H. Odera Oruka and the Right to a Human Minimum: A Sagacious Quest for Global Justice

Michael Kamau Mburu

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H. ODERA ORUKA AND THE RIGHT TO A HUMAN MINIMUM:

_A SAGACIOUS QUEST FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE_

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Mburu Kamau Michael

May 2018
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ABSTRACT

H. ODERA ORUKA AND THE RIGHT TO A HUMAN MINIMUM:

A SAGACIOUS QUEST FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE

By

Mburu Kamau Michael

May 2018

Dissertation Supervised by Professor Ronald Polansky

This dissertation primarily aims at making contribution to the advancement of philosophy from the practical point of view. It does so by analytically and critically studying H. Odera Oruka (1944-1995), arguably one of the finest 20th century African philosophers. Thus, it identifies, expounds, and critiques Oruka’s philosophical cum ethical commitment by situating him within various philosophical discourses touching such important global issues as justice, human rights, duty, ecology, and politics. It specifically advances Oruka’s argument for the right to a human minimum, showing how that ethical principle can be applicable in addressing such traumatic human conditions as inequality, poverty, inhumanness and ecological degradation. It also attempts to borrow and apply some ethical values from Africa – such as ubuntu (or humanness) - so as to clarify and philosophically defend the possibility of ensuring justice at the global level.

Key words: Odera Oruka, sagacity, right, duty, human minimum, ecology, global justice, ubuntu.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late dadi Peter Mburu and my mami - Margaret Mburu, who with love and care taught me basic existential and ethical principles within a rather challenging environment.

I also dedicate it to all who value human dignity, those who cherish wisdom and work for justice.
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Last, but not least, I am deeply indebted to my family members, lectures, colleagues, and all my friends; the list is too long to mention each one by name. Your immense contribution, support, and concern during this rather turbulent and perhaps most challenging enterprise in my life remain dynamically indescribable. Thank you so much, and may God bless you!
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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Philosophy can be etymologically defined as “love of wisdom”. That means philosophy, at least from the practical point of view, is inevitably tied with issues of justice; where justice means ensuring both egalitarian and ecological fairness. This is because wisdom or sagacity - the object of philosophy - is a human quality that enables one to utilize knowledge of his or her tradition and modernity for the purpose of making reasonable, mature, and objective judgments about life, human relations, and the environment (Oruka 1991, 40). Thus, philosophy so defined as “love of wisdom” is supposed to confer insight, knowledge, and ethical inspiration so that we humans are able to relate “healthily” not only with each other but also with our environment. Philosophy, in other words, ought to make us not only knowledgeable and critical but also reasonable and mature, and hence ethically responsible as moral agents.

Unfortunately, that has not always been the case. Despite various ideologies prompted by the rise in clamour for justice at the global level, socio-economic inequality and hence poverty – the bedrock of human misery - remains a thorny issue. The scary gap between the rich and the poor (be they individual persons or nation-states) sadly continues escalating as the few rich and strong mercilessly exploit world resources to the detriment of majority of the poor and vulnerable. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), for instance, the richest 10% of the world population earns 9.6 times the income of the poorest 10% combined (Reuben 2015). Further reports indicate that between 2015 - 2017, over 800 million people in the world were living in abject poverty, earning less than $ 2.00 per day (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina 2018).
But such pathetic situation is, no doubt, a real threat to the security and quality of human life. It is a grave form of injustice to humanity that needs to be addressed with urgency.

Indeed, socio-economic deprivation (often caused by greed), among other forms of human peril, is an “evil” that cannot be ignored; it is a real threat to both humanity and the entire universe. It adversely affects people’s rationality, creativity and ability to function as moral agents, thereby jeopardizing human dignity¹ and integrity. It also threatens global security and harmonious co-existence with Nature. Thus, we urgently need a philosophy that would address a rather difficult but legitimate question: what do we fundamentally need as humans to eradicate poverty in the world, thereby enhance people’s rationality, creativity, and ability to function as moral agents? This is a question in search of the human minimum; it forms the basis of my study.

There are some other important questions that may inevitably come to mind if one were to critically reflect upon the issue of poverty vis-à-vis the desire to have justice at the global level. First, is it ethically justifiable for some few people to exuberantly exploit world resources, and hence “suffocate” in luxurious affluence while millions of others languish in abject poverty? Put differently, is the “world order” fair to the global poor? Third, what ought to be done to alleviate this dire situation (socio-economic exploitation and hence poverty), thereby ensuring decent living and hence possibility of “happiness” to the majority if not everyone?

Now these and other intriguing questions, to me, seem to boil down to one fundamental ethical concern: don’t we (humans) have any duty to ensure that every human being in the world, 

¹ I use the term “dignity” here and throughout the project to denote that special “inner worth” associated with human species by virtue of them being rational, and hence having capacity to function as moral agents. It is that condition under which humans ought to be treated as an end in itself rather than means (cf. Kant 4:435). Thus, it is the basis of valuing human life; it is also the basis of respect, entitlement or rights, and empowerment of an individual person.
by virtue of being human, has at least the right to basic human needs met? That concern, in my view, would set the stage for the possibility of having justice at the global level.

1.2. Hypothesis

In response to the above questions, this project seeks to advance a hypothesis that the right to a human minimum, an ethical principle Odera Oruka ingeniously crafted, is the basic necessary (though not sufficient) means to ensuring a genuine practice of justice at the global level. Adhering to the ethical principle of human minimum, in other words, is what we would fundamentally need at the global level to reduce socio-economic inequality, eradicate poverty, and so enhance people’s rationality, creativity, and ability to function as moral agents. I will elaborate what constitutes the right to a human minimum, and demonstrate why it should never be denied to any member of the human species if we are to develop a much more “humanised” global society, i.e., a society in which one would feel more secured, dignified, taken care of, and motivated to act as an ethically responsible being irrespective of one’s domicile.

I further intend to show how the ethical principle of human minimum elicits what we might call “correlative global duty” that binds every capable moral agent. My argument with Oruka will be grounded on one basic sagacity that demand of us humans (who presumably are rational beings) to be ethically responsible to the wellbeing of each other our geographical, racial, gender, or any other sectarian affiliations notwithstanding. But that sagacity also prompts us to take good care of our environment, even as we pursue what we think is justifiably due to us (as our rights). And that, to me, would hopefully lead us toward a much better concept of global justice: one that does not only emphasize egalitarian fairness in human relations but also ecological fairness with Nature.
1.3. Commitment to Practical Philosophy

Henry Odera Oruka (1944-1995) is arguably one of the finest Africa philosophers in the twentieth century. Born and raised in the Western part of Kenya before undertaking graduate studies in Sweden and the United States, Oruka rose academically to earn for himself international repute. As a critical thinker, astute scholar, proficient author and a distinguished don, Odera Oruka was committed to making African philosophy a topic for global philosophical inquiry. He took this as a first step toward seeking justice for his people. Like other contemporary African philosophers – such as Hountondji, Wiredu, Masolo, Mudimbe, Gyekeye, Appiah, etc., Oruka’s work has also opened new ways of philosophizing in modern Africa beyond the polemical question of the nature and the content of African philosophy.

Odera Oruka is, no doubt, well known for his Sage Philosophy; a project that almost single-handedly turned the University of Nairobi where he was based into a hub of “philosophic sagacity”, a globally recognized school of thought. But, unfortunately less known (though in my view most important) is Oruka’s practical philosophy, especially his ethical thought. He believed that any philosophy worthy of its name ought to be sagacious, meaning it ought to be practically relevant to the wellbeing of humanity and the environment. Hence, at the heart of his practical philosophy was ethics, which he regards as a philosophical inquiry into the moral language and principles that govern or ought to govern the conduct of human beings (who are supposedly moral agents) as well as determine their role, value and dignity in a society (Oruka 1990b, 3).

1.4. Background to the Project

Odera Oruka’s proficiency in writing surprises many. At the time of his untimely death (he was hit by a lorry in one of the streets of Nairobi aged 51 years old), Oruka had published at least
six books and co-authored three. In addition, he wrote over fifty academic essays, many of which have been published in local and international newspapers, journals, and books. His writings, most of which are quite enticing to read, were mainly focused on such practical topics as sagacity, ethics, justice, humanism, liberty, politics, economics, eco-philosophy, etc.  

Now out of the six books he authored, Oruka is arguably best known for *Sage Philosophy* (1990/91), a book many consider to be his most epic contribution to philosophy. It continues to draw interesting academic discussions from scholars not only in Africa but also in America, Europe, and Asia. As Graness aptly points out, *Sage Philosophy* has “opened a new perspective on the Eurocentric history of philosophy and African history as such”, leading to “a new discussion about the origins of philosophical thinking”. It is therefore “an important contribution to the reconstruction of the history of world philosophy” (Graness and Kresse 1997, 247). Indeed, several dissertations and many academic papers have been written and published on *Sage Philosophy*.

There is, however, another book by Professor Oruka that I consider invaluably resourceful not only to my project but also to anyone committed to the issue of global justice, i.e., to advancing socio-economic fairness to humanity without jeopardizing the environment. This work entitled *Practical Philosophy: In Search for an Ethical Minimum* was published posthumously in 1997, dedicated to future thinkers and those who work for justice and a better environment (Oruka 1997, x). It is a collection of some of Oruka’s essays that had been previously published over a span of twenty years: probably from 1976 to 1995.

As we learn from the introduction, these were the essays Oruka himself had selected and was critically revising in view of publishing them as a book before his untimely death. And in my

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2 For a complete bibliography of Oruka’s works, see Graness and Kresse 1997, 261-65.
view, these were essays that Oruka thought would fittingly define his philosophy as a sagacious inquiry into human predicaments. He seems to have envisioned a kind of philosophy that would be more relevantly attuned to not only enlightening the mind of his audience, but also provide practical possible solutions that would help improve the socio-economic wellbeing of humanity as such without causing havoc to the environment.

1.5. Significance of the Project

Oruka’s *Practical Philosophy* is divided into four parts, namely, i) The Issue of Truth and Truth in Faith; ii) Values, Ideology and Praxis; iii) African Philosophy and the Problem of Culture; and iv), Philosophy, Ethics and the Environment. In this project, we focus mainly on the second and fourth parts. As Oruka aptly writes, these two parts contain “essays that purport to be critical of matters of ethics and values in social life and politics” (Oruka 1997, xi). They address pertinent issues of poverty, underdevelopment, freedom, socio-economic injustice, inhumaness, and environmental degradation, just to mention a few (cf. Oruka 1997 101, 106, 138, 243).

These are, no doubt, issues of great global concern; they are important to both humanity and the entire world. As a philosopher with a practical inclination, Odera Oruka felt the need to first address these issues as a matter of urgent moral imperative so as help improve the world for better human existence. He likewise challenges other philosophers and thinkers to do the same. In one of his fascinating essays addressing the issue of global irresponsibility he writes:

This concern [i.e., global irresponsibility] calls for philosophers to help reorganize and rationalize the available knowledge in order to improve human understanding and the welfare of mankind. And here lies the moral mission of philosophy. In our times it is more urgent than the concern, say, to develop new methods of solving classical metaphysical paradoxes (Oruka 1997, 99).
This project aims at responding to that moral imperative urgency by critically analysing some of the issues mentioned above. But that does not mean that we disregard metaphysics and other “classical” branches of philosophy. Rather, we simply want to develop a philosophy that is sagaciously concerned about humanity’s wellbeing in our quest for a global society, a society that is essentially both egalitarian and communitarian oriented. Such a society, we argue, must be inspired and guided by some ethical principles, such as the right to a human minimum.

As we shall see, the concept of human minimum is one of the central principles in Oruka’s practical philosophy; it either explicitly or implicitly cuts across the issues mentioned above, especially as he seeks a genuine practice of justice at the global level. Indeed, it was because of his commitment to humanism or humanness (i.e., an ethical concern for the wellbeing of humanity as such and the environment) that Odera Oruka believed every human person being entitled to some basic needs: physical security, subsistence, and health care. These three basic needs together constitute what Oruka dubs the right to a human minimum. He subsequently claims that global society, insofar as it is as reasonable as it ought to be, has the ethical duty to ensure or facilitate the enjoyment of that right (the three basic needs) to every member of the human species their geographical, racial, gender, or any other sectarian affiliation notwithstanding. In fact, Oruka would further vest that ethical duty to every capable individual person within the global society.

To get Oruka’s argument, it is perhaps important to briefly talk about ‘right’: what it is or ought to be. Now right can be defined as that which one is justifiably entitled to insofar as one is human. It is therefore “the rational basis for a justified demand” of something that is fairly due (Oruka 1997, 85). And the enjoyment of that something - i.e., the substance of a right in question - is what matters most. It is what confers the “moral worth” to a right in question. But rights are
not of the same status. There are those considered inherent to human existence (such as the ‘right to life’), and those considered rights *prima facie*, for instance the ‘right to freedom of speech’.

Now with that distinction in mind, we can posit that the most basic “thing” a human being can justifiably demand and is entitled to enjoy insofar as one is human includes: (i) physical security, (ii) subsistence and (iii) health care. These three “things” are fairly necessary (though not sufficient) to sustain human life. Without one of them or all of them, human life becomes fundamentally untenable. That is why Oruka refers to the three basic necessities together as *the right to a human minimum*. It is a right that is so basic and “primitive” to sustaining human life at the minimum level. That means the enjoyment of its substantive elements (the three basic needs) every human is necessarily entitled to by virtue of them being members of the human species.

It follows, therefore, that *the right to a human minimum* is the basis of all other human entitlements in principle empowers every human being, insofar as one is human, to make a justified demand for the three basic necessities so as to lead a fairly decent life worthy of a human person. And as an ethical principle, *the human minimum* is also the basis for establishing a necessary global duty that ought to make every human person, every capable moral agent feels ethically inspired to fulfil or enable others to enjoy the basic needs. Thus, as we shall see later, adhering to the demands of *the right to a human minimum* is the first most basic prerequisite for establishing global justice - understood not only in terms of ensuring ‘egalitarian fairness’ but also ‘ecological fairness’.

Put differently, *the right to a human minimum*, as an ethical principle, can be said to confer a necessary global *ethical duty* to us humans (who presumably are the only rational beings on earth) to take care of each other without overexploiting the environment. That would, however, imply two things: (i) that we all strive to use world resources in a more responsible manner; and
(ii) that we all strive to share or distribute world resources more equitably for the common good. These two ethical values, I think, would lead us to a genuine practice of justice at the global level. They would, in other words, lead us toward an egalitarian global society.

This is another crucial point that this project wishes to underscore. An egalitarian society, we can say, is that society governed by some objectively chosen ethical principles that treat every member as equal, with dignity and respect of a human person. Such principles take humankind as an end in itself. In other words, they dignify life in every human being by ensuring a decent livelihood for all. Thus, an egalitarian society always strives to improve the living conditions of its members regardless of their sectorial differences. To put it differently, in an egalitarian society, there is no room for exploitation; there is, instead, equitable opportunities for all members to work together to improve their socio-economic wellbeing.

Nonetheless, that does not mean every member within an egalitarian society would have, say, exactly the same amount of wealth, success or prosperity. Instead, it means every member is equitably given the viable opportunity to realize their potentialities without some individuals or group having what we might call “systemic privileges” over others. It also means that those who, for some reasons, fail to meet their basic minimum requirements to live a decent life worth of a human person are given the necessary assistance to do so. That means no one would be left behind languishing in abject poverty, for instance, while some others “swim” in luxurious affluence.

It is on this ground that we, following Odera Oruka’s insight, wish to propose the right to the human minimum as a surest means of establishing an egalitarian global society, a society that will ensure a genuine practice of justice (i.e., egalitarian and ecological fairness) at global level. Such an egalitarian global society, in my view, will also necessarily be communitarian oriented;
meaning, members therein would feel closely connected to and interdependent with each other, sharing both their anguish and prosperity as equal members of one human family, their apparent differences and sectorial affiliations notwithstanding.

1.6. Justification of the Project

I have chosen to specialize in Oruka’s ethical thought for two main reasons. First, as hinted above, Oruka’s *Practical philosophy* has not received as much scholarly coverage and recognition as it deserves; yet, in my own assessment, I strongly think it is perhaps the most important part of his philosophy in our contemporary world. Practical philosophy (as opposed to theoretical/speculative philosophy), he says, “... addresses principles of ethics and the rules of their application in the social, political, religious and legal life of humankind” (Oruka 1997, xi). Our contemporary world, no doubt, requires such address. The second reason is based on the fact that Oruka’s *Practical Philosophy* seems to reflect his mature thoughts. It captures such important practical themes as humanism, global justice, ecology, consumerism, etc., which themes, I think, Oruka would have wished his philosophy to further undertake had he lived longer.

Indeed, Oruka was convinced that philosophy has a special mission of enhancing the socio-economic wellbeing of people without causing havoc to the environment. Philosophers, he would say, have a noble task of not only critically reflecting on the issues facing humanity but also most importantly coming up with solutions that would make life in society better in the future. Any philosophy worth its salt, he urges, ought to be committed into creating a humane society. Oruka’s famous maxim was that “philosophy must be made sagacious” (Graness and Kresse 1997, 253-254); meaning, philosophy ought to be relevant in creating a society where everyone feels ethically responsible toward the wellbeing of the ‘other’, a society that privileges no one and excludes no
one. That would translate into a global society that is both egalitarian and communitarian oriented. And that, to me, is what Oruka envisioned the right to a human minimum would help us achieve.

1.7. Methodology and the Scope

To achieve the aforementioned objectives, this study undertakes a critical analysis of some crucial works of Odera Oruka. It also considers extensively other philosophical works that have a bearing on issues of poverty, human rights, global justice, global responsibility, ecology, among others. Thus, in its critical consideration of the relevant literature, the study employs the method of “philosophical analysis”, confining itself to both conceptual and logical analyses (Gorovitz and Williams, 1965, 79-81). While the former helps in the clarification of meaning of concepts as situations may demand, the latter involves examination of presuppositions in arguments, and how such presuppositions are used to justify certain positions and historical facts.³

1.8. Précis of the Chapters

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one, the current chapter, serves the purpose of general introduction. In chapter two, we discuss Odera Oruka’s legacy in depth, thereby exposing his commitment to philosophy from a practical point of view. The chapter is divided into three related sections. The first section explores Oruka’s biographical information, traces his academic achievements, and critically evaluates his life-style as a sage-philosopher.

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³ As a cautionary remark, I wish to clarify that I do not intend to analyze Oruka’s Sage Philosophy project, though I may occasionally refer to it; I do not plan to conduct interviews of my own either. But that does not mean that I disregard or disapprove Oruka’s methodology of interviewing sages; rather, I only feel that that technique may not work for the topics I am dealing with. Furthermore, there are already dissertations and papers written and published on Sage Philosophy. In this project, therefore, I want to do something different: promote and publicise Odera Oruka’s ethical thought in his Practical Philosophy, the other side of his scholarly work that, in my view, has not been as sufficiently explored as it deserves.
The second section addresses the issue of what philosophy essentially is, or ought to be. Here, we shall ascertain why Oruka, who identifies himself within the Socratic tradition, envisioned a kind of philosophy that is more practical than theoretical; a philosophy that is relevantly committed to improvement of the welfare of humanity without jeopardising the environment. We will further try to explain why Oruka strongly believed that other than being committed to the issue of truth, genuine philosophers (and indeed every rational being) ought to be committed to and guided by some ethical principles that bring about global ethical duty. Oruka took that as perhaps the most basic and ultimate goal of philosophizing if philosophy was ever to be made “sagacious”, that is, if philosophy was ever to become what it etymologically is: “love of wisdom”. And in the same vein, the third section will attempt to show: how philosophy can be made sagacious, i.e., practically relevant to solve people’s problems, thereby moving from theory to praxis.

Chapter three in turn focuses on Oruka’s incontestable commitment to defending, shaping and developing philosophy in Africa. As part of seeking justice for the Africans, this chapter seeks to publicize one of Oruka’s most distinguishable trademarks: philosophic sagacity; a trend he uses to help liberate philosophy in Africa from ethnological (read mythological) and racist prejudices from other parts of the world. In the context of his Sage philosophy project, and in response to a distressing question on the nature and the existence of philosophy in Africa, the chapter will try to argue that philosophic sagacity is no doubt one of the most outstanding philosophical trends or school of thoughts in Africa, just as it is also applicable elsewhere in the world.

The chapter, therefore, calls for a genuine retrieval as well as critical reconsideration of traditional sagacity that would be instrumental in solving such contemporaneous issues as pride, greed or possessive individualism, racism, and ecological degradation, thereby helping alleviate socio-economic inequality and poverty in the world. Put differently, chapter three presents Oruka’s
approach to philosophy essentially as a practical response to one of the most intriguing issues in contemporary Africa: biased socio-politico-economic and intellectual deprivation/suppression. And hopefully, this will in turn portray Oruka as a diligent sagacious philosopher committed to seeking justice not only for his people but also for humankind as such.

In chapter four, I shift gears to discuss Oruka’s “need-based” concept of human right, thereby advancing a critique to the current human rights talk that appears predominantly influenced by modern liberal philosophy from the West. This is a philosophy (by such modern thinkers as John Locke) whose “liberty-based” idea of right tends to exhort unlimited pursuance of individual entitlements but at the expense of ethical duty (or responsibility) that we humans ought to have towards each other. It also tends to promote possessive individualism, pride and hence unnecessary prejudice. We shall contrast that view with Oruka’s need-based account that seems to derive from, or at least influenced by, philosophies in most pre-colonial Africa.

In the same vein, chapter four seeks to debunk a commonly held fallacy that the concept of human right is a product of enlightenment and modern Western liberalism. Thus, apart from trying to derive a possible definition of human right, the chapter also seeks a possible philosophical justification of our thinking about rights. It also talks about the concept of human right from the pre-colonial African perspective that mostly tends to emphasize the actual enjoyment of human entitlement in relation to our (human) natural quest for justice and the common good. That means the idea of right is also tied to such communitarian values as solidarity, generosity, care, tolerance, responsibility, etc., which all help in setting “priority order” insofar as the actual enjoyment of

4 By the “West” here and throughout this project I mean European countries like Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Greece, Portugal, etc., as well as their allies in North America.
rights is concerned. The chapter concludes by submitting that Oruka’s “philosophy of right” ought to be seen as trying to inject that sagacity into the current human rights talk.

This will usher in chapter five, whose focus is on critical analysis of Oruka’s argument for the *right to a human minimum*. Here, we shall see how Oruka develops that ethical principle, which he says is the most basic human right, arguing that it is not only the prerequisite for one to justifiably act as a moral agent but also the basis without which there cannot be actual enjoyment of other rights. We shall then see why, as an ethical principle, the *right to a human minimum* also elicits a correlative global duty insofar as the enjoyment of some basic human needs is concerned. And that duty, the chapter argues, is the rational justification for us humans having any other ethical duty toward each other and our environment.

Oruka’s philosophy of the *human minimum*, therefore, is closely tied to issues of global justice (as opposed to international justice); it strives to achieve for every human being what in principle each one is justifiably entitled to insofar as one is a member of the human species. It helps us realize that as humans (i.e., as rational-socio-ethical beings), we have some basic needs that we are always necessarily justified to demand from each other: physical security, subsistence and health care. But the question is: what is the rational basis of that justified demand? Similarly, it would appear we have some necessary duty to fulfil or at least facilitate realization of what in principle everyone is entitled to – at least the basic human needs. But again, the question is: what is the rational basis of that necessary duty? The answer to these questions, the chapter argues, lies in the idea of *human minimum*. It is the rational basis of our justified demand of our rights. It is also the rational basis of our ethical duty toward the wellbeing of each other as equal members of the global society. It is, therefore, the basic prerequisite ethical principle of ensuring the possibility of practicing justice at the global level.
In chapter six, we seek to apply Oruka’s ethical thought to advance a discourse that would help ensure a genuine practice of justice at the global level. The chapter is divided into two related sections. The first section critically analyses the idea of justice conventionally understood in terms of ensuring ‘egalitarian fairness’, thereby emphasizing the need to practically de-territorialized justice to a global level. Here, we maintain Oruka’s position that ensuring the enjoyment of the right to a human minimum to the majority (if not all) in the world is the basic prerequisite for establishing anything akin to global justice. Thus, we’ll define global justice tentatively as ‘the totality of demands of justice that can reasonably be applied to both local and international human relations so as to establish a global society that is both egalitarian and communitarian oriented’.

The second section focuses on Oruka’s “eco-philosophy”, a term he coined to emphasize on the need to further de-territorialize the concept of justice, that is, make the idea of justice as “global” in practice as it should be. But that would imperatively require having a different world view, a new ethics that would not only motivate a spirit of equitable distribution or sharing of world resources, but also consider the natural world (the environment) as invaluable constituent of the global society. Thus, in contrast to Hardin’s lifeboat ethics (1980) mentality that tends to limit the enjoyment of justice as ‘egalitarian fairness’, we propose Odera Oruka’s parental earth ethics, the heartbeat of his eco-philosophy. Oruka’s ethics, we shall see, takes an eco-centric rather than anthropo-centric approach to issues of global justice, thereby ensuring “ecological fairness”, which is a necessary prerequisite of establishing egalitarian fairness. Oruka’s parental earth ethics also emphasizes the “stewardship model” as opposed to “possessive-exploitative model” insofar as the use of world resources is concerned. Thus, it challenges us humans to be more ethically responsible when we use and distribute wealth and world resources. That ethics seems firmly grounded on Oruka’s conviction that the earth is a “commonwealth” and a common heritage for all.
Finally, in chapter seven (the general conclusion), we will try to critically consider Oruka’s commitment to practical philosophy in terms of humanism that properly defines his ethical thought and hence his unrelenting quest for global justice. Oruka understood humanism (or humanness as he would sometimes call it) as an endeavour to uphold the quality and security of human life. It seems to borrow much from the pre-colonial way of life in Africa where such important human values as solidarity, generosity, care, etc. were emphasized. It is well captured in “parental earth ethics” and other essays that talk about justice, human rights, politics, ecology, consumerism, etc.

Oruka’s humanism, however, is quite unusual. It emphasizes the “intrinsic good” of every creature on earth. It recognizes human beings as rational cum moral agents without devaluing the rest of natural world. It helps us understand what it really means to be human in relation to our environment. It calls for an integral approach to the ecosystem, even as we humans strive to meet our needs, thereby seeing the entire world as a global society, a sort of “organic unit” or a “family” governed by principles of interdependence and ethical responsibility. It helps us realize that we humans are not really the masters but merely privileged members of an ecological system.

In sum, Oruka’s humanism underscores the ethical duty that we humans have or ought to have towards the wellbeing of other fellow human beings as well as other creatures on earth. Hence, it can establish a more viable concept of justice at the global level. Cognizant of the fact that every being on earth is interrelated and interconnected for the common good, it enables us to define global justice not simply in terms of ensuring egalitarian fairness (which properly applies to human relations), but also “ecological fairness” that includes every creature on earth.
CHAPTER 2  
ORUKA’S LEGACY IN PHILOSOPHY

One can be an expert in logical and cogent reasoning and still be an idiot on matters of life and human relations. Wisdom, therefore, is not philosophy and vice versa (Oruka 1991a, 40).

2.1. Introduction

This chapter aims at discussing the legacy of the late Professor H. Odera Oruka, arguably one of the finest philosophers in Africa. It is also meant to expose, espouse, and critically evaluate his commitment to philosophy, particularly from a practical point of view. It is divided into three major sections. In the first section we explore Oruka’s biographical information, trace his academic achievements, and critically evaluate his life-style as a philosopher.

The second section will investigate Oruka’s understanding of what philosophy is, or ought to be. Here, we shall see why, for instance, Oruka envisioned a philosophy that is more practical than theoretical, a philosophy that is relevantly committed to improvement of the welfare of people without compromising their environment. Furthermore, we will try to show why Oruka strongly believed that other than being committed to the issue of truth, genuine philosophers (or philosophic sages as he would call them) ought to have ethical duty as perhaps the most basic and ultimate goal of philosophising if their philosophy is ever to become sagacious, that is, if their philosophy is ever to become what philosophy etymologically is – “love of wisdom”.

Indeed, as we shall see, Odera Oruka was committed to, say, fighting against global injustice. His practical philosophy attests to his task of philosophizing against social, political, structural, economic, and theoretical deprivation and suppression of the minority. It also emphasizes his point that philosophy is (or ought to be) tied to critical individual thinkers who in most cases ought to challenge the status quo in order to seek practical solutions to human and ecological problems.
This is what the third section will attempt to show: how philosophy can be made sagacious or practically relevant to solve people’s problems. Here, we aim at moving from theory to praxis. Thus, the chapter concludes by justifying Oruka’s commitment to practical philosophy, particularly his ethical thought and his unrelenting quest for justice at the global level.

2.2. Oruka’s Historical Background

2.2.1. Biographical Sketch

Henry Odera Oruka was born on June 1st, 1944 in Ugenya, Siaya County, Western part of Kenya. As he grew up in a large but humble family, Oruka showed exceptional interest in education. He attended Jera and Sega Boys Schools for his primary education, before proceeding to St. Mary’s High School Yala for his secondary and advanced level studies. Having excelled in high school studies, Oruka won a prestigious scholarship from Uppsala University in Sweden for a Bachelor of Science programme in the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Science. He studied Geography, Meteorology, and Geodesy, but on his own initiative and interest, he added Philosophy as an optional course (Oruka 1997, 281). It was here also that Oruka met his mentor and a father-figure – Professor Ingemar Hedenius (a philosopher and prolific author well known all over Scandinavia), who would become influential in shaping his philosophical trajectory.6

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5 Odera Oruka’s father had ten wives, of whom his mother was second in rank, though Oruka was obliged to call any of the other nine wives “mother” according to the Luo customs. Oruka’s childhood, however, was not all that rosy. His biological mother died when he was barely eight, leaving behind three younger siblings. This made Oruka drop out of school to take care of his siblings, especially the youngest (Okoth) who was six months old, and whom Oruka says died almost on his lap one year later. This tragic event, however, was a blessing in disguise, for Oruka was able to resume school, while he and his other siblings survived as what he calls “multi-mothered mother-less children” of all the nine wives of his father (Oruka 1997, 282 and Odhiambo 1996, 13).

6 Philosophy studies at Uppsala, according to Oruka, were divided into two tracks: practical and theoretical. He chose to specialize in practical philosophy (i.e., ethics, socio-political philosophy, and legal philosophy), which he thought would be more useful for understanding the problems of Africa, particularly for helping to liberate it and also sustain its independence (Graness and Kresse 1997, 212).
Upon graduation with a Bachelor of Science degree (a year ahead of his class), Oruka surprised his sponsors when he opted to drop science for philosophy, a choice that inevitably cost him his scholarship (Oruka 1997, 281). Nonetheless, he found his way to Wayne State University in Detroit, MI., accompanying Professor Hedenius for a Masters degree in philosophy, which degree he completed within a year. Under the supervision of Hedenius, Oruka wrote a thesis on the concept of punishment in 1969, which he later refined and published under the title *Punishment and Terrorism in Africa* in 1976 (Odhiambo 1996, 13).

After completing his Masters degree, Oruka once again accompanied Professor Hedenius back to Uppsala University where, owing to his excellent academic record, he easily regained admission for the doctoral programme in philosophy. He wrote a dissertation on the concept of freedom, obtaining a Ph.D. in 1970. He would later develop and have this work published into a book entitled *Philosophy of Liberty: An Essay on Political Philosophy* in 1991.\(^7\)

Upon his graduation in 1970, the twenty-seven-years-old Doctor of Philosophy returned to Kenya, where he was hired by the University of Nairobi as “special lecturer” of philosophy. That title, as Masolo observes, really meant that he had no regular appointment, may be due to his young age but mostly due to scepticism and bias of those who led the department (Graness and Kresse 1997, 233). Oruka himself sadly laments that when he was hired to teach at the University of Nairobi, the department of philosophy was “suffocated” with religious studies. Majority of the staff, moreover, were clergy and lay theologians who had little time for philosophy. In fact, most of them did not believe that Africans have the ability to think logically, let alone do philosophy at

\(^7\) Life abroad was not easy for Oruka. He had to survive by doing such odd jobs as pushing trolleys in paper factories. Meanwhile, his residence, as he lightly puts it, “was in a wrecked boat resting like a lame duck in one of the gulfs of the Baltic Sea” (Oruka 1997, 283). Despite all these challenges, however, Odera Oruka found solace in reading whatever philosophical material he could lay his hands on.
the University level. To back up his point, Oruka cites one Rev. Bishop Stephen Neil (Oruka 1991, 16), whose bias against Africans was tremendously “revered”.

Surprisingly though, Odera Oruka rose in academic rank so quickly owing to his prolific publication. By 1986, he had assumed full Professorship, thereby becoming one of the first two African full faculty members of philosophy at the University of Nairobi (Nyarwath 2009, 2). It was here also, and owing to his passion for philosophy, that Oruka initiated and spearheaded the separation of philosophy from religious studies, a fierce administrative battle that was eventually won and approved nine years later - July 1980. Consequently, he became the founder-chairman of the new department of philosophy, a position he held for about six years. And with this new arrangement in place, Oruka, together with other upcoming scholars like Masolo, was able to lay a lasting foundation that would see the University of Nairobi transform into a hub of African philosophy (Oruka 1997, 233). But unfortunately, he never lived long enough to see the full fruition of this dream. On December 9th, 1995, at around midday, Odera Oruka was tragically overrun by a lorry along Mbagathi road in Nairobi. He died shortly after aged 51 years old.

### 2.2.2. Academic Achievements and Awards

A quick survey at Oruka’s short life vis-à-vis his achievements and awards reveals a man whose legacy will last long. At the time of his untimely death, Oruka had published at least six

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8 Needless to say, considering the biased situation at the University of Nairobi then, Oruka also had to “naturally” join such African scholars, as Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Micere Mugo and Okot p’Bitek from the department of literature and history, who were already questioning the Eurocentric curriculum that was just but a colonial heritage. While the former three championed Oral Literature from Africa, Oruka was committed to his Sage philosophy project (Presbey 2016).

9 There is controversy surrounding Oruka’s death. While some say it was politically organized (for Oruka was a fierce critic of the then Kenyan government led by president Moi), others claim Oruka was by then at the verge of mental breakdown and was just roaming along the streets. But whichever the case, one thing is certain: Oruka’s death was a huge irreplaceable loss to academia, though his legacy lives on.
books and co-authored three. In addition, he had over fifty essays and academic papers published in local and international newspapers, journals, and texts. His writings were mainly on philosophy, ethics, politics, economics, science, and environment.

Apart from his busy schedule at the University of Nairobi, Odera Oruka never tired of giving lectures and talks outside Nairobi, especially in Africa, as a visiting Professor. He was ever committed to teaching and promoting philosophy in Africa. And for that reason, Oruka has been described properly as “a true son and a savant of Africa” (Odhiambo 1996, 12). But he also got numerous invitations to attend international philosophical conferences in Europe, America, and Asia, where he always emerged among the most impressive guest speakers (Ogutu 1995, 6). In fact, just before his tragic death, Oruka was scheduled to go to Marist College in New York as a visiting Professor for about a year (Odhiambo 1996, 19). And most notably, Odera Oruka held prestigious positions, either as a member or a leader, in various local and international societies and organizations. He also received numerous awards both locally and internationally.¹⁰

Now all these achievements and awards reveal Odera Oruka as a world-class philosopher, an intellectual whose work cannot be ignored. As Barasa rightly describes him, Professor Odera Oruka was known by his peers and junior scholars as an incisive yet disarming intellectual, a don who could not suffer mediocrity, revisionism, or foolishness. As a philosopher, and more so a refined logician, Oruka proved himself decent, wise, witty, objective, lucid, and accommodating in his arguments (Graness and Kresse 1997, 21). He also always preferred the use of clear communication, with avoidance of jargon to decipher truth. “I have always written simply.” Oruka says, adding “I do not know how to use verbosity, and I hate philosophers who rain circumlocution

¹⁰ For a list of his awards, see Nyarwath 2012, iv; Ogutu 1995, 6; Graness and Kresse 1997, 21-22.
on me” (Oruka 1997, 286). Finally, as a creative and artistic author, Odera Oruka often employed irony, sarcasm, as well as “wiry chuckles” - perhaps to pour scorn on fools and awaken those in slumber (Graness and Kresse 1997, 22). No wonder, then, his writings are very attractive to read.

2.2.3. Oruka’s Lifestyle

Despite his steady academic achievement, Odera Oruka was a modest person who always preferred substance to style. He has been described as a person who “nursed a humble but often thoughtful provoking concern about the enigma surrounding the destiny of humankind, particularly among the poverty-stricken peoples worldwide” (Ogutu 1995, 10). Commenting about his achievements and his vision for philosophy in Africa, Oruka honestly says that he has hitherto been clearing obstacles on the way to philosophy, and that he does not consider himself having reached the core of what he envisioned should be done. He writes,

If all were more or less well with the world, I would have spent the time and energy I have employed in publishing in social-legal-political philosophy reading and writing in the area of philosophy of science and theory of knowledge. I do not, however, believe that I have reached the core of what I should do in philosophy. It has all still been an attempt to help clear obstacles on the way to philosophy (Oruka 1997, 286).

Indeed, Odera Oruka was much concerned about three obstacles to philosophy; and by extension to truth, wisdom, and justice. These obstacles are: (i) social-economic deprivation of the disadvantaged, (ii) cultural-racial mythology and prejudice among the global society, and (iii) the illusion of appearance in the human mind (Oruka 1997, 283). And of these three obstacles, quite often Oruka vehemently argues that the socio-economic deprivation with its accompaniments – hunger, oppression, etc. - is the greatest constraints to both mental development and creativity. For him, “socio-economic deprivation is the fastest way to historical and scholastic nonentity” as it has been evident in the African case and in other so-called “third world” areas (Oruka 1997, 283).
His numerous essays and texts, then, can primarily be seen as attempt to give a philosophical and practical response to that single most challenging obstacle.

Odera Oruka lived humbly. He has been described as a sober modern man who lived a simple but quality life, despite his status and tremendous achievements (Graness and Kresse 1997, 21). The biggest car that Oruka owned, for instance, was a Peugeot 504. His office at the University of Nairobi, we are told, was merely twelve meters square, with no personal computer, for he preferred sharing the department’s computer lab for his prolific production. According to Barasa, who was one of his closest research assistants, unlike the majority of African academics and elites of his time whose primary pursuit and loyalty was easy material gains and power, Oruka’s public life revolved around four major activities: learning, teaching, researching, and humbly providing for his family (Graness and Kresse 1997, 20).

And Odera Oruka never forgot his modest background, though he fought strenuously to emancipate his people from poverty and other social, political, and economic injustices. His residence by the time of his death was in a humble Nairobi middle-class suburb, South C; yet, as Barasa further tells us, Oruka always looked forward to visiting his rural home in Nyang’ungu when his busy schedule allowed (Graness and Kresse 1997, 20). More so, Oruka was always ready to share his fortunes with the less fortunate in society, especially the needy but bright children, for many of whom he paid their school fees.

I wish to conclude this section by saying that Odera Oruka was clearly a noble person, a serious thinker, a sagacious mentor, a path finder, and a committed philosopher; a man who practically lived what he philosophized. Following the Socratic tradition, which he closely associated himself
with, Oruka understood philosophy primarily as love of wisdom,\(^{11}\) which would inevitably lead to pursuit of truth, justice, and hence strive for betterment of the wellbeing of humanity and their environment. No wonder, then, Oruka’s philosophy seems to revolve around two major themes: (i) practical philosophy, and (ii) philosophic sagacity (or sage philosophy).

In what follows now, I attempt to discuss and analyse the first of these two rather related themes that properly define Oruka’s legacy as a philosopher. We shall start by looking at Oruka’s understanding of what philosophy is or ought to be, before narrowing down to his special focus on practical philosophy, and especially ethics. In the next chapter, we shall see how Oruka practically responds to the daunting question about the nature and the existence of philosophy in Africa, with much emphasis on his *philosophic sagacity* as the new trend. And in so doing, we hope to expose a real philosopher committed to wisdom, truth, and justice.

**2.3. Oruka’s Commitment to Practical Philosophy**

Oruka’s entire philosophy can be seen as having two overarching objectives: (i) to reconstruct the sagacious practical dimension in philosophy, and (ii) to liberate philosophy in Africa from ethnological and racist prejudices (Graness 2012, 13). The first objective, which will be discussed in this section, involves Oruka’s emphasis on practical commitment as he exhorts philosophers to try to come up with thought processes that could be applicable to contemporaneous challenges facing humanity, thereby improving their welfare and that of the environment. And key among

\(^{11}\) Oruka often quoted the rhyme of one sage Stephen Kithanje of Meru, Kenya, who defines wisdom as the ability to be conscious of where one is coming from (the past), where one is *now* (the present), and where one is going in life (the future). But he also understood wisdom as the ability to think, reason, respond to and act according either to one’s inborn insights or acquired knowledge and experience in order to critically challenge a situation or manner of doing certain things, as well as strive to offer a viable alternative solution to a contemporary problem. We shall further interrogate that view shortly.
these challenges is socio-economic inequality and poverty. The second objective, which will be treated in the next chapter, is well covered in Oruka’s book *Sage philosophy*; a project he initiated to prove the existence and practice of a genuine philosophy in Africa.

The two objectives, however, are very much related and complementary. In fact, it has been argued that Oruka’s entire work can be understood as basically “philosophizing against social and theoretical deprivation and suppression of the African” (Graness and Kresse 1997, 241). To me, that sounds like an excellent view that captures Oruka’s legacy in philosophy; a legacy that lies especially in his commitment to the practical dimension of philosophy and his insistence that philosophers, just like any other scholar, have an essential duty of social and practical commitment that involves *ethical duty*. This section, and indeed the entire project, is precisely dedicated to defending that position as it also tries to expose Oruka’s commitment to practical philosophy, with special focus on his ethical thought.

