

On virtuous living

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Abstract

This essay has as its target audience man, and his conduct. This essay is not about that which none has spoken of. This essay is not about that which none has written on. But, the hope is that adding one more voice to these will enable one reach conviction. Or, let it strengthen one's poise if one is already in conviction. In the face of debilitating assault on the moral order, perversion of cherished norms of life, vincible but prevailing ignorance, hijacked religious devotions and failed or inadequate moral standards this study is a proposal on virtuous living. This proposal seeks to redirect attention to a neglected dimension in the search for a moral man, the good life and a humane society. This essay presents the *I AM* or *I- EMPHASIS* principle of virtuous living.

Keywords: Conduct; I Am; I-Emphasis; Moral; Principle; Man; Virtuous; Vice; Virtue; Viceful

Introduction

The religious institution has been bludgeoned and, or bastardized. Citadel of perversion is now almost a synonym for the religious institution. The political institution is no less in a mess. Selfish interests derail the polity. The dreams of *statesmanship* have been dashed. Public coffers are shamelessly drained. Unemployment becomes experience. Robbery comes with violence. Mediocrity is enthroned. Looted funds are stashed away in foreign banks. Citizens become beggars in their own state. Factional wars are fought and rebel groups refuse to yield as those in power refuse to dialogue - the masses' blood, tears and sweat oil their triggers. The youths are leaders of tomorrow but the question is how do they survive today in order to lead tomorrow? Most of them died yesterday. Those remaining are in the main mental wrecks. They have no jobs, no hope. These made them vulnerable. The affluent use them as expendables - they execute their crimes and serve as their shield as they bestride the society.

Look into today's Educational Institutions. In the orchard called educational institution we have sown anomie, relative deprivations etc. and the fruit is bounty. We harvest thugs, cultists, armed robbers, whores, sex-hawkers, etc. How to make children clear qualifying exams and enter universities to read head blowing courses now form special family discussions- the how is nothing but fraudulent.

The canker worm that ate away the fibers and fabrics of our society found its way into the financial institutions not early enough. But it after all did. Banks and banks failed. These banks got distressed. The financial institution became as fraudulent as every other part of the society. Bank staff connived and defrauded the banks, took and/or approved loans they knew would never be repaid. Some were never banks in the first place. But, when a bank fails the people suffer.

In the families, life is no less a mess. The best one can say of most families is that intimate strangers are brought together by circumstances beyond their control. There is a constant need for each and every member of most families to fight for the right of way. The father avoids responsibilities. He indulges the

children to avoid their questioning his ways. The mother does nothing less than that. The deviant young men have fathers. They have mothers too. The armed robber has a father. The triangular equilibrium girls of home-school-prostitution have mothers. Yes! Mothers and fathers who get a fair share of their sons' and daughters' exploit. Families arrange viable relationships for their children. Hammers house of horror - the family institution.

Consequently, this essay has a sole aim. The aim is to propose a new way to virtuous living or a new way towards a life of virtue that is towards the realization of a complete man. The purpose is to showcase a very personal and most effective principle of good life that most effectively can scale over the hurdles that ditched every other initial proposal on principles of good living. If it is the case that error is due to ignorance or madness because nobody is voluntarily evil, then this work is significant in showing that it is the prevailing ignorance of this fundamental principle of morality as here presented that makes anyone contemplate evil at all. This work is also significant in showing that most other principles are difficult if not impossible to implement because they are too impersonal. This is more so when it is realized that judgment always points beyond the self and that nobody points to the direction of his father's village with the left hand.

The materials for this essay have in the main remained extant works on morality, especially those espousing principles of good living. In following up these initial proposals and how they have impacted on the society, observation was also an indispensable source of materials for this essay. The essay has also been presented with a certain degree of analytical or descriptive stress but in the main the method of exposition was embraced to make for a successful presentation of this new way to a virtuous living. Thus, having presented what this essay intends to do and how it is to be done the next section of this essay will be devoted to the clarification of certain terms of this essay.

Viceful Living

The designation of a person as good (just) or as bad (evil) is never based on any single accidental act that is good or bad in nature. A good person is that whose will always disposes toward a morally good life as a matter of habit. Even so it is for the evil person-if disposed toward evil habitually. The introduction has opened our eyes. Life in the society is full of evil. They are *viceful* (a term used in this essay to imply a life full of vices either in terms of individual lives or in terms of the society at large). That is, there is almost a permanent inclination toward evil, which inheres in the will and the sensuous desires and enhanced by repetition.

