenon like the earth's rotation. It is a system of voluntary activities which is amenable to internal or external control but only under the leadership of human knowledge system, norms, values and grounded in wisdom.

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