Now one pressing issue that preoccupied Oruka was trying to establish how philosophy does or could contribute to the enhancement of the value, security, and dignity of human life (Oruka 1997, 143). And as we shall see shortly, Oruka challenges contemporary philosophers to take the etymological definition of philosophy as ‘love of wisdom’ seriously, thereby to try and make philosophy more *sagacious* by coming up with theoretical insights and ideas that can be put into practice for the betterment of the wellbeing of people and the environment. It is regrettable, though, that Oruka’s commitment to practical philosophy is less known than, say, his *sage philosophy*; yet, the former seems to be the direction that Oruka desired and envisioned his philosophy should take.
The title of his posthumously published book - *Practical Philosophy: In Search of an Ethical Minimum* (1997) - evidently attests to this.\(^\text{12}\)

### 2.3.1. Philosophy Must be Made Sagacious

Reading a number of Oruka’s works reveals a philosopher who was convinced that philosophy must be made *sagacious*. But that would happen if philosophers were to first of all try to combine their speculative, critical, and analytical technique, skills, and methodologies with a sagacity (or wisdom) that is practically oriented to the betterment of people’s wellbeing without neglecting the environment.\(^\text{13}\) This is well established in his 1970 Ph.D. dissertation, *Philosophy of Liberty* (published as a book in 1990), which is arguably the foundation of his socio-political philosophy. His *Sage Philosophy* is yet another testimony to this fact. Indeed, as Kresse rightly observes, Oruka’s various philosophical works can and should be seen as manifestation of his commitment to the practical relevance and social significance of knowledge and wisdom (Kresse 2013, 26).

That means Oruka was strongly opposed to purely abstract speculative discourses (e.g., mere rhetoric), even though he was not opposed to “theoretical” discourses that were applicable in real life situations.\(^\text{14}\) In fact, Oruka did so well in trying to apply his theoretic/philosophic knowledge, skills, and techniques into praxis by critically questioning some common assumptions, thoroughly clarifying concepts, and ardently using his insights to reconsider such human fundamental issues as social, political, and economic predicaments. He tried to find solutions to some of these

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\(^\text{12}\) This book is a collection of Oruka’s “practical” essays, which had been published elsewhere, and that Oruka himself was revising in view of republication before his tragic death in December 1995. It is dedicated to such practical issues as liberty, social justice, humanism, eco-philosophy, consumerism, etc.

\(^\text{13}\) Oruka attests to this fact in an interview he gave in 1995, barely three months before he died, where he seems to espouse on the aphorism: “wisdom surmounts might” (cf. Graness and Kresse 1997, 253 ff.).

\(^\text{14}\) I use the term “theoretical” here loosely in reference to discourse written or otherwise proposed as viable solution to some human predicaments. This is to contrast merely abstract speculative discourse.
problems, as he also challenged other philosophers to do the same. He was convinced that philosophers ought to employ sagacity or wisdom in their endeavours lest their philosophies become irrelevant to others and the society. He says,

Great philosopher are path-finders, and path-finders disobey the routines of pedestrians when they emerge to command the war of the search for knowledge unless they are tempered by the rare quality of wisdom and sagacity (Oruka 1997, 203).

What Oruka appears to be doing here is to challenge philosophers (plus other scholars) to be *sagacious* - that is, to be in touch with “reality”, to be practically relevant in trying to solve human predicaments, and to acknowledge their limitations as well. He cites Hegel who, despite being arguably one of the greatest thinkers in the West allegedly boasted to being the last philosopher, and that his standpoint was the culmination of philosophy’s historical development,\(^\text{15}\) thereby proving his deficiency in matters of sagacity.

Oruka’s own life-style, as we saw earlier, is a clear testimony of how a philosopher ought to make philosophy sagacious, that is, make philosophy “an art of living” and “a way of life” (Hadot 1995, 28). He tried to live in accordance with the philosophy he propagated. But this required total commitment to practical issues without, of course, neglecting theoretical perview. Thus, as Wiredu rightly observes, Oruka’s commitment to practical philosophy does not imply any form of shying away from theoretical issues; it rather means that practical commitment, especially with regard to his quest for socio-politico-economic justice, was the most crucially motivating factor in his entire philosophy (Graness and Kresse 1997, 142). And to underscore this point, it will be helpful to first consider Oruka’s understanding of what philosophy is or ought to be.

\(^{15}\) cf. Hegel (1975) *Lectures* vol. 1.46.
2.3.2. What is Philosophy?

The question of what philosophy is or ought to be is no doubt central for Oruka, just as it is with many other philosophers. There have been numerous theories and definitions of philosophy throughout human history, with many of these philosophers hardly coming to a general consensus. To some, for example, philosophy can be described as a rigorous systematic inquiry and writing about any topic; that is, an extension of intellectual search for answers to such questions as: ‘what is x?’, ‘why x?’, ‘how is x?’, etc.; where “x” could be a substitute of anything. To others, however, philosophy is found within the realm of predicaments (or chaos) and in trying to find possibilities or viable solutions to those predicaments. Deleuze and Guattari in What is Philosophy? adopt this description, insisting that philosophy ought not to be mere speculation, reflection, or simply communication of what is given “ready-at-hand” for the sake of it; instead, philosophy is supposed to create “concepts” that are always new (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 5), thereby bringing about new possibilities, and hence, its relation to social, political, and economic development.

Now as we shall see shortly, Odera Oruka would have most likely agreed with the latter description rather than the former. Commenting on the indisputable relevance of philosophy in every society, Oruka observes that philosophy is “the basic framework behind all our [human] practices” without which there would be chaos in society (Oruka 1997, 185).

2.3.3. Speculative and Practical Philosophy

Philosophy can be further considered as a discipline; in which case it is defined as a study, an inquiry, or just a wonder that involves arguably the most deep-seated issues about life and reality as such (that which is). Put differently, it is a study of such issues as natural phenomena, human person, human knowledge, God, logic, morality, language, politics, etc. But that definition is too
general; thus, as Oruka says, philosophy ought to be further divided into two branches, namely, (i) speculative or theoretical philosophy, and (ii) practical philosophy. While speculative/theoretical philosophy “treats issues about the fundamental principles of knowledge and the metaphysics of reality”, practical philosophy “addresses principles of ethics and the rules of their application in the social, political, religious, and legal life of human kind” (Oruka 1997, xi).16 The former involves such studies as logic, physics, metaphysics, epistemology, cosmology, theodicy, etc.; the latter involves philosophical ethics, legal and political philosophy, etc.

It is in this regard that we, in this section, intend to emphasize Oruka’s commitment to the practical dimension of philosophy and especially his ethics, without, of course, undermining the speculative dimension. Our position with Oruka is that whereas speculative dimension is helpful in, say, sharpening people’s brain, increasing knowledge, improving insight and broadening ideas, it should nonetheless not be seen merely as the end of philosophizing. Rather, insofar as there still are predicaments affecting humanity and the environment, speculative philosophy ought to be seen and used as means to create practical philosophies that would help improve the life and the wellbeing of people and their environment. This is what Oruka believed would make philosophy sagacious; it would make it be what it etymologically is - love of wisdom.

However, we need to point out that by giving priority to the practical dimension, and particularly ethics, Oruka does not intend to be reducing philosophy to ethics. Rather, he only feels that philosophy should first and foremost be used to settle such practical and urgent issues as combating socio-economic and environmental injustices, before engaging in other “luxurious”

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16 Oruka, however, points out further that historically, that distinction, common in Europe and especially Scandinavian Universities, is in line with Kant’s distinction between theoretical reason and practical reason (cf. Kant 4:387-392).
speculative exercises. In other words, he felt that ethical issues ought to be part of the central kernel of philosophy if philosophy is ever to become practically relevant.

To that effect, then, and as we mentioned earlier, even though Oruka was well known for his sharp logic, just as he had great passion for philosophy of science and epistemology (which all fall under the speculative domain), circumstances forced him to practically spend his time and energy first clearing what he considered to be three current and future obstacles to philosophy, wisdom, and justice in general, namely, (i) social economic deprivation, (ii) cultural-racial mythology, and (iii) the illusion of appearance (Oruka 1997, 283-286). Thus, Oruka reflected, wrote and published extensively in social, ethical, economic, political and environmental issues. But he also expresses the view that if he ever lived to old age, and “if all were more or less well with the world”, then philosophy of science and theory of knowledge (or epistemology) would have been his “resting ground” (Oruka 1997, 284). This point will become clearer as we proceed.

2.3.4. Philosophy defined as “love of wisdom”

As we said above (2.3.3), Oruka is known to have treasured and pursued the etymological definitions of philosophy as “love of wisdom”. This definition, Oruka says, is perhaps the most compelling and proper, though it unfortunately seems to be taken for granted, especially today. It not only makes philosophy be seen not merely as an endeavour to seek knowledge for the sake of it, but also challenges philosophers to apply such knowledge in real life situations. In other words, it makes philosophy become what Hadot calls “an art of living” and “a way of life” (Hadot 1995,
28), thereby making philosophy a life-long endeavour to pursue wisdom that would enable one to “know thyself”\(^\text{17}\) better, and hence relate well with the ‘other’.\(^\text{18}\)

And in my view, it is this endeavour to love and pursue wisdom that ultimately makes one \textit{sagacious}; it makes one try to practically apply what has been discovered (knowledge, insight etc.) in one’s own life and in that of other people. Understanding philosophy as ‘love of wisdom’, then, comes closer to what practical philosophy seems to be all about: striving to be practically relevant and ethically responsible to both oneself and the ‘other’. Now to elaborate this point, it is important to consider what wisdom is, and why it is worth pursuing.

The term “wisdom” (in Greek \textit{sophia}) can be understood in two senses. First, in its broader sense, it refers to a quality or an attribute of some intellectual beings such as humans, angels, deity, etc. Second, in its narrower sense, wisdom refers to a quality attributable to humans only. Thus, we talk of a wise person or a sage as the one who is able to make proper judgments in life based on his or her account of the past, analysis of the present and projective goals of the future.\(^\text{19}\) Indeed, as Oruka rightly defines it, wisdom (or sagacity) is that “quality which enables a person to utilize knowledge of his traditions and human nature in general for the purpose of making mature and objective judgment about life and human relations” (Oruka 1991, 40). Viewed from this perspective, then, wisdom or sagacity confers both insight and ethical inspiration to a person so that one may relate healthily with other people, conscious and mindful of the environment also.

\(^{17}\) This ancient Greek aphorism is often attributed to the Delphic Oracle, though it has foundation in other cultures, especially in ancient Egypt. Socrates is known to have adopted it as the most basic principle in search of wisdom and ethical life. For details, see Plato’s dialogues: \textit{Philebus} (48c); \textit{Charmides} (164d); \textit{Phaedrus} (229e); \textit{Protagoras} (343b); and \textit{Alcibiades} I (124a, 129a, 132c).

\(^{18}\) The term ‘other’ here refers to a fellow human being and the environment as such.

\(^{19}\) I will use the term “wisdom” interchangeably with “sagacity” in reference to this latter sense.
But in a little bit more complex way, we can define wisdom as the ability to think, reason, and act according either to one’s inborn insight or acquired knowledge and experience in order to critically challenge a situation, a lifestyle, or a manner of doing things, and strive to offer viable alternative solutions to some contemporaneous challenges facing humanity and their environment. This, according to Oruka, is what makes one a philosophic sage - a human person who can competently combine both theoretical insight and practical aspects of life for the betterment of the wellbeing of humanity as such without jeopardizing the environment. And as we shall see shortly, such a philosophic sage is also necessarily an ethically responsible person.

Viewed from this perspective, then, wisdom or sagacity appear closely related to prudence (in Greek *phronesis*), one of the “intellectual virtues” that disposes us to perform certain tasks, fulfil duties, and be more responsible in the best way possible under a given circumstance.²⁰ Hence, quite often, especially in the wake of human peril and suffering, a wise person (a sage) is expected to depict the highest degree of competency, urgency, and adequacy in order to not only promote human life but also safeguard human dignity, thereby significantly reduce possibilities of misery in the eyes of many by offering the best possible but viable solution to their problems.

Thus, it is on these grounds that we, following Oruka’s insight argue that practical commitment, especially in matters ethics, is the single most crucially motivating factor in philosophy. It is arguably the *end* of any genuine philosophy, for it first and foremost prompts one to quest for social justice, which is part and parcel of being sagacious and hence more responsible as a moral agent. This, however, does not in any way imply that speculative philosophy is irrelevant or not necessary; rather, it means that good philosophers (philosophic sages) ought to

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carry out their theoretical and analytical work in a manner that will be practically relevant and helpful to them and to the ‘other’. Oruka captures this point beautifully when he says:

So, a sage is wise; he has insight, but he employs this for the ethical betterment of the community. A philosopher may be a sage and vice versa. But many philosophers do lack the ethical commitment and inspiration found in the sage. ... A sage proper is usually the friend of truth and wisdom. A sage may suppress truth only because wisdom dictates, [but] not because of some instrumental gain (Oruka 1991a, 9).

It is apparently clear, then, that for Oruka (who closely associates himself with Socratic tradition), *ethical commitment* is one of the central aspects of a good philosopher (philosophic sage) and hence genuine philosophy. And he never relents in emphasizing the centrality of ethics in philosophy. In his essay “Achievements of Philosophy” (Oruka 1997, 95-105), Oruka identifies four missions of philosophy: (i) Truth, (ii) Aesthetic, (iii) Communicative, and (iv), Moral/ Ethical. He, however, points out further that moral/ ethical mission is the most important one, for it makes philosophy be in touch with the urgent and dominant needs of the people.

To complete its proper function, then, Oruka suggests that “philosophy has to extend its function to the ethics of human life and the conditions for the improvement of the world for human existence” (Oruka 1997, 99). This concern, he says, is what would actually make philosophy *sagacious* and relevant, given that it “calls for philosophers to help reorganize and rationalize the available knowledge in order to improve human understanding and the welfare of mankind” (Oruka 1997, 99). Nonetheless, despite this emphasis on ethical commitment, Oruka quickly points out that the other three missions, particularly those concerned with pure search for knowledge, cannot and should not be ignored.
2.3.5. Philosophy Understood in Two Senses

According to Oruka, philosophy (as love of wisdom) may also generally be understood in two senses. First, in its broader and “loose” sense, philosophy refers to “a person’s or a people’s general unexamined outlook on life” and reality as such (Oruka 1991, 26). Hence, we talk of people’s culture, traditions, beliefs, and their general way of life or world-view as philosophy. But in its strict and “proper” sense, philosophy ought to be understood as a critical evaluation of people’s outlook or world-view, “and a free reflection on ideas and concepts as a mirror of reality” (Oruka 1991, 26). Now understood in the latter sense, there is often a general consensus that philosophy is or ought to be foundational, scientific, critical, analytic, and systematically reflective. Also, while the former sense (the “first-order” culture philosophy) is often driven by what Oruka would later dub popular or folk sagacity, the latter sense (the “second-order” philosophy) has its base on philosophic sagacity.21

In both senses, however, Oruka generally takes philosophy as a universal human activity that essentially involves the use of reason to solve human peril, satisfy curiosity and wonder, just as it also aims at increasing knowledge, wisdom and truth. Oruka’s position here is evidently contrary to some thinkers in the West, whose rather unfortunate thesis is that philosophy is an essential characteristic of European civilization. For Oruka, reason, which is arguably the driving force in philosophy, is a human endowment and not a monopoly of any one culture or race (Oruka 1997, 183). Nonetheless, he insists that in its strict sense, philosophy proper qualifies to be considered “scientific”, given that it involves critical thinking, reflective analysis, and logical inquiry and explanation about reality (nature, humans, deity, etc). And it is this strict or “proper” sense that

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21 I come back to this point later, but for details, see Oruka 1991a, 45-55.
Oruka was much interested in. He was interested in seeing philosophy as a product of critical, reflective, and free thought process; always characterized by logical consistency, and often tied to independent thinker(s) who in most cases challenge the status quo rather than being merely complacent (Kresse 1996, 23; Graness and Kresse 1997, 61-62).

### 2.3.6. Philosophy as Foundational Discipline

Apart from understanding philosophy as ‘love of wisdom’ Odera Oruka is also known to have endorsed and somehow praised the often-called “classical” understanding of philosophy as a foundational discipline, the base upon which other sciences and human knowledge is built.\(^{22}\) Although this view was highly challenged especially during the age of Enlightenment, perhaps it would be unwise to declare philosophy irrelevant even in such fields as empirical sciences, mathematics and engineering. To presuppose that philosophy is a foundational discipline, Oruka says, is “to take the stand that there is somewhere a solid correspondence between the world and human thought about the world” (Oruka 1997, 208).

It also means that philosophy (indeed every science) has as its primary business the task of digging out and explaining such a correspondence. In other words, Oruka felt that philosophy was and is still the most reliable base and route not only in search of wisdom and knowledge, but also in establishing criteria for truth and falsehood, as well as right and wrong. He writes:

> Thus, philosophy is the base on which all social practices are built. When we are forced to justify our lives ... our political system, ... our legal system, ... our marriage system, in the end the ultimate justification will have to be philosophy (Oruka 1997, 185).

\(^{22}\) The term “classical” here refers to the Ancient, Medieval, and Scholastic era, when philosophy was taken as comprising nearly all forms of human search for knowledge and truth.
And on that note, Oruka was scornfully opposed to the so-called “postmodernism” as a trend in philosophy. Postmodernism may be described as a philosophical “movement” that developed in the mid to late 20\textsuperscript{th} century as a radical departure from the Ancient, Scholastic and Modern philosophies. It is typically characterized by an attitude of scepticism or distrust toward reason. Thus, it is opposed to classical topics of metaphysics, epistemology, enlightenment, idealism, etc.; thereby rejecting any possibility of objective truth. Instead, postmodernism asserts that knowledge and truth are the products of unique systems of social, historical, and political discourse and interpretation, meaning they are contextual and relatively constructed (Bertens 1995).

Oruka also regularly attacked extreme “logical positivism”, another late twentieth century trend that claims philosophy has no foundational knowledge or truth to proclaim, and that these should be left to the domain of empirical sciences (Oruka 1997, xii). He, for instance, criticised such logical positivists and linguistic analytic thinkers as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Richard Rorty, who seem to discredit metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics – arguably the bulk of what had traditionally been included in philosophy per se. Thus, Oruka, for instance, faults Wittgenstein’s conclusion that philosophy “is merely an extra-intellectual activity showing what is impossible to express or explain”, just as he also takes offense with Rorty, for whom “philosophy is not a mirror of reality, but only one of the activities in the conversations of mankind” (Oruka 1997, 167).

2.3.7. Philosophy as Dialogical Exercise

Despite being critical of postmodernism and logical positivism, Oruka was also alive to the fact that philosophy also ought to be dialogical. That means apart from generally being a universal, critical, reflective and free or independent human activity, philosophy also ought to be a kind of self-enriching exchange. And as a self-critical discourse, philosophy ought not to be rigid and
closed, but rather dynamic, lucid and open to dialogue. Put differently, any genuine philosophy ought to be open to engage not only with other philosophies but also other disciplines so as to satisfy humans’ desire for knowledge, truth and wisdom.

It is on this account that Oruka challenges philosophers to put forward their ideas, insights and thought processes “not as absolute truths or authoritatively injected dogmas, but as tentative proposals whose truths are open to reasonable consideration and discussion” (Oruka 1997, 171). But for that to happen, it would require philosophers to have some ethical responsibility, and hence instil some discipline and respect for each other.

Being dialogical in nature, philosophy also is supposed to be “a perspective of the whole or part of the whole of the human predicament and an insightful suggestion on how to get out or conform” (Oruka 1997, 206-207). And this perspective, he says, may be expressed either orally or literally. Hence, philosophy, according to Oruka, is “a conceptual logical discourse, a discourse that is self-critical. It is a discourse better enlivened and preserved by the tradition of writing, though writing is not necessary condition for philosophy” (Oruka 1991, 26; 1997, 184). Here, Oruka does not wish to underrate the importance of literacy and proficiency in philosophy; rather, he wants to underscore the fact that writing is not thinking while philosophy is about thinking and and trying to find new possibilities or viable solutions to human and ecological predicaments.

Putting that fact into consideration, in my view, is very helpful, for it will not only ensure healthy dialogue among philosophers (orally or literary), but most importantly also, it will make philosophy become what it etymologically really is – ‘love of wisdom’. It will also help emphasize the fact that wisdom or sagacity, the key object in philosophy, is not gauged by how proficient one is in writing or talking; it is rather gauged by the quality of what one says and/or writes, that is,
whether it is practically relevant to people and the environment or not. But again, for philosophy to be practically relevant, it is imperative that philosophers have some practical commitment or some *ethical duty* to instil some discipline, respect and concern for the ‘other’.

### 2.3.8. Philosophy and Humanism

And now having looked at Oruka’s understanding of what philosophy is or ought to be, it is time to pursue further the argument we have been trying to implicitly make: at the heart of any genuine philosophy, there lies some practical commitment that often inspire good philosophers to be sagacious, be *ethically responsible*, and hence produce a philosophy that is practically relevant to the lives of people and their environment. To grasp that argument, though, it is important to highlight Oruka’s conviction that the ultimate and the most basic standard of moral good, which seems to be the central object of a genuine philosophy, is or should be *humanism* or humanness, by which he means ensuring “the quality and security of human life” (Oruka 1997, 138).

Indeed, Oruka believed that it is within the nature of a genuine philosophy to discern, safeguard and promote “moral good” that would lead to a more humanised society where people love and care for each other.\(^{23}\) That means it is an inescapable function of genuine philosophers (and indeed every moral agent) to, among other things, have concern for a substantive quality and security of human life over and above mere existence. Put differently, it is within its natural mandate for philosophy to search for a remedy to human problems, especially where humanism seems to be in danger or decline (Oruka 1997, 138).

\(^{23}\) Indeed, as Masolo rightly observes, most of Oruka’s work seems to be raising the issue of ethics of care to the level of global justice (Masolo 2012, 25).
However, in saying that philosophy ultimately ought to concern itself with moral good and humanism does not, as Oruka says, amount to confusing philosophy with such disciplines as religion, technology, and politics that also in a way concern themselves with the human problem. He also believes that for philosophy to carry out that mandate (i.e., championing moral good and humanism), it needs to be not only critical but also dialogical in nature. That would make it effectively safeguard and promote the value and dignity of human life, discouraging the prevailing and impending inhuman practices in the world. Such a philosophy, Oruka argues, should take cognizance of science, technology, religious beliefs, and “the reality and nuisance of political and mystical powers” (Oruka 1997, 139). But philosophy should not be subservient to these realities and nuisance; rather, “it must apply its critical and dialectical reason to them and tolerate nothing that is against the quality and security of human life” (Oruka 1997, 139).

### 2.3.9. Philosophy and Ethical Commitment

One aspect that properly defines Oruka’s legacy as a philosopher is his unrelenting ethical commitment. It is what underscores the sagacious or the practical dimension of his philosophy. As a person, he felt ethically bound to contribute to the wellbeing of humanity and the environment irrespective of geographical, racial, or any other sectarian demarcations. In fact, Oruka believed that this is how any genuine philosophy ought to proceed, it being a universal human activity and hence independent of racial or regional boundaries. Oruka elucidates this point further saying,

In the last analysis, philosophy is not a language analysis, not the exercise enjoyed in a logical dialogue, and not a special insight of the world reserved for some race or gender. *Philosophy is a perspective of the whole or part of the whole of the human predicament and an insightful suggestion on how to get out or conform.* This sort of perspective can be found in anybody … In every community, there are always people who specialize in offering or studying such perspectives (Oruka 1997, 206-207, emphasis mine).
According to Oruka, such few people in every community who specialize in offering insightful perspectives on how to resolve human predicaments are properly referred to as *philosophic sages*. He defines a sage as “that sort of person a culture produces who is able to mirror and reproduce logical and intuitive steps of the metrics of the culture” (Oruka 1997, 207). Such a person could be formally educated and literate or uneducated and illiterate. All we require to have a philosophic sage, Oruka says, is “the ability to help coin a path for escape” or find justifiable solutions when one’s culture (society) is at risk (Oruka 1997, 207). My position is that for that to happen, it is imperative for the said philosophic sage to be ethically responsible as a moral agent.

Thus, Odera Oruka challenged his contemporary philosophers to embrace this ethical commitment, thereby making their philosophies more practical and relevant, given that the world considered as a global society was and is still experiencing human perils and unwarranted sufferings. And as a typical philosophic sage, Oruka himself tried to fulfil this task by generously sharing his insightful thoughts through writing, teaching, and mentoring especially the youth. He wrote extensively and gave talks on such ethical topics as justice, human rights, liberty, ecology, economics, politics, among others.

All these talks and writings clearly demonstrate his unrelenting ethical commitment. It is quite rather unfortunate that much of these writings remain unexplored as they ought to. Our task in the subsequent chapters of this project will be to engage some of Oruka’s practical philosophy, especially his ethical thought. And as we shall see, Oruka’s practical philosophy is not just another speculative work on such topics as mentioned above. Rather, his is a philosophy pointedly characterized by a special interest to the real life of the people, especially in Africa. He explains why and how he got so much involved with practical philosophy in an interview conducted on 10/27/1993 at the University of Nairobi where he says:
At that time (sixties and early seventies) main-stream philosophy in Scandinavia and U.S.A. was mostly logical positivism and linguistic philosophy. But I was more interested … in philosophy that would be useful for understanding the problems of Africa, for helping to liberate it and also sustain its independence, and for that matter, I became naturally interested in ethics, social political and legal philosophy (Kresse 1996, 22).

Thus, it was after critically observing and being conscious of the predicaments his people in Africa were going thought that prompted Oruka to philosophically respond as a sage: trying to find some way out of such evils as poverty, human rights abuse, and neo-colonialism (Graness 2012, 8).

Oruka therefore held the view that philosophy ultimately has this sagacious cum normative (regulative) role to not only inform, critique and intellectually challenge people, but most importantly also transform their lives by trying to practically improve on their welfare (Oruka 1997, 218). For him, as we pointed out earlier, the speculative aspects of philosophy (like logic, metaphysics, epistemology, etc.) ought to be seen and used primarily as means to produce practical philosophy. But this presupposes philosophers having some ethical responsibility, just as it implies the normative ethical dimension of philosophy. In fact, it is this normative ethical dimension of philosophy that, to Oruka, differentiates between what he calls the sage proper (philosophic sage) from the mere philosopher (speculative theoretician or rhetorician).

In another interview carried out on 08/16/1995 (four months before his tragic death) at the University of Nairobi, Odera Oruka emphatically reiterates this point saying,

The mere philosopher [theoretician] one could call him a scientist of the mere thought in a broad sense, he looks for thoughts, he looks for principles that guide nature, for principles that guide society, he looks for knowledge. The mere philosopher looks for pure knowledge and tries to express knowledge, but the sage [proper] cares about knowledge, and he adds to knowledge morality, the moral spirit. He aims at the ethical betterment of the community that he lives in. So to me, the sage [proper] has these two policies: he has the science, the knowledge plus ethical obligation for himself, for the community and for the world (Graness and Kresse 1997, 254, emphasis mine).
Here, we can see Oruka scornfully attacking mere speculative philosophers or theoreticians in favour of a philosophic sage who, on top of having scientific knowledge also has *ethical obligation* as tools for the betterment of his or her life and the lives of others in the world.

To emphasize his point, Oruka singles out Socrates from his contemporary rivals in the ancient Greece and Asia Minor - the Sophists. While the former represents a philosophic sage or a sage proper (given that Socrates was concerned primarily with pursuing such ethical virtues as truth, justice, courage, and above all wisdom), the latter fit the bill of being mere philosophers, given that they went around teaching people how to twist ideas to simply win arguments regardless of the truth.\textsuperscript{24} The sophists were interested in mere rhetoric for money, fame, and honour. Socrates, on the other hand, was committed to defending the truth to a point of death; and he always emphasized ethical commitment to everyone in the community, a commitment geared towards gaining practical knowledge necessary for the betterment of all. Indeed, at his defence before the Athenian jury, Socrates is recorded saying:

And while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy [love of wisdom], exhorting anyone whom I meet after my manner, and convincing him, saying: ‘O my friend, why do you who are a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens, care so much about laying up the greatest amount of money and honour and reputation, and so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul ...? (Plato *Apology*, 29 d-e).

Here then lies a philosophic sage with admirable ethical commitment, the one whom Oruka proposes for us to emulate. Socrates is said to have diligently obeyed his conscience that inspired

\textsuperscript{24} Cf. Plato’s dialogues: *Sophists*, *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, *Laches*, etc. It is important to note that in most of these dialogues, while the sophists claim to possess knowledge, Socrates, the sage proper, only claims to be “lover of wisdom”. For Socrates, wisdom or sagacity is the ability to beware of the limits of one’s knowledge (*Apology* 21d, 22e). Indeed, the only thing that Socrates seems to *know* with certainty is the fact that he *does not know*; hence, the so-called “Socratic ignorance” that prompts one to pursue the ethical imperative to use one’s limited knowledge for the sake of the common good.
his ethical commitment, which arguably made him the wisest of all people in Athens. It is the same commitment that Oruka, who situates himself within Socratic tradition, was trying to promote in our contemporary era. He envisioned a philosophy that would be more practically relevant in solving our socio-politico-economic predicaments. Thus, like Socrates, Oruka had passion to make human life better, more dignified, and therefore more enjoyable. And in his writings, Oruka also challenged other contemporary philosophers and scholars to do the same.

Of course, not everyone, especially today, would agree with Oruka’s view. Some might accuse him of reducing philosophy into this one sagacious ethical (normative) dimension. Bertrand Russell and other logical positivists, for instance, might single out symbolic logic as the most essential part of philosophy. But that, in my view, would not invalidate our argument so long as that logic would find its practical relevance. Put differently, Russell’s position would not invalidate our claim that speculative aspect of philosophy, and human knowledge as such, should be used as means to solving human predicaments before engaging in some “luxurious” intellectual exercises.

Indeed, as Odera Oruka would say, it is unfortunate, and regrettably so, that philosophy understood as ‘love of wisdom’ seems to have been lost in the technical and analytic language during the last few decades. He laments that the contemporary era (especially since the mid twentieth century) seems to have lost the sagacious normative dimension of philosophy with its practical relevance and ethical commitment.25 Consequently, as Graness aptly argues, philosophy seems to have been reduced into a mere “expert knowledge”, a sort of “science in the ivory tower” often characterized by specialized and complicated jargons (Graness 2012, 1). It is in this view,  

25 This is a dimension of philosophy that by and large leads to genuine humanism or humanness; that is, an ethical dimension that largely emphasizes centrality of human life and its non-negotiable dignity.
therefore, that we propose Oruka’s legacy, particularly his advocacy for ethical commitment, to be seen as a philosophic call to retrieve back to that sagacious normative dimension of philosophy, thereby ensuring a genuine humanism and authentic practice of justice at global level.

2.4. From Theory to Praxis: how to make philosophy sagacious

We have been at pains trying to justify why Odera Oruka felt that philosophy must be made sagacious; meaning that philosophers ought to use their speculative, analytical, and critical techniques, skills, and methods to come up with a philosophy that is practically committed to the betterment of people’s wellbeing and their environment. We have also tried to argue that Oruka’s life as well as his philosophical works can and should be seen as manifestation of a philosopher committed to alleviate some socio-political-economic predicaments, thereby elucidating practical relevance and social significance of knowledge.

At the same time, we have several times pointed out that while Oruka was opposed to merely abstract speculative discourses, he was not in any way opposed to theoretical discourses that were applicable in real life situations. In fact, this was precisely what Oruka was trying to do: applying his philosophic knowledge, skills, and techniques into praxis by critically questioning some common assumptions, thoroughly clarifying concepts, and ardently using his theoretical insights to reconsider such human fundamental issues as socio-economic inequality and deprivation. He tried to find solutions to these problems, just as he also challenged other philosophers to do the same. He was convinced that philosophy could be made sagacious if and only if philosophers could embrace some ethical duty in their endeavours lest their philosophies become irrelevant.

In this section, let us look at some ways in which philosophy can practically be made sagacious (i.e., practically relevant to the betterment of people and their environment), which is
what Oruka’s legacy seems to advocate. There are two questions that we need to respond to. First, what does sagacious normative dimension of philosophy consist of? And second, how can it be achieved? Both questions, however, are relevantly related; they not only seem to be challenging us to see what social justice would entail, for instance, but they also challenge us to develop what we might call “an intercultural approach to philosophy” that would ensure genuine practice of justice at the global level. Indeed, the two questions seem to relate well with our guiding question in this project, namely, what do we fundamentally need to do as humans to ensure global justice?

To the first question, then, we say that the sagacious normative dimension of philosophy refers to that ethical aspect of philosophy that by and large leads to humanism or humanness; it is an ethical dimension of philosophy that largely emphasises promotion of human life and its non-negotiable dignity so as to enhance the common good. It consists mainly in the ethical commitment of philosophers to become sagacious (or wise) by trying to apply their speculative knowledge, skills, ideas, and insights so as to create philosophies that would be relevant and beneficial to solving humanity’s predicaments. In other words, it consists in philosophers’ commitment to make philosophy more practical, where theory and praxis overlap for the common good. As Oruka would say, genuine humanism or humanness is often manifested in someone’s actions (say, in writing or arguing), and is always directed towards the betterment of the overall living conditions of people, regardless of their geographical, racial or any other sectarian affiliation in the name of building an authentic global justice for all (Graness and Kresse 1997, 254).

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26 This is a new orientation in philosophy that, as Oruka points out, neither privileges any culture, philosophical tradition or method, nor imposes a hierarchy of any sort; it is a kind of new orientation that is open to various ways of philosophizing, provides freedom of thought in every culture, as it tries to understand, interpret and integrate various philosophical traditions into the “world discourse” so that there is much better understanding than misunderstanding (Graness and Kresse 1997, 246-247).
As we said above, to be a sagacious philosopher means having the ability to put insightful knowledge and experience of a practical nature into some good use. That means philosophers by no less means have a special ethical obligation to make their philosophies more practically relevant and socially acceptable so as to enhance the wellbeing of their people, and hence surmount what Oruka calls “the disappointing present” - by offering solution to the current problems. To put differently, the ability of philosophers to think critically has to be made fertile for the betterment of their society now and in the future.27

The point we are trying to make is that for philosophy to become sagacious, it ought to inevitably be a product of philosophic sages, that is, thinkers who can distinguish between the two dimensions of philosophy (speculative and practical) and to put much emphasis on the practical aspects. This follows Oruka’s insight that wisdom, which he equates with sagacity, is not intellectual sophistication and vice versa; for one can be an expert in logical and cogent reasoning and still be an idiot on matters of life and human relations (Oruka 1991, 40). The following quote perhaps will sufficiently clarify the point.

Philosophy is an art of reasoning and provides a critical intellectual weapon and methodology for analyzing and synthesizing the basic problems of man, society and nature. [But] in dealing with the problems of man and society, philosophy is moral and social. And the problems and definition of moral good and the ideals of humanism fall within the real moral and social philosophy (Oruka 1997, 140).

Here, Oruka is trying to draw attention to the two dimensions of philosophy - theoretical and practical – that makes it become both an art of reasoning and a way of life. But he seems to give priority to the latter, especially ethics (moral and social philosophy), in tackling human and societal problems without collapsing the two. He seems to be saying that the two dimensions ought

27 By philosophers here we mean the philosophic sages whose ultimate goal is to promote humanism.
to overlap in a balanced way to bring about much-needed viable solution to human predicaments. Thus, Oruka would later say that the main function of moral philosophy is to “apply rigorous analytic and synthetic reasoning to the basic moral and social problems and help explain or define moral good, moral evil, and the requirements of a humanist social order” (Oruka 1997, 140).

It appears, then, that it is the normative ethical dimension that makes philosophy become sagacious, meaning the major task of genuine philosophers (philosophic sages) is to get to where both theory and praxis overlap in a balanced way for the common good. Elsewhere, in an interview conducted in October 1993, Oruka reiterates this point saying that philosophic sages ought to have such ethical commitment even in a deeper way than other professionals (Kresse 1996, 30).

And now turning to the second question (i.e., how we can achieve the sagacious ethical or normative dimension of philosophy), we propose adopting Odera Oruka’s approach to philosophy, namely, philosophic sagacity. This is a trend that insists that the wisdom (sagacity) worth pursuing would have to be first and foremost philosophic; that is, critical, well-founded, clear, and flexible. To that effect, therefore, we propose that philosophy can be made sagacious in three ways. First, by finding philosophic sages who, like Socrates, are entirely committed to philosophic wisdom and truth within our societies today and giving them a platform, a chance to air their voices, and a wider coverage, thereby exposing their thoughts in response to the current human predicaments.

Second, we can make philosophy sagacious by applying the theoretical knowledge (i.e., the ability to think, reason and insightfully argue) to our contemporary ethical, social, economic, and political issues. This in effect is a huge challenge to philosophers to try and collaborate with scholars from other disciplines rather than remaining aloof in their field. Indeed, it appears that
without such sagacious co-operation with other disciplines, no envisioned solution linked to the welfare of all in our globalized society today would be achieved. 28

The third way in which philosophy can be made sagacious and hence practically relevant would involve philosophers initiating and promoting open, candid, and truthful philosophical discourse with each other on various issues affecting humanity and the environment at the global level. This is in line with Oruka’s conviction that philosophers ought to be open to dialogue and critique if they are to advance and enrich each other. Philosophers also need to study and embrace or accommodate other philosophies of the world. Asked to comment on how African thinkers could make contribution to “world philosophy”, Oruka emphatically replied:

Through the kind of discussion they are doing already and also through discussing not only specifically African problems but also the problems which are philosophical anywhere. I think ... African philosophers should even discuss German philosophy and be sent to contribute to German Philosophy, discuss Chinese Philosophy, Indian Philosophy and interact with those philosophers, have debates, have seminars with them (Kresse 1996, 26).

Such an exchange, however, ought to be done in such a way that it accommodates most world philosophies on an equal level. This will not only promote “intercultural philosophy” 29 but it will also ensure a genuine quest for justice at the global level, a quest for justice that is culturally, economically, socially, politically, and historically sensitive.

It appears, then, that Oruka would most likely advocate for an intercultural philosophy or simply a “philosophy of all cultures” today; he would champion for a philosophical forum whose

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28 For practical ways in which philosophy can collaborate with other disciplines, see Oruka’s intriguing essay: “Philosophy and other Disciplines”, in Graness and Kresse 1997, 35 ff. Here, Oruka discusses the relation and use of philosophy to other subjects studied at most universities. He defends the view that philosophy “is always for life and not life for philosophy”, meaning philosophers ought to take a lead in offering practical solutions to societal problems, thus challenging those who prefer to study it in isolation.

29 See footnote no. 26. Here, I need to point out that this orientation has been pursued and practiced for over twenty years now, resulting into the journal Polylog based in Vienna (cf. polylog.org.).
goal is to establish global exchange and healthy interaction on equal level. Here, philosophies in 
Africa would intellectually engage philosophies in Europe, America, Caribbean, and in Asia. The 
aim is to establish a much stronger intercultural philosophical tradition as a human heritage. And 
in my view, such philosophical discourse will be one of the best forums for establishing justice at 
the global level. It fits well with Oruka’s stance that philosophy needs to be critical and dialogical 
in nature if it is to succeed in carrying out its mandate of pursuing humanism and moral good; that 
is, safeguard and promote the value of human life, as well as discourage the prevailing and 
impending inhuman practices in the world (Oruka 1997, 139).

But one may object that different cultures and specific forms of fundamental beliefs might 
create obstacles to having a meaningful and mutual philosophic discourse, given that philosophical 
content is, to a large extent, determined and shaped by one’s cultural beliefs. To overcome these 
obstacles, we suggest with Oruka to either bracket what he calls “cultural fundamentals” (though 
this might be difficult thing to do) or better yet make them as transparent as possible. That would 
make dialogues freer and fairer, as people mutually understand their cultural prohibitions and learn 
to respect them (Oruka 1997, 194). It would further help us overcome the temptation of “totalising 
our own cultural specifications as the universals”, which, unfortunately, is what essentially defines 
our history. The tragedy of colonialism and imperialism, Oruka says, could be singled out as “a 
classic case of a given culture’s specifics totalised as the universals”, thereby hampering effective 
cultural and other forms of development in Africa (Oruka 1997, 195).

While receiving his second doctorate degree (i.e., Fil Dr. honoris causa) from Uppsala 
University in Sweden on June 4th 1993, Odera Oruka reiterated the same point (i.e., the possibility 

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30 These are “concepts, attitudes, styles, and [psychological] expectations specific to a given school of thought” that tend to cause “obstacles to smooth intellectual dialogue and exchange” (Oruka 1997, 194).
of having meaningful inter-cultural exchange in philosophy and other forms of thought processes) more vividly saying:

> All philosophical theses ... are rooted and driven by their cultural origins; hence, the first requirement for any useful philosophical dialogue is that all cultural origins be bracketed or at least must be made transparent and unpolluting during the dialogue (Oruka 1997 176).

Indeed, if only we could succeed in either bracketing or making our different cultural fundamentals as transparent as possible, then we would create a conducive environment where participants would mutually and respectfully interact and express their philosophical thoughts with the same rights of expression in a situation that is free of some powerful domination that often rule the international political and economic exchanges. This would create, as Oruka says, “a new and fresh thinking in the philosophic path-findings and cross-culture debates” with an ultimate goal of solving human predicaments (Oruka 1997, 199). Perhaps that may sound ideologically attractive, but, I think, it is also realistically possible with some effort.