Naturally vices could be in the forms of (a) excessive estimation of oneself (pride), (b), inordinate love for edibles (gluttony), (c) inordinate love for revenge or unreasonable opposition to a person or a thing (anger), (d) inordinate passion for sexual enjoyment (lust), (e) inordinate passion for worldly things (covetousness), (f) unhappiness induced by other people's good for the fear that such might belittle one's glory and importance (envy) and (g) laziness in body and mind, which result in dereliction of obligations required of one in search of moral goodness (sloth). These are capital vices which find bases in ends which man pursues, which are (a) conceptual ends-honor, fame, etc., (b) personal or bodily ends-food, drink, etc., (c) preserving ends-sex, etc. and (d) material or external ends-wealth, etc. (Bittle, 1950: 269) ^[4]

It costs much the same energy in doing well as in doing bad, if not more. This finds expression in the fact that every person is endowed with passion. That is the strong feeling and push towards action induced by bodily physiological variations especially in the functioning of the affective states. Passion is morally neutral - it works in virtue as it does in vice. Passion confers vices with strength with which vices push the will of man towards acts contrary to reason as operative habits. *Viceful* passions could be as operative habits. *Viceful* passions could be (a) concupiscible desires in the forms of hatred, aversion, and sadness. And (b) irascible desires in the forms of despair, fear and anger.

Viceful life is an evil life, not a life good enough for man. It is not examined life. It is a life of the ignorant. It is a life of insanity. One cannot live a life of evil by choice. It (evil life) is not worth living (Compare Hamilton, Edith and Cairns, Huntington (Ed.), (1973) ^[9], Plato, *Laws*: 5.731c; 2.661d; *Meno*: 77). How must one find his/her way out of bad, evil and *viceful* life? That is, the problem. The answer has been there-the only answer to the problem of a viceful, bad and evil life is a good, right and virtuous life. But, here with you is something unique-a proposal and definition of a new way to a virtuous living. This is a new way indeed.

What Is Virtue

Virtue is the state of one's character, which makes one good – disposes one to doing one's work well. It is that positive quality of one's mind by which one lives righteously and which one cannot misuse. It is one's permanent disposition and wherewithal to perform morally good acts. It is one's operative habit in the form of morally good conduct. Virtue is not a natural endowment. Nobody is born good or bad. Acts, conduct and habits make one good or bad. Virtue is acquired habit as a result of rigorous but rewarding repetition of good or right actions. As a habit, it is killed by prolonged neglect and, or repeated contrary actions. Natural dispositions such as synderesis - "the habitual knowledge of primary moral axioms

or practical principles of moral action which are present in the human intellect" (Bittle, 1950: 683) ^[4] and principle (faculties) are not virtues. They are not operative habits.

Virtue is operative habit. Virtues are habits but not all habits are virtues. Habit is a qualitative attribute. It is relatively permanent. It disposes one as good or bad, well or ill. Habits could be estimative, that is permanent and over all dispositions in condition of living such as deformity or proportional that is physical beauty. These are not habits properly speaking. Habits could also be operative that is shaping and disposing the faculties in their operations. It could be in the forms of talking or looking that is functional beauty, etc. These operative habits presuppose faculties that are indifferent and indeterminate.

Virtue comes from free will as operative habits. Operative habits come from human beings. They - human beings - are not determined, that is predisposed. They are free in their activities, rational desires. Only a free will is capable of operative habits. Properly organized, the intellect depends on the will. The will should define what should be known, seen etc. and not the intellect. The sensitive powers such as sign, imagination and memory, which inform the intellect, considered on their own are not capable of habitual disposition. They become so via the influence of the will.

The will is the subject of virtue. Virtue as an operative habit is in the will. This is because the will is itself an operative power. If virtue is found in any other power as in talking it is in as much as the power of talking is influenced by the will. Human acts are acts governed by the will. And, only human acts become virtues. Sensuous appetencies are never on their own virtues. For instance, temperance in smoking because of miserliness is never an act of virtue. Virtuousness issues only from the good will towards the morally good.

A Life of Virtue

It is only in the will seeking to curb the sensuous appetites and subjecting them to the good control of reason that virtue is realized. Hence, a life of virtue is a life in the good control of reason and rational desire. Moral worth or a life of virtue comes from good will, which loves the morally good and inclines all actions and natural capabilities toward the morally good. The good will's love of the morally good is the key to all life of virtue. A life of virtue is a life in accord with the cardinal virtues. A life of virtue is a life positively disposed to man's other powers as found in the virtuous. These powers in their various kinds can be reduced to four otherwise referred to as the cardinal virtues. These are the virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude. Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle in their works gave these. But, it was Saint Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* 1a 2ae. q. 61, art. 2; 2a 2ae. q. 48) who actually explained why virtues are analyzable into four cardinal points. In his view, (this part of this essay was basically on his discussion of the cardinal virtues) things are numbered either according to their formal principle or their subjects. Formally, when reason defines the good as it relates to itself (that is reason) it is prudence or wisdom-one of the cardinal virtues. When reason puts its order into another thing and this thing into operation we have justice, another cardinal virtue. However reason can order something into operations in the form of passion. That is, passion may thwart reason. This may occur in the form of passion inciting something against reason. This needs to be checked. This check is called temperance-a cardinal virtue. Passions in thwarting reason may also occur in the form of passion working to withdraw one from following

the dictates of reason. Fear and anger for instances. A life of virtue needs to be strengthened for (to be in the defense of) that which reason dictates. This strength comes in the form of fortitude or courage—the fourth of the cardinal virtues.