In our subsequent chapters, we will see how Oruka’s practical philosophy challenges us to embrace such an intercultural approach that promotes freedom of thought if we are to ever succeed in establishing a genuine practice of justice at the global level. His ethical concept of the human minimum, which is a right to a minimum qualitative standard of living for all humans, will inspire us to regard the world as our “common good” or a common homeland governed by the principles of interdependence and responsibility for the ‘other’. Consequently, we shall see Oruka proposing an ethics that is more eco-centric rather than anthropocentric, an ethics that challenges us humans to take the complex inter-relatedness and inter-dependence of being into a serious consideration. His ethics – parental earth ethics, in other words, offers motivation for socio-economic fairness as well as environmental concern, hence “ecological fairness” with Nature.
2.5. Conclusion

Professor Odera Oruka can be described simply as a brilliant, incisive, and down to earth African philosopher who worked his way through to build a long-lasting legacy. His entire life, though short, was nonetheless full of invaluable qualities and great achievements. He spent his entire life so vibrantly and tirelessly in pursuit of knowledge, truth, and wisdom in a manner that neither privileged anyone nor excluded nobody. In this chapter, we have tried to expose Oruka’s rather difficult yet tenacious academic journey; one that is characterized by countless number of challenges, but one that ultimately made him a distinguished scholar, a respected don, an accomplished author, and an inspiring mentor-friend.

Because of the love he had for Africa, Oruka was known as one of a few internationally cited African intellectuals who stayed “home”. As an astute intellectual, despite many everyday-life hardships on different fronts (social, political, economic, etc.) in Kenya where he was based, Oruka was astonishingly ever productive in terms of publication and intellectual output. More so, as a prolific writer, Oruka did not limit his philosophy to academia, for he regularly wrote newspaper articles also, thereby extending the philosophical questioning process and problem solving to a wider audience. He was also open to dialogue and critique, always standing for what is reasonably acceptable rather than being swayed by the urge to be politically expedient and correct. What an exemplary person we had, what a legacy! His is an inspirational story, especially to many young people in Africa where equal opportunities are not often assured and forthcoming.

Oruka’s enormous work in philosophy can be seen as having two major overarching objectives: (i) to reconstruct the sagacious normative dimension in philosophy by trying to make philosophy more practical and relevant to humankind and the environment; and (ii), to liberate philosophy in
Africa from ethnological and racist prejudices that dominated his time. To achieve these two objectives, Oruka first sought to address arguably one of the classical, if not perennial questions, namely, what philosophy is or ought to be, before seeking its relevance in life. This approach ultimately helped him to prioritize and emphasize on the *ethical duty* of a moral agent, thereby demanding practical relevance from philosophers and other scholars as well.

Indeed, as we have seen in this chapter, philosophy from Orukan standpoint has two complementary dimensions: speculative and practical. Thus, from speculative point of view, philosophy can be understood as a critical, deductive, and reflective thought process; always characterized by abstract reasoning, logical consistency, and often tied to individual thinkers. But such critical thought processes, Oruka insists, must have a sagacious normative dimension, meaning that knowledge, skills, and insights from speculative abstract reasoning should first of all be seen and used as *means* of creating philosophical discourse that aim at contributing to the betterment of the wellbeing of people and their environment. The latter is the practical aspect of philosophy that Oruka seems to prioritize and emphasize more.

The two dimensions of philosophy, however, should not be seen as enemies to each other; rather, they ought to be complementary. Speculative philosophical disciplines such as logic, metaphysics, epistemology, etc., are very crucial in sharpening the mind and gaining insight and knowledge, but that knowledge should be translated and possibly transmitted to others in ways that can be practically helpful in life. Hence, a good philosopher, a philosophic sage as Oruka would say, ought to be not only logically refined, lucid, and critical, but also objective, decent, and accommodative in arguments. In other words, he or she should resolutely work hard to pursue and communicate the truth rather than try to decipher it with verbosity and circumlocution. Most
important, a good philosopher also ought to be responsibly committed to try and resolve predicaments affecting humanity as such and the environment.

Thus, we have also seen that for Oruka, who situates himself within the Socratic tradition, philosophy is or ought to be essentially understood as ‘love of wisdom’. This means that it is and should be inextricably tied to both conceptual and practical ways of solving humanity’s predicaments, thereby promoting their dignity and ensuring social justice. Put differently, we have seen that philosophy thus conceived as ‘love of wisdom’ ought not to be just another “science in the ivory tower”. Instead, philosophy ought to ultimately promote humanism or humanness (i.e. concern for the ‘other’) in a way that would ensure genuine practice of justice at global level. In this way, philosophy can be seen at best in service of humanity as people try to put theory into praxis so as to improve on their wellbeing. This, however, does not mean that we tolerate laziness, idleness, greed or mendacity in the name of humanness. Oruka, for instance, would not endorse the idea of giving free money to some strong and able persons who could work for it in some other honest way, given that this would degrade the very notion of humanness; just as greed, corruption, and possessive individualism do.

To that effect, we have discussed at length Oruka’s commitment to practical philosophy, highlighting the ethical dimension as the end or the ultimate goal of philosophising. We have seen the sagacious ethical responsibility that Oruka felt philosophers should embrace – one that aims at not just abstract speculative discourse, but most importantly making better the lives of people and their environment. This has helped us clarify one of our major claims: at the heart of any philosophy worth its salt, there is always some practical commitment that quite often inspire philosophers (indeed every human person) to be ethically responsible.
Thus, we have seen that for Oruka, one thing that is unavoidable for normal adult human being is to be *ethically responsible*. That involves, among other things, being concerned about the wellbeing of oneself and the ‘other’. To be exempted of this responsibility, Oruka says, one must be either an infant, an idiot, or otherwise incapacitated. But ethical duty must also be taken both in terms of what we do and what we do not do as moral agents. Thus, the big question should be: what am I doing (or not doing) as a human being, a moral agent, to improve not only my own life and dignity but also that of other humans especially the less privileged without jeopardizing the environment? In my view, this is no doubt one of the greatest challenges that Oruka’s philosophy poses to us today. It is a challenge that we seek to address further in this study.

Odera Oruka is well known for his *Sage philosophy*, a project that he ingeniously initiated and wrote about as a response to some misconstrued bias against Africans – that Africans are incapable of having or doing philosophy given that reason and logic are foreign to them. But he also wrote extensively on other socio-politico-economic issues affecting humanity, especially in Africa. His work seems to be a typical product of a philosophic sage, given that he used his intellectual skill and vast knowledge to write a philosophy that is practically relevant to the betterment of the wellbeing of humankind and the environment. It is rather unfortunate that many do not recognize or appreciate that the late Odera Oruka was such an important practical philosopher.

In our subsequent chapters, we will focus on exposing Oruka’s practical philosophy. And to begin with, the next chapter will specifically discuss Oruka’s contribution to the shaping and developing of philosophy in Africa. Here, we shall embark on publicizing perhaps one of his most distinguishable landmarks - *philosophic sagacity*. In the context of his Sage philosophy, and in response to a rather distressing question on the nature and the existence of philosophy in Africa, philosophic sagacity becomes a genuine trend (or means) of retrieving and critically reconsidering
traditional or classical wisdom that would be instrumental in solving some contemporaneous issues. It springs from the idea that wisdom or sagacity involves being aware of the past so as to make proper judgments for the present and the future. Thus, we will see how Oruka was able to successfully master the tension between tradition and modernity. And in this way, Oruka is able to rescue philosophy in Africa from ethnological and racist prejudices.
CHAPTER 3

ORUKA’S COMMITMENT TO PHILOSOPHY IN AFRICA

*Philosophy is conceptual and logical discourse ... the difference between African philosophy and Western philosophy does not lie in the use of reason, which is a universal human trait* (Oruka 1991a, 26).

3.1. Introduction

In our previous chapter, we focused on the legacy of Odera Oruka where we tried to expose, espouse, and critically evaluate his commitment to philosophy from a practical point of view. Among other things, we discovered that Oruka envisioned a kind of philosophy that is more practical than theoretical, a philosophy that is relevantly committed to the betterment of the welfare of people and their environment. In this chapter, we will, on the same impetus, explore Oruka’s incontestable contribution to the shaping and development of philosophy in Africa, which is another way of espousing his commitment to practical philosophy.

As mentioned in chapter two, Oruka’s entire philosophy can be seen as having two overarching objectives, namely, (i) to reconstruct the sagacious practical dimension in philosophy, and (ii) to liberate philosophy in Africa from ethnological (or mythical) and racist prejudices. The current chapter will focus on the second objective, which is well covered in one of his most famous works - *Sage philosophy*. This is a project that Oruka ingeniously initiated to demonstrate that there really exists a genuine philosophy in Africa, thereby dispelling some biased views about Africans.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section displays the historical and contextual background that informed or prompted Oruka’s response to the then contentious issue of the nature and the existence of philosophy in Africa. The second section considers *philosophic sagacity* in depth as a new outstanding trend in philosophy. Here, we shall see Oruka’s approach to philosophy as a practical response to one of the most intriguing issues in contemporary Africa, namely: social,
economic, political, and intellectual deprivation and suppression. And hopefully, this will portray Oruka not only as a sage but also a diligent philosopher committed to seeking justice for his people.

The two overarching objectives mentioned above are inextricably tied together. This is another point we want to underscore. Indeed, we’ll see that Oruka’s commitment to philosophy in Africa is in tandem with his understanding of what philosophy is, or ought to be: a way of critical thinking in pursuit of truth about the most fundamental principles of human life and their relations with the environment. According to Oruka, then, philosophy (understood as ‘love of wisdom’) seems inescapably tied to some ethical commitment and social responsibility. Thus, he challenges contemporary philosophers to embrace that commitment and responsibility to bring to the fore practical dimension of philosophy, thereby enhancing the wellbeing of their people without jeopardizing the environment.

Now it is from that perspective, we shall try to argue, that Oruka’s commitment to defend, shape, and develop philosophy in Africa attests to his general task of philosophizing against social, political, economic, and theoretical deprivation and suppression. Indeed, as Richard Bell rightly observes, philosophy in Africa, among other things, ought to be tied to the experience of the lived reality of the people, which is made up of the pre-colonial traditions, its colonial history, current harsh circumstance, and human struggles (Bell 2002, 35).

Oruka’s philosophy seems in pursuit of that agenda. His approach to philosophy (i.e., philosophic sagacity), we urge, is also practically relevant today beyond Africa. It emphasizes that philosophy worth its salt ought to be tied to individual critical thinkers rather than being misconstrued into some community-based pseudo philosophy (ethno-philosophy), which nonetheless only perpetuates such oppressive structures albeit in different form. It also underscores
that genuine philosophy ought to be sagacious; meaning it ought to be practically relevant in solving contemporaneous issues affecting humankind and the environment. Thus, the chapter will conclude by justifying Oruka’s commitment to such critical issues as human rights, ethical duty, humanism, communalism, and above all global justice.

3.2. African Philosophy: A Turbulent Path

The issue of the nature and the existence of philosophy in Africa has, until recently (1990s) gone through what one might aptly call a turbulent journey. This journey is marked by several significant historical phases, with some arrogantly if not ignorantly denying any possibility of having philosophy in Africa, while others vehemently trying to defend its rightful position. As a result, there have been a number of trends or schools of thought in pursuit of this course. According to Oruka, for instance, this issue first went through what he calls “the myth of pre-philosophy”, a stage in which African mind and culture were generally claimed to be extremely alien to logic, reason, philosophy, and civilization (Oruka 1991a, 45). Ironically, though, representatives of this phase include such famous philosophers as Hume, Kant, Hegel, among others.

As a reaction to the ‘myth of pre-philosophy’, there arose a second phase, that is, the “ethno-philosophical phase” in the works of such scholars as Tempels, Mbiti, and Kagame. But as we shall see shortly, although this second phase tried to assert the nature and the existence of

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31 The issue was problematised since the early 1960s through late 1990s with intensive debate meant to handle such topics as: What is philosophy? What is African philosophy? Did the Africans in their typical traditional cultures ever philosophise? Should African philosophy, if any, overlap with other philosophies? Who qualifies as an African philosopher? etc. (Oruka 1997, 160).

32 Of course, their derogative works, had been carefully concealed from academia until mid-20th century when their racist overtones, arrogance, and ignorance were exposed. For an intriguing coverage, see C. Neugebauer, “The Racism of Hegel and Kant” in Oruka 1991, 247-257 and Odhiambo 2009, 1-19.
philosophy in Africa, it nonetheless found itself lazily conceiving of it as a communal affair (with no individual philosophers) that uniquely defined the African mind.

That necessitated the rise of yet another phase, the “professional phase”, which saw individual Africans who had been professionally trained as philosophers in Europe and elsewhere grappling to articulate issues about African philosophy. But in this endeavour, the professional school of thought unfortunately alienated itself from (or took for granted) the existence of indigenous African thinkers. And it was precisely due to this and other challenges that Odera Oruka came up with a new trend he dubbed *philosophic sagacity*. This trend as we shall see, tries to capture both indigenousness and professionalism in African philosophy. To get this point clearly, therefore, let us first consider these phases in depth.

### 3.2.1. The Myth of Pre-Philosophy (The First Phase)

The ‘myth of pre-philosophy’ represents a time when African mind and culture was, out of bias or ignorance, considered inadequate: extremely alien to logic, reason, philosophy, civilization, and scientific inquiry. This position, which Odhiambo calls the “conventional conception of the African mentality” holds that anything African could not be philosophical, and likewise, anything philosophical could not be African (Odhiambo 2009, 1, 43). It appears in some disparaging works of such Western philosophers and scholars as Kant (*Philosophical Anthropology*), Hegel (*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*), Levy-Bruhl (*The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*), Westermann (*The African Today*), among others. According to this literature, Africa could only be described as primitive, static and “dark”; which sadly situates Africans as pre-logical, pre-scientific, pre-literate, and hence pre-philosophical (Neugebauer 1991, 54).
Kant’s bias and blatant racism, to start with, though unknown in the mainstream academia, is incontestable. Kant seems to defend the monogenetic racial theory: humanity descended from an original “stem species” that began in one part of the world; different races, however, emerged as members of that species migrated to different parts of the world with different climates, which triggered their predisposition to produce the physical features (and especially the skin color) they needed to survive in these new environments. And for Kant, once climate and environment trigger human predispositions to produce racial differences, that process is irreversible (Boxill 2017, 45).

Thus, in his lectures on *Philosophical Anthropology*, Kant discerns four races of human species according to colour-line, namely, white (European), yellow (Asian), black (African), and red (Native American) in that pecking order, which order is determined by decreasing mental and general capability (Oruka 1990, 251). Excepting the first (i.e., white) race, Kant claims that the other three races inherently suffer from mental defects. Commenting about the black race, for instance, in “Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime” Kant writes:

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to adduce a single example where a Negro has demonstrated talents, … the difference between the white and black races seems to be just as great with regard to the capacities of mind as it is with respect to color (Kant 2:253).

In yet another essay entitled “Of the Different Races of Human Beings” (1775), Kant further observes that “The Negro, who is well suited to his climate, [is] strong, fleshy, supple, but who given the abundant provisions of his motherland, is lazy, soft and trifling” (Kant 1775/2007, 82-97; cf. Kant 2:438). And to rectify such defects, Kant says the Negro is fit for special training, which training he recommends to be done by thoroughly thrashing the Africans, preferably with a
split bamboo cane rather than an ordinary whip owing to the thickness of their skin.\textsuperscript{33} And behold, Kant erroneously justifies slavery and colonial imperialism, a move that, unfortunately, would contradict what he is famously known for: a morality based on the categorical imperative.\textsuperscript{34}

It is important to note also that Kant generally regards the concept of ‘race’ in terms of “class distinction” prevalent not only in human beings (hence the pecking order above) but also in other animals. And such class distinctions, he says, are inevitably inherited by nature. Thus, mixing of races, according to Kant, should entirely be avoided; it can only cause misfortune and damage.\textsuperscript{35} I wonder how such racism in Kant can be defended or reconciled with his “mainstream” thoughts.

Hegel’s bias is equally scary, as he disparagingly describes Africa in a rather general and derogative way. In his Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, for instance, Hegel describes “Africa proper” (by which he means the sub-Saharan region) as a continent enclosed within itself, with no signs of development, and whose dominant principle is “cultural backwardness”. He says,

In Africa proper, man has not progressed beyond merely sensuous existence, and has found it absolutely impossible to develop any further. Physically he exhibits great muscular strength, which enables him to perform arduous labours; and his temperament is characterised by good-naturedness, which is coupled, however, with completely unfeeling cruelty (Hegel 1975, 172).

Hegel apparently divides Africa into three regions: (i) the land to the south of Sahara (Africa proper); (ii) the land to the North of Sahara (Europe-Africa); and (iii) the region of the Nile and


\textsuperscript{34} See the second formula that states: “So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (Kant 4:428).

Ethiopia (Asia-Africa). He however says that Africa proper “is the characteristic part of the whole continent” (Hegel 1975, 173). Hegel then denies in Africa not only philosophy but also history, morality, religion, culture and civilization (Hegel 1975, 174). And by extension, he also denies Africans two major concepts in his philosophy: reason (or spirit) and consciousness.

Now to support his outrageous claims purporting that black people are inherently inferior to, say, white people, Hegel further argues that North Africa (especially Egypt and Carthage), whose civilization is no doubt a classical marvel, is not part of Africa; its inhabitants are not Africans but Europeans in character. But that is obviously untrue. There also were many other civilizations in ancient Africa that Hegel arrogantly ignored to investigate. Thus, as Christian Neugebauer rightly points out, Hegel’s purported description of Africa clearly unmasks his main source about Africa: ignorance and racial biasness (Neugebauer 1991, 54). At best, Hegel relies on embellished stories and travel diaries to disparagingly define Africans as static, primitive, dark, savage, illogical, philosophically innocent, and culturally homogeneous (Bernasconi 1998, 43-46). He writes,

The negro is an example of animal man in all his savagery and lawlessness, and if we wish to understand him at all, we must put aside all our European attitudes. We must not think of a spiritual God or of moral laws; … we must abstract from all reverence and morality, and from everything which we call feeling. All this is foreign to man in his immediate existence, and nothing consonant with humanity is to be found in his character. For this reason, we cannot properly feel ourselves into his nature, no more than into that of a dog (Hegel 1975, 174).

Consequently, the much-celebrated German philosopher concludes his introduction of the Lectures by stating unequivocally that he is not going to include Africa in his analysis. For him, world history (by which he means a progressive development of the consciousness of human freedom) properly speaking begins in China (or Persia) and ends in Europe (Hegel 1956, 180).
It is for these and other racist remarks that Odera Oruka critically observes that the ‘myth of pre-philosophy’ can be seen as an attempt to establish two things about Africa: (i) the impossibility for having any philosophic dialogue; and (ii), an obvious (i.e., conventional though not accurate) nonexistence of a tradition of any organized philosophical systems in Africa (Oruka 1987, 47). In this regard, also, the myth seems to naively regard philosophy only in the “usual” sense as the heritage of the West, thereby treating it as a typical or a natural European activity foreign to other races and continents like Africa. But to think that logic, reason, science, philosophy, religion and civilization are exclusively European enterprises, as Kresse points out, no doubt, amounts to a serious scientific if not philosophical blunder (Kresse 1996, 23). Nonetheless, and perhaps on a positive side, it was after the ‘myth of pre-philosophy’ was exposed that debates on the nature and existence of philosophy in Africa took another better twist, ushering in the second phase.

3.2.2. Ethno-philosophy (The Second Phase)

To offset the ‘myth of pre-philosophy’, some scholars have made frantic attempts to show that African societies – ancient or contemporary – are neither innocent of logic, reason and hence philosophy, nor alien to civilization. This school of thought dubbed ethno-philosophy, marks the second phase in search for the nature and existence of philosophy in Africa.36 But as we shall see, despite its apparent noble motive, ethno-philosophy ends up describing African philosophy merely as “traditional-communal-thought-system” often found in fables, proverbs, songs, and other

36 Paulin Hountondji, one of the leading African Philosophers and a fierce critique of this school of thought, claims to be the one who coined this term ethno-philosophy (Hountondji 1983, 34). However, in a more recent publication Hountondji acknowledges that the term had been employed almost three decades earlier by Nkuruma in his doctoral thesis undertaken (but uncompleted) at the University of Pennsylvania (Mosley 1995, 175). It is not very clear though whether Nkuruma uses the term ethno-philosophy in the same sense as Hountondji does, that is, in reference to “a collective thought” often but erroneously attributed to African philosophy (Gyekye 1995, xvi).
linguistic features (Oruka 1987). Thus, it is reflected in such expressions as ‘Bantu philosophy’, ‘Agikuyu philosophy’, ‘Luo philosophy’, etc; which “philosophies” as Gyekye aptly observes, subscribe to a “monolithic set of ideas and beliefs”, hence unanimity (Gyekye 1995, xvii).

Ethno-philosophy, furthermore, starts with a strong anthropological assumption that African philosophy is and must only be different from, say, European philosophy. But that assumption, of course, is fallacious. Ethnophilosophical trend, therefore, spectacularly fails to solve the real problem at stake: tackling the misconception about the nature and the existence of philosophy in Africa. Indeed, as Oruka rightly observes, ethno-philosophy seems to only succeed to embody what he calls “the myth of a unique philosophy”, another kind of myth that requires a communal consensus as it fuses (or confuses) mythologies with philosophy (Oruka 1991, 45). In other words, ethno-philosophy only identifies with the totality of customs and common beliefs of a people (Oruka would call this folk philosophy), thereby forming a sharp contrast with a deductive philosophy developed by a critical mind and consistent logic of individual thinkers.

The point we are trying to make here is that following Oruka’s insight, and contrary to the ethno-philosophical approach, philosophy (whether African or otherwise) ought to be a product of critical, deductive, and reflective thought process, always characterized by logical consistency and often tied to independent individual thinkers who in most cases challenge the status quo. But at the same time, such philosophers ought to embrace and integrate some ethical commitment and social responsibility so as to make their philosophies relevant and practical to the betterment of humanity’s wellbeing and the environment. I come back to this point later, but first, let us first look at some examples of ethno-philosophy.
3.2.2.1. Placide Tempels and “Bantu Philosophy”

One of the key proponents of ethno-philosophy is Rev. Placide Tempels, a Belgian Catholic priest who did missionary work from 1930s through 1960s among the Luba people in today’s Democratic Republic of Congo. In response to the ‘myth of pre-philosophy’ that we discussed above, Tempels sought to defend a contrary position, urging that speculative thought and reasoning was indeed a permanent and prevalent feature of pre-colonial Africa. Thus, Tempels contends that to deny logic and ontology (and hence philosophy in its strict sense) to the Africans or any other “primitive” group of people is an unrealistic and untenable position.

In his small but widely read book entitled *Bantu Philosophy*, Tempels claims that Bantu philosophy comprises of some basic principles that underlie the African behaviour, beliefs, and customs. These principles, which revolve around the concept of *vital force*, are crucial given that they govern Africans in their day-to-day lives. Thus, according to Tempels, Bantu’s behaviour, ontology, wisdom, psychology, ethics, religion, and “restoration of life” are all centred in the value of *vital force* - a reality that, though invisible, yet is supreme and permeates every Bantu (Tempels 1945, 49). And behold the Bantu philosophy!

It should be surprising and intellectually baffling, though, that Tempels could claim almost single-handedly to have discovered Bantu (or African) philosophy; one that is uniquely communal, permanent and stable system of beliefs, though consistent with some peculiar and inferior logic based on one primordial concept of *vital force* (whatever that may be). And it is this “philosophy”, Tempels says, that has perennially been handed over from ancient to the modern Africa. It is what defines the African mind despite the fact that the very African mind could neither formulate nor
articulate. It is a kind of philosophy that required an outsider to define and articulate it for the world to know all about its nature and existence.37

Now it is in this regard that we maintain how difficult it is for any reasonable person to see how Tempels could possibly succeed in attacking the myth of pre-philosophy, let alone enhancing helpful debates on the nature and existence of Philosophy in Africa. His major claims are obviously controversial if not outright false. According to Oruka, Tempels committed two “intellectual crimes” by first claiming that “the Bantu were not themselves capable of theorising and articulating their own ‘philosophy’, and second, he confused people’s Weltanschaung with philosophy as an academic discipline” (Oruka 1997, 164).

Yet, perhaps on the positive side as Odera Oruka further notes, “Tempels was ahead of the European anthropologists and missionaries who found no philosophy worth its salt in African culture; a culture which to them was a product of ‘a primitive mentality’” (Oruka 1997, 164). Thus, Tempels has incontestably been accredited as the first European scholar to have published a work that prima facie seems to systematically debunk the ‘myth of pre-philosophy’ despite the fact that he does this in the sense of finding, as Oruka elsewhere rightly puts, “rationality in the irrational” (Oruka 1990, 16). Now whether Tempels deserves such an accreditation or not might be debatable, and the scope of this study may not allow me to delve into that debate. But it remains reasonably clear to me that Tempels, just like most ethno-philosophers, was gravely mistaken to generalize his anthropological findings that he then lazily baptized Bantu (read African) philosophy.

37 I concur with Gail Presbey, who, along with Paul Radin, critiques Tempels’ approach as highly “presumptive and wrong-headed insofar as Tempels presumed to describe Bantu philosophy on behalf of Bantu speaking people” (Presbey 2016, 5).
Scholars in African philosophy, however, remain divided on this, with some praising Tempels as being arguably the father of African philosophy (Masolo 1995, 46). Others have aired their discomforts while appreciating his contribution. Commenting on Tempels’ text, for instance, Odera Oruka, scornfully observes that it is “full of intolerable paternalism of a vigorous Western missionary who is eager to save the souls of the Bantu people” but nonetheless ends up crafting an idiosyncratic “philosophy” that denies them knowledge proper, except that knowledge which is mystical and sporadically magical (Oruka 1995, 21).

This, to me, sounds a valid criticism against Tempels’ methodology and intentionality; for Tempels only grants to Bantu people the knowledge of *vital force* that happens to hierarchically permeate being: God, Spirits, ancestors, humans, animals, plants, and other stuff in that pecking order (Tempels 1945, 23-35, 55-59, 61-64). But obviously this cannot be the only knowledge that Bantu people, leave alone Africans, are capable of, neither is it the only kind of knowledge that is *idiosyncratically unique* to them as Tempels would like us to believe.

3.2.2.2. John S. Mbiti and “African Philosophy and Religion”

Another scholar who has immensely contributed to propagate the ethno-philosophical approach to African philosophy is a Kenyan-born theologian John S. Mbiti. In his rather famous text entitled *African Philosophy and Religion* (1969), Mbiti sets out to emphasize the unity of African religions and philosophy. As he categorically puts it in the introduction, one can hardly separate philosophy from religion in Africa, since “Africans are notoriously religious,” and it is religion more than anything else that governs or drives their life (Mbiti 1969, xii).

Mbiti consequently conflates traditional African religions with African philosophy, thereby describing the latter as simply having to do with how Africans ordinarily but uniquely respond to
life in their different daily activities. What follows then in the remainder of his book is an analysis
of such topics as time, kinship, family, birth, child naming, initiation, marriage, death, prayers,
sacrifices, magic, etc. And in thoroughly treating these topics, Mbiti seems to portray Africans as
not only unique but also strangely mysterious.

With regard to the concept of time, for instance, Mbiti suggests that time in the African
mind is not similar to, say, the Western concept of time that has three significant phases: past,
present, and future, with time moving from the past to the future. According to Mbiti, Africans are
philosophically unique since their concept of time has two dimensions, namely, a long-past and
the felt-present; with hardly any future (except that which covers about six months to two years).
He uses Kiswahili words zamani and sasa to describe the two dimensions (the long-past and the
felt-present) respectively, saying that the latter (sasa) covers all that is present plus the short future
of about six to two years (Mbiti 1990, 17-24). Time in Africa, Mbiti also adds, moves from
present to past, given that time in Africa is measured in terms of events.

The idea of time moving from present to past is significant in Mbiti’s philosophy, though
it remains highly dubious. For him, the past (zamani) is the permanent “storehouse” for all events;
it is “the ocean of time in which everything becomes absorbed into a reality that is neither after
nor before” (Mbiti 1990, 23). Thus, events move from sasa and disappear into zamani. The latter,
therefore, as Oruka observes, seems to be “the period of myth that gives the sense of foundation
to all things in the sasa period” (Oruka 1997, 188). And it is from this concept of time, one would
say, that Mbiti understands African philosophy as “the permanent and unquestionable foundation
of beliefs that give sense to every aspect of life and the history of the people” (Oruka 1997, 188).

38 It is surprising that Mbiti chose not to use the Kiswahili word usoni, which literally and properly
translates into “infinite future”. But that would water down his whole analysis of time.
Thus, like in Tempels, African philosophy from the ethno-philosophical point of view becomes in Mbiti a permanent if unanimous body of beliefs that the whole community lazily absorbs.39

3.2.2.3. Why Ethno-philosophy is a flop

As we hinted above, despite its attempts to debunk the ‘myth of pre-philosophy’, ethno-philosophy as a school of thought seems to flop for various reasons. First, it tends to see philosophy in Africa as a collective enterprise, a communal participatory thought process, thereby lacking in the basic characteristics (e.g., individual intellectual astuteness) ordinarily attributed to other world philosophies (Odhiambo 2009, 65). In other words, ethno-philosophy tends to present philosophy in Africa as merely a lived communal worldview. Ethno-philosophy, therefore, can be described as “the study of collective forms of culture as manifestations of African philosophical systems” (Ivan and Masolo 2000, 4); at best only giving us what is supposedly assumed in everyday life.

Ethno-philosophy has further been accused of serving the interests of colonialists and imperialists whose intention is to dominate and exploit Africans, having classified them as uniquely inferior. It basically aims at presenting and defending traditional African worldview as a thought system, albeit within a particular culture. Upon careful scrutiny, however, it becomes apparent that this trend only succeeds in portraying philosophy in Africa as unique, idiosyncratic, and distinct from, say, Western philosophy in a pejorative manner. This is because at best, ethno-philosophy is only exercised as a collective wisdom of a people, one that is almost uncritically shared by everybody in the society. The end result, then, is not philosophy in the proper sense of the word. Hence, as Oruka rightly says, whereas Western philosophy is identified with reason,

39 Others who subscribe to ethno-philosophical approach include: Kagame (1959); Horton (1987); and Griaule (1965). For details, see Odhiambo 2009, 43-64.
logic, and science, African philosophy in the eyes of ethno-philosophy is defined by the opposite of these attributes, which ultimately creates “a subtle form of master-slave distinction between the two races” (Oruka 1991, 20).

As a communal thought system, ethno-philosophy also seems desperately impersonal; it is not identifiable with any individual thinker, which again works against the Africans and their interests within the global society. Hence, Oruka describes it as “the philosophy of everybody; it is understood and accepted by everyone. It is at best a form of religion. But would in other cases function perfectly like a taboo and superstition” (Oruka 1982, 48; cf. Oruka 1990, iv-v). This point has had support from other contemporary scholars who lament sadly that philosophy in Africa has been unfortunately presented by ethno-philosophers as atypical; that is, as “a remarkable unanimity with no dissenting voice ... a philosophy without philosophers” (Odhiambo 2008, 96; 2009, 73).

Another criticism levelled against ethno-philosophy pertains to its methodology. In its endeavour to get to the underlying basic principles of reality and behaviour of the people in Africa, ethno-philosophy employs a methodology similar to that which cultural anthropology ordinarily uses, namely, ethnology. This, according to Oruka is a method employed in cultural anthropology to study “a people as a collective and unified one-willed organism” (Oruka 1991, 19). The information acquired is then craftily described in a philosophical language. The end-product, however, as Hountondji aptly observes, is neither anthropology nor philosophy proper but a conglomeration of both, or more euphemistically ethno-philosophy. For him, such a process mostly succeeds in producing “ethnological works with philosophical pretensions” (Hountondji 1983, 34).

Evidently, then, ethno-philosophy falls spectacularly into the same pitfall it so desperately sought to avoid. Just as the ‘myth of pre-philosophy’ tends to confine philosophy to the West,
ethno-philosophers embark on writing something about philosophy in Africa, but, as Odhiambo says, they do so not without a remarkable naivety. They try to argue, for instance, that African culture and its philosophy are a uniquely lived experience, and not a myriad of concepts to be idealized or rigorously rationalized by critical mind. In other words, they see philosophy in Africa as “an inseparable part of the concrete, of culture as Africans feel and live, and not an entity to be isolated and discussed [critically]” (Odhiambo 2008, 98). But in so doing, they also almost unconsciously demonstrate that philosophy understood as a detailed, critical, rigorous, intellectual exercise has no place in African culture, both traditional and modern.

Elsewhere, Oruka affirms this point, cautioning that the contentious issue is not that there is and perhaps there must be a distinction between African philosophy and, say, Western philosophy; for indeed, “the historical, cultural, and environmental conditions and choices in the two systems are reasonably different. But, whatever the difference, it does not qualitatively lay in the use of reason” (Oruka 1991, 26). Hence, for Oruka, the greatest disservice to development of philosophy in Africa is to deliberately or otherwise deny Africans the use of reason, which is a universal human trait, and instead attempt to “dress it in magic and extra-rational traditionalism”, which is what ethno-philosophy basically does (Oruka 1991, 26).

Here, Oruka seems in tandem with Lévi-Strauss whose “structuralism” acknowledges reason in all people’s thought process despite their cultural and environmental difference (Lévi-Strauss, 1976). Gyekye also seems to agree with Oruka when he astutely argues that philosophy (by which he means ‘intellectual inquiry into fundamental questions about human experience’) is essentially universal human activity; meaning the propensity, the desire and the capacity to wonder and hence to raise fundamental questions about nature, supreme being, human existence, etc, can be found in peoples of different cultures even though the responses given may vary (Gyekye 1995, xiv, 10).
3.2.3. Professional African Philosophy (The Third Phase)

Owing to the above criticisms levelled against ethno-philosophy, some professionally trained African philosophers emerged to assert that African philosophy should be seen from the professional/ academic perspective. This trend, which forms the third phase in search for the nature and existence of philosophy in Africa, insists that any African philosophy worthy its name should be not only individually based, but most importantly engrained with critical, complex but coherent arguments (Wiredu 1980, 34).

Key proponents of this school of thought include: Wiredu (Philosophy and an African Culture, 1980), Bodunrin (The Question of African Philosophy, 1981), Hountondji (African Philosophy: Myth and Reality, 1983), and to some extent Odera Oruka. As Odhiambo rightly observes, these are professionally trained African thinkers who have one remarkable characteristic: they strive to employ techniques and methodology commonly but perhaps erroneously associated with Western philosophy only (Odhiambo 2009, 74). Also, while they generally concur that African philosophy should be independent, dynamic, critical, and discursive, yet they in most cases hold some interesting, divergent, and even sometimes incompatible views, especially when the question boils down to the exact nature of philosophy in Africa, or when the question involves a particular contentious issue. They try to lift the discourse to a “universal level” before turning to specific existential conditions and priorities affecting humanity in search of truth (Bell 2002, 27).

A good example can be seen in reference to an intriguing debate between Oruka and Wiredu on the concept of truth. Whereas the latter in the essay “Truth as Opinion” holds that truth is nothing categorically set other than an opinion (Wiredu 1972), the former in his paper “Truth and Belief” opines that truth must be absolute and foundational to knowledge, otherwise if truth
were merely opinion, discourse would be vitiated by subjectivity, which would result in anarchy and chaos (Oruka 1975). Wiredu then responds to Oruka in a paper “In Behalf of Opinion” (1976), before Oruka’s rejoinder in “For the Sake of Truth” (1988). Unfortunately, that exchange could not last long following Oruka’s untimely death in 1995. Thus, Wiredu regrets that he was still planning on how to respond to Oruka in yet another essay, which most likely would have ignited another intellectual battle. It seems the two had created a habit of challenging each other in almost every topic they wrote about. However, their divergent views, fierce criticisms, and perhaps misreading each other only made their friendship grow deeper and stronger (contrary to the opinion of many). Wiredu affirms this point when in tribute to his fallen comrade writes:

I recall that our friendship [with Oruka] grew even as our philosophical disagreements gathered momentum. I have pleasant memories of the long discussions Oruka and I had whenever we met, which was quite frequent. In these discussions, we took up points of disagreement much oftener than points of agreement, and we both found that rewarding; certainly, I did (Graness and Kresse 1997, 141).

I bring out the passionate encounter between these two arguably most prolific philosophers in Africa then to show how the so-called “professional” school of thought envisioned philosophy in Africa ought to be: a robust formal (written) intellectual encounter characterised by systematic complex arguments and counter arguments by two or more critical minds in relation to a particular philosophical issue. Thus, as a trend basically meant to debunk the ‘myth of pre-philosophy’, the “professional” school of thought, then, seems to have the intention to articulate and defend African philosophy in the strict and technical usage of the term.40

40 As a caveat, though, it is important to note with Oruka that representatives of this trend are referred to as “professional”, not because of their superior or otherwise individual intellectual astuteness, but simply because they hold the position that whatever African philosophy is, it must satisfy the criteria of professional philosophy: critical, independent, and discursive reflection (Oruka 1991, 20).
3.2.3.1. Why the “professional” approach might fail

Despite all its noble intentions, the professional approach to African philosophy, unfortunately, also has some shortcomings. First, having been trained mostly in the Western traditions, the so-called “professional philosophers” are often accused of inappropriately deploying Western techniques, logic, and methods to do African philosophy. They tend, in other words, to use Western “spectacles” to see African philosophy, thereby missing an invaluable chunk of African-ness. The end-result of what they qualify African philosophy becomes in essence, as Oruka says, “a scholarly exercise rooted in the West” (Oruka 1990, 16-19).

Furthermore, even though the professional approach would grant the existence of African philosophy in its proper and strict sense, it nonetheless limits itself to modern or contemporary Africa, giving a false impression that traditional Africans were inherently incapable of technical philosophy (Odhiambo 2008, 97). In sum, the professional trend can be accused of going “too far in risking African philosophical identity to the Western bias”, that is, using Western philosophy as the measure of philosophizing in Africa. It also seems not to go far enough in limiting the discussion to the specific issues affecting the African context (Bell 2002, 28).

3.3. Philosophic Sagacity: A “New” Trend

Following our discussion so far regarding the nature and the existence of philosophy in Africa, it is now clear, I think, that the two trends (ethno-philosophical and professional approach) fail in one way or another to adequately address the issue, thereby debunking the ‘myth of pre-philosophy’. Hence, it becomes imperative to think of another approach that would clarify the matter. And that is where the ingenuity of Odera Oruka comes in as he seeks to craft another trend, a kind of “hybrid” or go-between trend that would overcome the challenges of both ethno-
philosophy and professional philosophy without losing their invaluable contributions. As we shall see, this “new” trend, which Oruka dubbed *philosophic sagacity*, proves to be very helpful in shaping the understanding of the nature and the existence of philosophy in Africa. It is also applicable elsewhere in the world, leading to a possibility of having an intercultural approach to philosophy, a prerequisite towards establishing a genuine practice of justice at the global level.

### 3.3.1. Philosophic Sagacity enroute

Now in response to the ‘myth of pre-philosophy’ that had scornfully denied any philosophy in Africa, and owing to the challenges of ethno-philosophical and professional approach, Odera Oruka as early as 1974 came up with a new approach that would seek individuals within traditional African societies who were considered not only morally irreproachable but most importantly sagacious in a rather philosophic, critical, or didactic sense. The idea was to have a serious dialogue with these sages (normally in their own mother-tongue) and then systematically record their thoughts on such important issues as the nature of the Divine, the concept of human person, the meaning of freedom, democracy, justice, equality, time, death, afterlife, etc. The recording of such thoughts became for Oruka a concrete evidence of philosophy in Africa, which philosophy could later on be critically analysed and academically engaged with other philosophies. *Philosophic sagacity*, therefore, is a trend that aims at rescuing African philosophy in the technical sense of the word seen through African “spectacles”, that is, seen with little or no Western influence.

*Philosophic sagacity* started with two rather ambitious but related projects that Oruka together with some of his students and colleagues at the University of Nairobi carried out in Kenya.

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41 The term “philosophic sagacity” can be viewed in two rather related ways: first, as a trend or a school of thought; and second, as a quality or an intellectual capacity of an individual - a philosophic sage. In this section, we will mostly advance the former connotation rather than the latter to demonstrate Oruka’s practical response to the contentious issue of the nature and existence of philosophy in Africa.
The first project entitled “Thoughts of Traditional Kenyan Sages” was carried out in 1974. Its aim was either to substantiate or invalidate the claim that traditional African people were innocent of logical and critical thinking, and hence seemingly removed from any philosophical discourse. As Oruka tells us, it sought to address the following question:

Would it be possible to identify persons of traditional African culture capable of the critical, second-order type of thinking about the various problems of human life and nature; persons … who subject beliefs that are traditionally taken for granted to independent rational re-examination, and who are inclined to accept or reject such beliefs on the authority of reason rather than on the basis of a communal or religious consensus? (Oruka 1991, 17).

The project was conducted in the form of dialogues with Kenyan sages across the country. Many of these dialogues have been published in Oruka’s classical text - *Sage Philosophy*. But as Oruka further notes, while some sages were found merely to reiterate cultural beliefs and moral systems, others were critical, independent-minded, and very insightful. The former are folk sages, whereas the latter are philosophic sages whom Oruka was mostly interested to expose to the world.