The four cardinal virtues stand out in terms of their subjects. The power that is rational—prudence or wisdom; the will which is rational by participation—justice; the concupiscible power which is rational by participation—temperance and the irascible power which is rational by participation—fortitude or courage. Each of the cardinal virtues represents a host of other important virtues of similar nature. Every one of the virtues is made up of three parts—the subjective, integral and potential parts. The subjective part of a virtue identifies it and indicates to which cardinal virtue it belongs. The integral part helps complete the action of the virtue in line with the necessary cardinal virtue. The potential (cognate) part or derived part helps cardinal virtues blossom in full activity, it regulates certain activities as occasioned by the uniqueness of the character involved. Let us take a closer look at these components of a life of virtue.

Prudence. This is wisdom. It is primary and the most important of the cardinal virtues. Prudence is not the shrewdness of a businessman aimed at profit maximization. It is not the aptness of the manager of a factory in labor application. It denotes choice of means toward a desire end. Especially, where the means are in no way regimented, prudence inquires into the nature of these ends, judges the best way towards them and gives command to the will to initiate means towards such. It is a relatively permanent feature of the practical intellect. Prudence teaches regulation of its activities for moral goodness. The object of prudence is that which is morally good. Prudence is in epitome, therefore, an intellectual virtue, which empowers one in individual cases to judge correctly what is demanded of him by the moral order.

A prudent life, as a life of virtue, demands one's correct judgment of what is demanded of him by the moral order as regards himself or towards others as its subjects. A prudent life must integrate remembrance, intelligence, docility, reason, foresight, circumspection and caution. A prudent life must potentially be proficient in finding proper means to an end (eubulia), clear decisive judgment (synesis) and higher judgments and finding apt answers to extra-ordinarily difficult problems concerning principles of a higher order which needs mental discernment of judgment (gnome).

Justice. The widest understanding of justice is rendering (without exception, fear or favor) to each and every one his due in all ramifications. In this sense justice has all other virtues in its embrace and smacks of perfection. Justice as a cardinal virtue means rendering unto other rational beings what they rightly demand of one as duly theirs such as right to life, right to privacy, etc. Of this, two restricted meanings could be intuited. One, justice is the case as far as rendering unto others what is their due is concerned. Hence, worship of God, obedience to parents and other constituted authorities and gratitude to benefactors become part of justice.

Two, justice is rendering what is the due in equivalent value which could be general or particular. It is general when it regulates individual actions in a community in relation to the community. This is also called legal justice. It is legal because it is a legislative matter to determine and prescribe what is due to the community from the individual with regard to the common good. The common good (depending on condition and circumstance) commands and stipulates a life of virtue for its members.

Particular justice concerns the individuals as private persons. It regulates an individual's action towards other private individuals. That is, justice in this sense compels individuals in their will to render unto others that which is their due in the equivalent value. In this sense too, particular justice is said to be commutative.

Particular justice can also be distributive that is, it regulates the dealing of the society with its members and guides those in power towards equal sharing of common goods and burdens among members. It also guides members in reacting to such sharing. The subjective parts of justice are commutative justice, distributive justice and legal justice. The potential parts of justice are love of moral truth, gratitude, liberality, affability, fairness, neighborly love, love of God, hope in God, piety or dutifulness and observance.

Temperance. Temperance as a cardinal virtue is not only against lust, gluttony and, or drunkenness. It is generally for the moderation of inner emotions and personal human actions to avoid extremes—excesses and deficiencies. It is a case of training conduct to quit the stage when the ovation is loudest. The watchword of temperance is the mean, which is subjecting desires or appetencies to the regulation of reason.

The cardinal virtue of temperance is not against pleasure. It recognizes pleasure as an essential and necessary aspect of life. It recognizes pleasure as a preserving principle for the individual and the community. If there is no pleasure in eating people will starve and die; so also if sexual behavior lack in pleasure people would shun it which would result in collective demise of the community of man. Temperance requires that pleasure should not be sought as an end in itself but as a means to an end. Accordingly, temperance insists that pleasure must be schooled by reason.

Man is a composite being, at one level he is an animal (in his sensuous capacity) and on the other hand a rational being bestowed with a will that is free. Man is a higher rational being. Reason compels him to live rationally as a human and humane being. He must regulate, moderate and adequately school his appetite.

The cardinal virtue of temperance within the limits of rationality directs the desire of sensible pleasures. The subjective parts of temperance are sobriety (abstinence from too much use of intoxicating drink), chastity (abstinence from illicit sex) and being reserved. The integral parts of temperance are propriety (moderate love and use of beautiful things), and senses of shame and honor. Temperance has its potential parts as self-restraint, humility, clemency (the will to forgive faults and, or alleviate punishment) and modesty (moderation in external exposure as in movement, speech, posture, dress and amusements).

Fortitude. As C.N. Bittle (1950: 265) ^[4] rightly observed the moral life of a man is a continuous battle against evil in all its forms, which goes on uninterruptedly from the age of discretion in childhood until the last minute of life. It is the cardinal virtue of fortitude that sees any moral agent through the trying turbulent times of moral life. It is also known as courage, the right courage—the courage to be. It is the virtue, which guides the will towards over-coming grave dangers and sustaining hardship in the endeavor to pursue and maintain the morally good.

Fortitude is neither cowardice nor rashness. Fortitude does not back out when dangers and difficulties threaten as in cowardice. Cowardice is lack of courage, which results from under-estimation of one's ability. Fortitude does not incline the will to

take unnecessary dangerous risks. This is rashness. Rashness in the will over-estimate the individual's natural strength and, or places too much reliance on it.

Its potential parts are confidence (being calm and collected in the face of dangers and difficulties), magnanimity, magnificence, patience, perseverance and endurance. Fortitude shares regulation of tendencies and emotions emanating from the sensuous appetencies of man with temperance. It is concerned with the realm of pain - temperance with pleasure.

Why A Life of Virtue

Every other day but particularly on Saturdays and Sundays most people converge in places of worship. Much of the deliberations, admonitions, exhortations etc. are around the code - of conduct. That is, we have been told again and again that we need to live a good life because God wants (commands) us as his creatures to live so. Go across religions - traditional religions, Christianity, Islam, etc. the message is that God wants (demands or commands) a good life from man. 'Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect' (NKJV Holy Bible, 1994, MAT. Chapt. 5 v48)^[10], 'blessed are the pure at heart for they shall see God' (NKJV Holy Bible, 1994, MAT. Chapt. 5 v8)^[10], etc. are some of such (Christian) religious exhortations. Several religions remind that man is made in the image and likeness of God and that the body of each individual man is the temple of the most high. Then comes the threat - one is reminded of the last judgment, the anguish of waiting in a purgatory (if he is a Christian) and eventual perpetual anguish and sufferings in hell consequent upon living a bad life, (NKJV Holy Bible, 1994, MAT. Chapt. 19 v41)^[10]. On the aegis of the above religious locutions man has been compelled or admonished to live a good life.

No doubt, every religion embodies a code of conduct. But, no religion claims to know God - they only believe. Believing that God commands and knowing it as such are too different things. More so, which God commands? The one that died on our hand as witnessed to by Nietzsche? (Nietzsche, *The Death of God*). If God really must command he cannot be as arbitrary as one sees in churches today. The many (who are blind) are exploited, robbed, raped and abused - name it, in the religions all in the name of God by a few. Blind they may be but the many have come not to trust God's command. After all, the other day stories made the round of the beautiful lady who went and connived with a 'man of God' who uttered it as God's command that the lady belongs to a man in the church as a wife. Unknown to them the man was married already with children. He then asked them whether God has as such changed his mind over polygamy. Many more questions could be raised on this.

Then, man is reminded of the need to live a good life since he is rational. He is a Homo sapiens. He reasons, thinks - meditates. Man shouts it from roof tops that apart from having been made in the image and likeness of God he is the only creature endowed with reason. Hence reason compels him to live a moral life. Vanity...that man is rational is the source of one of the most crippling vices of man - anthropomorphism, which is an illusion. Being rational may never be enough to sustain man in the line of good life.

Look in the pages of newspaper. Put on the radio. Look out into the street. The absurdities, the atrocities (name them), which we are witnesses to come from the rational man. Man reasons; so he says. He knows that God is love and almighty who no one should avenge for but in the name of religion etc. how many souls have we lost at the hands of the rational man? The wars

in countries, diseases, famine, draught and the general threat to existence as we know it is under the guise of human rationality. No doubt, that man is rational may never be enough reason to compel him to live a good life.

May be, as some others hold, man must live a life of virtue because he lives in human society and as such must be good, but which human society? Is it the society that honors evil, which has enthroned corruption? Is it the society that looks the other way while evil goes on this way? The society has actually lost its grip on the individual. What cannot money do? It can also buy the society. The society cannot make one live a good - a life of virtue.

May be, as some others have argued, the need to be happy compels every man to live a good life - a fascinating idea but totally misunderstood. Happiness is not joy. Happiness is not pleasure. Joy has a slender body that breaks too soon, (Ola Rotimi, 1978: 8). Pleasure belongs more to sensual desires. Both joy and pleasure belong to sensual desires. Both joy and pleasure are material. Happiness is not material. Happiness is life in accordance with perfect virtue (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*: BK I 1098-27).

The true idea of happiness is lost on man. He sees happiness in flashy cars; mind-blowing houses...name them. The rich sometimes cry and long for happiness but finds it not. He looks outwards - happiness is within. His search for happiness in this form never compels him to be of virtue and for it but against it. Why then must one live a virtuous life? My answer as to why one - you and I - should live a life virtue is a simple but very important one. One (has to) should live a life of virtue because one wants to be a complete man. That is to be complete as human being, to be a human person.

Speaking of a life of virtue Shakespeare wrote of the character Brutus in 'Julius Caesar' (Act V Scene V 73-75, P. 845), that 'the elements so mixed in him that nature could stand up and say to the world this was a man' - it is so with every man of virtue.