In 1976, Oruka launched yet another project, this time bringing in some national and social dimensions. This project entitled “The Philosophical Roots of Culture in Kenya” was presented to the Ministry of Culture and Social Services, though it was never officially published. The two projects constitute what Oruka would later call “Kenyan philosophic sagacity”. This is because, whereas the 1974 project sought to identify philosophic sages in Kenya, the 1976 project was geared towards engaging their thoughts for the sake of finding lasting social cohesion and national prosperity (Odhiambo 2008, 94-95). Hence, for Oruka, philosophic sagacity is not just another school of thought for mere speculative abstract discourse; it is rather one practical trend meant to offer viable alternative solutions to some contemporaneous predicaments affecting his people.
There has been controversy regarding exactly when *philosophic sagacity*, as a trend, made its grand-maiden entry into philosophical arena, with some claiming 1978 while others holding on to 1981. I follow those who maintain that it was in 1978 when Odera Oruka officially proposed it to the international community during a conference to commemorate the achievements of A. W. Amo (1703-1759) in Accra Ghana (Odhiambo 2008, 92). During that conference, we learn that Oruka presented an intriguing paper entitled “Four Trends in Current African Philosophy”, where he identified four trends in (or approaches to) philosophy in Africa, namely, ethno-philosophy, nationalistic-ideological philosophy, professional philosophy, and philosophic sagacity.

In his conclusion, having analysed both the strength and the weaknesses of the other three trends, Oruka passionately appealed for *philosophic sagacity* as the ideal trend to approach African philosophy, showing how it overcomes most of the criticisms levelled against the other trends. The following year, Oruka is said to have read a slightly revised version of that paper during the 16th World Congress of Philosophy in Dusseldorf, Germany, where he once again defended philosophic sagacity. The paper, however, was only published in 1981, which perhaps makes some have the false impression that the term “philosophic sagacity” found its entry into the philosophical arena then (Odhiambo 2008, 92). Oruka would later develop and publish this paper as a book entitled *Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy* (1990).

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42 Born in present-day Ghana in 1703, Anton Wilhelm Amo was brought to Germany by the Dutch West Indian Co. in 1707 as a child slave. He was, however, lucky to access education, becoming arguably the first black African known to have attended university in Europe where he exhibited great intellectual capacity. He studied law, medicine, psychology, and philosophy. He later taught at the universities of Halle and Jena and published several philosophical works. He returned to his native land in 1753, where he died later on in 1759 (Mabe, 2014). For more details, see Asante and Abarry 1996, 424 ff.

43 Oruka would later add two more trends: (i) hermeneutic philosophy, which consists of philosophical analysis of concepts in a given African language to help clarify meaning and logical implications; and (ii) artistic or literary philosophy (Oruka 1991, 5).
3.3.2. Philosophic Sagacity or Sage philosophy?

There has been temptation to conflate ‘philosophic sagacity’ with ‘sage philosophy’ as if the two are synonymous. But, as we shall see, this amounts to misreading Oruka, given that the former is a derivative of or just one aspect of the latter. As hinted above, Sage philosophy is an ambitious project that proceeds from the premise that there are individuals within various African societies who exhibit some rare but philosophic insights, rigorous arguments, and viable positions while addressing some deep-seated issues related to nature, life, existence, deity, etc., both at the communal and universal planes. The assumption, as Barasa holds, is that if such individuals were engaged in a dialectical manner on their own or through midwifery provocation by a professionally trained philosopher, they can with ease reveal a great deal of insight, which may be harnessed for enlightenment and betterment of the wellbeing of their people (Graness and Kresse 1997, 20).

Thus, besides being a trend or an approach employed to identify, philosophically provoke or engage, as well as sort out such enlightened individuals, philosophic sagacity can also be considered as an intellectual quality or product of philosophic sages. That means not every sage as such can exhibit philosophic sagacity as product of their thoughts. This point might become clearer if we take a keen look at Oruka’s understanding of sagacity.

According to Oruka, sagacity can be considered in two senses. In one sense, sagacity consists of thoughts, beliefs, and convictions of people considered and acknowledged as wise by their respective communities. The condition for one to be considered wise in this case involves having or showing some deep insights and good judgments in one’s endeavours. But in yet another

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44 For a detailed account on how the two terms appear in Oruka’s work, see Odhiambo, 2002 19-30. It is also worth noting that the phrase “African Sage Philosophy” is now commonly used in reference to the body of thought produced by persons considered wise in Africa (cf. Masolo 2006).
sense, sagacity refers to a body of basic principles, aphorisms, and tenets that underlie and justify beliefs, customs, and practices of a given culture (Oruka 1991, 34.) We therefore notice that sagacity – the object of sage philosophy - can be split into two: *popular* (or folk) sagacity, and *philosophic* (or didactic) sagacity. Oruka clarifies this point when he describes sage philosophy as,

[T]he expressed thoughts of wise men and women in any given community [which is also] a way of thinking and explaining the world [in a manner] that fluctuates between *popular wisdom* (well-known communal maxims, aphorisms and general common-sense truths) and *didactic wisdom* (an expounded wisdom and rational thoughts of some individuals within the community) (Oruka 1991, 33; emphasis mine).

He goes on to point out that while popular wisdom is often “conformist”, didactic wisdom is at times critical of the communal systems and popular wisdom. Put differently, while popular or folk sagacity consists of generally well-known communal principles and common-sense truths, didactic or philosophic sagacity expresses deep-seated insights and rational thoughts of some intellectually outstanding individuals within a given society. Oruka in fact refers to folk sagacity as “culture philosophy” or philosophy in the first order in contra-distinction with philosophic sagacity, i.e., philosophy in the second order; and he insists that his research project in Kenya was concerned with the sage philosophy of the second order to disprove the well-known view that real philosophical thought had no place in traditional Africa (Oruka 1983, 387; Oruka 1991a, 34).

It appears, therefore, that sagacity or wisdom as such is the object of sage philosophy, with philosophic sagacity as one aspect of it and folk sagacity the other, even though the two aspects of sagacity are very much related. This is because it is the thoughts of persons already acknowledged as incredibly wise that, in fact, constitute the basis on which their respective communities build popular or folk sagacity. But that should not be the reason to conflate the two. Thus, we insist with Oruka that philosophic sagacity transcends folk sagacity by always being critical and non-
conformist to attain that technical status. Put differently, whereas all instances of philosophic sagacity locate within sage philosophy, not every instance of sage philosophy amounts to philosophic sagacity; some could be instances of folk or popular sagacity (Oruka 1991, 33).

From what we have said also, it is apparent that we can think of sages in two ways, namely, folk (or mere) sages on the one hand, and philosophic sages on the other. According to Oruka, a sage is a person who is well versed in the wisdom and traditions of his or her people. In this regard, a sage normally acts as a mirror reflecting the community’s wisdom, culture and traditions (Oruka 1983, 386). But being a sage does not necessarily make one a philosopher; for one may be wise “within the conventional and historical confines of their culture”, yet, one may not be wise (or critical) “in understanding or solving the inconsistencies of their culture or coping with the foreign innovations that encroach on it” (Oruka 1983, 386).

Some sages, however, have the capacity to transcend folk (or popular) sagacity so that as serious thinkers, they display not only critical thoughts, but most importantly adhere only to those aspects of sagacity that satisfy their rational scrutiny. And as Oruka points out, such sages are in most cases “potentially or contemporarily in clash with the diehard adherents of the prevailing common beliefs” (Oruka 1983, 386). They are not only critical, but sometimes rebellious against status quo or popular sagacity. For Oruka, then, only those sages who are critical and inquisitive qualify to be called philosophic sages; and philosophic sagacity, as a trend, aims at exposing and systematically rearticulating their insight, thoughts and ideas for the betterment of our society.

On the other hand, though, there are folk sages who, unlike the philosophic sages, operate squarely and almost lazily within the confines of their cultural beliefs and status quo. Talking about folk sages, Oruka pointedly says:
Beliefs or truth-claims within culture are generally treated as ‘absolute’ (i.e., not to be questioned). Anything outside or contradictory to the culture is treated with indifference and even hostility. Those sages or persons who are (merely) experts in the culture defend this “philosophy” and the structure of their society with the zeal of fanatical ideologists defending their political line (Oruka 1983, p. 387).

Thus, while folk sages may glorify communal conformity, a philosophic sage is in most cases sceptical and critical of communal consensus, often employing reason to assess it. Also, while folk sages are often identifiable by their consistent inability to isolate their own opinions from the beliefs of the community (for instance, being readily inclined to take refuge behind the popular unexamined positions whenever one is intellectually challenged), philosophic sages are clearly able to isolate community beliefs from their own critical evaluation, rationalization, and even criticisms, quite often enjoying a dialectic encounter with the challenger (Oruka 1991, 36).

To illustrate this point further, Odera Oruka compares two sages: Ogotemmeli from the Dogon community in Mali and Mbuya Akoko, a sage from the Luo in Kenya. In this comparison, Ogotemmeli, given his unequalled capacity to faithfully recite and fanatically defend beliefs common to his people, represents a typical folk sage. He makes no attempt either to assess or transcend them. Thus, in spite of the seemingly significant ideas attributed to him, Ogotemmeli cannot qualify to be a philosophic sage given that his doctrine is even well known to the average member of his community, especially the elders. His teaching, one could say, is rather esoteric in character, though not necessarily philosophical. When asked about what he thinks about women, for instance, Ogotemmeli lazily answers that according to customary belief of Dogon, a woman is fundamentally different from a man based on a curse and punishment from God. “After God made woman”, argues Ogotemmeli, “he gave her bad blood which has to flow every month... which obviously makes her inferior to man” he says (Griaule 1965, 146).
Unlike Ogotemmeli, however, Mbuya Akoko (one of the philosophic sages interviewed by Oruka) not only knows his community’s culture and moral beliefs, but he also critically questions and quite often improves upon some of the traditional Luo beliefs, such as how the community thinks about women. As a philosophic sage, Akoko makes his own critical assessment arguing:

A man has the physical capacity to run faster than a woman. But on the other hand, a woman has the physical capacity to undergo the pains of carrying and bearing a baby which a man lacks. So, we cannot correctly say one is superior or inferior to the other. ... In truth ... the two [genders] are naturally equal or balanced .” (Oruka 1983, 389).

Here, then, we have an argument that is not only independent, but most importantly philosophical in the proper sense given that it goes beyond the communal chorus of the general Luo beliefs about women being inferior than men; it distinguishes Mbuya Akoko as a typical philosophic sage.

It is crucial to note that Odera Oruka was compelled to make that distinction as he sought to answer Peter Bodunrin (one of his contemporaries) who, as an attempt to expose and critique Oruka’s philosophic sagacity had cited two other approaches to philosophy in Africa: (i) Griaule’s famous Conversations with Ogotemmeli (1965); and (ii) Sodipo and Hallen’s research on the Yoruba concept of a person in An African Epistemology (1981). Badunrin had then, according to Oruka, erroneously put the two approaches at the same par with Oruka’s approach, making him (Oruka) feel misread insofar as his philosophic sagacity trend is concerned. Badunrin had further unfairly criticised the genius in Oruka’s approach prompting a rejoinder (Oruka 1983, 388-393).

3.3.3. Philosophic Sagacity versus Ethno-philosophy

We have been at pains to ascertain that sage philosophy is not synonymous to philosophic sagacity. The two are related, although there are some crucial differences that many scholars unfortunately continue to overlook. This, however, has been to the disservice of sage philosophy,
with some conflating it with ethnophilsophy. As Odhiambo aptly notes, critics quite often “equate sage philosophy with ethno-philosophy in toto, yet in actuality it is only the folk sagacity aspect [of sage philosophy] that lends itself to ethno-philosophy” (Odhiambo 2008, 105).

Indeed, comparing philosophic sagacity with the ethno-philosophy reveals that the former significantly differs from the latter; the former is both individually-based and dialogical in nature. It is a thought process of variously known and named thinkers, and not a popular or communal worldview. More so, unlike ethno-philosophy, philosophic sagacity is rigorous and philosophical in the strict sense of the word (Oruka 1990, 17). Thus, we can only equate folk sagacity (but not philosophic sagacity) with ethno-philosophy.

I find that point crucial, for it forms the basis of our previous position that philosophic sagacity aims at overcoming the challenges of ethno-philosophy, thereby salvaging its unique indigenous African-ness. Ethno-philosophy, as we said, has been frequently accused of merely rearticulating African’s communal or folk beliefs and customs using some pseudo-philosophic language but lacking in any independent, critical and coherent engagement. Perhaps folk (or popular) sagacity, the other wing of sage philosophy, may fail the task of overcoming this criticism, but surely not philosophic sagacity. Indeed, philosophic sagacity, as Oruka rightly says, is the only trend that can give “an all-acceptable decisive blow to the position of ethno-philosophy” (Oruka 1983, 384). This gives us the impetus to interrogate further what philosophic sagacity aims at.

3.3.4. The Hallmark of Practical Wisdom

At this juncture one may ask: what exactly is philosophic sagacity concerned with? And to answer that question, we say that philosophic sagacity, as a trend in African philosophy, seeks to escape the many criticisms levelled against ethno-philosophy while manoeuvring its way past the
limitations of “professional” philosophy. Put differently, besides disproving the false suppositions of the former, philosophic sagacity becomes handy in rescuing the latter. At its best, philosophic sagacity seeks to bring back to light some of the lost glory of philosophy in Africa by emphasizing sagacious reasoning (i.e., practical wisdom) rather than merely abstract speculative discourse. But that does not mean philosophic sagacity is unfriendly to or incompatible with theoretical critical thinking. What it means is that theoretical critical thinking ought to be taken as means toward addressing practical issues affecting us. Thus, a good philosophic sage will have to employ critical thinking to come up with a philosophy that must be relevantly applicable to alleviate humanity’s perils, thereby help to improve people’s wellbeing without neglecting the environment.

To put this into the perspective of what we said earlier, philosophic sagacity seeks to combine and retain the unique indigenous value-systems found in ethno-philosophy with modern “professionalism” in the professional trend as it endeavours to handle fundamental issues and problems facing humanity and the environment across the board, but with special focus in Africa. Thus, as it seeks to rehabilitate philosophy in Africa, it focuses on African thoughts that are truly critical, discursive, and independent. Conversely it focuses on philosophical issues that are genuinely relevant to contemporary Africa. It does this by striving to find out how sages in Africa (traditional and modern) could effectively address the current problems (Odhiambo 2009, 97-98).

Furthermore, cognizant to the fact that a sage can be either formally educated or not, philosophic sagacity expresses the view that there exist within various African communities individuals who, despite the fact that they have not had the benefit of having contact with the Western philosophy (such as the works of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant, Heidegger, etc.) are, nonetheless, philosophical by the power of reason and inborn insight rather than by the authority of communal consensus (Oruka 1990, 16).
Thus, from a practical point of view, philosophic sagacity first and foremost aims at showing that the problem in traditional or modern Africa is not really lack of logic, reason, or scientific curiosity. The problem rather is failure to identify these factors (logic, reason and scientific curiosity) due to some unjustifiable, biased and racist misconceptions. The fact is: given that we can find some philosophic sages with a system of thoughts that employs a rigorous use of their mental gifts, then that shows clearly there is rational reflection in Africa.

Second, philosophic sagacity aims at showing that communal consensus, a fact typical of most if not all traditional societies, should not be viewed as a hindrance for individual critical reflection. Indeed, as Oruka further observes, “just as religion and all kinds of dogmatic fanaticism did not kill philosophy in the West, traditional African folk wisdom and taboos left some room for real philosophic thought” (Oruka1983, 385). The main task therefore is to try to distinguish the two wings of sage philosophy and systematically rearticulate the thoughts of philosophic sages in every society. That would make philosophic sagacity arguably the most effective trend capable of understanding what philosophy is, before articulating the sort of philosophy found in Africa.

Finally, and to conclude this section, we say that philosophic sagacity is a school of thought that enables our talk of philosophy in Africa without alienating African thinkers from their “intellectual roots”. Given that it tries to systematically bridge the gap between “traditionalists” and “modernists” insofar as the debate on the nature and the existence philosophy in Africa is concerned, philosophic sagacity guides us on how best we can do philosophy in a relevant and well-founded way to combat the current issues affecting humanity and the environment, while at the same time being aware of our cultural cum historical milieu. As an invaluable tool or means toward creating practical philosophy, philosophic sagacity, then, has an important function of distinguishing a genuine philosopher (lover of wisdom and truth) from, say, a mere rhetorician, a
religious leader, or a political activist. Thus, philosophic sagacity is the hallmark of advancing practical wisdom, a prerequisite condition for building up a more humane and just society. 45

### 3.4. Conclusion

This chapter was meant to further discuss Oruka’s commitment to practical philosophy by exploring his rather incontestable contribution to defence and shaping of philosophy in Africa. In response to some misconstrued bias against Africans, Oruka is known to have embarked on a research project in Kenya to demonstrate that there really are genuine philosophers who, solidly guided by reason, do critique the status quo as much as they propose new ways of solving human predicaments. Such philosophers might or might not have been formally educated through the Western system, for instance, but they nonetheless clearly demonstrate the use of reason, logic and critical thinking, thereby debunking the racist bias that Africans are incapable of having or doing philosophy given that reason and logic seems alien to them. At the heart of this project was Oruka’s concept of philosophic sagacity, in which this chapter had special interest.

Thus, we started off by displaying the historical and contextual background that informed or prompted Oruka’s response to the then distressing matter of the nature and existence of philosophy in Africa, before considering in depth philosophic sagacity within sage philosophy. This was meant to show Oruka’s approach to philosophy as a practical response to one of the most intriguing issues in contemporary Africa: biased social, economic, political, and intellectual deprivation and

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45 I am alive to several criticisms against philosophic sagacity, most of which, unfortunately arise from misreading Oruka. They include: Keita (1985); Badunrin (1981); and Masolo (1995). For an intriguing debate on how Oruka responded would have responded to such criticism, see Odhiambo 2010, 126-150; and Oluwole in Graness & Kresse 1997, 149-162.
suppression. It was therefore meant to portray Odera Oruka as a diligent practical philosopher committed to seeking justice for his people.

In the first section, we critically considered the three phases that, according to Oruka, seem to characterize a rather turbulent path that finally saw the recognition and appreciation of philosophy in Africa. The first phase dubbed “the myth of pre-philosophy” comprises of a stage in which African’s culture and mind were generally claimed to be extremely alien to logic, reason, philosophy and civilization. Ironically, this phase is well represented by such prominent philosophers as Hume, Kant, Hegel, among others.

The second phase, the ethno-philosophical era, saw such scholars as Tempels and Mbiti vehemently trying to assert African philosophy, but only succeeded in lazily conceiving of it as a communal affair (with no individual thinkers) that uniquely define the African mind. That necessitated the rise of yet another phase, with individual Africans who had been professionally trained as philosophers in Europe and elsewhere grappling to articulate issues about African philosophy. But in their endeavour, the so-called “professional phase” alienated itself from (or took for granted) the existence of indigenous African thinkers while at the same time going too far in employing Western methodologies and skills to determine how philosophy in Africa ought to be done. And it was precisely due to these challenges that Oruka ingeniously came up with a new trend he dubbed philosophic sagacity, a trend that tries to capture both indigenous value-systems on the one hand and critical professionalism on the other in developing African philosophy.

The second section was dedicated to espousing philosophic sagacity as a trend that properly underscores Oruka’s practical dimension of philosophy. In the context of his Sage philosophy project, philosophic sagacity can be viewed in two related senses: (i) as a trend or a school of
thought; and (ii), as a quality or capacity of an individual who qualifies to be a philosophical sage. We tried to focus much on the first sense. Thus, we have seen that philosophic sagacity is no doubt one of the most profound philosophical trends in Africa, just as it is also applicable elsewhere. This is so because it calls for a genuine retrieval as well as critical reconsideration of traditional philosophic wisdom and insight that would be instrumental in solving contemporary problems.

In short, using philosophic sagacity as his trademark, we have tried to show how Oruka was able to successfully master the tension between tradition versus modernity, thereby fulfilling a mediating function between the two value systems. This was done by showing how philosophic sagacity, as one of the trends in philosophy, sails through the challenges of both ethno-philosophy and professional philosophy. As a practically relevant school of thought, it takes a crucial step towards the preservation of traditional (classical) wisdom while at the same time contributing immensely to an independent and critical history of philosophy in Africa. This way, Oruka rescues the nature and the existence of philosophy in Africa, which is one way of seeking justice for Africa.

At the same time, understood as a quality or ability that a philosopher has or ought to have, philosophic sagacity turns out to be handy in emphasizing the practical dimension of philosophy; it is that which qualifies one to be a philosophic sage, that is, a thinker who is not only reasonable, critical, independent-minded and logically consistent but most important also one who embraces ethical duty to improve humanity’s wellbeing without jeopardizing the environment. Thus, a philosophic sage, we argued, ought to be wise, meaning she or he should be able to make proper and reasonable judgments in life based on her or his account of the past, analysis of the present and projective goals of the future. To be wise would also mean that one should aim at pursuing the truth and upholding justice as an ethically responsible moral agent.
Now looking at the trajectory of Oruka’s interest in philosophy reveals that over time, the issue of proving the nature and existence of philosophy in Africa to biased and racist outsiders eventually diminished in importance as the question of how sagacity and critical reflection could help Africa and humanity as such took centre stage (Odhiambo 2006, 21; Kalumba 2004, 39-40; and Presbey 2007). Thus, it comes as no surprise to see Oruka’s practical philosophy remarkably working through and taking such topics as truth, justice, liberty, and ecological ethics to a global level, even long before such topics had become as “fashionable” as they are today. But it is also regrettable that many do not recognize or acknowledge Odera Oruka as an important practical philosopher.

In my ensuing chapters, I will demonstrate how Oruka’s legacy, particularly his commitment to practical philosophy, is specifically a sagacious-ethical quest for a genuine practice of justice at the global level. It is a quest that seeks to uplift, safeguard, and promote humanity’s wellbeing while at the same time taking care of our environment. His concept of global justice, we shall see, aims at achieving not only ‘egalitarian fairness’ but also ‘ecological fairness’, which fairness ought to be realized irrespective of our geographical, national, racial or any other sectarian affiliation. His “parental earth ethics” is centred on the concept of human minimum; a unique “humanism” or humanness based on the principles of egalitarian and ecological fairness. It calls us humans, who presumably are rational cum ethical beings, to embrace some ethical duty toward each other as well as our environment, even as we pursue what we tend to think is rightfully due. It is therefore more eco-centric rather than anthropocentric. And being praxis-oriented, it seeks to realize socio-economic reforms that would see the building of a more humane and more just global society.
CHAPTER 4

ON HUMAN RIGHTS: A CRITIQUE OF THE CURRENT DISCOURSE

If human beings did not have some needs, they would not know or care about “rights” (Oruka 1991b, 53).

4.1. Introduction

As we have seen in the last two chapters, Odera Oruka spent a considerable portion of his short life mulling over the questions of what philosophy is or ought to be in general, with a special interest in philosophy in Africa from a practical point of view. He believed that any philosophy worthy of its name ought to be sagacious, meaning it ought to be practically relevant to the wellbeing of humanity and the environment. At the heart of his practical philosophy was ethics, which he regards as a philosophical inquiry into the moral language and principles that govern or ought to govern the conduct of human beings as well as determine their value and dignity in a global society (Oruka 1990b, 3). Thus, Odera Oruka ventured into such important ethical issues as human rights, justice, liberty, punishment, humanism, ecology, etc.

This chapter aims at discussing the issue of human rights from a critical and practical point of view. Thus, using Oruka’s philosophical insight, I seek to critique the current human rights talk that to a large extent seems heavily influenced by modern cum post-modern liberal philosophies in the West. First, I try to establish what a human right is or ought to be, thereby determining the nature and the qualities of what could be considered human right per se. I then employ Oruka’s insight to establish a possible philosophical defence of human rights discourse, insisting on the actual enjoyment of their substantive elements, thereby ascertaining whether they all necessarily imply duty in the same way or not, and how far that duty (if any) ought to abide.
Next, I will critically engage John Locke’s philosophy of natural rights, pointing out some shortcomings therein. His account, as we shall see, conflates the idea of right and duty with freedom or power that people supposedly have to pursue their own interests. Thus, it tends to promote exaggerated individualism, greed, and hence irresponsible exploitation of the ‘other’. I will use Oruka’s insight to critique that position, before evaluating two important claims about human rights: (i) they are universal, inalienable, moral and legal norms for ensuring justice; and (ii) they ought to be socially guaranteed and enforceable, meaning they do have some compelling reasons to be enjoyed by all members of human species equally. Hopefully this will enable us to advance a sound critique of the current human rights talk, one that unfortunately tends to deny or ignore the concept of duty - understood in terms of the socio-ethical obligation that we humans ought to have toward the wellbeing of each other without over-exploiting our environment.

Finally, using some traditional value-systems (or sagacity) from Africa, I will attempt to construct a different human rights discourse that would primarily enhance a genuine quest for justice at the global level. This will hopefully enable us to deconstruct a commonly held fallacy that human rights talk has its “origin” from modern liberal philosophies in the West.

4.1.1. Preliminary Remarks

It is arguably true that human rights are universal standard norms for promoting justice to all, where justice means striving to fairly render or facilitate the enjoyment of what every human being is justifiably entitled to insofar as one is human. That would, however, presuppose a global society governed by such principles as “egalitarian fairness”, which principle implies a sense of duty or

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46 By the ‘other’ here I mean both fellow human beings who, for instance, supply labour as well as the environment from where wealth and resources come.
ethical obligation towards the wellbeing of each another for the common good. But that may raise a fundamental question: do all human rights imply duty in the same way?

The current human rights talk to a large extent appears oblivious to that question, thereby being unable to enhance a genuine quest for justice at the global level. First, it seems more inclined to advancing the so-called civic or “political” right - for instance, right to freedom of speech - more than it does on socio-economic rights, such as the right to decent life. That oblivion has made it difficult to determine how best we can achieve actual enjoyment of rights, if any. Put differently, it has made it difficult to establish priority order so that not every individual’s claim would qualify to be a human right per se. As a result, the current human rights talk has become mere rhetoric for political purposes rather than being the means to ensuring actual enjoyment of justice for all.

The current human rights talk also seems predominantly influenced by modern liberal philosophies from the West, thereby isolating other philosophical trends in the world. This has been partly due to a biased thinking that the idea of human right is a “child of Enlightenment” (Cranston 1962, 1), and that only Western liberal thoughts can make human rights be what they ought to be: universal moral and legal norms for ensuring equality, fairness and common good.

Indeed, until the late 1990s, hardly did we have any major contribution from non-Western philosophies into the current human rights talk; yet, one would expect a meaningful discourse to be not only inclusive but also at the core of our natural quest for justice for all people. That lack of inclusivity, in my view, casts doubt as to whether the ideals supposedly being advanced in the

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47 This is a philosophy mostly advanced by such modern thinkers as Locke and Hobbes, whose idea of right tends to exhort unlimited pursuance of individual freedoms and entitlements but at the expense of ethical duty toward the wellbeing of the ‘other’. It also tends to view human beings as self-autonomous agents, at liberty to construct their identity devoid of social norms guided by reason (i.e., nature).
current human rights talk are able to transcend the dominant philosophical thought (i.e., modern/post-modern liberalism) so as to develop a universally acceptable discourse that would champion the enjoyment of what the idea of justice entails at the global level.

To change this situation, I submit that we need to urgently engage and involve other non-Western value-systems or philosophies so that we not only enhance the discourse itself but also ensure actual enjoyment of what is justifiably due to all humans – for instance, such basic human needs as security, subsistence and health care. This is what this chapter, inspired by Oruka’s insight, aims at. We want to inject some sagacity into the current human rights talk, part of which means being ethically responsible toward the wellbeing of each other and taking care of our environment. And that, to me, would enhance the quest for justice at the global level. We begin by considering the concept of human right and what it really means, or what it ought to imply.

4.2. Defining Human Rights

The term human right is an honorific term given that what it stands for is normally considered universally desirable, even though it cannot be precisely defined. It is perhaps one of the most problematic issues at hand. Most of us often cry “my right has been violated”, whenever we feel treated unjustly, pointing to a possibility that human rights are really tied to our natural quest for justice; yet, few can ascertain precisely what a human right is or entails. Even more troubling is the fact that only few can really establish the basis of our thinking that we humans have some universally accepted entitlements we can justifiably claim as fairly due. There is also the question about duty, namely, who is responsible for the fulfilment of such entitlements, and how far should that responsibility (if any) stretch? Our position with Oruka is that that obligation
ought to include every capable moral agent, our social, political, regional, racial or any other sectarian affiliation notwithstanding. That is what would ensure global justice (Oruka 1997, 85).

Of course, some might argue against a single universally endorsed definition of *human right* despite our having a robust discourse in play (Nickel 2014). And this could be attributed to the fact that different thinkers tend to give different concept of what they think human rights are or ought to be based on their historical, cultural and philosophical orientations. Nonetheless, there has been consensus among ethicists at least in advancing a possibility of having some standard-universal norms (or *means*) for respecting human dignity and promoting justice for all. Here, “justice” refers to not only receiving what one is fairly entitled to insofar as one is human, but also facilitating the enjoyment of what others are duly entitled to as well.

Thus, we can tentatively define human rights as “universally recognized norms, standards or principles that are morally, socially, and therefore legally grounded to protect human beings from various forms of injustice based on our common humanity”.48 This is a definition Oruka would have most likely endorsed. Although he does not explicitly define *human right*, Oruka was deeply concerned about issues of racial discrepancy, social-economic inequality, oppressive governance, etc.; all of which are violations of justice, as they also contribute to abject poverty in the world. He had a great passion for holistic liberation of the poor and the oppressed.

For the most part of his short life, Oruka spent a lot of time reflecting on and trying to find solutions to abuses of justice in the world, and especially in Africa. As we learn from one of his intriguing essays “Philosophy and Humanism in Africa”, Oruka believed that it is within the nature

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48 I derive this “working definition” from Nickel 2014; Mutua 2013; Shue 1996; and Cranston 1962, and I intend to use Oruka’s insight to support and develop it further.
and mandate of philosophy to discern, safeguard, and promote “humanism and moral good”, which would in effect improve the quality and security of human life (Oruka 1997, 138-145). He also envisioned a theory of global justice that would, among other things, treat all human beings as existing in a global society governed by what he calls “rational and humanistic ethics” regardless of our national, regional, racial or any other sectarian affiliation (Oruka, 1989, note no. 9).

According to Oruka, then, human rights are standard principles meant to ensure quality and security of human life for all. As universal, moral and legal norms also, human rights are meant to guarantee what all human beings are entitled to everywhere at all times simply by virtue of their being human (Cranston 1962, 36). But human rights are not just abstract ideals; rather, they are means to establishing a “humanized way of life on Earth” (Oruka 1997, 85). They are, in other words, means to ensuring enjoyment of something that would enhance human dignity, decency, fairness, equality and equitability for all. They are also means to ensuring a sense of duty or ethical obligation toward the wellbeing of each other despite our apparent differences.

4.2.1. A Possible Philosophical Defence

A more fundamental question, perhaps, may arise: what is the philosophical basis of our thinking that there are universally recognized “things” that all humans deserve to enjoy? This is no doubt a tough question to tackle. Granted that the idea of human right, as said above, implies equality or common humanity, and given that it is often associated with our (human) natural quest for justice, one might argue that unless all human beings are actually equal then we can neither have nor need similar universal entitlements. And given the current prevalent situation where people are physically, morally, socially and economically unequal, then the idea of having universally recognized norm to guarantee even the so-called “inalienable rights” for all humans is a just but farfetched, unnatural, and simply impossible moral plea (Vincent 1986, 8).
But as Oruka helpfully points out, such “elitist conception of human rights”, though widespread and popular among those who wish to perpetuate injustice in the world, is basically misleading. Thus, it should be replaced by what he calls “democratic conception of human rights” which states that “physical and moral differences among persons notwithstanding, men and women are, as human beings, endowed with dignity and worth, which entitle them all to certain fundamental rights and freedoms” (Oruka 1982a, 8). He elaborates further saying that these entitlements arise from the fact that all humans have similar needs, at least the basic ones.

There is no difference in kind between the needs of people. Therefore, the equality of all human persons means at least that physically and morally human beings have the same needs. And they should all be entitled to the rights necessary for fulfilling those needs. Such rights are human rights (Oruka 1982a, 8).

Thus, in response to a rather rhetorical question about the basis of our thinking about rights - in terms of entitlements that all humans deserve - we can follow Oruka’s “need-based account” and say that such a thinking derives from the fact that all humans are essentially equal; and that equality is based on undeniable fact that all humans naturally have the same basic needs key among them being physical security, subsistence and health care. And as we shall see later in the next chapter, these three basic needs constitute the substantive elements of the right to a human minimum, an ethical principle Oruka says is the basis for enjoying any other human right.

Elsewhere, Oruka reiterates this point saying that a human right cannot be said to exist devoid of the actual enjoyment of its substantive element (Oruka 1991b, 53). To say that human beings have ‘right to food’, for instance, is not enough. What matters most is whether people are actually enjoying or having access to quality food at the time they need it. And to that we may add and say human rights cannot be enjoyed adequately without people having a sense of duty or ethical obligation toward the wellbeing of each other, thereby promoting justice and common good.
In sum, our discussion so far indicates that human rights are or ought to be intricately tied to our natural quest for justice, which quest at minimum level implies enjoyment of some basic needs. It also indicates that human rights could philosophically be grounded on the understanding that we have not only a common humanity to share but also some common basic necessities we all need, pointing to what we might call “egalitarian common good.”\(^{49}\) Hence, the idea of human right also seems to imply a sense of duty - understood in terms of the ethical responsibility that we humans (as moral agents) have or ought to have toward the wellbeing of each other. Finally, the discussion also points to a possibility that the idea of human right can be traced from every organized human society geared toward egalitarian common good. I come back to qualify these claims later, but first, we need to engage John Locke, whose account seems to suggest otherwise.

4.3. John Locke and ‘Philosophy of Right’

John Locke (1632-1704) is often considered the father of human rights talk, perhaps due to his systematic ‘philosophy of right’ that diametrically differs from his predecessors, one that seems quite palatable today. That, however, does not mean the concept of human right and what it really stands for – quest for justice – is a brainchild of Locke. As Cranston critically points out, whereas it might be plausible to trace human rights talk from modern philosophies, it would be blatantly fallacious to simply think the idea of human right is “the child of Enlightenment” (Cranston 1962, 1). In fact, as Hayden says, the concept of human right seems to have arguably a much more solid if not better foundation from some Ancient and Scholastic philosophies in the

\(^{49}\) By “egalitarian common good” I mean that for the sake of which human societies exist, which in most cases is desirable wellbeing for all. This follows from the fact that human beings, as Aristotle says, are social (political) beings (cf. Aristotle Politics 1253a). That means we all have a natural aptitude to live in solidarity so as to prosper and effectively achieve a common (though not uniform) desirable well-being or happiness. This, as we shall try to argue later, could be achieved within a society that is both egalitarian and communitarian oriented, a society where justice is the key governing principle.
West, just as it does with other non-Western philosophies (Hayden 2001, 3). Locke nonetheless is a key figure to consider.

Unlike his predecessors in the West (the Ancients and Scholastics) who, for instance, preferred the ‘eudemonistic’ approach to ethical issues – i.e., seeking happiness and social order via virtuous life – Locke, just like most of the 17th century thinkers like Hobbes, opted for “personal freedoms” to pursue one’s self-interest guided by “reason” or nature. Locke apparently thought, contrary to his predecessors, that humans are not by nature socio-political beings with some ultimate end or common good. For him, each of us simply pursues what seems good guided by reason (by which he means nature). That means we form societies out of convenience - for safety and freedom to pursue self-interest according to how nature and personal inclinations dictate.

The Lockean account, no doubt, has significantly influenced the current human rights talk. A good example is the 1787 United States Constitution (cf. Guier 2017). In his Two Treatises of Government (1690), Locke claims that individuals have some basic “natural rights” independent of their socio-political structures, meaning there are entitlements that we all have equally in a “state of nature”. These are: (i) right to life, (ii) right to liberty, and (iii) right to property. They have become the ground upon which other human right declarations, including the UN Bill of Rights, have been made. They have also become the basis upon which the current human rights discourse has been advanced, especially in the West.

Now according to Locke, “natural rights” are so called simply because they flow freely from “natural law”, by which he means (again contrary to his predecessors) the law that governs our human nature as individuals. It is this “natural law” or the law of nature that determines our individual choices based on reason and personal inclinations (Hayden 2001, 4). Here, we find
Locke cleverly diverging from the “classical” concept of natural law – such as the one advanced by the Scholastics - to develop a new kind of ethics that unfortunately seems to promote greed, possessive individualism, pride and irresponsible appropriation of wealth (Oruka 1997, 126).

According to Aquinas, for instance, “natural law” derives from divine reason (i.e., God), and is imprinted within our hearts to govern human relations. It is the basis upon which the concept of *right* or entitlement and *duty* (understood in terms of ethical responsibility of a moral agent) are philosophically grounded. It is related to what is popularly known as “the Golden Rule” or the law of reciprocity prevalent in many world religions and cultures. Hence, natural law, for Aquinas, expresses the “essence” of universal morality that is supposed to guide all our human relations (cf. Aquinas *ST*. Qs. 91-94). Locke, however, reverses this view to claim that natural law (i.e., the law of nature) gives freedom to pursue individual self-interest.

Locke starts off the *second treatise* by discussing “the state of nature”, which for him is a quasi-historical notion of a pre-political condition of humanity. This is a state of perfect freedom bound only by *reason* or the law of nature. It is also a state of equality in which no one has a natural claim to rule over another. It is therefore a non-political state where everyone has a ‘right’ (i.e. freedom) to make their own laws according to their own self-interest (cf. §4; §19). That means individuals have a *right* or freedom to choose what seems good to the m.

Although his account is not as radical as that of Hobbes who equates the state of nature with a state of war – where life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (Hobbes 1994, xiii §9), the Lockean account, nonetheless, clearly runs contrary to the traditional concept of justice, the one advanced by most of the Ancients. He seems, for instance, to contradict Socrates who in the *Republic* claims justice for the most part means seeking egalitarian fairness for a common good
rather than personal interest. Instead, Locke seems to be embracing Thrasydamus and Glaucon, who both insist that some form of injustice and pursuing self-interest pays, and that the strong and mighty triumphs over others (Plato, Republic book 1). However, rather than directly advocating for injustice, Locke cleverly appeals to “human equality” that he believes would somehow lead to some sort of justice without the demand for common good. Apparently, his reasoning is that since no one has any natural claim to rule over another, there is no likelihood for injustice to thrive. But that argument, to me, sounds preposterous; it is difficult to see how it can be practically possible.

The state of nature, though, Locke says, is not “a state of license” (§ 6); meaning people cannot simply do what they want. To grasp his point, we need to get what “the law of nature” means for Locke. This is the only law that binds people while in the state of nature. First, it confers to individuals a “divine” or natural duty to self-preservation, just as it also prohibits “waste”. It, for instance, prohibits suicide, given that life and everything else is a gift from God. Individuals only have “right” or duty to preserve it. Locke formulates the law of nature this way:

The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions (§ 6).

It is quite clear therefore that priority is given to self-preservation by all means. Even punishment, for Locke, is not absolute, neither is it arbitrary. It is utilitarian rather than retributive; meaning it is for reparation and restraint or deterrence. Although it is only the victim who gets reparation in the state of nature, everyone may join in punishing another but only for restraint or deterrence, except in murder, which Locke considers “summum malum” or greatest evil (§11, §19).

But apart from ensuring self-preservation, the law of nature also teaches us not to harm others, thereby giving us just a restricted obligation. It is also silent with regard to what one ought
to do or not do to help another person pursue their interest. It is not the same as the traditional “Golden Rule” that says: ‘do unto others as you’d have them do unto you’ or ‘love thy neighbor as thyself’. Instead, Locke seems to be saying: ‘preserve yourself by all means, and when you can avoid it, do not harm others’. Locke, nonetheless, thinks the law of nature is the basis upon which every other human (civil) law can be considered a “right” (§12).

In the same vein, Locke claims people generally agree to form societies, not so much because they want to come out of “the state of nature” or that they have mutual responsibility to pursue a common good, but in order to primarily protect and promote their individual interests (§ 123–130). In other words, people, out of convenience, contractually decide to transfer to a public authority their individual powers to implement “the law of nature” on their behalf. But this power, Locke says, is conditional and limited to the said society’s capacity to protect individual rights or freedoms from invasion and to secure their more effective guarantee in life. Thus, when authority is imposed, the state of nature degenerates into “the state of war”, which in turn degenerates into slavery - where some work for others without agreement (§22).

Connected to the law of nature is the Locke an account of liberty or freedom, another basic natural right. For Locke, we are all born free (or to freedom), by which he means we are born to live only under the law of nature with no other restraint. We only find ourselves under our parents’ guidance, for instance, until we attain the age of reason when the law of nature takes charge. That means no other law can strictly speaking restrain our freedom (§ 57-61). Instead, law is primarily meant to protect our freedoms. Any law that tends to restrain peoples’ rights or freedoms should not be obeyed. Thus, Locke defines liberty precisely as doing what one wishes to in accordance with “the law of nature”. And that capacity, he says, is grounded on the same law - reason (§63).
With regards to the right to property, Locke initially suggests that all things are freely given by God to all, pointing to a possibility of egalitarian communality. But he later says property precedes political community; hence, people enter commonwealth basically to protect their ‘right to property’ (§27). He argues further that the need for consumption to survive is what gives rise to the need for private property and appropriation. In other words, the law of nature, which essentially calls for self-preservation gives us a right (i.e., freedom or duty) to appropriate whatever one can mix their labour with. That, according to Locke, is what God’s command to subdue the earth really means (§32). The earth, then, is made for man to exploit. Here, then we find a salient connection between Lockean concepts of right, freedom, and duty.