The African measures human person by the standard of virtue the one attained. Life of virtue begets for one a good certificate on dying. While alive a life of virtue brings respect, reverence and honor. Only a man who lives a life of virtue can feel complete. A vice - even one - creates a vacuum in the man. It makes one incomplete, no doubt. Hence, the African as he lives must always atone for vices. In the African's life as the final hour approaches for one to pass on one continued to feel incomplete until one must have divulged all vices. The Christians are no less so. Some go for confessions; others make atonement in other various ways. Every man expectedly sees himself - one's incompleteness would find one out.

It is only a clear conscience that fears no accusation. Only a container filled with water can be steady - the one half-filled shakes once it is disturbed. The elderly are never comfortable when dry bones are mentioned. Man strives for a life of virtue mainly because he wants to be complete as a man - only that makes him steady and never afraid. Only a complete man can shout, can be bold - the guilty is always afraid. Except that crime begets crimes, one who has a viceful life is incomplete and shuns public engagements such as politicking. The complete man walks about freely - his completeness (life of virtue) is his protection.

Vices create certain emptiness inside of a man thereby making of such a man an incomplete creature. Only a life of virtue can make one completely a man. It is only a complete man who recognizes God's command. It is only a complete man who can

properly situate reasoning and know when reasoning is a right one. It is only complete man who knows when it is right to conform to societal norms and dictates and when not to, even at the peril of death. It is only a complete man who knows the true meaning of happiness and how to go about it.

The Way to A Life Of Virtue

Many people are prone to the thinking that being religious is equal to being virtuous. No wonder much shock is expressed if a religious man who is viceful is found. However, whether one understands religion as a social institution that has a cult, a creed and a code (O'Connor, 1958: 46) ^[14] or as the sum of duties obliging man to render honor and homage to Supreme Being as the creator and sustainer of the universe (Bittle, 1950: 330) ^[4], it must also be clearly understood that religion is personal, and a belief.

Even the angels eat beans. The most pious looking could be as viceful as any other. The cloak never makes a monk. The *religious-immoral* abounds just as we have *moral-irreligious*. Most of those who are armed-robbers, hired-assassins, arsonists, pen-robbers, extortionists, and embezzlers are never irreligious.

Even inside the churches we hear them pray for corruption to cease in the society, praying to God may be to beg man to stop being corrupt. Remark also that those who induce wars, disturbances are never irreligious. Religion has become too political, too weak (by circumstance) to be a good guide to the complete man, which man is in search of through religion. Religion is now looked upon mainly as a political ladder, economic enterprise, sectional interest and, or a social status symbol.

The other way people have looked upon, as a good guide to a life of virtue, which makes a complete man, is societal measures. This is so, according to them, because since man is man in society he must live, as the society desires. Meeting up with and living up to the desires of society is, therefore, regarded as the life of virtue that realizes the complete man. And, for the society to meet its desires, it must strategically form its citizens.

It was Shagari administration in Nigeria that enunciated the ethical revolution between 1979 and 1983, when his government was over thrown. Then came Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon (now late). This duo unleashed a drastic approach to a life of virtue - the War Against Indiscipline (WAI 1983). But, during Babangida administration, which succeeded Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon administration the brute force with which dressing and work ethics were being enforced were slackened. During Abacha's regime it was turned into War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC). Now it is National Orientation Agency. They were (are all) political.

They all failed for two major reasons. One, they appealed to force which made them non-prescriptive as ethical injunctions should be. Two, they were based on laws - which we have always been reminded is an ass. Every law creates loopholes for those bigger than it to escape.

Philosophers of repute have been handy with ways to a life of virtue, which make the complete man. Some have said that it is through the golden rule principle - do unto others, as you would want others to do unto you (Hospers, 1973) ^[11]. It fails because it does not make clear the virtue to be pursued. More so, the principle is too objective.

Immanuel Kant led the way to the principle of realizing what, according to him, is the man of good will (the virtuous man),

(Kant, 1958: 267-270) ^[12]. This he did in his 'categorical imperative'. By this, he held that the way to a life of virtue is to so live that by one's own free will one can vouch that such becomes a rule of life. This was projected in characteristically Kantian way but it still has some failings. This principle is too subjective. More so, certain maxims of virtuous living cannot be universalized. It is likely to be partial.

The conscience has also been put forward as a good way to the life of virtue, (Fromm, 1958: 147) ^[7]. This has also been severally and severely faulted. If some people, no doubt, have no conscience how then would conscience as a way to good life account for such? Others possess consciences that are authoritarian that are not theirs' - they are voices of internalized external authorities. These voices are the parents, desires, the state, the church, etc. More so, the many and varied meanings of the conscience makes it a vague principle.

Other philosophers, especially the medieval school, have held that the right and surest way to the life of virtue, which realizes the complete man is right reason. This is so for them in so far as man is rational. Straight from the cove, one knows that right reason, as a principle is vague. It varies from individual to individual. It is highly subjective. Right reason leads one person to threaten another's life. Men who reason rightly have unleashed terror, war and pestilence on other fellow men. Nigeria is corrupt. Nigeria has, in riches, unemployment. Nigeria has religious upheavals - all this in the name of people who are believed and held to be able to reason rightly.