By establishing money through consent, Locke argues, the formal condition for large appropriation and unequal estate is established (§ 37). And given that money does not spoil, he suggests that people become greedy only when money is introduced (§ 49-50). Thus, it is money that causes inequality, which in turn multiplies causes of quarrels and contentions and increased numbers of violations of the law of nature, which in turn leads to the decision to create a civil government, hence loss of freedom. Nonetheless, Locke believes large accumulation of wealth (private property and money) is socially good and beneficial. It depicts individual’s creativity, astuteness and “smartness”, given that labour is so much the greatest source of wealth.

In effect, Locke seems to be saying that individuals can pursue and appropriate whatever wealth they may wish through labour, provided they have the means and opportunity to do so without necessarily minding who suffers pain or loss in the process (Macpherson 1962). But that would mean only the few mighty and powerful thrive at the expense of exploiting the weak and defenceless. And that seems to be the common modus operandi fashionable today. Hence, in Locke and other modern liberal philosophies, we find a salient anticipation of the current human rights
talk, one that oddly tends to promote not only individual rights and freedom of choice, but also possessive individualism characterized with greed and exuberant appropriation of wealth, with less emphasis on ethical duty toward the wellbeing of the ‘other’ (Oduor 2012, 224).

4.3.1. Locke and the Current Human Rights Talk

We have been trying to set up a possible basis of our thinking about human rights in Locke. His account, however, seems to be working differently from his predecessors’ ethical thoughts. His account also appears fundamentally opposed to what we said human rights are or ought to be: universally recognized norms that are morally, socially, and therefore legally grounded to protect human beings from various forms of injustice based on our common humanity. His account seems especially flimsy with regards to the kind of duty or ethical obligation that we humans ought to have towards the wellbeing of each other and our environment. It seems, therefore, not sufficient to establish a genuine discourse that would enhance global justice: dignity, decency, fairness, equality and equitability for all. Needless to say, Locke’s involvement with slavery has ruined his reputation as perhaps the great champion of liberty and equal rights (Armitage 2004).  

One interesting move that Locke makes is to conflate the idea of right, duty and freedom together, thereby deriving a different account of justice (and injustice). For him, right refers to the freedom or liberty or power due to one having property and ability to use it because one has reason under the law of self-preservation (§57). But right also refers to entitlements or privileges that come about through labour and laying down some of our freedoms (§67, 78). Hence, our rights come about by birth or by labour and consent. And the basic right that we have is the duty or obligations one ought to do to ensure self-preservation (§ 88-89). That means my primary duty is

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50 See also Uzgalis (2017) in Zack (ed.) 2017, 29; and Losurdo 2011, 3, 14.
to promote my entitlements and freedoms. But that would only lead to possessive individualism, greed and irresponsible exploitation of people and the environment. Put differently, Lockean so-called “liberty-based account” seems to deny the fact that we are essentially socio-ethical beings who are also inter-connected with Nature – i.e., our environment (Oruka 1993).

Another interesting twist Lockean account makes is to deny the idea of *summum bonum* or the highest good as the “end” of human action. That, in effect, makes ethics to depend upon what individuals can judge palatable to them. In other words, it is personal reason as directed by the law of nature that determines what one should or should not do. And given that the law of nature will always prioritize what is best for me, then I will not have any *duty* or obligation to mind the wellbeing of my fellow human being. What matters most is not “the good” as the end of philosophizing or leading virtuous life but rather personal good or pleasure as one dims fit.

The Lockean account, then, seems to contradict what we said earlier: that the idea of *human right* ought to be intricately tied to our natural quest for justice, where justice at minimum implies enjoyment of some basic human needs. The idea of *human right*, we also said, implies a sense of *duty* understood in terms of the ethical responsibility that we humans (as moral agents) have or ought to have toward the wellbeing of each other. In what follows now, I attempt to use Oruka’s “need-based account” to advance these claims. Oruka’s insight, as we shall later see, derives from traditional African sagacity meant to enhance justice for egalitarian common good.

**4.4. Oruka’s Need-based Account**

In one of his striking essays entitled “Philosophy of Foreign Aid”, Odera Oruka neatly defines the concept of *right* as the rational basis for a justified demand of *something* that is fairly due to a member of the human species (Oruka 1997, 85). That *something*, he says, is the substance
of the right in question, and it ought to be socially guaranteed; meaning other people or global society should make some arrangements so that one will still be able to enjoy the substance of the right even if actually, and especially if, it is not within one’s own power and capacity to arrange or ensure enjoyment of the substance of the right in question.

Oruka’s argument follows that of Henry Shue, who says that “to have a right is to be in a position to make demands of others” (Shue 1996, 13), that is, to claim that which is inherently due. Shue, however, points out that in making the demand of that which is inherently due, one also needs to be mindful of the wellbeing of others. Now Oruka picks up this idea to further claim that the concept of right is the rational basis for a justified demand of something that one ought to have access to in order to live and function as a human person - not merely exist as a human being but actually enjoy living and functioning as a responsible moral agent (Oruka 1997, 86). That means the concept of right also necessarily implies duty, the latter being understood in terms of the ethical obligation that we humans have or ought to have toward the wellbeing of the ‘other’.  

It is through the idea of human right, Oruka further argues, that we relate or ought to relate and treat each other as equal members of one global society. Put differently, it is on the basis of us (humans) having some “justifiable claims” that one can reasonably hope to be treated humanely, that is, treated with fairness, respect, dignity and care, failure to which certain vital human potentialities such as rationality, creativity and character development would adversely be affected. Here, Odera Oruka seems in concurrence with such contemporary thinkers like Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen who both agree on “capability approach” to the issue of global justice, thereby arguing that human rights are necessary not merely for life but for a life of dignity, a life.

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51 Similar argument has been made by Miller (2005), who talks about “care ethic” that acknowledges the situatedness and interdependence of human existence.
worthy of human beings capable of exercising their potentials in a freely and effective manner

Oruka therefore connects and justifies the idea of human right with human needs, saying
that their actual enjoyment ought to be socially if not legally guaranteed against any standard
threats lest they adversely affect people’s functionality, security and good conduct. That in effect
qualifies Oruka’s “need-based account” which says that without realizing some basic human needs
- security, subsistence, and health care - then human dignity, morality, personhood, etc., cannot be
effectively realized (Oruka 1997, 87). Elsewhere, Oruka makes this point clearer saying,

We usually need a right not just for its own sake but in order to fulfill something.
“Something” must refer to certain needs that are either necessary for maintaining our
survival or for advancing and enriching it. If human beings did not have some needs, they
would not know or care about “rights” (Oruka 1991b, 53).

Oruka’s position presupposes that there are some basic needs or entitlements that human
beings can justifiably demand from each other, either to maintain or enrich their survival. It also
points to the fact that the actual enjoyment of the substantive element of any right in question,
which for him is the most important thing, ought to be socially if not legally guaranteed (Oruka
1997, 85). Thus, Oruka could most likely have agreed with his critic/ friend Kwasi Wiredu, who
defines human rights as “justifiable human entitlements” that are morally, legally, and socially
owed to all (Wiredu 1996, 172). He could also most likely agree with Patrick Hayden, who says
that human rights are “essentially inviolable kinds of entitlements that are required to attain basic
security, well-being, self-respect and dignity for all” (Hayden 2001, 8).

Perhaps one might be tempted to dismiss Oruka’s need-based account (i.e., talking about
human rights in terms of necessary human entitlements) as less inclusive, given that it seems not
to capture such “obvious” rights as freedom or liberty the way Lockean account does. But before
raising this criticism, it is important first to note that the term *entitlement* can be understood in two related senses. In one broader sense, the term entitlement means power, capacity, or the prerogative to claim, demand and pursue what is justifiably due. In another narrower and proper sense, however, entitlement means the substantive element or the object under pursuit. The former implies and presupposes liberty/ freedom to demand and pursue the substance of what is justifiably due. This is because liberty in and of itself cannot be the substance of what is justifiably due (Oruka 1991b 53). It is not the end but rather the means to actual enjoyment of the right in question. Hence, liberty or freedom ought to be understood as an entitlement also (i.e., as one of fundamental human rights) but only in the former sense, not in the latter sense. However, other basic human needs such as physical security, subsistence and health care are all basic human entitlements in the second and proper sense of the word. Hence, they ought to be given priority.

Now that distinction, to me, is very important because, as we shall see later in the next chapter, it forms the rationale behind Oruka’s claim that the three basic needs - physical security, subsistence and health care - together constitute *the right to a human minimum*, which right, he says, ought to be fulfilled first if the other human rights, including ‘the right to liberty’, are to be actually and effectively enjoyed. Here, it forms the basis of our critique of the current human rights talk that unfortunately seems not keen to acknowledge such priority order.

### 4.4.1. Moral and Legal Rights

According to Oruka, human rights could further be considered as either morally or legally grounded and binding. And what determines the difference is their enforceability. They are considered legally grounded or binding, he says, “if they are to be enforced by a given legal system, by the sanctions of law”. They are, however, considered morally grounded or binding “if they
ought to be enforced by an ethos arising from the prevailing moral system” (Oruka 1997, 87). Morally-grounded rights, Oruka further notes, are usually universal insofar as the obligation to ensure their fulfilment or to blame their violation is a duty of every person, every responsible moral agent. They include the right to physical security, subsistence and health care. Legally-grounded rights – such as right to freedom of speech or assembly, however, have the government or some other “legal” institution as addressee.

Again, Oruka’s views resonate well with some leading contemporary human rights protagonists. James Nickel, for instance, defines human rights as “moral and legal principles” that aim at identifying some “necessary positive and negative prerequisites” for humans to lead “a minimally good, decent, and happy life” (Nickel 2014). His definition presupposes that human rights are not only universal norms (meaning they ought to apply everywhere for everyone) but also that they are enforceable either morally or legally. And being enforceable, as Kuper adds, means they have compelling reasons to be realized and enjoyed, otherwise there results some serious unpleasant effects, especially to the victim (Kuper 2005, 17, 80).

In my view, Oruka would have agreed with Nickel and Kuper, but he would quickly point out that human rights are not like legal enactments, meaning their duty does not oblige in the same way. Hence, some rights, he says, are considered inalienable to the extent that they flow from the very human nature. A good example is the ‘right to life’ whose object is self-preservation through actual enjoyment of such basic human necessities as security, subsistence, and health care. Such necessities are also rights, Oruka argues, adding that they also ought to be considered “absolute” in the sense that nothing can justifiably compromise their demand (Oruka 1997, 87). Denying someone of such basic needs, then, is tantamount to denying one of the very human life. On the other hand, there are some human rights - such as right to freedom of speech, assemble, associate,
worship and own properties - that are or ought to be considered rights *prima facie*; meaning, “however important they may be to enhance human life, they can justifiably be overridden by other rights or by something of a greater moral significance” (Oruka 1997, 87).

Now that is another crucial distinction Oruka makes, but one quite often ignored in our current human rights discourse. Whereas inalienable rights are also essentially necessary for people’s existence and normal human functionality as moral agents, the *prima facie* rights are not necessarily essential, even though they are important. That is why inalienable rights are said to be absolute, meaning nothing can justifiably compromise their enjoyment without adversely affecting human existence and functionality. They are also universal; meaning they ought to be guaranteed for, and actually enjoyed by, all human beings everywhere. They are, in other words, the basic prerequisites that are essentially necessary (though not sufficient) for humans to lead a minimally secured, decent, healthy, and possibly happy life.

In the next chapter, we shall see Oruka pushing this argument further to claim that the actual enjoyment of the three inalienable rights (or needs) - physical security, subsistence and health care - is the foundational *basis* for the actual enjoyment of other human rights, thereby ensuring a more “humanized life on Earth” (Oruka 1997, 85). Put differently, the actual enjoyment of the three basic human needs above is what defines *the right to a human minimum*, which right is a basic prerequisite *means* to enjoyment of other human rights (especially freedoms).

**4.4.2. Human Rights and Correlative Duty**

We mentioned earlier that enjoyment of human rights implies correlative ethical duty, although not in the same way. This is yet another important insight that Oruka introduces in our current human rights discourse. For Oruka, *duty* means the specific obligation, commitment and
responsibility that we humans have or ought to have toward the wellbeing of each other and the environment. In fact, it is the concept of *duty*, Oruka says, that makes us different from other non-rational beings (Oruka 1997, 103). It is therefore crucial in ensuring the actual enjoyment of the substantive elements of our rights, given that rights are supposed to be socially if not legally guaranteed. This is because no one can effectively enjoy the substance of his or her right (which is what matters most) in isolation. Conversely, rights cannot be violated unless people interact without minding the need or the well-being of the ‘other’. What ensures harmonious interaction with each other and with our environment, and hence effective actual enjoyment of the substance of our rights, we now submit, is the sense of *ethical duty* as defined above.

To put the point differently, the concept of *duty* is essential to advancing the concept of *right*, the latter being understood as a justifiable demand of something due upon each other, however difficult it might be to point out the ‘other’. But that *ipso facto* means that rights basically have “addressees” who could be either individuals or government agencies. Thus, Oruka observes that the concept of ‘right’ is correlative (but not equal) to that of ‘duty’ so that if a person has a right to *something* very basic and necessary, it means somebody else has the duty to ensuring its enjoyment, however difficult it might be to point out that other person (Oruka 1997, 87).

In that argument, Oruka seems to agree with Shue, who says that the duty associated with our rights typically require some actions that ought to be carried out by individuals or government agencies; hence, both positive and negative duties. The former involves what “addressees” should do to ensure actual enjoyment of rights; the latter involves what they ought to restrain from doing to ensure enjoyment of the right in question (Shue 1996, 52). And to what Shue is saying, Oruka adds that *duty*, especially with regards to the basic human needs, reciprocally binds every capable and responsible moral agent (Oruka 1997, 103). It refers to what a human person is reasonably
expected to do, uphold, or desist from in order to assist another, especially those lacking the basic needs, to enjoy their needs. And because it is tied to our natural quest for justice (part of which means enjoyment of some basic needs), the concept of duty, therefore, just like the concept of right, also ought to be considered morally, socially, and therefore legally grounded. That is why Oruka insists that we can only talk of duty in reference to human beings who alone are presumably rational, moral and social beings (Oruka 1997, 130).

Here, we find Oruka injecting something desperately lacking or not given enough attention in the current human rights talk, namely, that human rights cannot be said to exist without there being some measures in place to ensure the actual enjoyment of their substantive elements. But such necessary measures, and hence the actual enjoyment of rights, can only be had if and only if we all embrace a sense of ethical duty toward the wellbeing of each other our geographical, racial, or any other sectarian affiliation notwithstanding.

We might easily claim that every human being has a ‘right to life’, for instance. But that is not enough to guarantee that everyone (including the most vulnerable) is actually enjoying that which sustains life: security, subsistence, medicines, etc. We need therefore to revise not only our thinking but also the “world order” to ensure that majority, if not every member of human species is actually enjoying at least the basic inalienable rights (Kuper 2005). This is basically what Oruka means when he says that human rights, especially the basic inalienable rights, also have correlative necessary duty that ought to be morally, socially, and therefore legally binding. He writes,

There is … the moral obligation that requires every moral agent to protect … the right to life of every human being. This obligation is not confined just to relatives and members of one’s nation. It is a global duty for every member of the human race (Oruka 1997, 103).
Oruka seems to agree with Kuper who, in emphasizing global responsibility, suggests the need to shift our approach to human rights talk “from a recipient-centric articulation of rights to an agent-centric approach”, thus focus more on identifying those with capacities and obligation to deliver on basic rights. We need, in other words, to focus on “who must do what for whom?” (Kuper 2005, xi). For Oruka, that ethical duty more intricately binds every capable responsible and capable moral agent within the global society. His proposal also resonates with other contemporary philosophers like Peter Singer (2002, 2010) and Thomas Pogge (2004, 2008), who both challenge affluent individuals and nation-states to reverse “the drama of global inequality”, given that they (the affluent) are the ones who shape “the world order” (Kuper 2005, 31).

We shall explore that possibility in chapter five when we discuss in depth the right to a human minimum. For now, though, we can summarily confirm with Oruka that human rights are or ought to be globally recognized norms or principles that are morally, socially, and hence legally grounded to protect us from various forms of injustice based on our common humanity.

That definition, however, seems to be predicated upon two major premises: (i) every human being, insofar as one is human, has some basic needs or entitlements to claim, pursue, enjoy, and hence be able to lead a more decent, dignified and possibly happy life; and (ii) human beings are (at least essentially) rational, moral and social beings. That means both local and global society has a duty or ethical responsibility to provide for or at least facilitate the pursuit and realization of decent life to every member of human species. That in effect means we all have a shared collective ethical duty to ensure justice (which for the most part involves egalitarian common good) in every social order we participate in, both locally and globally (Kuper 2005, 10; Graness 2015).
4.5. On the Bill of Right

In this section, I wish to use Oruka’s “need-based account” to critique the current human rights talk on the fact that it appears clogged with mere rhetoric as the clamour for more rights increases without establishing proper mechanism to realize their actual enjoyment. That clamour has led to what we might call “human rights inflation”, a situation where every individual agitation seems to be part of the human right corpus (Nickel 2014, 9; Kuper 2005, ix).

Of course, one might argue that expanding human agitations is itself desirable, for it might lead to expansion of human possibilities and hence maximizing “utility”. But the problem with maximizing possibilities without establishing proper mechanism to realize them, I think, would take people’s preferences at face value, urging us to satisfy as many of our preferences as possible without really distinguishing those that are necessary for really ensuring a dignified human life and those that are for superfluous things we merely want. In other words, it would make it difficult to distinguish between human ‘needs’ and human ‘wants’, which distinction is crucial if we are to be more ethically responsible towards the wellbeing of each other (Reader 2005).

Thus, the current human rights talk also seems to be getting the priority wrong. Rather than stressing the actual enjoyment of the basic inalienable rights, we find priority given to rights that ought to be considered so prima facie. A quick snip through the UN “Bill of Rights”, for instance, reveals a trend where priority is given to civil or political rights (such as right to citizenship) more than the socio-economic rights, some of which involve basic human needs (Cranston 1962, 47; Mutua 2013, 47). And that trend, as Mutua further points out, unfortunately appears to have been carefully designed by the organizers of the first UN assembly in 1948.
Without entering much into politics, it is worth noting that there were two major blocs during the first UN assembly: the Western bloc led by traditional liberal democracies like the United States and Britain on the one hand, and the Eastern bloc led by former Soviet Union on the other. The former bloc, however, had an upper hand; it was the key player in drafting the Bill of Rights.\(^5\) Thus, its members were keen to push for liberal principles that would ensure protection of the so-called individual rights and freedoms (hence the civil/ political rights) according to the philosophies of Locke and other modern liberal thinkers in the West.

The ‘socio-economic rights’, however, mostly championed by the Eastern bloc were somehow foreign or unknown to the Western bloc. Hence, their inclusion, as Cranston critically observes, “represented a considerable diplomatic victory for the Communist members of the United Nations” (Cranston 1962, 34). Mutua supports that claim, adding that they were, in other words, included just to compromise and accommodate the ‘others’ – the Eastern bloc (Mutua 2013, 47). And being alive to this “fraud”, Oruka was keen to lament and wonder why article 25 of the Bill of Rights, for instance, which talks about the right to basic human needs strangely appears almost as an appendix to the whole document. According to Article 25,

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control (United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948).

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52 It is also worth noting that the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights” was codified into two covenants: (i) the *international covenant on civil and political rights*, and (ii) the *international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights*. The two covenants, however, came into force in 1976, and together with the “optional protocols”, they constitute what is now referred to as the “International Bill of Human Rights” or simply the “Bill of Rights” (see Oduor 2012, 225; and Mutua 2013).
Now for Odera Oruka, this article 25 is perhaps the most important one given that it talks about what is so basic and necessary to safeguard human life and dignity. It should, therefore, have followed article 3 that talks about right to life had the organizers of the first UN assembly been careful enough to get the priority right, and if politics was not in display (Oruka 1991b, 86).

Unlike most contemporary human rights protagonists, Oruka was careful to get the priority right insofar as the quest for justice is concerned. He sought to first defend or advocate for the actual enjoyment of such basic human right as the right to a human minimum, whose substantive elements ought to never to be denied to anybody, lest we adversely affect people’s life, creativity and ability to function or act as moral agents. He could not fathom, for instance, why priority should be given to civic or “political” freedoms before guaranteeing the ‘right to life’ whose substantive elements include physical security, subsistence and health care; yet, the actual enjoyment of the former presupposes and in fact depends on the enjoyment of the latter. He says:

The necessity to have basic socio-eco-biotic needs fulfilled first precedes all thought [i.e., right to express oneself] because their fulfilment is the climate under which everyone might be able to move from mere instinctual action to thoughtful existence. The fact that they should be fulfilled cannot be a subject of debate or of any philosophizing. All debate about their fulfilment, to be reasonable, can only be about how they might best be fulfilled, not whether they should be fulfilled [first]. This is what we mean by stating that, in human life, these needs take priority even over thought (Oruka 1997, 100).

It is on these grounds, then, we insist with Oruka that any human rights talk worthy its name ought to not only prescribe what one is entitled to as human, but also do so cognizant of the priority order, that is, by ensuring such basic needs as security, subsistence and health care first. It should also prescribe what one is supposed to do to assist or facilitate others in enjoying what in principle all humans ought to have access to. Such a discourse should also include some norms that restrains or prohibit what in principle ought not to be done to any human being. It should
prioritize, in other words, both positive and negative duties crucial to actual enjoyment of human
inghts, and hence to our natural quest for justice. This is because, as Oruka would say, human rights
ought to be sought to fulfil some ends whose necessity or goodness can be easily encumbered and
endangered by actions of other people (Oruka 1991b, 51).

Indeed, the urgency to revise the current human rights talk as well as reorganize our socio-
political setting to get priority order cannot be overemphasized. As highlighted earlier, the idea of
human right is so intricately tied to our natural tendency for justice. That is why a human right can
also be defined as “a globally shared core conception of basic justice” (Pogge 1995). For Pogge,
just like for Oruka, justice means, first and foremost, ensuring that all humans get access to and
actually enjoy what is due to them – and especially the basic needs. And what is due to humans,
Pogge insists, ought to be morally, socially and hence legally guaranteed. He says:

By postulating a person P’s right to X as a human right, we are asserting that P’s society
ought to be reorganized in such a way that P has secure access to X and, in particular, so
that P is secure against being denied X or deprived of X officially (Pogge, 1995).

Oruka would most likely have agreed with Pogge on this,53 but I think he would have added
that justice also means upholding our ethical duty toward the wellbeing of the ‘other’, given that
we are or ought to be socio-political beings. In other words, justice, as we said earlier, also means
being keen to observe both positive and negative duties. It means being sagacious enough to be
considerate to the needs of other humans. It also means taking good care of the environment even

53 See Oruka 1991b, 53-55, where he makes a brilliant argument for liberty saying that we should no
longer ask the general question “What is liberty?” but rather “What is liberty for X?” (55). That follows
his argument that liberty as a right ought to be relational; it ought to be considered as liberty for X in S,
where X may represent any individual and S local or global society. He further says that “liberty for X in
S” means that X has, with respect to S and with equality with others in S, ability and opportunity to
obtain or satisfy X’s needs in S (54). The same, I think, can be said of justice.
as we pursue what we consider justifiably due, and to share with those who for some reasons lack especially the basic needs for humanity’s sake and for the common good. This, in my view, is the kind of sagacity Oruka wants to inject into the current human rights discourse, a sagacity that is also prevalent in most pre-colonial African societies.

4.6. Human Rights Talk in Africa

To conclude this chapter, I would like to discuss the concepts of right and duty from the traditional (i.e., pre-colonial) African perspective. The point of emphasis here is that contrary to some misleading views, the concept of human right, and what it implies was not alien in pre-colonial Africa. Like in many other organized human societies, it was prevalently centred on peoples’ quest for justice, that is, in striving not only to give but also receive what is fairly due. That is why there were norms, customs and traditions that primarily sought to promote justice, safeguard human dignity, and hence uphold egalitarian common good.

That, however, does not mean pre-colonial Africa was free from the abuses of rights or injustice against humanity; this is common to every human society. What it means is that there were measures in place to enable people access and actually enjoy what they in principle were justifiably entitled to. There were also measures to ensure people fulfil their ethical duties as moral agents. That means individual entitlements were relational; which in effect means they could not be sought outside the social context, nor were they sought for their own sake.

The concept of human right in pre-colonial Africa was therefore defined and imbued with such ideals as solidarity, generosity, care, respect, and above all ethical duty, whose primary end was to promote justice and the common good. Put differently, the concept of right in pre-colonial Africa was engrained within the idea of justice rooted not just in individual’s claims against
society, but also in the physical, psychic, and social security of the entire community (Mutua 2013, 79). Thus, even though one may argue that most pre-colonial African societies did not emphasize individual rights and freedoms in the same way as, say, modern Western liberal societies do, it would be fallacious to assume that they did not have the concept of human right at all. The fact of the matter is: while individuals had rights or entitlements they could claim and actually enjoy, they (individuals), nonetheless, remained members of a community in which they had an ethical duty to protect, uphold and secure.

Thus, it was crucial in traditional Africa, as Cohen points out, to try and strike a balance between individual rights and freedom on the one hand, and communal ethical duty on the other (Cohen 1993, 3-4). Here, individual rights and freedoms imply communal duty to provide or facilitate their enjoyment; but communal duty presupposes individual duty to be ethically sound. This is what informed the notion of justice understood in term of striving to not only receive (as an individual) what in principle is fairly due, but also in ensuring the same to other people. And that, as Mutua argues, was meant to counter-check pride, greed, and exaggerated individualism as well as promote solidarity, cohesion and common good (Mutua 2013, 75).

Commenting about the Akan in Ghana, Wiredu reiterates that balance between individual rights (and freedoms) and community obligation, urging that even if individuals were believed to have some intrinsic value and hence “entitled to a measure of basic respect and dignity” - which ipso facto conferred upon them personhood and individuality - “they were nonetheless members of a community that generated duties and obligations such as participating in public works and sustained prosperous household” (Wiredu 1996, 243). And by adhering to these duties, each
individual enhanced their “personhood”. Conversely, if one failed to meet these duties and obligations, then their “personhood” also diminished (Wiredu 1996, 243-247).

The same can be said of the Agikuyu in Kenya (where I come from), and indeed almost every traditional society in Africa. The point is that in pre-colonial Africa, people were believed to be born equal, that is, as inherently valuable members, and they were to be treated so even beyond physical death (Kenyatta 1953). Thus, individuals were naturally endowed with certain basic *entitlements* – such as food, security, shelter, etc. - to sustain and enrich life. But each individual was also naturally endowed with a sense of *duty* toward the wellbeing of not only members of one’s own community but also foreigners. The Agikuyu, for instance, were known to be generous and hospitable even to strangers. One of their proverbs capturing that value says: *mūgeni nĩ rũĩ*, which literally means “a visitor is a river”, meaning visitors are passers-by, they don’t stay long and they cost little to host; yet, like a river, they normally bring invaluable treasure (Barra 998). Oruka can be seen inspired by such sagacity when he says that the ethical obligation to eradicate poverty, and so protect the ‘right to life’, “is not confined just to relatives and members of one’s nation, but is a global duty for every member of the human race” (Oruka 1997, 103)

Some may ignorantly claim that individual rights and freedoms were not upheld in pre-colonial Africa, but a critical study reveals the opposite was the case. One way in which individual rights were pre-eminently protected in traditional Africa was through viable judicial systems. The only “problem” perhaps is that such systems were different from what we have today. Another “problem” could be that they have not been as publicized as the current liberal judicial system is. But that does not mean there were no justice systems in Africa. Thus, as Oruka rightly points out,

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54 Wiredu seems to have a similar conception of “personhood” as Oruka, namely, those qualities that make one function as a responsible moral agent (see Oruka 1997, 86).
the justice system in most pre-colonial Africa was well elaborated to ensure fair trial of the accused and fair recompense for the victim (Oruka 1985, 45).

Makau Mutua concurs with Oruka, urging that just like we have in the UN “Bill of Rights” (article 5), no one in pre-colonial Africa could be punished without first given a fair hearing. Assumption of innocence until proven guilty was an absolute principle of justice. The right to “personal security”, moreover, was jealously guarded. The ‘right to life’ also was so pre-eminently valued that the power over life and death was reserved to just a few elders who could measurably exercise it after an elaborate judicial process on grievous matters like murder (Mutua 2013, 77).

Comparing the penal system and judicial procedure in most of pre-colonial Africa with the judicial system in the modern “liberal” West, Odera Oruka in Punishment and Terrorism observes that the objective of settling offences in the former was to compensate the victim rather than punish the offender by inflicting pain, suffering or loss (Oruka 1985, 48). And compensation, Oruka argues, would take the form of one family or clan of the offender giving some material goods to the wronged person or his relatives. Even on serious offenses like murder, fair compensation and restitution was the preferred mode of settlement, except when the offender proved so notoriously dangerous to the entire community. On the death penalty, for instance, Oruka says:

Death penalty was inflicted only on incorrigible and frequent murderers and witches. The argument [or rationale] for this was that such murderers and witches were a danger to the whole community and it was in the interest and safety of the whole community to dispense with them (Oruka 1985, 48).

Thus, we evidently find herein an elaborate judicial system that aimed at jealously protecting individual’s ‘right to life’, except when that right proved a grievous threat to the common good. It is a system that contrarily runs against the current judicial system inspired by modern liberalism.
4.6.1. African Socialism

African socialism can be defined as a way of life that exhibits a great deal of solidarity, communal sharing, and care, among other noble ethical values. It is meant to enhance the balance between individual rights and community obligations, which balance as we said, was highly valued in most pre-colonial African societies. Julius Nyerere, among others, has competently captured African socialism (not communism) in his philosophy of *Ujamaa*. This is a philosophy based on the idea of family- hood or kinship. It aims at protection of individuals and their “personhood” in a more dignified manner within the family setting (Nyerere 1968). But this protection comes with commitment and a sense of duty toward the wellbeing of other individuals, one’s own family, and the entire community. As Hyden further elaborates, *Ujamaa* is based on three key principles: (i) mutual respect as each family member recognizes the place and rights of others; (ii) common ownership of property for the common good based on the fact that all people have the same basic necessities; and (iii) obligation to work, given that every family member has the duty to provide for their right to food, shelter, security, etc. (Hyden 1980, 98).

Apart from solidarity, especially in times of need, socialism in Africa was also evident through such human values as tolerance, loyalty, hard-working, and consultative dialogue - also known as “consensus democracy”. And the aim was to make each member feel part of the entire community; with individual rights, dignity and autonomy, but at the same time with a sense of ethical duty imbued in each one’s consciousness (Mutua 2013, 79). In this way, African Socialism

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55 This is a “non-party democratic system” of governance rooted in the traditional humanist and communitarian conceptions of the individual and the community in which political decisions are reached by consensus (see Wiredu 1996, 182-190).
not only supported individual rights, dignity and welfare, but it also did not allow gross inequality, exaggerated individualism or greed and irresponsible exploitation of the ‘other’.

Thus, inspired by such value-systems from Africa, Odera Oruka insists on our having a sense of ethical duty as an essential part of ensuring the actual enjoyment of human rights. This is an important insight Oruka wants to inject to improve the current human rights talk. His philosophy underscores a sagacity prevalent in most pre-colonial Africa, just as it also attempts to develop a more unitary, integrated and solid conception of human rights where greed, pride and extreme individualism could be tempered by the individual’s obligation toward the wellbeing of the ‘other’ within a global society. According to this sagacity, a human being is to be understood not just as an isolated and abstract being, but most importantly as an integral member of a community animated by a spirit of solidarity and communalism (Mutua 2013, 65).

Oruka’s philosophy also captures the underlying wisdom prevalent in traditional Africa, namely, that individual’s entitlements, joys, sorrows, etc., are interwoven into what we might call “social tapestry” (not social contracts) that denies isolated individuality. John Mbiti sums up that sagacity well with a maxim: “I am because you are, and because we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti 1990, 141). That maxim, prevalent in most traditional African societies, means no one can exist on their own, given that humans are socio-political cum ethical beings. Oruka seems inspired by that maxim when he calls for a global ethics of inclusivity that would ensure a more “humanized life on Earth” (Oruka 1997, 85). For him, the world (i.e., humans and the environment) ought to be seen as a kind of family unit, that is, a “complex web of beings” governed by principles of interdependence and ethical responsibility (Oruka 1997, 150).
Part of what that means is that we human beings (who are presumably socio-political moral agents) are endowed not only with individual rights and freedoms, but also with global ethical duty to contribute to the unity and the common good of the entire global society, thereby proactively tying our personal needs with other people’s needs (Hayden 2001, 9). In deed this seems to be the epitome of the concept of human right as such. An in my view, it is what Oruka wants to use to critique and hence enrich the current human rights discourse.

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter was meant to advance “a need-based account” that would help give a sound critique to the current human rights discourse that seems predominantly influenced by modern Western liberalism. It was also meant to dispel a fallacy that the concept of human right and what it stands for – quest for justice - derives from liberal philosophies in the West. Thus, using Oruka’s insight, we have defined human rights as globally recognized norms, standards or principles that are morally, socially, and therefore legally grounded to protect human beings from various forms of injustice based on our common humanity. We have tried to analyse what that definition means, emphasizing the idea of duty or ethical obligation that it also implies.

We have also seen that some rights are so basic and inherent to human life that they deserve to be called inalienable or absolute rights. Others, however, are just but considered human rights prima facie. That distinction, which sadly seems often ignored today, is very crucial because it advances our argument with Oruka that there are some basic rights whose actual enjoyment of their substantive elements cannot be compromised or denied of someone without adversely affecting their existential wellbeing and functionality as moral agents.
And to debunk a rather misguided view that human rights talk is a child of Enlightenment and liberalism, we have critically engaged Locke, whose account tends to promote unlimited pursuit of the so-called individual rights (or freedoms) but at the expense of having ethical duty, thereby promoting greed, exaggerated individualism and irresponsible exploitation of the ‘other’. In fact, the Lockean account only seems contrary to his predecessors – the Ancients and Scholastics – who, in my view, had a much better grip of such ethical issues as justice. His account, we said, may not succeed in delivering a genuine human rights talk whose aim is to promote justice at the global level, with principles of egalitarian fairness and common good as the driving force.

In the same vein, we have applied African socialism/ communalism to demonstrate that pre-colonial Africa was not innocent of human rights talk. The concept of human right, we said, was centred on people’s natural quest for justice, that is, in striving to not only give but also receive what is fairly due. It was also imbued within such values as solidarity, generosity, care, respect, and a sense of ethical responsibility. These communitarian ideals were also treasured among the Ancients in the West and other parts of the world. Unfortunately, they seem to have been eroded or altogether ignored today courtesy of the modern/ post-modern liberal philosophies.

In my view, though, there is need to seriously reconsider what non-liberal philosophies can offer to enhance the current human rights talk. The truth of the matter is that principles of justice, human dignity, equality and equitability – which all are the basis of the idea of human right – are inherent in every organized human society. It behoves us, then, to critically evaluate such value-systems, thereby seeing each philosophical tradition as essential contributor to, rather than try to project one as the ideal constituent of, human rights talk. Engaging such philosophies, moreover, will not only enrich the current human rights talk but will also enhance their actual enjoyment, which is essential for establishing a more humanized life in the world.
Odera Oruka’s practical philosophy is, no doubt, committed to that task. By critically using traditional African value-systems, Oruka is able to construct an ethics that would help curb the shortcomings often presented by liberal philosophies in the West: exaggerated individualism or greed, and irresponsible exploitation of the ‘other’. He was critical of modern and post-modern liberalism, just as he was keen to re-introduce practical sagacity into the current human rights discourse. Thus, he advances a “need-based account” of human rights as the means to a genuine quest for global justice. His account essentially calls for the actual enjoyment of some basic needs that may never be compromised or denied any human being, lest their existential wellbeing and functionality as moral agents be adversely affected. We shall try to advance this point further in the next chapter where we explore the concept of the human minimum – both as a right and a duty.
CHAPTER 5

IN SEARCH FOR THE RIGHT TO A HUMAN MINIMUM

For all human beings to function with a significant degree of rationality and self-awareness, they need a certain amount of physical security, health care, and subsistence (Oruka 1997, 87).

5.1. Introduction

In the last chapter, we tried to advance Oruka’s need-based account of human rights, as we also gave a critique to the current human rights discourse. We tried to situate Oruka among thinkers who subscribe to the view that human rights have their basis from the very human nature and status, meaning they are not political privileges, nor are they legally or otherwise revocable. Thus, linking the concept of human right with our natural quest for justice, we defined human rights as globally recognized norms that ought to be morally, socially, and hence legally grounded to protect us humans from various forms of injustice based on our common humanity.

We therefore emphasized actual enjoyment of the substantive elements of rights as the most important thing, taking the idea of right as a rational basis for a justified demand of what in principle all human beings are entitled to insofar as one is human. And for Oruka, we observed, it is through the concept of right that humans ought to relate to each other as equal members of one species. The concept of right, we observed, is the basis for our socio-political way of life as moral agents. But we also realized that that ‘justified demand’ and actual enjoyment of what one is entitled to ought to go hand in hand with a sense of duty, that is, with some ethical responsibility toward the wellbeing of the ‘other’. And that duty, we further said, is often considered as either positive or negative. The concept of duty, then, refers to what we humans (who presumably are moral agents) are expected to do (hence, positive duty) or refrain from doing (hence, negative duty) in order to fulfil, realize or facilitate realization of what we in principle owe to each other.
We also noted that human rights are not on the same level, meaning the duty they elicit to realize or facilitate their enjoyment does not bind us in the same way. Hence, some rights (say, the right to subsistence) are considered *inalienable* or absolute to the extent that they flow from the very human nature. Such rights are *necessary* (though not sufficient) to preserve and sustain human life, just as they also enhance human dignity and our ability to function or act as moral agents. That in effect means nothing can justifiably compromise their demand; and nothing can legitimately jeopardize their fulfilment as well, even though that is not always the case. Other rights, however (say, the right to freedom of speech), are considered so *prima facie*. They are, strictly speaking, important though not necessary for human existence and functionality as moral agents. Their demand and their actual enjoyment, in other words, can justifiably be overridden or compromised by other rights or by “something of a greater moral significance” (such as national security), their importance notwithstanding (Oruka 1997, 87).

Now that distinction, which sadly today seems often ignored, is very crucial because it forms the basis of Oruka’s critique of the current human rights discourse. It is also the basis of his argument for the idea of the *human minimum*: a claim that there are some basic human needs whose demand, realization and actual enjoyment ought to be morally, socially and hence legally guaranteed to every member of the human species, lest their existence and functionality as moral agents be adversely affected, thereby jeopardizing global security and peaceful co-existence.

In this chapter, we focus on critically examining Oruka’s argument for the *right to a human minimum*, an ethical principle he crafted as a means to ensuring what he calls “a more humanised life on Earth” (Oruka 1997, 85); that is, a way of life governed by egalitarian principles of justice.\(^{56}\)

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\(^{56}\) Justice here means not only receiving what one is fairly entitled to, but also giving or facilitating realization of what others are duly entitled to insofar as they are humans.
key among them being the ethical duty toward the wellbeing of each other. We shall establish what constitutes the right to a human minimum, as we also seek to understand why it is not only the prerequisite for one to act as a moral agent but also the basis upon which other human rights can be sufficiently enjoyed. And being an ethical principle, the right to a human minimum, we shall see, also necessarily elicits a correlative ethical duty that binds or ought to bind every human being, every capable moral agent irrespective of their national, regional, racial or any other sectarian affiliation or demarcation. We shall interrogate further what that claim entails.

As a critique to the current human rights talk also, we therefore seek to engage Oruka’s insight in depth. His philosophy, as we shall see, seems closely tied to issues of global justice (as opposed to international justice); that is, in striving to achieve for every human being what in principle everyone is justifiably entitled to insofar as one is a member of human species. It seeks to emphasize, for instance, the importance of realizing basic human needs for all as a necessary prerequisite for acting or functioning as a responsible moral and creative agent. His philosophy also emphasizes the importance of human relations and solidarity, hence the ethical duty that is central to establishing anything akin to global justice.

Thus, following Oruka’s insight, we might discover that as human beings (i.e., rational socio-ethical beings), we all have some basic entitlements that we are always necessarily justified to demand from each other. But a critical question is: what is the basis of that ‘justified demand’? Likewise, it seems we have some correlative necessary duty to fulfil or at least facilitate the actual realization of what in principle everyone is entitled to, especially the inalienable rights. But again, the question is: what is the rationale or the basis of that duty? Our assumption is that these rather difficult queries can be answered by critically analysing the concept of human minimum, the primordial ethical standard of living for every human being. The idea of human minimum, we will
see, is the rational basis of our justified demand of our rights. It is also the rational basis of our duty to each other as equal members of global society. It is therefore the basic principle of ensuring that justice is practiced at the global level.

5.2. Human Minimum: Towards an Ethical Standard of Living

Crucial to Oruka’s ethical thought is the concept of *human minimum*. It first appears in his 1979 essay entitled “On Philosophy and Humanism in Africa”, where he uses it in reference to the minimum standard necessary for any human being to live a decent life worthy of a human person. Here, Oruka defines it as “the ultimate or most basic standard of moral good” whose aim is to ensure “the quality and security of human life” (Oruka 1997, 138). And for Oruka, the dignity and security of human life is measured by the *quality* and *security* of individual and collective existence or lifestyle. But that would be determined by how both local and global society responds to various forms of dehumanizing lifestyle of some of its members. It is the concept of *human minimum* that helps in establishing a bench-mark or a standard below which no one can reasonably be expected to tolerate if we are to ensure quality and security of human life. The concept of *human minimum*, in other words, is what defines “the highest ethics of humanism” (Oruka 1997, 139), whose ultimate goal is to establish a more humanised kind of life on earth.

The concept of *human minimum* then appears in his 1989 essay dubbed “The Philosophy of Foreign Aid”, where Oruka employs it to argue for the ethical duty that global society has for everyone to live a standard humanly dignified lifestyle. Here, he develops it as the minimum basis for achieving global justice as opposed to international justice. He also links it with human rights talk, and so he defines the *human minimum* as “the very minimum a human being demands from the world so that he or she may be in a position to understand and recognise the rights of others”
(Oruka 1997, 147). Thus, using the concept of human minimum, Oruka is able to advance what we might call a need-based human rights discourse, thereby bringing about a paradigm shift insofar as our quest for global justice is concerned.

To underscore that point, it is important to note that Oruka believed not only in human equality but also empowerment, which he wants to justify or at least attempt to achieve using the concept of the human minimum. He wants to develop an ethical principle that would justify equitable distribution or sharing of wealth and world resources. He is not necessarily advocating for monetary foreign aid, nor is he promoting merely giving hand-outs to the poor; rather, he wants to instil a sense of global responsibility towards the wellbeing of each other, part of which would mean ensuring: (i) equitable sharing or distribution of wealth and resources; and (ii) empowering the poor and the youth with skills and opportunities to realize their potentialities.

Oruka therefore envisioned a situation where all people in the world would have, in more or less equal measure, the ability and opportunity to satisfy at least the most basic human needs: physical security, subsistence and health care. And for those who for some reasons lack that ability and opportunity, he says, arrangements ought to be made so that their needs are also met (Oruka 1997, 85). The assumption here, of course, is that we are all members of a global society that has some obligations to fulfil what in principle every member is entitled to (Oruka 1991b, 55-56). It is only when majority if not all members of the global society are able to enjoy their right to a human minimum that Oruka believed we can have anything akin to global justice.

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57 This is a discourse that emphasizes the actual enjoyment of the substantive element associated with a particular right if that right is to achieve its “moral worth” (cf. Oruka 1991b, 55).
Thus, it follows that *human minimum* is or ought to be the same for all people, given that it is a standard below which no human being should be allowed or would willingly accept to sink. But that should not be construed to mean that everyone ought to be forced to meet the same minimum, although it is hard to believe that any reasonable person would prefer to live below the *human minimum*, that is, live without enjoying at least the basic needs. There are, no doubt, many people in the world today who live below the *human minimum*, but very few if any do so willingly.

And on the same note, the *human minimum* should not be taken simply as a sort of static quantitative measure – ensuring a particular number of calories for food per day, for instance; rather, the quality and the standard of the substantive elements of the *human minimum* ought to be dynamically revised depending on how the society can afford, that is, based on the availability of resources and technology. Hence, Oruka’s important point, as I see it, is that it would be ethically irresponsible, and in fact, a form of injustice for some people in the world to exuberantly amass wealth and resources while others haplessly languish without even the basic needs. I come back to this later, but first, we need to clarify what the term ‘global justice’ means or ought to mean.

### 5.1.1. Global Justice or International Justice?

The term ‘global justice’ is perhaps a fairly recent term that has become “fashionable” in the late 1990s. But Odera Oruka as early as 1980s applied this concept in more or less the same way as it is used in the current cosmopolitan approach. As Anke Graness points out, he applied it to elevate the context of principles of justice to a global level, linking it to the ethical responsibility that every capable moral agent has to enforce justice on a global scale (Graness 2015, 128). Indeed, his 1981 essay - “John Rawls’ Ideology: Justice as Egalitarian Fairness” - attests to this fact.
In that essay, Oruka critically engages the Rawlsian view of justice, which says that the scope of obligations to ensuring justice is defined and largely determined by the citizenship that people share within a particular socio-political setting. According to Rawls, therefore, one would have obligations of justice - ensuring what is fairly due to others - and hence the duty to meet or facilitate enjoyment of the basic human needs, for instance, only to the extent that people live together under a particularly recognized regional boundary (Rawls 2001, 70-74). But Oruka vehemently refutes that view, arguing that if justice was to be understood as “egalitarian fairness” (which is what human rights essentially seek to promote), then principles of justice, especially in matters of basic human needs, cannot justifiably have boundaries. This is because all humans in principle have the same basic needs (Oruka 1997, 123).

Now even without going into details of Oruka’s attempt to “salvage and purify the egalitarian elements in Rawls” (Oruka 1997, 115), it is clear that there has been a misconception with regard to what global justice really is, with some applying the term ‘global justice’ when they actually mean ‘international justice’. But as Oruka pointedly says, it would be a huge mistake to think of the two terms as synonymous. And the key to unlock the difference largely involves clarifying the “entities” involved. Thus, whereas international justice involves a kind of “relation that holds between two or more independent nations, states or societies,” global justice, in contrast, is basically “a relation that holds between human or sentient beings within something called the global society” (Ericsson 1981, 20-21 quoted by Oruka 1997, 84).

In other words, while international justice mainly has nation-states as its crucial entities, global justice takes human beings as primary subjects in quest for justice. Also, whereas the former is pretty much in practice today insofar as nation-states relate and deal with each other (say, in trade), the latter remains sort of an ideal to be realized. Oruka clarify the matter saying,
I do not pretend to believe that we have anything in the world today that can significantly be treated as global justice. Global justice is still only an ideal as far as nations are concerned. *What obtains among nations is international justice rather than global justice* (Oruka 1997, 84, emphasis mine).

Thus, Odera Oruka suggests that we need to urgently formulate a theory of achieving global justice, and that formula would consist mainly on how we humans (socio-politico-ethical beings) ought to relate and treat each other as members of a global society irrespective of national, regional, racial, political or any other sectarian affiliation. And to justify this urgency, Oruka demonstrates how global justice is more relational, inclusive, dynamic and progressive than international justice, given that global justice is meant to be concerned with what is “good and fair” to individual human beings in terms of their needs, their citizenship notwithstanding (Oruka 1997, 84).

It is in this context that Odera Oruka propagates the idea of *human minimum*, thereby bringing a dynamic shift insofar as our quest for justice is concerned. The goal is to have an ethical principle that would enhance a healthy human relationship within the entire global society. At the back of his mind, Oruka seems convinced that the most important issue in this endeavour has to do with what we all are entitled to or owe each other (i.e., our basic rights), and how we ought to responsibly try to realize or facilitate realization of that entitlement. But that would require, among other things, laying down some normative conditions for a fair distribution or sharing of wealth and world resources (Ericsson 1981, 20-21). It would also require having some ethical duty toward the wellbeing of each other, and especially the poor, so as to achieve egalitarian fairness. And for Oruka, that egalitarian fairness can only be had if we first guarantee the right to a human minimum.

### 5.2.2. Rationale for the Idea of Human Minimum

To justify the idea of *human minimum*, Oruka appeals to the principle of self-preservation, which for him is not only the object of ‘right to life’, but also “the basic necessity for an individual
if he is to enjoy any other right” (Oruka 1997, 85). But to preserve life for an individual, Oruka observes, entails first and foremost satisfying some needs meant to sustain human existence, key among them being physical security, health and subsistence (Oruka 1997, 85). The three basic needs taken together, he says, constitute the very minimum any human being can justifiably demand from both local and global society for one to live a standard humanly dignified lifestyle. They, in other words, constitute the right to a human minimum, which right, Oruka says, ought to be treated as the most basic, universal, inalienable, absolute and necessary - not only for human existence but also for enabling us to function as moral agents.

That argument follows Oruka’s noble conviction that all human rights that aim at ensuring the fulfilment of basic human needs ought to be treated so simply because they essentially ensure “necessary basic requirements for human survival and development anywhere and for the exercise of the functions of a [human] person” (Oruka 1997, 85). As a caveat, though, the human minimum should not be construed to be the end or the “floor” equivalent to mere self-preservation - as in Hobbes and Locke; rather, it is really the means or the “doorway” to living a decent and dignified life. As Oruka would say, it is only the basic necessity for enjoying other human rights (Oruka 1997, 85). We shall be investigating further what the right to a human minimum entails, but for now, we need to clarify the claim that it is the basic necessity for enjoying any other human right.

5.2.3. The Basis of other Rights

As highlighted above, the idea of human minimum is the rational basis for demanding some basic necessities without which a human being cannot sufficiently enjoy life and other rights. It is therefore the basis for establishing “a more humanised life on Earth” (Oruka 1997, 85), that is, a life governed by egalitarian principles of justice. To get Oruka’s point, we need first to remember
his definition of ‘right’, which he says is the rational basis for a justified demand of *something* that is fairly due (Oruka 1997, 85). We need also to remember that for Oruka, the actual enjoyment of the substantive element of a right in question (which is what matters most) ought to be socially if not legally guaranteed. But for one to enjoy the substantive element of any right whatsoever, one must first of all be alive, secured, and healthy. Put differently, one must first be assured of the three basic needs that sustain life, namely, physical security, subsistence, and health care before one can effectively enjoy the substantive elements of any other right.

On these grounds, then, Oruka claims there must be some rights that are crucial to ensuring the three basic human needs mentioned above; and these rights properly qualify to be everyone’s *minimum* reasonable demands upon the rest of human society. That means their fulfilment and the actual enjoyment necessarily ought to be morally, socially, and hence legally guaranteed so that no one member of human species goes without. This is because they not only ensure individual’s survival but also “preservation of the value of humanity in the universe” (Oruka 1997, 85). Here Oruka seems to be following Henry Shue who, in defending some basic human rights holds that even under unfortunate circumstances where it is not within one’s own power, for instance, to arrange on how to enjoy the basic needs, other people ought to make some arrangements so that one will still be able to enjoy them (Shue 1981/1996, 26, 27).58

Hence, Oruka claims that the concept of *human minimum* is the rational basis for a justified minimum demand of the three basic needs - security, subsistence and health care, the denial of which “no self-respecting human being can reasonably be expected to accept” (Oruka 1997, 85). Now there are two possible interpretations here. First, we can take Oruka to be defending the

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58 Shue has only security and subsistence as basic rights. Oruka, however, adds health care on the list, for it is indubitably basic, universal and necessary for preserving life and for the enjoyment of any other right.
human minimum precisely as that which is the most necessary (though not sufficient) means or basis for people to live a worthy humanly dignified life. But second, we can also take him to be defending the fact that every human being is entitled to enjoy that minimum justified demand insofar as one is human, which implies that we owe each other the human minimum both as a right and a duty. To me, both interpretations are complementary. Hence, Oruka elsewhere would define the human minimum as the very minimum a human being can demand from the world so that one may be in a position to understand, recognize and fulfil the rights of others (Oruka 1997, 147).

Oruka further observes that the three basic rights referred to above are also human rights, meaning they are fairly entitled to every member of the human species and not merely to some citizens of a given nation. They are also universal, meaning they ought to apply everywhere in the same way, given that their fulfilment is very essential for the preservation of the very human life and for upholding human dignity. Finally, Oruka adds that the three basic rights are inherent to every human being, meaning their justifications flow from the very human nature. They are also “absolute” in the sense that nothing can or ought to compromise their fulfilment without adversely affecting human life, dignity, and ability to function as a capable moral agent. He says:

I wish to refer to the three basic rights (the rights to physical security, health, and subsistence) as “the inherent rights of persons.” They are “inherent” because, for any individual to be able to exercise the function of a person (the function of being a capable moral agent), he [or she] needs at least the fulfilment of these rights as a necessary condition (Oruka 1997, 86).

59 Earlier (see footnote no. 1), we defined ‘dignity’ as that “special inner worth” associated with human species by virtue of them being rational and having capacity to act as moral agents. Here, we emphasize not only the importance of enjoying or realizing that dignity, but also the role that society ought to play to realize it. That, however, does not mean the society owes anyone their dignity; rather, it means the society can determine how people actually enjoy their dignity. A society that tends to neglect people’s right to a human minimum, for instance, would make it extremely difficult for them to live a dignified kind of life, to function as moral agents, for instance, even though they may still struggle to do so.
It seems quite clear, then, that the reason why Odera Oruka pushes for the concept of *human minimum*, both as a right and a duty, is not merely to defend human entitlements for the sake of it but rather to ensure that the majority (if not all) are able to enjoy a life worthy of a human person; that is, a life not of sheer survival – scavenging dumpsites for food or living in fear of imminent attack, for instance - but rather a more humanly dignified lifestyle that would enable people to function as they ought to. Oruka clarifies the matter saying:

For all human beings to function with a significant degree of rationality and self-awareness, they need a certain amount of physical security, health care, and subsistence. Let us, for simplicity, refer to this minimum amount as the *human minimum*. Below this minimum, one may still be human and alive. But one cannot successfully carry out the functions of a moral agent or engage in creative activity (Oruka 1997, 87).

One of Oruka’s points here is that for any human being to live and function as a human person (i.e., function with a significant degree of rationality, creativity, self-awareness, liberty and capability as a moral agent), one would need significant amount of what the concept of *human minimum* calls for, namely, security, health care, and subsistence. Although Oruka does not specify how much of these basic needs would be necessary, my take is that it is as much as the society (both local and global) can afford.

Oruka, however, further points out that below the *human minimum*, that is, below some significant amount of security, subsistence and health care, “one may still be human and alive”, but it would be almost impossible for such a human being to “successfully carry out the functions of a moral agent, or engage in creative activity” (Oruka 1997, 87). And we might add to that and say that it would be difficult to freely engage in such human activities as studies, religious worship, or participation in decision making processes. Put differently, it would be more difficult to enjoy other human rights. I come back to this point below; but for now, we need to reiterate Oruka’s
point: meeting what the *human minimum* demands is very necessary (though not sufficient) for anyone to be truly reasonable, free, self-determinate, creative, and responsible moral agent.\(^{60}\)

### 5.2.4. On Human Functionality

The analysis above seems to lead us to an interesting but important discussion about the *human minimum* in relation to human capacity or functionality. And the question is this: how does the *human minimum* (as a right to some basic needs) or lack of it affect the human’s capacity to function as a moral agent? That question arises from Oruka’s assertion that enjoyment of the right to a *human minimum* is necessary (though not sufficient) for a human being to act as a moral agent, that is, function as a human person: reasonably, freely, creatively and ethically responsible (Oruka 1997, 87). It also emerges from Oruka’s further claim that without practically realizing what the *human minimum* essentially calls for (physical security, subsistence, and health care), a human being tends to be reduced to function either as a brute or a human vegetable, thereby losing “the very minimum necessary for a decent definition of human being” (Oruka 1997, 87).

Now to understand Oruka’s claims, we need to clarify what he means by the terms ‘person’ and ‘personhood’. The two terms have had varied connotations throughout history of philosophy. Boethius (480-524 AD), for instance, in *De persona et duabus naturis*, c. ii. defines a human person as “an individual substance of a rational nature” (Gedes 1911). For Boethius, then, it is the *rational nature* or some “isolated static quality of rationality” that grants human beings ‘personhood’, and hence dignity and ability to act as moral agents (Mentiki 1984, 172). But that

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\(^{60}\) I don’t intend to mean that people living below the *human minimum* in any way cease to be human beings, meaning they cannot or should not function as moral agents or engage in such activities as believing in God; in fact, majority of them do. What I want to emphasize, as the discussion below will prove, is how lack of the *human minimum* may adversely affect human functionality. Later, I will argue that perhaps it is unfair for any society to expect those members living below the *human minimum* to act as moral agents.
conception of a person does not address the role community plays or ought to play in realizing an individual’s ethical conduct in terms of pursuing their rights and fulfilling ethical duties. It does not, for instance, address how the physical or bodily needs of an individual would be met, yet these are, needless to say, central factors that contribute toward human development and fostering the individual’s personality, dignity and ability to function as expected – function as a moral agent.

And that has been the critique to the so-called “classical” conception of ‘person’ and ‘personhood’, especially in the West, where a human person is metaphysically conceived as “a self-sufficient atomic individual who does not depend on his/her relationships with others for the realization of his/her ends” (Gyekye 2002, 297). It seems to beg for another concept of “moral personhood”, where a human person would be defined largely “in terms of moral qualities or capacities” that are, nonetheless, realizable only within a community (Gyekye 2001, 304).

To me, Oruka’s argument for the human minimum seems to be emphasizing the fact that that capacity to function as a moral agent ought to be actualized first if one is expected to make proper moral judgments, and hence function as a moral agent. His position is that ensuring what the human minimum demands is arguably the most basic necessity towards actualizing the human capacity to act as a moral agent. Oruka would therefore define a human person as a human being who not only has moral or ethical inclination (and hence capable of making moral judgments), but one who actually does that. But that would presuppose a community that has prepared or facilitated means and ways of making moral judgments. And one way of preparing an individual to make moral judgments is by ensuring such basic needs as physical security, subsistence and health care, which is what the idea of human minimum demands. That, Oruka believes, would make or allow people to fully utilize their rationality, and hence be more confident, creative, and free. It would
also make them ethically responsible toward the wellbeing of each other, thereby curbing pride, greed and possessive individualism.

Hence, Oruka claims that a human person must have “characteristics which are additional to those qualities that are sufficient for the definition of a human being, i.e., a member of human species” (Oruka 1997, 86). Here, Oruka seems to be following Kant who argues that the idea of ‘personhood’ implies human dignity; thus, it must be inextricably linked with human freedom and “autonomy” besides the rational nature (Kant 4:435-436). For Kant, therefore, just like in Oruka, ‘personhood’ includes those qualities of an individual that go beyond the mere fact of having “rational nature” or being a member of the human species. Oruka, however, seems to dynamically blend the Kantian view with what has been aptly referred to as “the traditional African concept of person and personhood,” where each individual is diametrically seen as an important part and parcel of the entire community rather than an isolated autonomous entity (Mentiki 1984, 2006; Gyekye 1995, 85-103; Wiredu and Gyekye 1992). Thus, Oruka insists that a community or human society (local and global) must first ensure the demands of the human minimum to its members before blaming them for acting contrary to its norms (Oruka 1997, 88).

In this context, Oruka seems to understand a human person not only as a member of human species (i.e., rational, sentient, and self-conscious being), but also one who is free to act and engage in creative activities as a responsible moral agent. For him, ‘personhood’ refers to those qualities that enable a human being to function as a rational, free, self-determinate, creative, and responsible being. But such qualities are properly actualized insofar as one enjoys at least some basic human needs: security, subsistence and health care. Put differently, it is the enjoyment of what the human minimum demands that actualizes “personhood” which in turn enables a human being to actually function or act as a moral agent. That in effect means there are some human beings who, for some
reasons, cannot strictly speaking be considered “human persons”, especially insofar as they fail to act or function as responsible moral agents. But that does not mean such people cease in any way to be humans with no value and dignity.

To clarify his point, we see Oruka vehemently attacking such contemporary thinkers as Peter Singer who, following Kant, narrowly defines a human person merely as sentient, rational and self-conscious being (Singer 1980). Singer makes a distinction between “sentient beings” and “sentient beings that are rational and self-conscious”. He then claims that human beings mostly belong to the second category, and so they are considered ‘persons’. But he also controversially argues that there are some humans who just fit in the first category, whereas some non-human animals could fit in the second category, i.e., as persons. For Singer, then, it is only ‘human persons’ (i.e., human beings that are not only sentient but also rational and self-conscious) who have such “special value” in society as dignity, rights, and liberty. In other words, there is no special value in the life of a human being simply because one is a member of the human species. That logically means there are at least some humans (say, the unborn babies) who are less valuable, even less valuable than non-human animals (Singer 1980, 123-154). But this is not what Oruka is suggesting or implying, as he eloquently says:

Here, I am not concerned with persons in general, but only with human persons. I do not, however, wish to buy Singer’s definition of ‘person’. All I am concerned with here is to point out those needs whose fulfilment liberates human beings from the life of sheer existence to that which offers a possibility for creativity. And I am also suggesting that this liberation is necessary condition for one to function as a person, whatever meaning we attach to this concept (Oruka 1997, 92 footnote no. 11).

In other words, Oruka seems to be saying that potentially every human being is a human person by virtue of being a member of the human species. But one needs to actualize their personhood, and hence be able to function reasonably, creatively, freely, and responsibly as a
moral agent. And for him, what brings about actualization of that capacity to function as a moral agent is the actual enjoyment of at least the three basic human needs: physical security, subsistence and health care. Thus, guaranteeing these basic needs to every human being, Oruka would say, is the most basic prerequisite means for social and global justice. It is the basis for ensuring that “all human beings live in dignity, and are thus able to be part of the community of moral agents” (Nyarwath 2012b, 76). Fulfilling what the human minimum demands, in other words, is the basis for establishing socio-economic freedom, thereby ensuring possibility for establishing a more humanized way of life on Earth” (Oruka 1997, 85).

It follows, therefore, that the right to a human minimum is indeed one of the basic prerequisites for ensuring the possibility of realizing our human/ethical potentialities so that a human being is not simply alive (having the life of sheer existence) but also able to function as a reasonable, creative, and responsible moral agent. Like Martha Nussbaum, Odera Oruka believed that it would be extremely difficult for people to function as moral agents unless the global society makes some effort to “create capabilities” that would enable them to enjoy their universal entitlements, key among them being the right to a human minimum (Nussbaum 2011, 33-34).

For clarity’s sake, let us think of someone who has lost the entire standard guarantee for physical security, and has been exposed to threats against his or her life. Such an individual may still be human and alive, but because of the imminent danger, his or her immediate concern would most likely be survival at all costs. And in such a situation, we cannot justifiably expect the victim to act as rational, self-determinate, free, creative, and responsible moral agent. If a woman, say, was at the verge of rape or murder, she may decide to co-operate with the rapist or the murder; she

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may also agree to do any possible thing to survive - however stupid, irrational or useless that action may appear from our own ordinary perspective (Oruka 1997, 86).

In the same way, people starving to death or being afflicted by terrible diseases are most likely prone to lose their capacity for a creative and self-determinate kind of life, even though they may still remain alive as humans. They may, however, adapt to a stoic way of life to survive; in which case they may embrace servitude, pain, and sickness as normal or as fate would dictate. But they may do so only to avoid trouble or perhaps gain some short-term tranquillity. They may even strive to function as moral agents, abiding by all the norms and laws of morality – as many of them do anyway. But that would by all standards of justice be unfair to them, not unless they embrace stoicism deliberately, which is not what we are talking about. 62

The ancient Stoicism in around 3rd century BC is known to have advocated for a way of life where individuals would be “in a state of being fully free”, even when in servitude, sickness, torture, or whatever form of bodily suffering. For the Stoics, virtue (or the highest good) is based on one’s knowledge of their surrounding; which comes about when one learns to live in harmony with the divine reason (i.e., fate) that governs the cosmic world. Freedom and hence happiness, therefore, for the Stoics also comes about when one tries to be indifferent toward the vicissitude of fortune, pleasure, and pain (cf. Epictetus, Discourses 1.15.2). Oruka, however, would obviously reject such kind of “philosophy”. 63

62 I am not insinuating that people under risk due to lack of the human minimum ought to be immoral; nor am I saying that their striving to be moral is unfair or undesirable on its own. My point with Oruka is that it seems quite unfair for global society, especially from the side of those living in affluence, to expect or demand that those deprived of their right to a human minimum should function normally as moral agents. The goal is really to underscore the ethical duty that we ought to have toward the wellbeing of each other. 63 Of course, there are some even today who might be sympathetic to stoicism – perhaps for religious or political reasons; but in my view, it is really difficult to see how stoicism can be taken seriously.
Thus, as Oruka rightly suggests, it is reasonably important, necessary, and morally binding that people who are lacking basic needs be helped out of their misfortune (Oruka 1997, 86). And that is where the concept of *duty* - i.e., a sense of being ethically responsible towards the wellbeing of the ‘other’ - becomes handy. It enables us to realize that it is morally unjustifiable for us (who are assured of the basic needs) to expect those living below the *human minimum* to always act as responsible moral agents. It also makes us aware that it is ethically unfair if not unreasonable, Oruka insists, to think that people starving to death would be capable of freely negotiating a fair-trade deal or sign business or political contracts (Oruka 1997, 86).

To underscore that point, Oruka makes us reflect on some common practices in the world where affluent nations or individual billionaires tend to use their wealth and power to entice small-starving (poor) nations with unfair deals. They may, for instance, seek to have monopoly of utilizing the poor people’s “resource-and-mineral-filled land” for about 99 years or so in exchange of food and medicine. Yes, by all reasonable and normal standards, Oruka agrees, such deals look grossly unfair to the poor, considering the high value of minerals and resources targeted by the rich and powerful party. Yet, Oruka thinks it would be unfairly cruel (if not unreasonable) to blame the poor governments for accepting such raw deals since their first priority would be emancipation from starvation and diseases (Oruka 1997, 86).

Oruka’s example might appear too simplistic and farfetched today, but it reflects what happened when colonialist from Europe first came into Africa. British colonialists in Kenya, for instance, are known to have duped the locals (who could not read English) into signing a lease to
use “crown land”, i.e., prime and fertile land, for over 99 years. And the majority of Africans continue to suffer devastating effects of such frauds. One just needs to read Rodney’s book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) to concur with me. Oruka’s example also sadly reflects the socio-economic exploitation prevalent, especially in Africa today, of course, under the disguise of development while the reality is neo-colonialism at best.

And in the same vein, I do not think Oruka was naive to the fact that there are some rogue leaders in Africa and other so-called ‘developing countries’ who continue to enrich themselves through such corrupt trade and mineral deals as the one highlighted above. Of course, there are corrupt leaders in Africa, just as they are also there in other parts of the world; and the challenge is always how to get rid of them. But there are also leaders in Africa who genuinely want the best for their people. A case in point was Mwalimu Nyerere of Tanzania, whose fight against poverty, greed, and exaggerated individualism (among other vices) arguably has no equal. His efforts to champion global justice, peace, unity and fostering equitable distribution of world resources is indubitably distinct. In one of his intriguing speeches in 1970s, for instance, Nyerere attacks the then “world economic order” that favoured the rich and the so-called “developed countries” while exploiting the poor. He then calls for “a new world economic order” that would deal with most global inequalities and injustices (Nyerere 1986, 7, 12).

That, however, does not mean such leaders as Nyerere (if he was alive today) cannot sometimes be duped into raw deals that by reasonable standards appear unfair to their people. But the question is: do such leaders have another better option? Put differently we may ask: what is

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64 For a devastating policies of land alienation and colonial labour in Kenya (1897-1934), see Kinoti 2010, 43-55. These policies not only took away African’s right to use their own land but also allotted to them “duty” to work for Europeans, and to the latter the right to own land (p. 49).
the lesser evil: to let your people die of starvation and diseases, or forego their right to minerals and resources in exchange of some food and medicine? Any responsible leader, I believe, would go by the latter option even though it may look unreasonable to an outsider. And that is Oruka’s point! He wants to establish the priority of human minimum in terms of what ought to be realized first as the prerequisite for humans to act responsibly as moral agents.

Hence, one conclusion we can draw from the analysis above is that there are some basic human needs - key among them being physical security, subsistence and health care - that all human beings ought to unconditionally enjoy so as to effectively preserve life and function as responsible moral agents. We can then justify the human minimum as the basic prerequisite standard necessary for any human being to live a decent life worthy of a human person, and hence be able to enjoy other rights. It is also the basis for our ethical duty toward the wellbeing of each other, our geographical or any other sectarian affiliation notwithstanding.

5.3. The Right to a Human Minimum

We have been at pains trying to establish and justify the concept of human minimum, which involves a fundamental expression that there are some inherently basic human needs that all human beings ought to enjoy so as to preserve life and effectively function as responsible moral agents. From one angle, the human minimum, we have seen, helps to underscore the idea of human right and what it involves – quest for global justice. But human minimum can also be considered as a human right on its own. This section aims at elaborating that point.

The concept of human minimum, as we have established, involves striving to realize three basic human needs, namely, i) physical security, ii) health care, and iii) subsistence. Taken together as a unit, Oruka argues, the three basic needs constitute the right to a human minimum, which in
essence is meant to ensure preservation and sustenance of humanity. Thus, *the right to a human minimum* is not only inherent to every member of the human species but also universal, meaning that every human being is justifiably entitled to it. Thus, it also imposes obligations that transcend territorial, national or any other sectarian affiliation (Oruka 1997, 87). That means to deny someone *the right to a human minimum* is to deny them the very minimum prerequisite to not only be human but also function as a human person or a responsible moral agent; it is to deny them the right to life, dignity, liberty, creativity, and self-determination (Oruka 1997, 88).

Here, Odera Oruka concurs with Sterba, who points out that basic needs are those human necessities that must be guaranteed to every human being in order not to seriously endanger one’s life, health, and sanity (Sterba 1991, 108). He also concurs with Shue, who defines basic needs as necessities that ensure the ‘right to life’ (Shue 1996, 26-27). For Oruka, therefore, *the right to a human minimum* is, in fact, analytically equivalent to the ‘right to life’, whose enjoyment is necessarily presupposed for the enjoymen of any other right. That also means *the right to a human minimum* (or right to life) cannot be restricted, limited, compromised or overridden by any other consideration; not even by the enjoyment of any other right (Oruka 1997, 88).

Oruka pushes his argument further, claiming that since it is inherent to every human being, *the right to a human minimum* ought to be safeguarded by the law of every nation or society worth its name. He stresses the term ‘ought’ because laws exist primarily to ensure order, which order cannot be had if people are lacking the minimum means for realizing their right to life, dignity, liberty, and self-determination. That means ensuring *the right to a human minimum* to the majority would make it easier, say, to govern and conduct other business; it would proportionately reduce risks of insecurity, insurgence and upheavals.
Thus, Oruka concludes by saying that the right to a human minimum is both inherent and universal to every member of the human species. It is also “absolute” meaning there is no other right that can justifiably compromise its enjoyment. And as a right, it is the basis upon which every human being can duly demand some basic things from both local and global society without feeling guilty or inferior. Its fulfilment, moreover, obliges everyone both morally and socially regardless of their national, geographical, or any other sectarian affiliation. That means it also confers a necessary duty to every capable moral agent to provide for those who for some reason may find themselves unable to realize it without feeling sympathetic or superior. Its fulfilment, in other words, is the most basic starting point for the enjoyment of any other human right. Indeed, the right to a human minimum seems to be the basis of both our justified demand of what in principle we are all entitled to as well as our ethical duty to ensure that others too enjoy their rights. Oruka sums up these points quite ingeniously saying:

Thus, the right to a human minimum is the basis for a justified demand by anybody that the world (not just his society) has the duty to ensure that he is not denied a chance to live a basically healthy life. And should he find himself in a situation denying him this right, he will be tempted to disown himself as a moral agent. And if he does this, the world will have no adequate moral ground for expecting such a person to abide by anybody else’s right to anything (Oruka 1997, 88).

5.3.1. A Quest for Global Justice

There are a number of contentious practical implications that Oruka’s argument for the right to a human minimum elicits. That includes his proposal that the rich (individuals as well as nation-states) have the moral obligation to help the poor by sharing their purported wealth. For him, foreign aid (i.e., monetary or otherwise) should be justifiably given on the understanding that the affluent are simply fulfilling their global ethical obligation, and not that they are doing any favour to the poor (Oruka 1997, 88). His point is that everyone living above the human minimum
has an ethical obligation to facilitate or assist those living below the *human minimum* so that the majority (if not everyone) in the world are able to enjoy *the right to a human minimum*. And behind this rather contentious proposal is Oruka’s keen concern/quest for global justice, which he says cannot be had without first reducing the gap between the few rich and majority poor.

In one of his intriguing essays entitled “Philosophy of Foreign Aid”, Odera Oruka tries to establish a situation where foreign aid from affluent nations to poor ones would be morally and legally justified without making the donor feel superior or more important whereas the recipient suffers humiliation, guilt, and inferiority complex. This is an important move or condition that Oruka believed would make global justice realisable. For him, global justice would be realisable in a situation where: (i) the gap between the rich and the poor is significantly reduced (if not completely done away with); (ii) the wealth and world resources are equitably shared to correct some historical injustices, and (iii) everyone feels ethically responsible for each other despite our cultural, national, racial or any other sectarian affiliations (Oruka 1997, 84). Oruka’s insight seems to resonate with John O’Neil’s, who in his essay “Need, Humiliation and Independence” strongly argues for social solidarity at the global level (O’Neil 2005, 73-98).

One might claim that Oruka’s argument was perhaps palatable only in 1990s when much of debate on global justice was about foreign aid. But that, in my opinion, would be an ungenerous way of interpreting his argument. Oruka’s point, as I see it, is not so much about foreign aid; it rather has more to do with creating awareness that we (humans) have ethical duty to be concerned with the wellbeing of each other despite our apparent differences, even as we pursue and enjoy what we believe to be personaly due. Thus, Oruka’s argument seems to dynamically enhance our natural quest for justice. It is therefore even more relevant today in matters global justice.
Looking at our contemporary world, we might regrettably agree with Oruka that what we have been having in practice as nation-states interact with each other is at best international justice, not global justice. As noted above, these two terms might be in use interchangeably, but they do not philosophically speaking mean the same. Whereas global justice takes human beings as the primary concern, international justice takes nation-states as its crucial entities. Hence, we properly talk of global justice as consisting mainly on how we humans ought to relate and treat each other as members of a global society on the one hand, and international justice consisting on how nations relate and deal with each other (say, in trade or other negotiations) on the other (Oruka 1997, 84).

I am therefore tempted to think that if Oruka was alive today, he would be even much concerned about issues of inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities more than he was in 1990s. He would, in other words, be concerned about global injustices that tend to hamper the actual realization and enjoyment of the right to a human minimum in the world. Like most global ethicists, Oruka would abhor the ever-growing gap between the rich and the poor. He would also, I believe, challenge us to strive for “a more humanised global society” (Oruka 1987, 84), where everyone feels not only cared for but also ethically responsible towards the well being of all, and especially those living below the human minimum in America, Europe, Asia, or in Africa.

In sum, Odera Oruka would no doubt advocate for a global society that is more egalitarian, inclusive, and hence dynamically transformative. He would therefore advocate for global justice rather than mere international justice. This is because global justice typically considers what would be fair to individual humans irrespective of their citizenship. And perhaps the most important question in our quest for justice has to do with what we owe one another and how we responsibly try to realize that obligation. Indeed, one advantage of searching for global justice is that we are not forced to take nation-states as fixed constraints, meaning we can consider a wider range of
relevant relationships, capacities, obligations, etc., thereby being able to structure our interactions in a way that might foster a more elaborate concept of global responsibilities (Gillian 2015).

The point we are trying to make here with Gillian and Oruka is that asking about what individuals owe each other as moral agents may well have wider implications of justice not only for nations and their respective obligations but also for individual agents themselves and other global institutions. That, I believe, is precisely what Oruka’s argument for *the right to a human minimum* aims at establishing – global justice, and not international justice.

**5.3.2. Principles of International Justice: A Critique**

We have tried to establish that what has been in play as nations interact with each other is at best international justice, even though we aspire to establish global justice. In this section, we critically examine at least three principles that have apparently been in use to legitimize or forge international relations, pointing out why they all have failed to achieve anything akin to global justice. These principles according to Oruka are: (1) the principle of international trade; (2) the principle of historical rectification; and (3) the principle of international charity (Oruka 1997, 85). While they may *prima facie* look attractive, they, nonetheless, harbour some shortfalls in that none of them, not even all of them taken together, would form an adequate ethical rationale for ensuring global justice in our time. None them, in other words, would make it *morally obligatory* for affluent nations or wealthy individuals, for instance, to aid the global poor purely from what Oruka calls the “unqualified moral duty for humanity” (Oruka 1997, 84).

To put it differently, the three principles of international relations that justify foreign aid to the so-called developing countries, for instance, cannot help the donors from psychologically feeling superior out of their “charitable” actions, nor can they make the recipient receive and
actually enjoy such aid honourably without feeling self-pity, guilty and humiliated. Hence, Oruka contends for another principle that would form the basis for an ethics that will help ensure the practice of justice among all the inhabitants of the world regardless of their cultural, national, geographical, racial or any other sectarian affiliation. That principle, he says, is the right to a human minimum. And before we can establish how it qualifies for that noble task, let us consider first how the other three principles fail.

Now according to Oruka, the first principle of international trade aims at establishing trade relations between nation-states in equal terms. But that is not always the case, given that poor developing countries are often left at disadvantaged positions, thereby hampering genuine growth (development) and fair practice of justice. It is true that the necessity and intricacy of modern international trade might bring about economic growth and socio-cultural exchange between nations. But when that relation is between rich and poor countries, it often comes along with what Oruka calls “the reality of unequal exchange,” which results in “unequal development within the monolithic systems of world trade” (Oruka 1997, 83). It comes, in other words, with some disguised expensive prices that mostly the poor countries have to pay.

As Oruka further observes, the rich (developed) nations may give aid to poor developing nations, but they quite often do so not purely from “unqualified moral duty for humanity”, but because they have some other ulterior motives. The donor might, for instance, be highly targeting recipient’s raw materials, human resource, markets, etc. Affluent nations may also donate a substantial amount to poor developing nations either as means to securing “ideological alignment” and agreements from recipients, or they may do so as a disguised form of price or bribe that the donor has to pay in order to remain the dominant player at the expense of recipients (Oruka 1997,
That, as most political analysts observe, was indeed the case during the cold war era; it is also very common trend today, albeit in a different version (Gaddis 1997; and Lölke 1997).

One may object that perhaps human beings and hence nation-states are self-interested actors by design, which means we should not expect any other sort of behaviour other than each one of them pursuing their self-interest regardless of who gets injured or unfairly treated in the process. That extreme “conservative” view might have sympathisers from the so-called “nationalists” who have a particularistic approach to international relations. But it has recently been fairly challenged by another view: the cosmopolitan approach. In the next chapter, we shall try to situate Oruka’s philosophy within that debate, where we shall try to argue that he seems to embrace what has now become the “moderate cosmopolitan approach” to matters global justice (Mandle 2006, 42). But for now, it suffices to say that the principle of international trade, as it stands, cannot be the basis for justifying foreign aid, equitability and egalitarian common good purely from “a global ethical obligation to humanity” (Oruka 1997, 85). It cannot, in other words, ensure possibility of enhancing a genuine quest for global justice.

Likewise, the second principle of historical rectification fails to establish global justice, for it advances the argument that the gap between the rich and the poor can only be reduced if and when the past historical injustices are settled and rectified accordingly. It is true that the gap between the rich and the poor (or under-developed) countries in the world is to a larger extent due to past and present forms of such unjust policies as slavery, colonialism, and imperialism. One may therefore reason following the principle of historical rectification that affluent former colonial or slave masters are ethically obliged to assist their former subjects to develop if we are to have
anything akin to global justice. Great Britain, for instance, would by this principle be ethically obliged to help rebuild or rehabilitate such countries like Kenya, which was (and perhaps still is) one of its strategic colonies or neo-colonies.

Oruka, however, contends that while such an argument may sound attractive, it does not really meet the threshold to ethically justify foreign aid from affluent nations for three compelling reasons. First, rectification, he says, cannot and should not be made based on a universal policy for all kinds of aid. Second, if at all foreign aid were indeed a form of rectification for historical injustice, he argues, then it should not come with “humiliating conditions for repayments”, as it often does. Third, pegging justification of foreign aid on the principle of historical rectification, Oruka says, would imply that any affluent nation that can prove not to have been party to past historical injustices would have no moral obligation to offer foreign aid (Oruka 1997, 85). Affluent countries like USA or China, then, would use that reason to exonerate itself from aiding most poor countries like Kenya for they were not directly involved in the latter’s colonial menace. Oruka therefore insists that we need another principle that for the sake of global justice would justify the rich to assist the poor purely from “a global ethical obligation to humanity” (Oruka 1997, 85).

In the same vein, Oruka dismisses the principle of international charity, arguing that even though charity is generally treated as one of the basic ethical values or principles in the practice of foreign aid, it nonetheless only attracts the acceptance and recognition of donors, but not the recipients (Oruka 1997, 83). And in this way, he says, we lose the very essence of charity, which requires that the act be performed purely from moral obligation to humanity rather than from some other ulterior motives like recognition. Oruka, therefore, envisions another principle that would

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65 These rather polemical arguments can implicitly be found in Rodney (1972), and in various works of Africa’s leading nationalist such as Kenyatta (1953), Nkuruma (2009) and Nyerere (1974).
vindicate the position of the recipient and their right to receive such aid without feeling inferior, guilty, or that they are receiving a favour. He says,

Aid from affluent nations (or individuals) to those countries (or individuals) suffering abject poverty, should be given on the understanding that people from the affluent nations are fulfilling the global ethical obligation of enforcing the latter’s right to a human minimum (Oruka 1997, 88).

And to further discredit the principle of international charity as incapable of bridging genuine practice of justice at the global level, Oruka observes that it takes us back to a situation where donors are protected by what he calls “national supererogation”. This is a principle that tends to protect a nation-state from blame if it remains indifferent to the needs of those outside its borders, however needy and desperate such people may be (Oruka 1997, 82).