The African would in his philosophy refer to the customs. They think that customs can surely guide man to a life of virtue. But urbanization has robbed most people of contact with their customs. Most middle-aged people were not born in communities where customs prevail. They are ignorant of the so-called customs. Customs vary from place to place and are arbitrary. What one custom upholds another custom bans. Customs in some cases are out of fashion with modern issues bothering on the good life of man - as man. Society is dynamic; customs don't keep pace with modernity. More so, some customs are too barbaric to be still upheld. For instance, certain customs arbitrarily press down on women, children and the poor against the fundamental human rights of man as man.

What then is the way to a life of virtue? The surest way to a life of virtue, which solely can realize the complete man, is the *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle. No principle can be more crediting to the preceding analysis than *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle. This is the only befitting and re-assuring way to a life of virtue. This principle and approach to a life of virtue refers to conscious personal emphasis in choosing the way of life. That is, an understanding of the fact that I shape the world through my choices, that existence is what I make it. *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle makes it clear that existence is like my bed - as I make it so I lie on it. *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle makes it clear that whatever one sows so one reaps. Let me render in clarity *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle.

Let it be here remarked that apart from the different ways in which the previous ways to a life of virtue have been faulted that they are generally faulty. They talk about "they, them, and we". They are couched in the impersonal. They are not as such definite and concrete in enunciation and application. The way to a life of virtue, which is to realize the complete man, should not be impersonal. More so, it must be concrete and definite.

The way to a complete man must be individual centered. It must be realized that if the country, the state, the town, the community and the home must be good I must be good. If I am

not good my church cannot be good. If I am not good my school, my work place, my friends, my business, my politics cannot be good. Let it not apply here the idea of judgment pointing beyond the self. Do not send for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for you. I, the individual should be the center and central focus of strives towards a life of virtue, which alone can grant complete man (Confucius, *Analects II, 1*).

When I, the individual, become the center of focus, I can then ask the question: do I know myself? It is a very important question. It calls on the individual to examine himself. Following Socrates (Hamilton and Cairns (1973)^[9], Plato, The Dialogues: Apol. 38a) one is induced to realize that unexamined life is not human life at all since it is not a life worth living. Let it be realized that error, evil, viceful life, the life that makes one incomplete as a man is due either to ignorance or madness. Nobody can by choice be viceful. Only knowledge of the self can lead one aptly to heed the call that one should examine his ways and return to good life.

It is only on the strength of knowledge of the self that I can choose correctly. But remark and remember that the choices I make is not only for myself alone but also for all. If I choose to be evil the society becomes evil; if I choose to be good the society will be good. Why do I say that my friends cheat if I am not a cheat? The lesson in this is adamant - the measure I give is the measure I get. As a tree stands so it falls. Birds of the same feather flock together. I shall not judge so that I am not judged. *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle carries a push and a pull akin to the Kantian categorical imperative

I AM or I-EMPHASIS principle urges the individual to choose the good - it is the only way. However, it is not easy and simple. Think of how I would suffer if I were truthful, sincere and upright. The good as a choice could be a threat to life. The student who is sincere, honest and upright has many odds to contend with; the politician who is truthful, sincere and upright must be in for troubles. The civil servant that refuses to be party to corruption finds any office a hard place to be.

Thus, in choosing the good I must be persevering, be strong and not be cowed by the evil in its apparent successes. They (viceful men and viceful acts) are empty spaces that make much noise. Virtuous presence is the greatest threat against the evil and the viceful. But this is only if I persevere. *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle is the way. It is the surest way, the rock of Gibraltar if you do not mind. It is the narrow road that leads to bliss, to the heart of the society, to God and to reason.

To the persevering one who upholds *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle it must be put that the raging cloud shall not long be victorious - it will not possess the sky for too long (Wa'Thiongo, 1985: ii). In the immediate doing good perseveringly makes the trader think he loses money, makes the politician think he loses opportunities, makes the student think he fails severally; makes the civil servant think he suffers. But, in the long run the good stands towering over evil and the viceful must run for cover or be shattered by the brightness of completeness. Then one is envied who is complete.

Persevering in choosing the good makes one shine forth like the light, which shatters darkness. Only persevering in choosing the good brings happiness, fits one into his society, makes one obedient to God's command (if one believes in God) and makes one rational in the right way. These are the major components of the complete man.

Moreover, *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle is being conscious of retributive justice. The barest fact of life is that the most necessary things of existence come to man free. But, how free

they are could better be appreciated via the consequences that follow upon violation of laws governing such things in their uses.

Remarkably, such free but monumentally important things of nature are the laws of nature or natural laws. The knowledge of such laws is given to man. One does not need any formal education to realize them. The truth, if one must be frank, is that formal education often times instead leads one away from the proper knowledge of such laws. One of these natural laws is the law of retributive justice. What is this law?

If you (as I do) accept, understand and see justice in the platonic tradition ((Hamilton and Cairns (1973)^[9], Plato, The Dialogues: Ib I. 332 sq., 336a; Rep. 4.445a sq., 9.589 sq.) then it means that each and every individual must get or give what is due to or from him or her. This has two main ambits-it is either retributive (getting) or distributive (giving). The law of retributive justice is of concern to me here.