Interestingly, though, the principle of “national supererogation”, Oruka keenly observes, also tends to “inspire” affluent nations to demand “showers of praise” should they decide to offer foreign aid to poor nations. In other words, the principle claims that nation-states are not ethically or otherwise obliged to aid each other; yet, should one of them decide to help another, “then the donor has an absolute right” to not only demand recognition and praise but also decide the terms, conditions, and the timing when such a donation would be appropriate (Oruka 1997, 82). Hence, the principle of “national supererogation” might inevitably lead to a form of neo-colonialism.

5.3.3. Alternative Ethical Principle

The three principles of international justice, then, seem to fail insofar as our quest for global justice is concerned. Hence, as Oruka claims, there is need for a fourth principle, one that will be the basis for the justification of foreign aid and equitable sharing of world resources purely as a global ethical obligation to humanity (Oruka 1997, 82). Such a principle would not only promote
mutual co-operation but would also invalidate or minimise the use of “national supererogation” in international relations, without, of course, discrediting the concept of national sovereignty and equality among individual nations. Most importantly, the principle should also ensure preservation of the existence and the rights of all human beings, as much as it also seeks to preserve the existence and the rights of every nation-state. He says:

We need a principle which would make it *ethically obligatory* for affluent nations to aid poor ones as an unqualified moral duty for humanity, and for the latter to receive such aid without feeling a sense of *self-pity*. Such a principle should also help to invalidate the use of “national supererogation” … without thereby discrediting the principle of national sovereignty and the equality of nations. It should also be a principle from which any nation (however independent) that treats its citizens as “sub-humans” would legitimately call for *humane* external interference in her internal affairs (Oruka 1997, 84).

Now according to Oruka, the principle that meets the aforementioned threshold is *the right to a human minimum*. It provides some adequate basis or rationale for our ethical responsibility toward the wellbeing of each other, just as it also enhances mutual relation and egalitarian fairness, thereby ensuring a possibility of achieving genuine practice of justice at the global level.

A question may, however, arise as to how that would prevent nations from oppressing each other given the current “world order”. As long as the oppressor gave the oppressed nation ‘the minimum conditions for life’, thus the charge might go, the former would seem to have a license to do anything else it wanted with the oppressed. And the same could be said about individual people dealing with each, say, in trade. Now while that may sound a valid critique, it nonetheless seems to miss the “spirit” or the rationale behind the ethical principle of *human minimum*. Thus, it is not so much about meeting some sort of static threshold or particular measurement as ‘the minimum conditions for life’ that matters most, but rather ensuring *fairness* in all our human undertakings, especially when it comes to distribution or sharing of wealth and world resources.
Furthermore, the quality of the *human minimum*, as we said earlier, ought to be dynamically revised, most preferably upward, depending on how the society (local or global) can afford. Now it might be true that ideally we should aim at flourishing the human condition for all rather than just striving to meet the bare minimum. But faced with the “reality” on the ground – the prevalent cases of poverty among other human perils – justice, I think, would require us to first strive to meet *the right to a human minimum* for all as a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for realizing anything akin to global justice. And that seems to be Oruka’s point too.

As he rightly points out, *the right to a human minimum* makes it morally obligatory especially for the affluent nations and individuals to assist the global poor (i.e., those living below the *human minimum*) “purely from an unqualified ethical duty to humanity” such that donors do not feel superior or special while recipients feel guilty or humiliated (Oruka 1997, 84). His point is that we should all strive to do good, fulfill our duty of helping each other enjoy *the right to a human minimum*, not for the occasional humanitarian ground based on sympathy, but in service of a moral norm that aims at uplifting humanity toward a common good (Masolo 2012, 48).

Oruka’s argument seems closer to Peter Singer’s in his famous essay, “The Famine Relief Argument” (1997). Singer claims that when the rich people and affluent nations allow the global poor to suffer and die when they can prevent such suffering and death with a minimum “sacrifice”, they actually engage in what he calls “reckless homicide” for which they are morally blameable (Singer 1997, 90-91). His argument for assisting the poor (those living below the *human minimum*) runs as follows: (1) If someone can prevent something bad without sacrificing anything of greater or equal comparable moral significance, then one ought to do it. (2) Absolute poverty is an intrinsically bad thing. (3) There is some absolute poverty that can be prevented without sacrificing
anything of greater or equal comparable moral significance. (4) Therefore, an ethically responsible and capable human person ought to prevent some absolute poverty (Singer 1997, 85-9).

To grasp Singer’s argument, let us suppose that I have a significant amount of hard-earned savings meant for a nice vacation, say, in Mombasa or buy a luxurious Ferrari. But before spending the money, someone who works with a charitable organization approaches me with a request to contribute towards feeding some malnourished sick children in Somalia or Haiti. In this case, I have the freedom to choose: either to forego my vacation or buying luxurious Ferrari to feed the hungry children or ignore their plight and go ahead with my plans - spend what is rightfully mine. It seems sort of a dilemma. According to Singer, however, as an ethically responsible and capable person, I ought to “sacrifice” buying the Ferrari (or going for vacation) and instead contribute towards saving the plight of the malnourished sick children. This is because, morally speaking, the latter act is “of greater comparable moral significance” than the former.

But one may question the basis or rationale behind making that choice. Hence, whereas Singer’s argument might sound logically appealing, it doesn’t, on its own, appear ethically compelling. It seems to beg for another ethical principle as the basis for acting according to what it proposes purely from an unqualified ethical duty to humanity such that the donor does not feel superior while recipients feel guilty or humiliated. That principle, we submit following Oruka, is the right to a human minimum. Itethically awakens the donor to realize that it is his or her duty to ensure what it calls for; thereby be able to “sacrifice” luxury so that the starving children can have the basic human needs. It also enables the recipients to receive whatever aid from the donor, not as a favour but as their right; that is, without feeling guilty or humiliated.
Thus, *the right to a human minimum* provides an important ethical shift insofar as our quest for justice is concerned. It enables us to not only get priority right but also shift our thinking: from being self-centred and nation-centric to being cosmopolitan and globally minded. It therefore helps us shift focus from international justice to pursuing global justice.

As a caveat, though, we should not simply disregard the three principles of international relation; we should rather insist with Oruka that they are inadequate, and hence in need of a solid base to meet the threshold for global justice. And precisely because it fulfills the threshold he sets for global justice - justifying equitable distribution of resources purely from an ethical duty to humanity, we suggest reversing the order so that *the right to a human minimum* comes first, given that it is the most basic of the other three principles of justice.

### 5.4. Practical Implications

We have tried to establish that *the right to a human minimum* is the most basic human right. It is therefore inalienable, universal, absolute and moral; meaning it ought to be socially and legally grounded or “safeguarded by the law of any state worth its name” (Oruka 1997, 87). It is necessary (though not sufficient) not only for the survival of humanity as such, but most importantly for individual humans to function as they ought to, that is, to function as responsible moral agents. All these qualifications have some interlinked practical implications that we now seek to discuss.

First, being universal and morally grounded, *the right to a human minimum* necessarily evokes an ethical duty on every capable moral agent to act responsibly by ensuring that this right is never compromised, overridden or violated. It, *ipso facto*, ethically obliges us to respect and uphold human value and dignity in the world. And that obligation, Oruka says, transcends our territorial, national, racial or any other sectarian affiliation (Oruka 1997, 87). We can also argue
that it is what fundamentally put us “in a position to understand and recognize the rights of others” (Oruka 1997, 147). It is therefore the basis of establishing what Oruka calls “radical humanisation” that would get rid of all forms of injustices in the world (Oruka 1997, 132).

Put differently, adherence to what the human minimum stands for would make it possible to establish a communitarian global society governed by principles of justice, key among them being egalitarian fairness. My assumption with Oruka is that it is incredibly difficult to establish global justice in a society predominantly defined by greed or possessive individualism (Graness and Kresse, 1997, 119), and hence socio-economic inequality and poverty. It is also not possible to have global justice without first taking care of our environment from which resources come.

In his 1993 essay entitled “Parental Earth Ethics,” Oruka makes it clear that global justice can only be had if we (humans) embrace an ethics that conceives the whole universe as a commonwealth or a common good. That ethics, he says, would make us be concerned with the wellbeing of the ‘other’, and so be able to share the resources therein despite our differences. For him, the world is “a kind of family unit in which the members have a kith and kin relationship with one another” (Oruka 1997, 150). That means we all have an ethical duty also to take care of our environment, just as we also mind about global redistribution of resources if we are to achieve anything akin to global justice. In other words, we need to be concerned about the wellbeing of the ‘other’ even as we pursue and enjoy what we believe to be our entitlements.

In yet another fascinating essay dubbed “Philosophy and Humanity Today”, Oruka keenly observes that although humanity is a part of nature, it is not itself a necessary part of nature. That might sound an obvious truism, but Oruka uses it “to calm the pride of those whose attitude is that

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66 By the ‘other’ here I mean our fellow human beings and the environment or the universe at large.
man [i.e., human] is the vital part of nature and the centre of universe” (Oruka 1997, 126). A corollary of that view, he says, is to think that a given nation or an “ideological bloc” has monopoly of truth for all humanity (Oruka 1997, 126). Another corollary, we might add, is to think that some people are more important than others simply because of the privileges or possessions that happened to come their way. In sum, Oruka insists, we need to get rid of pride or prejudice that often blinds us humans from seeing the ethical duty that ought to guide our relationship with each other and with other non-human beings in the world.

Elsewhere, in an interview with Kai Kresse in August 1995 (three months before his tragic death), Oruka pushes that idea further, calling for a kind of “global ethics” that conceives the whole earth as a global society, that is, a sort of “organic unity” governed by the principles of interdependence and ethical responsibility (Graness and Kresse 1997, 257). And in this “complex web of being” with symbiotic relation, Oruka further says, everything seems to depend on each other for survival; and nothing or no one is supposed to be more important than the other.

Everything on earth is important, you see. Even some of the small insects that we might think are useless, if you regard the earth as organic unity, then they are not useless. Maybe an earth worm may not look important, less important, for instance, than the German head of state, but maybe there could be no German head of state without the existence of the earthworm (Graness and Kresse 1997, 258).

Here, Oruka evidently seems to be pushing for what we might call ‘eco-centric’ rather than mere ‘anthropocentric’ account of global justice. He seems to be developing an ethics that recognizes the importance of every being, each according to its own mode of existence. But, Oruka

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67 That seems to be the direction Oruka’s ethical thought would most likely have taken had he lived longer (Graness and Kresse 1997, 257). And to me, ensuring the right to a human minimum as a standard of living for all is the key towards establishing such an ethics, and by extension ensuring global justice.
also emphasizes the central role that humans (who apparently are the only rational cum ethical beings on earth) have to play to bring about global justice. As rational cum ethical beings, Oruka says, we ought to enjoy the earth and its resources responsibly; that is, as stewards not owners, taking good care of it as our common good (Graness and Kresse 1997, 258). That means none of us, for instance, has, strictly speaking, an absolute right or monopoly of ownership and enjoyment of the earth more than others who for some reasons might appear less privileged.

Similar sentiments have been made by Pope Francis, who in his Encyclical “Laudato Si: On care for our Common Home” cautions against what he calls “the crisis and the effects of modern anthropocentrism”, which comes about when people tend to praise or prize the “technological mind” (i.e., human mind) over the rest of reality, thereby compromising the intrinsic value of the world. And that happens, he says, when humans see nature merely as “an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere ‘given,’ as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape…with complete indifference” (Francis 2015, 78). In this culture of exaggerated “technical thought” as the Pope further laments, human beings paradoxically “fail to find their true place in this world” as they fail to take themselves as stewards rather than masters, perhaps because of pride, arrogance, and ignorance. We then misunderstand ourselves to be the most important beings in the world, and so end up acting in a way that is detrimental to the common good of the whole world (Francis 2015, 78).

And that is evident especially today, the Pope observes, when we fail to monitor the harm done to nature and ignore the environmental impact caused by our techno-minded decisions. It is also evident when we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of the poor, the disabled, and the most vulnerable among us. Put differently, it is evident as we fail “to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected” (Francis 2015, 79). The fact of the matter is: once we declare our
pseudo-independence from the rest of reality and start to treat nature with absolute dominion, then the very foundation of our human life begins to crumble.

Thus, Like Oruka, Pope Francis advocates for an ecological approach to the issues affecting global society where humans are the key players. He propagates for what we might call an ethics of inclusivity and mutual respect as we listen to “the message of each creature in the harmony of creation” (Francis 2015, 58). In other words, he calls for an ethics that requires us (humans) to use world resources responsibly as good stewards, taking care of the wellbeing of the ‘other’ (i.e., other humans and the environment) even as we pursue and enjoy what we think is rightfully due. This is an ethics that also gives preferential option to the poor and the most vulnerable in our global society. But such an ethics would necessarily call for, among other things, egalitarian fairness in terms of equitable redistribution or sharing of world resources. It would require, as the Pope further says, to “integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (Francis 2015, 35). Our submission with Oruka is that the right to a human minimum is the basic principle or rationale behind embracing such an ethics.

We have also said that the right to a human minimum is not only inherent but also absolute and necessary; meaning nothing (not even another right) can morally, legally or otherwise justifiably compromise its fulfilment. That means it is the basis upon which any human being in the world can make a justifiable demand to both local and global society for the fulfilment of at least some minimum basic necessities. That in effect means both local and global societies have an ethical responsibility to ensure that no member of the human species gets denied a chance to live a basically secure, healthy, and subsistent life; otherwise the society would not be morally or otherwise justified to exist and to blame any member who fails to function as a responsible moral agent when their right to a human minimum has been compromised (Oruka 1997, 88, 130, 147).
That conclusion might sound outrageous, but it philosophically makes sense, for to deny people the right to a human minimum is tantamount to denying them the right to live. It is also tantamount to denying them ‘personhood’ - the capacity to function as responsible moral agents.

5.5. Possible Critique and Way Forward

There are a number of possible critiques that may arise from Oruka’s argument for the right to a human minimum. To conclude this chapter, I wish to highlight a few of them; and I believe Oruka was aware of them, only that he unfortunately did not live long to thoroughly address. First, we may rightly ask whether denying someone the right to a human minimum necessarily makes her/him lose capacity to lead a rational, creative, free and morally responsible lifestyle, as Oruka seems to suggest (Oruka 1997, 88, 147). Put differently: do those who for some reasons get denied the right to a human minimum have any ethical obligation to function as moral agents?

To answer these questions, it is important to point out that Oruka’s argument should not be taken to imply that those deprived of the right to a human minimum and hence their “personhood” cease to be human beings at all. Thus, it doesn’t mean those living below the human minimum are incapable of being responsible moral agents either. The fact is: they remain human beings with the value, dignity, and respect they deserve only that their ability to fully function as human persons (i.e., function as creative, free and responsible moral beings) may be adversely affected. In other words, their potentiality to act as moral agents remains intact only that they may fail to always actualize that potentiality since denying someone of the right to a human minimum amounts to denying her/him of the most basic prerequisite to function as a moral agent. Oruka’s language, moreover, suggests that even those living below the human minimum ought to act as moral agents.
Thus, he observes that majority of them actually struggle to negotiate through the world as responsible agents; his problem is that perhaps that is grossly unfair to them (Oruka 1997, 86-87).

Second, some might be tempted to accuse Oruka of narrowing down the issues to do with morality and human functionality to material/economic wellbeing. Hence, another question may arise: does material/economic wellbeing alone really affect people’s rationality, and by extension their ethical obligation to function as responsible moral agents rather than moral patients or irresponsible agents? Again this, in my view, is a question about what really makes one function as a responsible moral agent. Indeed, there are other factors such as cultural, social, political and religious background that adversely contribute to or determine how human beings function. And I believe Oruka was not naive to them, only that he wanted to emphasize the economic wellbeing, which arguably is one of the key factors, but certainly not the only one that determine morality and human functionality.

But a third contentious issue may follow: if enjoying the right to a human minimum is one of the key factors determining our morality, would it be ethically correct and therefore reasonably fair for those who are economically affluent to treat those who are apparently deprived of such basic needs as subsistence, security, and health care as though they are equal moral agents capable of freely and willingly engaging in fair deals, say, in trade? In other words, what could be the fair way to proceed given the apparent forms of inequality in the world?

Now one way in which Oruka would have answered that question, I think, would be to encourage the critic to read his ethics keenly and try to implement what he proposes, and hence run “from conjecture to practice” (Oruka 1997, 91). Oruka’s ethics, as we have said, challenges us to be ethically concerned about the wellbeing of the ‘other’ despite our differences, even as we
enjoy what we think is rightfully due. He, for instance, suggests revising “the world order” so that we might have new global arrangements that would see the wasted consumption in affluent nations being saved and transferred to alleviate poverty in other poor nations (Oruka 1997, 91).

Elsewhere in his essay entitled “The Ethics of Consumerism”, Oruka suggests creating national and international laws to protect consumer’s rights and ensure priority insofar as rationale for consumption is concerned. Such laws, he says, should also ensure an ethical framework, thereby restore ethical duty and harmony between “super-consumers” (the rich) and the “under-consumers” (the poor). And such laws, Oruka further argues, should “ethically remain part of human attempts to eradicate hunger and poverty,” which is arguably the number one priority of human consumption (Oruka 1997, 265). Here Oruka seems to be attacking, just like Pope Francis, a culture of over-consumerism, wastage, and “throwaway” syndrome (Francis 2015, 18-19); a culture that appears prevalent today in some regions.

Finally, there are those who might ask whether the world, given its wealth and resources vis-à-vis human population, can economically afford a life above the human minimum for all the human inhabitants (Hardin 1980). This is a question Oruka anticipated, of which he suggests seeking an honest answer from the experts in “positive economics,” which refers to a systematized knowledge about people’s economy, i.e., wealth and resources. He contrasts this with normative economics, or welfare economics, which “presupposes the existence and findings of positive economic but strives to utilize such findings for recommending ethically appropriate actions and the rational reorganization and redistribution of resources” (Oruka 1997, 81). But even as we wait

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68 Oruka thought there are basically three reasons for human consumption: (i) alleviation of hunger, hence basic consumption; (ii) the enrichment of life, hence, social consumption, and (iii) aesthetic enjoyment, hence, luxurious consumption. And for him, alleviation of hunger and poverty ought to take priority if we are to achieve a harmonious and more humanised world (Oruka 1997, 264-65).
for that honest response, Oruka suggests that nations of the world should significantly cut the current waste in military affairs and domestic consumption and then turn such savings to “rational redistribution among the global poor” (Oruka 1997, 91).  

And even in the unlikely event that the experts in positive economics prove that the world cannot afford to raise the welfare of everybody above the human minimum, Oruka still believes that “everybody and every nation which can afford the human minimum for some people is ethically obliged to do so” (Oruka 1997, 92). The real issue, therefore, is not so much about whether the world has enough resources or not; the real issue, in my view, is about how we use (or misuse) whatever resources available. The real issue, in other words, is about whether we humans are ethically responsible toward the wellbeing of other fellow human beings and the environment or not, even as we pursue what we think is rightfully due.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter was meant to critically examine Oruka’s argument for the right to a human minimum, an ethical principle he believes to be the foundational basis of the actual enjoyment of all other human rights, just as it also has the most compelling ethical duty to every capable moral agent. It is therefore crucial in our quest for global justice. We started off by assuming that: (i) human rights, at least the inalienable ones, are or ought to be morally, socially, and hence legally grounded to protect all human beings from various forms of injustice based on our common

69 There are credible researches indicating that the world has sufficient resources to meet the cost of satisfying at least the basic needs of every existing human being; the problem, however, is that priority seems to be given where it is not due (see Sterba 1991, 114-115 and Singer 1997, 86-87). That, to me, seems to be Oruka’s stance as well. For him, the reason why people tend to think the world has limited resources is mainly because of: (i) fear among nations, hence lack of political goodwill help each other, (ii) greed (camouflaged as ambition) hence lack of moral fairness, and (iii) irrational pride (Oruka 1997, 134).
humanity; (ii) human rights attain their relevance or “moral worth” if and when their substantive element associated with them is realised and actually enjoyed; (iii) human rights imply or elicit correlative ethical duty to realize or facilitate their enjoyment, though that duty does not bind with the same impetus; and hence (iv) there are some human rights that are inherent to the very human nature, meaning they are so basic and necessary to preserve human life, dignity, and ability to function as moral agents. The last assumption is what this chapter was aimed at expounding.

This we have done by delving into the concept human minimum, which Oruka sets up as the standard of living below which it would be extremely difficult for any human being to survive decently as she or he should, let alone function as a reasonable, creative, free, and responsible moral agent. Oruka’s subsequent argument has been thoroughly analysed. First, we discovered that it acknowledges some basic human rights that are universal, necessary and indispensable. His argument also presupposes there is no greater right of a human being than ‘right to life’, the object of which is self-preservation, which is what the concept of human minimum aims at establishing.

The concept of human minimum, we then said, involves enjoyment of three most basic human necessities, namely, (i) physical security; (ii) health care; and (iii) subsistence. Taken together as a unit, they constitute what Oruka dubs the right to a human minimum, which right is universal, necessary, inalienable, and hence the most basic prerequisite for any human being to survive decently as well as function as a creative, free and responsible moral agent. That means every human being is, by virtue of being human, inherently entitled to this right, meaning its enjoyment ought to be socially and where possible legally guaranteed. It is therefore the rational basis for our justified demand of what we as humans are entitled to, the denial of which no self-respecting person could reasonably be expected to accept willingly.
Similarly, we have discovered that by virtue of being the most basic, necessary and inalienable right, the human minimum also implies a correlative necessary duty on us. As an ethical principle, it by design or default imposes ethical duty upon every human person, especially those who are economically stable, to ensure that no human being goes without enjoying the right to a human minimum. Put differently, the right to a human minimum is the basis for our necessary duty toward the wellbeing of each other as rational beings striving to establish a more humanised life on earth. It is crucial to the establishment an egalitarian-communitarian global society governed by principles of justice, key among them being egalitarian fairness and ethical responsibility.

Consequently, we have established that the right to a human minimum is also the minimum prerequisite for us to have anything akin to global justice. It is, in other words, the minimum necessity that must be met for everyone in the world regardless of our racial, national, geographical or any other sectarian affiliations. Its fulfilment, as Oruka insists, is not only the starting point for the fulfilment and actual enjoyment of any other human right, but also guarantee for other liberties to dynamically pursue what is good for all. This, however, does not mean that the human minimum is the end of our quest for global justice; it is rather the mere foundational means to it.

Finally, we have looked at some practical implications that the right to a human minimum as an ethical principle presents with regards to our quest for global justice. We were able, for instance, to develop a rational defence as to why affluent nation-states and individuals should aid the global poor purely from their ethical responsibility for humanity’s sake. In the next chapter, we shall see how Oruka’s insight, particularly his concept of the human minimum might enhance the current talk on our quest for global justice. We shall especially see how Oruka’s “humanism” and “eco-philosophy” dialectically lead to what he calls “parental earth ethics” that he proposes as an ethical framework to help inspire in us a genuine practice of justice at the global level.
CHAPTER 6
PARENTAL EARTH ETHICS: TOWARDS GLOBAL JUSTICE

The earth or the world is a kind of family unit in which the members have a kith and kin relationship with one another, and the earth is a commonwealth to all humanity (Oruka 1997, 150).

6.1. Introduction

This chapter aims at advancing a discourse that would help ensure a genuine practice of justice at the global level. A good number of practical thinkers have been concerned with the issue of justice, that is, with the human effort to give and receive what is fairly due. Thus, such issues as human rights abuse, socio-economic inequality, poverty, etc. have always been raised and talked about. Most of these talks, however, tend to be confined within national or territorial boundaries. They tend, in other words, to “territorialize” the concept of justice, yet, one would expect that such ideal principles of justice as ‘egalitarian fairness’ would be applicable everywhere for everyone. The rise in globalization, moreover, despite some of its positive aspects has nonetheless exposed the reality of global injustice. The gap between the rich and the poor, for instance, seems to be escalating day by day. But to some of us, this is a worrying trend; it is a real threat to posterity and security of both humanity and the entire universe; it not only jeopardizes the dignity of human life but also threatens global security. The situation inevitably begs for a genuine concept and practice of justice at the global level. We seek in this chapter to establish what that might entail.

At the centre of global justice talk, then, is a question that, I think, needs to be addressed with urgency to help us transition more effectively towards a less unjust and more “globalised” world. In a world as interconnected and interdependent as ours, one may ask: is it justified that

70 According to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the richest 10% of world population earn 9.6 times the income of the poorest 10%. Such inequality, the OECD warns, is a threat to economic growth; it is a grave form of injustice (Reuben 2015).
some few people have so much affluence while the majority languish in abject poverty? To put the question differently, is it fair for some people to exuberantly exploit world resources at the expense of the survival of others? What responsibility, if any, do we (humans) have toward establishing a more genuine practice of justice at the global level? Furthermore, how ought we to treat other non-human beings in the world? These are some of the questions we seek to address in this chapter. We want to try and establish some ideal ethical principles that ought to guide our engagements and endeavours as humans, thereby making the world fairer enough for everyone.

Thus, the chapter attempts to apply Oruka’s insight to advance a critical discourse on global justice, a sensitive but crucial topic that, I think, has not been substantially considered. We shall see how, for instance, Oruka’s eco-philosophy, and hence his parental earth ethics leads us to a different kind of humanism (or humanness) that Oruka believes would motivate both: (a) global environmental concern, and (b) global distribution or sharing of wealth and world resources for the common good (Graness Kresse 1997, 130; Oruka 1997, 150). His parental earth ethics, we shall see, helps us understand what it really means to be human in relation to our environment. It calls for an integral approach to ecosystem, even as we humans strive to meet our needs and resolve our contemporaneous problems, thereby seeing the world as a global society, a sort of “organic unity” or a family governed by principles of interdependence and ethical responsibility.

Oruka’s parental earth ethics also helps us conceive the earth both as a home and a commonwealth or heritage for all of us – including non-human beings. It advocates for a “stewardship model”, thereby stressing our ethical duty as humans (who presumably are the only rational beings on earth) to take good care of the earth by responsibly using and equitably distributing (or sharing) resources therein. Parental earth ethics, therefore, helps us recognize and uphold human dignity as well as appreciate the unique role (or obligation) that we humans have to
play in making this world more habitable for all. But that would require us to be more stewards rather than owners or exploiters of the earth, thereby fostering our relationship to and with the environment – i.e., the natural world.

Some recent important philosophical thoughts seem to rekindle or resonate with Oruka’s proposal, and we seek to engage them critically. In his *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis, for instance, appeals to all people of the world to take a “swift and unified global action”, particularly in relation to environmental degradation (Francis 2015). His proposal requires taking good care of Nature, i.e., the whole of creation, which call also implies equitable distribution or sharing of wealth and resources with the poor. It also requires people coming together as rational cum ethical beings to initiate integral and sustainable developments throughout the world, which developments would ensure a more secured and habitable life on earth for all without jeopardizing the ecological system.

Oruka’s appeal, likewise, is for global society to ensure a more secured and humanized life on earth (Oruka 1997, 85), that is, a life above the *human minimum* to all members of the human species. This is a kind of life in which one is assured of enjoying at least such basic human needs as physical security, subsistence, and health care. Oruka believed that that is the basic prerequisite for establishing anything akin to global justice. But that would require not only equitable sharing or distribution of wealth and resources but also taking good care of our environment. Thus, we seek in this chapter to establish what global justice at minimum level entails. And our contention with Oruka is that a genuine account and practice of global justice, one that aims at curbing socio-economic injustices while promoting “ecological fairness” in the world ought to be grounded on *parental earth ethics*, whose driving principle is the *right to a human minimum*. 
We start off by critically analysing the idea of justice understood as ‘egalitarian fairness’. We then show why and how justice as so defined - in terms of egalitarian fairness - ought to be practiced at the global level, before establishing what global justice would really entail at the minimum level. We shall then discuss Oruka’s eco-philosophy, particularly his parental earth ethics. Here, we shall critically engage Hardin’s Lifeboat Ethics (1980) as a classical account that tends to “territorialize” or limit the practice of justice. Finally, we shall look at Oruka’s humanism and his unrelenting quest for justice at the global level. This will hopefully help us define global justice not merely in terms of ensuring “egalitarian fairness” but also “ecological fairness”. The former, we shall argue, cannot effectively be had without the latter.

6.2. Justice Defined as ‘Egalitarian Fairness’

The concept of justice is, no doubt, one of the central ideals in human relations, though it is difficult to precisely define. It therefore seems to be one of those concepts Oruka would call honorific, meaning it is something universally desirable to have even though its actual meaning seems to be “vague, obscure, and pervasive” (Oruka 1991b, 49). Nonetheless, in almost every culture or human society, justice is often understood not only as a virtue (i.e., human disposition toward moral good and excellence) but also a sort of contractual concept that facilitates every other human relation and interaction - social, political, economic, religious, etc.

The idea of justice, then, is essentially meant to ensure ‘egalitarian fairness’ in our human endeavor, which prima facie implies equitability, impartiality and reciprocity. Under the principle of ‘egalitarian fairness’, it is often assumed that people are and hence ought to be treated as equal members of a particular society regardless of their apparent differences. That, however, does not mean everybody should get the same amount or necessarily be treated exactly in the same way. A
horrible violinist does not have to be admitted in an orchestra anyway for justice to be had. The principle of ‘egalitarian fairness’, then, is meant to ensure that everyone is impartially given their due. It also implies reciprocity so that one does not only receive what in principle everyone is fairly entitled to, but that one also fairly gives or facilitates what others are duly entitled to.

Now the phrase ‘egalitarian fairness’ may sound attractive to define justice, but the idea in itself does not guarantee the actual enjoyment of justice. Thus, from a practical point of view, I think, we need to ask a more fundamental question, namely: how far should the demand of justice stretch or oblige? This is a question about the scope of justice, a question that Oruka sought to address, as he adopted the idea of justice as ‘egalitarian fairness’ from a global perspective.

Of course, there are several theories of justice that tend to explicitly push for the principle of ‘egalitarian fairness’, but most of these theories do so only for a particular region or nation; they, in other words, tend to limit the demands of justice (equitability, impartiality and reciprocity) within a particular territory. Under such accounts, then, one is expected to be more committed to the demands of justice only to the extent that one shares a common territorial establishment. It is such accounts that tend to inform what is now popularly known as “political realism” characterized by extreme nationalistic rhetoric and divisive politics (Mandle 2006, 28).

One may, for instance, recall the 2016 presidential elections in U.S.A., where Mr. Trump (now president) run a campaign with a slogan “make America great again!” The rhetoric that followed that slogan was to portray the urgency of ensuring “justice” to the American people first by dumping the rest of the world. That, to me, is a classic example of political realism where politicians are driven by the urge to pursue national (perhaps personal) self-interest and security
through power struggle. One may argue that that’s how the “world” has always operated - pursuing self-interests first; but that view is no doubt misleading if we are to seek justice at the global level.

Thus, perhaps the question we should focus on is how we can possibly “de-territorialize” the practice of justice so that there can be egalitarian fairness for all people in the world. This was one of Oruka’s major concerns when he sought to establish the foundational rationale of the idea of global justice using the ethical principle of human minimum. He believed that we cannot claim to practically have justice in the world unless we first ensure that no human being goes without enjoying the right to a human minimum (Oruka 1997, 84). The idea of justice, Oruka argues, ought to be practically de-territorialized if it is to achieve its desired egalitarian dimension. And for him, the right to a human minimum is the driving principle towards that end.

Oruka’s argument can be structured as follows. First, he adopts the definition of justice as egalitarian fairness, which implies equality, equitability, and impartiality. Second, he claims that ‘egalitarian fairness’ also implies reciprocity, that is, not only receiving what in principle every human being is fairly entitled to, but also giving or facilitating realization of what others are also duly entitled to insofar as they are human. Third, he establishes the right to a human minimum (whose substantive elements entails enjoyment of such basic human needs as security, subsistence, and health care) as one basic “thing” that every human being is entitled to. Thus, he concludes that ensuring the enjoyment of the right to a human minimum is the basic necessary (though not sufficient) prerequisite to having justice at the global level (Oruka 1997, 85, 88).

The next question that Oruka seems interested to answer is how justice could be de-territorialized or made “global” in practice. This is no doubt a difficult if important question. As mentioned earlier, the idea of justice as egalitarian fairness is crucial because it influences how
well people live or ought to live in any given society. It is related to almost every important aspect of human existential wellbeing. Yet, as Amartya Sen rightly argues, what animates our thinking about justice is the ability to arrest such “redressable injustices” as human rights abuse, socio-economic inequality, poverty, etc. (Sen 2009, vii). Such really dilapidating phenomena, according to Sen, must be addressed urgently at global level if we are to establish anything akin to global justice. His proposal seems to recount Oruka’s call for “a radical humanization” of the world (Oruka 1997, 132), which would require not only striving to eradicate socio-economic inequalities, but also coming up with viable plans and action for the abolition of most of human degradation.

6.2.1. What is Justice for X in S?

One important point, in my view, that Sen and Oruka seem to be making above is that there is need to urgently shift our focus from the mere theoretical/intellectual conception of justice to the actual practical exercise of justice at the global level. Hence, our major concern, in other words, should not be with the mere question: what is justice? Rather, we ought to ask ourselves: “what is justice for X in S?” where X stands for individual person (or a group), and S for global society. I borrow this analysis from Oruka’s similar treatment of the idea of liberty, which he says ought to be understood as “liberty for X in S” rather than merely “what is liberty”. This is what would render liberty its desireble “moral worth” (Oruka 1991b, 53-55). In the same way, I think, justice would have its moral worth or practical value only if it stands to defend against what we are calling with Sen “global redressable injustices”. To put it differently, it is not enough to define justice merely as egalitarian fairness, but it is more important to ensure egalitarian fairness to all people.

The question “what is justice for X in S?” is crucial for several reasons. First, it enables us see justice not merely as an ideal concept for the sake of it but rather as “something” that is either
necessary for maintaining human life or for enriching it. In other words, it underscores what Oruka would call the “practical moral worth” of the idea of justice. Second, the question enables us grasp the necessary duty (both positive and negative) that global society has, where every other human being is a legitimate member. Put differently, it helps us see the value and the need for each other, and hence our duty toward the wellbeing of each other as members of one global society.

Third, the question “what is justice for X in S?” resonates well with the principle of egalitarian fairness, which is essentially meant for establishing equitability, impartiality and reciprocity. Thus, it points to the idea of global justice, which as we have said, is meant to address what we owe to each other as humans at global level. This might lead to yet another good question: “how does Y in S contribute to justice for X in S?” Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the question “what is justice for X in S?” also points to what we humans owe to our environment, even as we pursue what we think is justifiably due. It leads, in other words, to an “ecological fairness”, another dimension of justice that we shall consider shortly.

6.2.2. Defining Global Justice

Following our discussion so far, we can define global justice as the totality of demands of justice that can be practically applied to human relations with each other everywhere, thereby being able to establish a global society that guarantees an egalitarian/ communitarian co-existence (Elke et al 2009, 107). That means if we are to establish anything akin to global justice, then the principle of egalitarian fairness ought to guide our engagements as humans despite our territorial or any other sectarian affiliation. That seems to be what would make justice achieve its desirable universal or global stature. The challenge, of course, is always on how to practically do that.
That is one problem Oruka sought to address when he wrote the essay “Philosophy of Foreign Aid”. In that essay, Oruka was, among other things, trying to establish an ethical principle that would justify stronger ties and relations between different people of different nations. He wanted also, as a result, to justify the basis of global responsibility that we humans have or ought to have toward each other as moral agents, thereby enhancing what seems to be our natural quest for justice from a global perspective. That ethical principle, as we said in chapter four, is *the right to a human minimum*. It primarily aims at ensuring a minimum standard of living for all members of the human species irrespective of their territorial or any other sectarian affiliation. As an ethical principle, *the right to a human minimum*, therefore, aims at indiscriminately ensuring a more secured, subsistent and healthier life for all. It seeks, in other words, to de-territorialize the idea of justice, thereby creating a more humanized global society on earth (Oruka 1997, 85).

Oruka was also concerned about cases of human rights abuse. And being critical to the current human rights discourse, he abhorred what purports to be a universalistic conception of human rights that, nonetheless, neither has a strong foundation in nor give priority to the most basic human needs. For him, any human rights discourse worthy its name ought to have a strong commitment to oblige the global society to first provide every member of the human species with at least a minimum standard of living that includes physical security, subsistence, and health care. Thus, he argues that the *right to a human minimum* is the basic prerequisite for enjoying other human rights, and hence for establishing anything akin to global justice.71

One important insight worth noting is the distinction Oruka draws between global justice and international justice. The two are not synonymous, he says, even though they are related. Thus,

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71 This is what we tried to establish in chapter three.
while international justice (which seems prevalent in practice) mainly has nation-states and regional territories as its crucial entities, global justice, which remains sort of an ideal to be realized, has human beings as its primary “entities” (Oruka 1997, 84). Thus, after considering three principles of international justice - international trade, international charity, and historical rectification – which principles, nevertheless, fail to establish egalitarian fairness at the global level, Oruka proposes the right to a human minimum as the fourth principle that we would need first to establish global justice. This is because the latter proceeds purely from what he calls “unqualified moral duty for humanity” (Oruka 1997, 83-84).

For Oruka, then, global justice consists mainly on how we humans, who are presumably rational, ethical and hence social beings, ought to relate and treat each other as equal members of one global society irrespective of our territorial affiliation. It has to do with, say, how we equitably distribute or share the resources available. It would also involve how we relate to and responsibly use other non-human beings who are also legitimate members of the world. Hence, global justice, the way Oruka sees it, is more relational, inclusive, dynamic, and progressive than international justice. It is concerned primarily with what is good and fair to every individual human being, i.e., what ensures their general wellbeing, their citizenship notwithstanding (Oruka 1997, 84). It also involves what is good and “fair” to other non-human beings, i.e., our environment.

6.2.3. Global Justice as ‘Ecological Fairness’

As hinted earlier, Oruka envisioned a situation where socio-economic injustice against humanity would be dealt with at a global level while at the same time ensuring what we might call “ecological fairness”. This is a situation where we humans would be more concerned about the environment even as we strive to meet our own human needs. This is another credible contribution
toward a possibility of establishing global justice. It resonates with an adage that says power (i.e., human capacity) without ethics is profane and destructive (Rolston 1988, xii). Indeed, while many have come to appreciate power or human capacity, say, in science and industrial technology, few are yet to see how irresponsible exploitation of the natural world unchecked by any genuine ethics can ruin not only human dignity and security but also deter us from appreciating the earth as our common home - together with other non-human beings.

Thus, in his eco-philosophy, Oruka suggests a new “epistemological outlook” that would challenge the current dominant Western ethical thought. He critically questions “traditional ethics” (Judeo-Christian ethics that has permeated most Western philosophical thought) for territorializing the idea and practice of justice. That ethics, Oruka observes, tend to elevate humanity above nature (i.e., natural world), thereby promoting possessive individualism characterized by greed, pride, and prejudice (Graness and Kresse, 1997, 119). Ironically, though, ‘traditional ethics’ is known to have excluded some sections of humanity (e.g., slaves and some races) from the domain of ethics.

Oruka, therefore, proposes a new kind of humanism, a new Menschenbild (Lölke 1997, 222) based on what he dubs “parental earth ethics” where humanity would be viewed as part and parcel of a complex and systematic totality of nature (Graness and Kresse 1997, 119). In such a setting, Oruka says, modernity and development will not be seen merely as continuous domination, utilization and exploitation of world resources (as evidenced during industrial revolution, for

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72 This is a philosophical approach that looks at Nature (i.e., natural world inclusive of human beings) as interrelated in its complexity and interdependent in its totality; cf. Graness & Kresse 1997, 120-121.
73 By “nature” we mean the natural world and whatever can be found therein, including humans. Thus, for clarity sake, I will capitalize ‘N’ whenever I use the term in that sense to distinguish it from “nature” as ‘that which constitutes a particular being’, say, human nature.
instance) to benefit humankind alone (Oruka 1997, 246). Instead, modernity and development will be seen also in terms of how we (humans) take care of Nature for a common good.

It is important to note, however, that in viewing humanity as part and parcel of Nature, Oruka does not wish to demean human dignity or disregard the unique role that humans play or ought to play therein. Neither is he sinking into “philosophical naturalism” - a view that everything in the world has a natural cause, and that organic life, including human life, is solely a product of random forces guided by no one (Keller 2008, 86). Instead, Oruka wants to underscore the ethical duty that we ought to have toward the wellbeing of other humans and non-human beings in the world. Here, he challenges us to appreciate and value Nature, in which we are part (Rolston 1988).

To take care of Nature, Oruka says, means caring for our own prosperity and posterity, which is what justice aims at. His point is that we must handle Nature carefully and respectfully, “for it seems as if almost everything in it has value not just for itself but for the reality of the survival of the rest” (Graness and Kresse 1997, 121). One of the ways in which we can take care of Nature would be exploring technological possibilities that can help reduce toxic gasses – carbon dioxide, methane, etc., which are arguably responsible for global warming.

This is the argument Oruka tries to advance in one of his intriguing essays entitled “Eco-philosophy” where he argues for “parental earth ethics”. This essay first published in 1994 (cf. Oruka 1994, 115-129) before appearing again in memoriam (cf. Graness and Kresse 1997, 119-131) is perhaps one of the most philosophically engaging essays that Oruka wrote before his tragic death. It seems to define the direction his ethical thought would most likely have taken had he lived longer. Part IV of his book Practical Philosophy (1997) entitled “Philosophy, Ethics and the
Environment” attests to this. The expression “parental earth ethics”, however, first appeared in another essay Oruka wrote in 1993 as a reaction to Hardin’s “Life-Boat Ethics” (1991).