The law of retributive justice has been variously expressed. Some have expressed it as the law of Karma. Others have called it the law of sowing and reaping (that is that what one sows that one reaps). Thus, the epitome is that the law refers to the retribution, boomeranging or inevitable coming back to one of the consequences, and results of every action that one takes. Time is no barrier to this law. Not even, space can hinder it; the ancient religions of the Far East are efficient in their emphasis on this law.

I AM or I-EMPHASIS principle is remarkably emphasizing the fact that one is free to regard as peccadilloes one's transgressions or vices but that every act viceful or virtuous must have recompense. Every laborer deserves his wages. It is I who must get the wages of my labor. The Christians would say that the wages of sin is death. It is the soul that sins which dies (NKJV Holy Bible, 1994, LK. Chapt. 13 vs 3; 5)^[10]. However, *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle further holds that the individual is responsible for everything that happens to him or her and, or to the generality of the society. This is because the result of his actions always affects others positively or negatively - it must. What I call the parable of the gullies would render in clarity the foregoing.

The liturgy of the parable of the gullies is simple. If one remembers that nature abhors vacuums then one is close to, if not in, what I want to emphasize. When complex and simple-in-design houses keep sprouting moment to moment in our cities one wonders whether these are due to magic of faith. No doubt, one has been told time and again that having faith as tiny as the mustard seed can make one move maintains (NKJV Holy Bible, 1994, MAT. Chapt. 21 vs 21-22)^[10] but one is mistaken to think so in the case of these gullies. Take a closer look at these ever widening gullies and think.

If the cities continuously get filled with bungalows and duplexes then where does the sand, stones and woods for their construction come from. I shudder even to think or to talk of all other sky scrapping houses and many more buildings of all forms and culture.

As projects such as roads, houses etc, put up at whooping costs continue to cave-in, the blame should go to man who indiscriminately use the resources of nature with wanton recklessness. These spectacles of devastating gullies are indications of what one has seen and what one is sure to see in the very short near future-the resultant effect of man's unrelenting transgressions on the poor mute piece called land. Man has sown houses etc. and he reaps gullies, landslides etc.

I know I would not like these gullies to threaten my house etc. However, needless to waste poor taxpayers' money on gigantic projects to arrest and restore erosion sites - such are wild geese chase and white elephant projects. However it has a cure-a sure panacea. But, to some this cure might be too acidic and nasty to contemplate. This cure is that all mind-blowing, magnificent edifices and paraphernalia of buildings born out of man's greed and aggressively destructive tendencies be demolished and used to fill the gullies since they were taken from these gullies. I do not think it matters how one feels about this panacea. Man either does it or it has to be done for him by nature itself but obviously at extra costs.

Going by the above parable, as I (an individual) continue to choose vices every other person follows me. Or, I choose for every other person. The resultant effect is that these negative choices of mine (for us) becomes the way of life of everybody else and begins to fundamentally threaten our very existence and mine. The cure is not only to put them away as vices but also to give back all proceeds from viceful acts. If I would not on my own, it would be done for me by nature and the society (and I) could be wasted in the process.

Let me look at *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle as conscious existence. In this sense I mean to be understood, the society is in a moral mess. What is the way out? "Bring the lamp", shouted a blind man. "Are you crazy?" retorted a mad man. The absurdity in the above is evident and obvious. The blind and the mad men above have privations such as would make it inimical and mockery of self for them to have made such pronouncements. But then, they were as serious as we heard them.

Almost every member of the society like the blind man calls for a lamp though he is blind, that is, for moral excellence though he himself lacks it. But, instead of beginning with himself he thinks the problem is out there in the other: in "them". It is in this sense that everybody almost thinks of the moral vices in the society. "The problem is not with me", everybody thinks.

This is why realization of a complete man through a life of virtue has been elusive, why the war against immorality has not worked for us. The reasons for the failure are to be found in the formulation, that is, the form as well as in the approach to the principle of good life, virtuous living. The answer I think to our moral mess - the only way to a life of virtue - is in the proper formulation of the moral theory as well as in a well-fashioned approach, hence, *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle. More so, *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle as conscious existence is the right approach.

I AM or I-EMPHASIS principle as conscious existence is very much akin to existentialism: "a collective term for several philosophical currents that take man's existential situation as their point of departure", (Gaarder, 1997: 455) ^[8] which attempts to make man aware of certain basic realities of life. The conscious existence approach also seeks to magnify for clarity the difficulty in pursuing a life of virtue. In *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle as conscious existence, solution to moral questions becomes possible only if one is conscious of the need for a life of virtue and the difficulty of staying on course to this virtuous living.

One can regard as certain basic tenets of this conscious existence approach the facts that the individual shapes his society through his choice and that a complete man can never be a product of a viceful society. Thus, conscious existence approach is the best medium for any attempt at re-directing our moral sense.

Existentialism and its founder, Soren Kierkegaard (Popkin and Stroll, 1993: 302-303) ^[15] are both younger than Socrates of Greece who by extension could also be regarded as one. But, in actual sense Socrates upheld the *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle as evidenced in his unyielding exhortation of man on the need for every man to be a conscious existent. Upholding the conscious existence approach he urged man, the individual man, to know himself. In his view, an unexamined life is not worth living (Hamilton and Cairns (1973) ^[9], Plato, The Dialogues: Apol. 38a). This is because only ignorance or madness would make one prefer viceful to virtuous living. Only conscious existent examines his life: tries to vitiate slumbering or ignorance in issues of good life. Thus, conscious existence stresses true patriotism, true perseverance and other aspects of virtuous life. No doubt, I could be good or bad to any degree as my will disposes me but rarely would any moral agent who is conscious of his existence be evil, bad and, or viceful. In conscious existence the individual should be able to point at oneself and say, "I am this active conscious existent who must and recreate the society and whose completeness or otherwise depends on the society I create". I am whatever I want the society to be.

That is to say that under conscious existence awareness is created in the individual that his choices are cardinal and irrevocable and that he must continue choosing - for himself and for the society. What the society is, her collective being depends on I, the individual. Unfortunately one cannot refuse to make these choices, one cannot separate himself from the society in which he exists. "I am in it because I am involved, not a spectator", a conscious existent should always say.

Individuals should approach moral issues without thinking that private inclinations matter only a little, feeling that after all these are only personal choices. This sort of nonchalance is costly. It does not matter only a little but much. If I choose for myself it is at the same time for the society at-large. Isolated, private and as individual as the choices might look - they are based on a simple but important law, the measure you give is the measure you get - the law of reciprocity.

But, the majority of individuals are not aware, they are not conscious existents - they would prefer not to choose at all. These are unconscious, indifferent, unconcerned and passive. They are those wishing it to pass by every moral issue that craves their choice. Not only that in not choosing that they have been chosen for but that refusing to choose is a choice all the same. Do not as an individual wait to be chosen for. Do not refuse to choose (the good). Move away from indecision and I do-not-care attitude in moral questions. Do not ever think that they are not personal or immediate - do not be nonchalant.

I Lieu of A Conclusion

A life of virtue which makes a complete man is never a gift on a platter of gold, it is a sort of struggle. It involves difficulties. Thus, no matter how put, *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle as most other principles comes under the negative influence of fear. This becomes manifest as conscious existents make their choices. Fear accompanies individuals as they make for completeness through virtuous living. Man, the individual re-affirms it through his acts in life. Fear is anxiety and dread of that which one is aware of its imminence but is yet to know or experience.

Viceful life in the society to a large extent finds basis in fear. Corruption, embezzlement, pen and armed robbery, political crimes and derailment of religious and other social values are

traceable to fear. That is to say that the public servant who on appointment steals large chunks of funds from the public coffers is only manifesting his fear of becoming wretched again after such a glorified office. The armed robber is afraid of being forgotten; he wants to belong. Not making it as a result of personal lack of acumen or societal dereliction the armed robber takes by force of arms what others have got so as to ride cars, carry on with expensive and ostentatious life; belong and be recognized. These show signs of dread. Also the businessman who makes or markets fake products is afraid of remaining poor - he manifests this in his anxiety to move away from poverty. This also leads to most ritual murders, etc. as rampant today. It is because of short-term benefits, which assuage fear that individuals find it easier to be bad than to be good. Goodness, life of virtue (the complete man) is cultivated and nurtured patiently until it matures. As earlier said, becoming a complete man (a life of virtue) needs perseverance, courage and determination.

In a morally degenerate society a life of virtue could be highly difficult, it involves much fear - it is as dreadful as it is anxiety ridden. There is no doubt about this. This is because amongst many, an individual could be a lone ranger for moral excellence - a situation under which the individual is possibly cowed or coerced into believing that he or she is odd. Such individual would encounter reproaches, abuses and assault. Even in extreme cases definite threats and attempts are made on the individual's life.

Fear can make an individual (though conscious of his existence) bow out. But this fear could be put in check by the right cardinal virtues. They, the viceful, are odd; the virtuous is not. They, the viceful are minority; the virtuous is majority. One with virtue, one complete man is greater compared to a thousand (a million) viceful men.

Do not be dumb-founded. Do not get stuck. Truth is normally stranger than fiction. If one in every thousand in the society could be virtuous the rapid transformation of the society would prove the efficacy of *I AM or I-EMPHASIS* principle as expressed in the awareness of retributive justice and conscious personal existence.

Lacking in the required courage, wisdom (knowing and choosing rightly) might make one to despair in the striving for a life of virtue with a view to realizing a complete man in the face of fear. However, despair should not be anybody's portion; despair is a resting house of the weak in the face of difficulties. It is a mark of unconscious existence - to despair in the face fear. Fear as above expressed makes virtuous living in a morally degenerate society a high degree risky venture. One willing to be virtuous risks all at the hands of the viceful and, as the case may be, dread public display of virtue, but because life is valuable only when good (Hamilton and Cairns (1973)^[9], Plato, The Dialogues: Crito 48b; Laws 2.661b sq. 4.707d) I adjure, "may fear never be anybody's portion." Say it. Repeat it - again and again - to yourself and anybody around you.

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