Now in all these essays (which I will critically engage shortly), Oruka basically argues for a new ethics that would prompt us to have a holistic eco-philosophical approach to such human issues as socio-economic inequality, poverty, environmental degradation, etc. This is an ethics that seems to appropriately “follow” Nature, thereby optimizing “human fitness on Earth” (Rolston 1988, xi). It is an ethics that would help us recognize the totality of spatial, temporal, spiritual and other inter-linkages in Nature (Graness and Kresse 1997, 119). It would help curb possessive individualism, greed, and prejudice; it would also help “calm the pride of those whose attitude is that man [humanity] is the vital part of Nature and the centre of the universe” (Oruka 1997, 126). It would, therefore, help us establish a global society that is not only egalitarian oriented but also ecologically concerned and fair to or appreciative of all its members. This ecologically-oriented way of thinking based on, but no doubt, going beyond the concept of human minimum is essential towards building a much better version of global justice, one that is relational and accommodative.

In what follows now, I try to critically evaluate what parental earth ethics entails, before analysing how Oruka comes to establish and defend it. The question ‘what is justice for X in S?’ will be an important guide in this endeavour, given that it points to a possibility of ascertaining not only what we owe each other as humans but also what we possibly owe to other non-human beings at the global level. Hopefully this will help us de-territorialize the idea of justice so that we do not only emphasize egalitarian fairness (which properly applies to human relations) but also ensure ecological fairness with Nature (which applies to other non-human beings).

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75 A revised version appears in Oruka 1997, 146-151.
6.3. On Parental Earth Ethics

*Parental earth ethics* is an important ethics that Odera Oruka proposes to offer motivation for a possibility of global justice in terms of ensuring: (i) global environmental concern, and (ii) global use and distribution (or sharing) of wealth and world resources (Oruka 1997, 150; Graness and Kresse 1997, 130). It is meant to promote justice at the global level for the common good, that is, for the good of both humans and the environment. It is basically driven by the ethical principle of *human minimum*, which principle ought to inspire us humans to be more *ethically responsible* insofar as the use and distribution of world resources is concerned for the good and security of all. The point here is that if we don’t take care of the earth on which we depend, then we endanger not only our own survival but also that of other creatures. More specifically, *parental earth ethics* is meant to advance a new kind of humanism that would ensure *the right to a human minimum*, which right involves actual enjoyment of the most basic human necessities, thereby enabling majority (if not all) to live a life worthy of a human person. I come back to this point later.

Oruka’s argument for *parental earth ethics* rests on one fundamental conviction: the earth is or ought to be a commonwealth for a common good. Now the idea of common good traditionally means the sum-total of living conditions (social, economic, political, etc.) that enable human beings to realize their natural fulfilment more fully and easily (cf. John XXIII *Pacem in Terris*, 39). As an ethical principle, it envisions a society that is dedicated to justice, peace, and security of humanity. Here, the primary goal is the good of all people, which goal is informed by the fact that humans are social-ethical beings, meaning they co-exist *with* and *for* each other.

But the idea of ‘common good’ also necessarily incorporates the security and the wellbeing of other creatures - the environment. This is an important insight that unfortunately seems to be ignored by most ethics. It is what Oruka sets to underscore. His *parental earth ethics*, then, wants
to reiterate both dimensions of the idea of ‘common good’. And that, he believes, would lead us to a genuine practice of justice at the global level. For him, everything in the world is somehow interconnected and interdependent with each other as a “family unit” for survival. He says:

> It is now clear, I hope, that I make the claim that the earth or the world is a kind of family unit in which the members have a kith and kin relationship with one another and the earth is a commonwealth to all humanity (Oruka 1997, 150).

Thus, according to Oruka, there is one undeniable fact: everything in the world is somehow interconnected and interdependent. And that is arguably the basic principle upon which any environmental concern and discourse at the global level would make sense. It is also a basic fact upon which human beings, who presumably are the only rational cum moral agents, would feel *ethically obliged* to responsibly use and equitably distribute world resources. It overrides not only the individual’s claim for the so-called ‘right to private property’ or personal achievement, but also the nation’s claim for territorial rights or “right by first occupation” (Oruka 1997, 150).

Consequently, Oruka pushes for an eco-centric rather than mere anthropocentric account of global justice. He develops an ethics that recognizes the value and importance of every being in the world, each according to their rightful mode of existence. But Oruka also emphasizes the unique role that humans play or ought to play to bring about what we might call ecological fairness. As rational cum ethical beings, Oruka says, we humans ought to enjoy the earth and resources therein more responsibly; meaning we need to use world resources as *stewards* rather than owners/exploiters, taking care of the earth as our common heritage (Graness and Kresse 1997, 258).

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76 Similar appeals have been made by Francis E. Abbot (1836-1903), who argues for the “organic theory of realistic evolution” as opposed to mechanical theory of evolution, (Abbot 1888, xii, 160-199).
The idea of the earth as a commonwealth and common heritage also means none of us has, strictly speaking, a monopoly of ownership and enjoyment of the earth more than others who for some reasons might appear less privileged. The earth, as Oruka further says, is our home for all. As moral agents, therefore, we humans have the ethical duty to not only take good care of it, but also use and distribute (or share) the resources therein more responsibly despite our apparent territorial or any other sectarian affiliations. That means we need to acknowledge and uphold the unique dignity and place that humanity occupies in this world; hence the need to equitably share wealth and resources so as to secure and maintain humane standard of living. But we need also to respect, value, and foster our interconnectedness to and with our environment; hence, the need to use the world resources more responsibly.

In sum, parental earth ethics is meant to motivate us to be more ethically responsible toward the wellbeing of the ‘other’ – i.e., fellow humans and the environment - even as we explore, use and enjoy whatever we think is rightfully due. It helps us, in other words, understand what it really means to be human in relation to other non-human beings in the world. It calls for an integral approach to the ecosystem, even as we try to address our human needs, thereby seeing the world as a global society, a sort of organic or family unit governed by the principles of interdependence and ethical responsibility. It is the basis upon which we can enjoy justice at the global level.

6.3.1. Parental Earth Ethics and other Philosophies

Some important ethical thoughts seem to rekindle or resonate with Oruka’s proposal. In his recent Encyclical – Laudato Si, Pope Francis, for instance, appeals to all people of the world together to take a swift and unified global action in relation to environmental issues. He calls for “ethics of international relation” (Francis 2015, 30) or simply global ethics, as a framework to help
ensure: (i) a more responsible use of world resources; and (ii) an equitable distribution (or sharing) of wealth and resources for a common good. The Pope also cautions especially the “industrialized world” on wastage and pollution that has led to global warming among other environmental hazards. These hazards, the Pope observes, mostly affect the poor - such as farmers and fishermen who directly depend on “natural world” for their livelihood. Thus, his proposal is that we not only take good care of Nature (the entire creation, humans included), but also initiate integral and sustainable development throughout the world, which development would ensure a more habitable life on earth for all without jeopardizing the ecological system.

Oruka’s parental earth ethics, likewise, calls for an integral ecology (that is, a holistic economy of Nature), which in its diverse dimension comprehends the unique place, dignity, and hence the ethical duty that humans have in this world, thereby fostering a relationship to and with the environment. The aim is to enhance debates on such pressing issues as climate change, global warming, global inequality, etc; which debates will have impact on socio-economic wellbeing especially of the marginalized. Oruka’s parental earth ethics, therefore, leads to and demands for a highly de-territorialized concept of justice – understood as egalitarian and ecological fairness - based on a complex interrelatedness and interdependence of all beings in the world (Graness and Kresse 1997, 224). Put differently, it leads us to and demands for a different kind of humanism, a new Menschenbild (Lölke 1997, 222) that would take human beings as stewards (rather than owners and/or exploiters) who are also part and parcel of stewardship (or Nature) itself.

Thus, parental earth ethics is, no doubt, also a critique of most popular ethics under modern Western liberalism that tend to territorialize or limit the concept and the practice of justice. It challenges to the core what Oruka following Worster (1985) refers to as “imperial ideology of Nature” (Graness and Kresse 1997, 121). This is a false belief or teaching that the natural world is
made for humans, and that humans are not made for the world (cf. Bacon 1603), meaning humanity somehow has a license to own, subdue, and exploit the natural world unchecked.

6.3.2. Hardin and “Life-Boat Ethics”

To develop parental earth ethics, Oruka sought first to engage Garret Hardin, who in his fascinating essay “Lifeboat Ethics” (1980) tries to defend a territorial bounded responsibility to justice (Lölke 1997, 222), claiming that the affluent can save themselves and the environment while letting the poor people die. According to Hardin, it would be senseless and even suicidal in the modern world for the rich individuals and nation-states to offer humanitarian aid to the poor. He gives two reasons. First, he alleges that there are not enough resources in the world to support large population. And second, he claims that the global poor do not share “our” (his) territory.

Hardin begins his essay by attacking global environmentalists who, using the metaphor of “spaceship earth” propose measures to prevent further pollution, which pollution largely affects the poor under-developed nations. While Hardin acknowledges such arguments as attractive, he nonetheless regrets that the metaphor of ‘spaceship’ is also often used to advance such senseless and suicidal moves as “generous immigration policy”, which often lead to “the tragedy of the commons” (Hardin 1980, 171, 174). This is a situation where countless number of people end up clamouring for equal basic rights without first fulfilling some responsibilities, thereby leading to what Hardin calls “mutual ruin” (174). For Hardin, then, the metaphor of ‘spaceship’ would make sense only if the world had a sovereign to enforce responsibilities, which it doesn’t. The spaceship metaphor, he says, “is used only to justify spaceship demands on common resources” without first acknowledging “corresponding spaceship responsibilities”. But that should not be the case, Hardin
charges adding, “where human survival is at stake, the acceptance of responsibilities is a precondition to the acceptance of rights” (172).

To further discredit “the ethics of sharing” and possible distribution of world resources, Hardin attacks those inclined to eradication of poverty in the world purely from humanitarian ground. Thus, considering the reality of an ever-widening gap between the few rich and majority poor of the world, Hardin makes us think of a fairly-crowded lifeboat carrying just a few well-to-do (affluent) nations on the one hand, and another much crowded lifeboat occupied by majority poor of the world on the other. And in due course, he says, some poor people would inevitably fall out of their over-crowded lifeboat and haplessly swim for a while in the waters, hoping to either be admitted to the rich-man’s lifeboat or somehow benefit from the “goodies” therein. The question, according to Hardin is this: “What should the passengers on a rich lifeboat do?” This, he says, is the central problem of “lifeboat ethics” (172).

And to further compound the problem, Hardin lets us assume the rich lifeboat having 50 people on board, with a possibility of admitting 10 more, although that would contravene their “safety factor”. He then indifferently asks: “The 50 of us in the lifeboat see 100 others swimming in the water outside, asking for admission to the boat, or for handouts. How shall we respond to their calls?” (172). Hardin’s dilemma is in threefold. First, if the 50 choose “the Christian maxim” (i.e., to be charitable) or the Marxist’s socialist way and admit all the 100 poor swimmers, then the lifeboat will be swamped and everyone on board drown: “complete justice, complete catastrophe”, he says. The second scenario is that the 50 people on board might choose to admit just 10, in which case besides contravening the safety factor, thereby risking their future, it will also be extremely difficult, and perhaps against “justice”, to decide how to discriminate. It would make them feel guilty for admitting just 10 poor people and leaving the other 90 out.
The third option, the one Hardin certainly prefers, is to “admit no more into the boat and preserve the little safety factor” (173). That would make it possible for the 50 in the lifeboat to survive, he says, even though they will have to be on guard against intruders. For him, although this might be abhorrent and unjust especially to some few “conscience-stricken” and “guilt-addict” on board (those who might be tempted to sacrifice their position for the poor to come in), yet, the third option, Hardin insists, is the best. It is what defines the lifeboat ethics.

Eventually, he says, everyone will want to preserve their luck if they happen to be on board, and it doesn’t matter who gets into the lifeboat first. Hence, following lifeboat ethics, the best way out the dilemma, Hardin says, is to eliminate “conscience” from the lifeboat, purify people’s guilt (of being lucky and unable to help) and then move on in pursuit of what is best for me unconcerned about how the ‘other’ is going through – in this case those who for some reasons find themselves unlucky and hence haplessly swimming in poverty outside the “lifeboat”.

In sum, Hardin dismisses not only the urgency for global environmental concern, but also the ethics of possible global sharing of wealth and world resources. Foreign aid (monetary or otherwise) from rich to poor nations, he says, is absurd leading to an “unsolvable dilemma” because while the former control their population, the latter breed exponentially and often in direct proportion to the aid they receive from outside (178). But without foreign aid, Hardin thinks, the poor would sooner be “checked in their growth by pestilence, wars and earthquakes, among other factors” (177). Thus, sharing wealth and resources, the way Hardin sees it, only serves to postpone the “doomsday”, which nonetheless will come and destroy not only the receiver but also the generous donor as well; hence, “mutual ruin” in the name of justice (177).
6.3.3. Critique of Hardin’s “Lifeboat Ethics”

Hardin’s lifeboat ethics, as Oruka says, no doubt captures the “realistic truth” that seems prevalent in the modern world (Oruka 1997, 147). It seems to describe a world driven by extreme “political realism” where only the strong, the fittest, and the lucky survive; a situation where at best, justice as ‘egalitarian fairness’ is territorialized if not thrown out of the window. It defines a society where possessive individualism, greed, exploitation, pride, and indifference toward the wellbeing of the ‘other’ seems valuable tools for pursuing what one deems right and best. Here, “any social system [would be] stable only if it is insensitive to errors” (Hardin 1980, 174). In other words, socialism (not communism), which calls people to restrain some of their selfish pursuits for the common good is always seen as counterproductive.

The lifeboat ethics, of course, may sound attractive especially today where extreme liberal capitalism appears fashionable, but it is no doubt contrary to a basic sagacity that implicitly calls us to cultivate such humane ideals as generosity, kindness, care, and hence ethical duty toward the wellbeing of the ‘other’. And the ‘other’ here means anyone living below the human minimum, territorial boundaries notwithstanding.

Thus, Oruka sought to critically challenge such lifeboat-ethics-mentality with his rather communitarian-oriented parental earth ethics. Armed with such a basic ethical principle as the right to a human minimum, Oruka is able to critique Hardin’s stance to the core. Hardin, in my view, seems to take it as impossible or most unlikely that everyone on earth would enjoy the right to a human minimum; at least not possible while the developed countries maintain their current way of life. But he was, of course, factually wrong as I will shortly demonstrate. The indifference and pessimism with Hardin may have to do less with principles than with factual possibilities.
To begin with, it is important to remember that Hardin is writing in the 1970s, and it seems possible that many nations are economically in better shape now than they were then. One major problem, however, remains in that resources and wealth are still predominantly in the hands of few. Secondly, Hardin seems much more pessimistic about the world and its resources than he is justified in being indifferent. For him, world resources are too meagre to sustain a large population. But studies have shown the opposite is the case.

According to *Worldwatch Institute* the major “global problem” is not about overpopulation but gross inequality in the use of world resources. A country like the United States, for instance, with less than 5 % of the global population uses about a quarter of the world’s fossil fuel resources; burning up nearly 25 % of the coal, 26 % of the oil, and 27 % of the world’s natural gas. It is also known, moreover, that Nature has its way of balancing itself. Of course, it is still possible that some natural catastrophe could one day put us in the situation as Hardin conceives it. But in the meantime, I think, it is possible to responsibly use world resources in a way that would ensure equitable sharing or resources for a common good. In other words, it is possible for all of us to enjoy *the right to a human minimum* if we were to curb possessive individualism and greed.

As we established in chapter four, *the right to a human minimum* being the most basic human right and the foundation of other rights aims at ensuring a dignified life of a human person to everyone. It is therefore the minimum necessity for a standard of living that the world (i.e., global society) owes to every human being as its legitimate member. It is, in other words, the very minimum any human being would reasonably *demand* from the global society. Thus, it imposes a necessary correlative duty on every capable moral agent in the world to help ensure that no human

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being, regardless of their domicile or any other affiliation, lacks in the means to realize and enjoy the most basic human necessities. Oruka sums up these points well when he says:

It then follows …., that those affluent individuals who are able to, but refrain from helping to alleviate poverty from any region of the world, are partly responsible for the consequences arising from such poverty (Oruka 1997, 147).

Now one way of ensuring the means to realize the right to a human minimum to everyone in the world is by trying to be ethically responsible, especially with regards to the use of world resources and accumulation of wealth. To be ethically responsible also entails willingness to share or distribute some of my fortune with those who for some reasons are deprived of such basic human needs as food, housing, medicine, etc. Thus, if I have a considerable fortune more than I need to live on, then I should feel ethically inspired to help, say, a family member or even a stranger who is living below the human minimum.

To be ethically responsible would also involve making viable efforts to curb other inhuman treatments – for instance, taking advantage of the situation to control minimum wage and market prices of essential commodities – all of which tend to exploit and marginalize the poor.

Another way in which we can be ethically responsible to the ‘other’ is by being cautious about wastage and pollution (which lead to environmental degradation) even as we explore and use world resources for our own survival and enjoyment as humans. This we can do by reducing industrial waste and agro-chemical products: from construction and demolition sites; from mining, clinical and electronic plants. As Pope Francis notes, it is quite tragic that while just a few people greedily clamour for more profit through industrial and technical advancement, we all end up with bi-products and waste that are often “non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive” (Francis 2015, 19); all of which have irreversible side effects on people’s health, especially the poor who
cannot afford expensive medication. And that, to me, seems to properly capture Oruka’s argument for the right to a human minimum and by extension his parental earth ethics.

The point is that we all ought to be ethically responsible as humans to the wellbeing of each other, part of which means equitably distributing or sharing wealth and resources. We need also to diligently take care of our environment, even as we pursue what we think to be rightfully due. Oruka’s argument, however, as said above, presupposes that the earth is a commonwealth and a heritage for all. It also presupposes what he calls “parental debt” that we all share in common. This, I think, is an important insight lacking in Hardin’s argument. Also lacking in Hardin but crucially present in Oruka is the undeniable fact that human existence and posterity is fairly interdependent because every existence on earth is symbiotically related as a kind of “organic unit” or “a complex web of being” (Oruka 1997, 150; Graness and Kresse 1997, 219, 258).

Thus, while Hardin talks about “industrialized world” (i.e., the West) as one ‘lifeboat’ comfortably sailing on the sea but surrounded by tons of poverty-stricken hopeless swimmers, Oruka instead claims there are, in fact, a number of ‘lifeboats’ (nations) in the world; a few of them indeed are affluent (though not everyone aboard is rich), while the majority of them are really poor or underdeveloped (though not everyone therein is poor). But all of these ‘lifeboats’, Oruka observes, are inter-connected by pipes that are fairly a result of historical dependencies (read injustices) so that “part of the little wealth and safety gadgets that are in the poor boats do find their way for use in the rich boats” (Oruka 1997, 148).

To underscore the idea of “parental debt”, that is, what we most likely owe to each other as humans, Oruka observes that it is possible that in the beginning all the ‘lifeboats’ in the world were poor, that is, undeveloped or unindustrialized (which is true of every nation-state), before
some sailors of the now rich lifeboats sailed to the now poor lifeboats, he says, “and by all means possible plundered the wealth of many of those [unindustrialized] boats and used the gain to cause economic and safety disparity between the boats” (Oruka 1997, 148). And that is exactly what happened when, for instance, Europe invaded Africa in the name of civilization.

One needs to carefully read Walter Rodney’s book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) to concur with me; to understand the dynamics of power, dominance, and socio-economic exploitation and inequality, and hence the negative effects of colonialism, imperialism, and slavery. It would also perhaps make one agree with Oruka that indeed “the now rich boats owe part of their current self-preservation to the gains brought to them by the inter-boat pipes”, and that if all the poor boats (i.e., poor people) in the world were to sink, “eventually the rich boats would also sink” (Oruka 1997, 148). Here, I see Oruka trying to underscore the fact that we all desperately need each other for survival, prosperity and posterity. Hence, it defeats basic sagacity when some people tend to inculcate possessive individualism, greed, pride, prejudice and hate.

Oruka also wants to make us realize that Nature (and not just humanity) is interconnected and interdependent as a complex web of beings for mutual benefit. The rest of life in the world, Oruka says, is no less important than human life (Oruka 1997, 244). The term “important” is carefully employed here to underscore the value of every living being. Thus, it does not mean all sentient beings are the same or that they relate in the same way. The way humans relate with, say, a dog is not the same they would with a worm; but that does not mean the worm in itself is less important. Oruka’s argument, then, does not demean human dignity; rather, it is meant to inspire us humans, who presumably are rational cum moral beings, to not only be *ethically responsible* toward the wellbeing of each other but also take care of our environment. But that would require us having a different kind of ethics - the *parental earth ethics* - that Oruka proposes.
6.4. The Earth as a Family Unit

Thus, having dismissed Hardin’s *lifeboat ethics*, Oruka embarks on advancing his *parental earth ethics* using the metaphor of a family. He makes us image the world as a sort of family unit, with members having a close relationship; a common origin, for instance, through their parents and a common education (Graness and Kresse 1997, 128, 258). But the members, Oruka says, also have some difference in terms of their socio-economic welfare. He attributes that difference to three factors, namely, (i) *family history*, (ii) *personal luck* and (ii) *individual talents*. The success or failure of each member is also determined by how each one of the members applies the common education they receive (Oruka 1997, 148; Graness and Kresse 1997, 125).

The family unit, Oruka further says, is also bound by some unwritten ethical laws that guide people’s lives and relations. He sums up these laws into two major principles: 1) the parental debt principle (PP); and 2) the individual luck principle (IP). And starting with the parental debt principle (PP), Oruka says it consists of “four related shared assumptions or rules” (Oruka 1997, 148) that deal with family security and dignity, parental debt, and individual and family survival (Graness and Kresse 1997, 126). Oruka formulates these rules as follows:

First, we have the *Family Security Rule* stipulating that the fate and security (physical or welfare) of each of the members is ultimately bound up with the existential reality of the family as a whole. That means however arrogant, self-sufficient or independent one member may think of him or herself now, eventually one or their progeny may experience a turn of events that could make them desperately in need of protection from the family. In other words, individual’s “existential reality” in a family unit may change so that the one who is poor and dependent now might become the donor in future and vice versa (Oruka 1997, 149).
Second, he talks about the *Kinship-shame Rule*, which states that “the life conditions of any one member of the family affect all of them, both materially and emotionally” (Oruka 1997, 149); thus, none of the members can reasonably be proud of their current situation, however happy or satisfied one may be, if any one member of the family tree lives in squalor.

Third, Oruka gives us the *Parental Debt Rule*, which explains the organic relationship, and hence parental debt between members. This precept assumes that “whoever in the family is affluent or destitute partly owes that fortune or misfortune to the parental and historical factors inherent in the development of the family” (Oruka 1997, 149). That means no one member of a family could be held exclusively responsible for their affluent or deprived situation. There is always a parental debt attached our apparent situations. And that, indeed, is a matter of fact; although some entrepreneurs like to suppose that they made it completely on their own, forgetting that that they are not really the inventors or creators of what they managed to turn into thriving enterprises. And in any case, they are also dependent on consumers, political situation and other factors to succeed.

Finally, Oruka talks about *Individual and Family Survival Rule*, which he derives from the previous three rules above. According to this precept, no one member of the family has any moral obligation “to refrain from interfering with the possessions of any other affluent or destitute brother or sister who ignores the obligation to abide by the rules of the family ethics” (Oruka 1997, 149). This, in my view, is the most interesting rule; it not only allows the disadvantaged member(s) to demand assistance from the affluent member(s), but it also allows “the creative and hardworking members of the family to repossess underdeveloped possessions of the idle relatives and develop them for use and posterity” (Oruka 1997, 149). It therefore captures the spirit of the ‘parental debt principle’ (PP), which basically accounts for the specific duties each individual member owes to the family, i.e., global society (Lölke 1997, 225). Whereas it propagates equitable distribution of
wealth and world resources - thereby checking possessive individualism, pride and prejudice - it does not entertain laziness and idleness in the name of communal life.

Next, turning to the individual luck principle (IP) mentioned above, Oruka says it consists of three decrees that essentially seek to protect individual property and the right to use whatever one thinks he/she duly owns in whichever way one may chose or deem fit.

First, he talks about the personal achievement rule, which states that “what a member possesses is due mainly to his or her special talent and work” (Oruka 1997, 149). And as Oruka points out, this rule expresses “a kind of family individualism which disregards historical experience and the organic constitution of the family” (Graness and Kresse 1997, 127). It basically seeks to protect the right to individual property that seems “fashionable” within liberal capitalism.

The second precept is the personal supererogation rule, according to which every member has the right to do whatever she or he wishes with their own possession. It parallels what Oruka elsewhere calls national supererogation, a corollary of the principle of “territorial sovereignty”, which says that a people organized into a nation-state with a given geographical region, and hence having territorial sovereignty has the right to utilize or do whatever it wishes with its possessions (Oruka 1997, 90, 130). And finally, Oruka talks about the rule of public law, which states that any member who contravenes the rights of another member, especially the personal supererogation rule will be subject to punishment and reparation to restore justice (Oruka 1997, 149).

6.4.1. Priority Order

Oruka then appeals to the “ethics of common sense” or simply basic sagacity to conclude that principle number (1), i.e., parental debt principle (PP) is or ought to be always prior to the individual luck principle (IP). And that priority order, he says, ought to guide our human relations.
Thus, should any of the rules in (PP) come into conflict with any of the rules in (IP), the former, Oruka insists, must always take priority. This is because (IP) is basically supported by what he calls “the veil of fate” (Graness and Kresse 1997, 127), which includes right of first occupation, personal luck, and personal achievement. Parental debt principle (PP), however, springs forth from the “organic unity”, that is, a common origin/ heritage that exists between family members, their socio-economic differences notwithstanding. It is also grounded on the need to have a common security, thus the reason why it should always take priority.

Oruka would therefore say that “matters of commonwealth and security” must always prevail over “matters of personal possession, luck or achievement” (Oruka 1997, 150). That means “personal supererogation” – i.e., the individual right to own, use or dispose of wealth - cannot prevail upon matters common good. Likewise, no individual or institution would be spared if it endangers the security and/or economy of a community. Thus, Oruka concludes by saying:

There is no country in which, for example, one would accept a wish or a will from one of its citizens which stipulates that upon death all his achievements, however dear to the country, should be exterminated or kept from use by anybody… The objection to this will can be supported by invoking issues of common origin, common security and common wealth of the community of which the person is a member (Oruka 1997, 149-150).

6.4.2. Practical Implications

There are several implications upon which Oruka’s argument for parental earth ethics depends. First, we note that Oruka wants to underscore a basic if important sagacity that many, unfortunately, tend to forget or ignore as they desperately pursue the ‘right to private property’ or the so-called ‘personal supererogation’. His ethics reminds us that the earth and resources therein is for the common good of all; not in the sense that it is an open field for the survival of the fittest, but only in the sense of sharing whatever we might gain from it (Graness and Kresse 1997, 128).
That means the wealth and property that may come my way as I mix labour with the earth is mine only in the strict sense of the word. It is simply given for my use. But the gift also obliges me with a duty to be more reasonable and responsible toward the wellbeing of the ‘other’ – fellow humans and the environment. This is because the earth from where we get wealth, strictly speaking, has no sovereign, nor does it have real owners except God, the first principle of being. We humans are only stewards, and that means the earth is a commonwealth or heritage for all of us. The earth is also a home and heritage for other sentient non-human beings (Graness and Kresse 1997, 125). Thus, it seems contrary to basic sagacity when some tend to amass for themselves even what they actually don’t need either to sustain their life or enrich it. Needless to say, it seems utter vanity or stupendous to accumulate luxurious wealth (quite often through dubious means) while others languish in abject poverty; yet, no one takes with them such wealth when they die.

In the same vein, it is important to note that Oruka is in no way discouraging hard work, innovation, industrialization; nor is he despising wealth and prosperity as such. Rather, he is only against possessive individualism, greed and pride that often lead to dubious means of acquiring wealth, most of which means tend to exploit the poor. For him, “subservient ends”, i.e., personal and national gains, are for the most part a result of “historical factors”, meaning they are outcome of our common past that only tend to favour some people or nations at one given time (Lölke 1997, 226). But that does not change the fact that the earth is a common heritage for all. In fact, trends may change (as history attests) so that those successful now may not necessarily be as successful in future, and vice versa. Thus, it is always sagacious when one is successful and capable now to consider sharing some of the purported personal wealth with those who for some reason happened to be deprived. This is what Oruka calls “parental earth insurance policy”, which calls on affluent and powerful nations and individuals on earth “to invest in the pool of service to the rest of the
world so that when their historical turn or shift to oblivion comes, others may remember them with compassion” (Graness and Kresse 1997, 129).

Oruka’s insight also reminds us that the earth is also a habitat to other non-human beings. It properly underscores the value, the interconnectivity and hence interdependence of all beings as members of one global organic unit, albeit in different ways and levels. It particularly enables us humans to understand how much we depend on our environment for survival. But it also reaffirms our dignity and unique role we play or ought to play within the ecosystem. It therefore re-awakens our consciousness to realize that it is we who, by virtue of being rational cum ethical, have to take care of the entire ecosystem for the common good. Oruka’s insight no doubt rekindles that of Carl von Linnaeus – often referred to as the father of modern taxonomy - who in *The Economy of Nature* taught that we understand “the wisdom of creator” better when we relate to natural things by which everything is “fitted to produce general ends and the reciprocal uses” (Worster 1985, 37-38).

In sum, Odera Oruka’s eco-philosophy, and particularly his *parental earth ethics* leads us into a different kind of “humanism” that is capable of establishing the possibility of a genuine quest for justice at the global level. This point will be advanced further in the next chapter. Here, it suffices to say that *parental earth ethics* enables us to practically de-territorialize the idea of justice so that it does not only refer to ‘egalitarian fairness’ (which applies to human relations) but also ‘ecological fairness’ that acknowledges, appreciates and values the entire natural world.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter was intended to advance a critical discourse that would possibly ensure a genuine practice of justice at global level. We started off by analysing the idea of justice as ‘egalitarian fairness’ - arguably the conventional understanding of what justice is or ought to be.
Justice as ‘egalitarian fairness’, we said, implies equitability, impartiality and reciprocity insofar as distribution of resources is concerned. Thus, we emphasized the importance of having that idea of justice being practically de-territorialized so that the majority (if not all) human beings could actually enjoy egalitarian fairness. That would make justice acquire moral cum practical worth.

We then established that global justice at minimum level would entail actual enjoyment of the right to a human minimum. Thus, we defined global justice as ‘the totality of demands of justice that can reasonably be applied to local and international relations, thereby establishing a global society that is both egalitarian and communitarian oriented’. But in order to fully de-territorialize the concept of justice, that is, for us to make it “global” in practice, we said it is imperative to have a different world view, a new ethics that would not only motivate a spirit of equitable distribution or sharing of world resources but also take into account the natural world (our environment) as a valuable member in our quest for global justice.

Thus, in contrast to Hardin’s lifeboat ethics mentality (which limits the enjoyment of justice, thereby promoting possessive individualism, pride, and prejudice), we have considered Oruka’s parental earth ethics, which takes an eco-centric rather than anthropocentric approach to issues of global justice, thereby ensuring “ecological fairness”. Parental earth ethics, we have seen, emphasizes the stewardship model rather than possessive/exploitative model, thereby challenging us humans to be more ethically responsible in terms of how we use and distribute our wealth and world resources. Parental earth ethics, we have said, is based on one important fact: the earth is a commonwealth and a common heritage for the common good. Part of what that undeniable fact means is that we humans have to: (i) responsibly use world resources, and hence take good care of the environment upon which we depend for survival; and (ii) equitably distribute
or share wealth and resources so that no one member of human species goes without enjoying the right to a human minimum.

*Parental earth ethics* is, no doubt, a milestone, a legacy to reckon with Odera Oruka. It seems to define the direction in which he would have wished his practical philosophy to take. It leads us into a different kind of “humanism” that recognizes humans as rational cum moral agents and the rest of natural world, especially sentient non-human beings, as valuable moral patients that require moral consideration and care. It helps us realize that humanity is not the master but just a privileged member of the ecological system.

That privilege, however, comes with a price: not to leave the world worse off than we found it. Thus, Oruka’s eco-philosophy as espoused by his *parental earth ethics* underscores the ethical duty that we humans have to protect Nature. His ethical thought is capable of establishing a viable concept of global justice, cognizant of the fact that every being on earth is interrelated and interconnected for the common good. It takes the concept of justice not only as that which helps us establish ‘egalitarian fairness’ (which properly applies to human relations), but also as that which brings about ‘ecological fairness’ with Nature. The latter (ecological fairness), we can now submit, would necessarily and effectively lead to the former (egalitarian fairness).
CHAPTER 7

GENERAL CONCLUSION

7.1. On Humanism, Ecology and Global Justice

I would like to conclude this project by reiterating Oruka’s commitment to humanism (or *humanness* as he would sometimes call it), by which he means an endeavour to uphold the quality and security of human life. Oruka’s humanism seems well captured in his essay *Parental Earth Ethics* (1994), but it is also evident in other works that talk about justice, human rights, politics, environment, etc. In fact, one would rightly argue that Oruka’s entire practical philosophy is humanistic in nature - both in its approach and methodology (Graness and Kresse 1997, 14). This is the point I tried to argue out in chapter two. His philosophy is primarily geared towards upholding human survival, dignity, and security. His ethical commitment and thought, particularly the concept of *human minimum* attests to that fact.

But Oruka’s humanism is unusual given that it also involves the natural world, that is, other non-human beings as crucial (though not necessarily equal) members. Oruka was not wholly satisfied with anthropocentric motivations for environmental preservation. He concurs with those who consider animals and plants as moral patients, but he insists that they nonetheless deserve moral concern since they can be recipients of cruelty and unjust treatment (Presbey 2000, 525). In one of his essays on environmental ethics entitled *Eco-philosophy*, Oruka envisions a situation that would liberate, appreciate and value the entire biotic and natural community. He writes:

> As slaves and some races were once excluded from ethical consideration but were later ethically liberated, so the time has come for the ethical liberation of soils, plants, trees, waters, mountains and all beings of a biotic community. We are … to live as equals in a community of biodiversity. Each member of this community, whether a human king or a … tadpole, has an intrinsic value (Oruka 1997, 244).
That quotation, however, should be read in its proper context. It is meant to underscore the *intrinsic* or the ontological goodness, value, and hence importance of every being on earth, each according to its own mode of existence. As Aquinas would argue, every being, insofar as it *is* (i.e., exists), is ontologically *good* and hence valuable and important in itself. This is because *goodness* and *being* are really the same; they only differ in idea (ST I Q.5 art. 1). That means every being is intrinsically *equal* in goodness insofar as it participates in existence. The difference comes, of course, in the mode or in the form of participation. The difference comes, in other words, in the *essence* or the nature of a being in question. This is because “every being, as being, has actuality” according to how it participates in existence. But every being, as being, “is in some way perfect; since every act implies some sort of perfection; and perfection implies desirability and goodness” (ST 1 Q. 5, art. 3). Hence, every being is *intrinsically good* in itself.

Likewise, Oruka would argue that every being insofar as it exists is *intrinsically equal in goodness*. Thus, a mosquito or a viper is intrinsically as good, and hence valuable and important as, say, a dog or a horse is. The same can be said (ontologically speaking) of a human king and a tadpole. It is that intrinsic value, in my view, that Oruka wanted to underscore when he says all beings in the world are “to live as equals in a community of biodiversity” (Oruka 1997, 244).

But we can also, of course, talk about other things being *extrinsically good* in relation to us. Here, we see different things as “good” with regard to the scale of valuation and importance that we humans often attach to them, depending on how they practically affect or benefit us. Thus, in relation to our human life, a mosquito or a viper is extrinsically harmful and bad, and therefore less valuable and important than, say, a dog or a horse. But this is simply because of the benefits we often attach to the latter category. Cultures and religious inclinations, moreover, also tend to
determine the scale of valuation and importance we attach to things. A pig to a Muslim or a Jew, for instance, is less valuable and un-important because majority of them believe it is not suitable for human consumption; yet, pork is often considered a delicacy by most Catholics. The question, therefore, is: how ought we to determine the value and the importance of things in the world?

That question, in my view, could be unravelled using Oruka’s insight, which points to the fact that every being in Nature is intrinsically good in itself. We may not easily recognize or appreciate the intrinsic goodness, and hence the value and importance of some things that do not directly benefit us as humans, but that should not be a reason to demean or to deny their goodness, their value and importance. Oruka’s insight therefore arguably seems to challenge us to transcend our human (i.e., socio-cultural, religious, political and perhaps even intellectual) cocoons so as to see the intrinsic value and importance of every being in the world.

In any case, even those things that we tend to think as less valuable and un-important (such as mosquitoes, vipers and tadpoles) are, nonetheless, good because they are part and parcel of Nature; and Nature, as Aristotle argues, ultimately works for a good course (Aristotle Physics II.8). That means every being in Nature is ipso facto good or moving towards “the good” (whatever that might be). Hence, by virtue of being part of Nature as we humans are, even that which seems less beneficial to us is good, meaning it might as well be valuable and important even to us now or in the future, although perhaps in ways that we may never understand or appreciate. That, to me, seems to be what inspired Odera Oruka’s “eco-philosophy” and hence his new kind of humanism.

Oruka’s humanism, and particularly his concern for environmental ethics appears holistic and “liberative”. As he describes it, it does not follow the popular humanistic approach in the West often shaped by “capitalist science and technology”; nor does it take the form of “socialist-cum-
Marxist critique” (Oruka 1997, 246). Instead, Oruka’s humanism is firmly grounded on a basic sagacity that gives high regard to both human and non-human beings, albeit in different levels. That sagacity, which is prevalent in most pre-colonial African societies, is characterized by such humane values as solidarity, generosity, care, etc. It is part of what his philosophy aims at. I come back to this point, but first, let me clarify how Oruka understands and applies the term humanism.

7.2. Defining the term Humanism

The term ‘humanism’ etymologically derives from Latin word *humanitas*, which denotes such human values as benevolence, kindness and care. It is related to a Greek word φιλανθρωπία (*philanthropia*) - from where we derive the English term philanthropy, which signifies human kindness, generosity, care or a “friendly spirit” and “goodwill” (cf. Gellius, *Attic Nights*, XIII: 17). Hence, ‘humanism’ denotes a commitment to being benevolent, kind, and caring; which all imply a sense of being ethically responsible toward the wellbeing of other humans, especially the less fortunate in society. This is one sense in which Oruka applies the term humanism in his philosophy.

But humanism can also be defined as a way of thinking and acting based on some set of ethical principles and values that tend to give priority to human existence. And that priority, as Oruka says, is measured by the *quality* and *security* of both individual and collective human existential well-being (Oruka 1997, 138-139). Thus, humanism in this sense tends to promote not only the good of humanity in general but also the good of individuals as the ultimate goal of human actions; it means taking the *quality* and *security* of individual human life and general wellbeing seriously. That is why Oruka would say humanism is or ought to be the ultimate standard of moral good and moral action in every human society (Oruka 1997, 139).
Humanism can also be understood as a kind of practical reasoning, i.e., a philosophy that aims at finding the “existential purpose and meaning in human life” (Azenabor 2010, 123). In this sense, it entails an active ethical commitment to socio-economic welfare of humanity, regardless of their national, geographical, racial, or any other sectarian affiliation. As a sagacious normative or practical dimension of philosophy, humanism then leads to humanness; it leads to an ethical commitment that emphasizes centrality of human life and its non-negotiable dignity and unique place in the world. Thus, genuine humanism, Oruka says, refers to that ethical commitment often manifested in someone’s actions (e.g., philosophizing or writting), and is always directed towards the betterment of the overall living conditions of people in the name of building a more humanized global society (cf. Oruka 1997, 130; Kresse 2013, 31; and Nyarwath 2009, 248-50).

Now as we have tried to argue in this dissertation, Oruka’s philosophy clearly demonstrates such a commitment. Matters pertaining to justice, human rights, liberty, politics, etc., are very central to his philosophy. But even more important (though perhaps less known) is the fact that ecological issues like pollution, consumerism, global warming, etc., form part of his philosophical inquiry. Oruka considered human beings not as owners cum exploiters of the natural world but as stewards to administer and hence take care of the earth and resources therein for a common good. This is no doubt an important dimension that defines Oruka’s humanism.

Just like most humanists in Africa, therefore, Oruka insists that “humankind must be made the central focus” (Azenabor 2010, 112), thereby upholding human dignity and security. However, that should not be construed to mean giving license to exploit world resources unchecked - as most modern liberalism inspired by Lockean philosophy, for instance, seems to do. Instead, it means that human beings have a special mandate to use world resources more responsibly. They also have an ethical duty to distribute or share resources more generously, thereby building a better life
that is safe and secure for all. And that duty, Oruka says, flows from the fact that it is only humans who presumably are rational, ethical, hence socio-political beings on earth (Oruka 1997, 126).78

In his endeavour to develop a philosophy that is humanistic in nature, Odera Oruka seems convinced that human beings are by nature rational, ethical, and hence socio-political, besides their being creative and conscientious. He was convinced that we have a natural tendency to relate and “socialize” with each other despite our differences. That means we have a natural tendency to be humane; to be ethically responsible: caring, loving, generous and kind to each other. And this is what, I think, basic sagacity calls for. Of course, that natural tendency might sometimes or quite often be overshadowed by some vicious inclination to greed or possessive individualism, pride, prejudice and hate. But that does not mean the latter aspects should define the human nature.

7.3. Humanism in Pre-colonial Africa

I mentioned earlier that Oruka’s humanism is grounded on traditional value systems that tend to give high regard to both humans and non-human beings, albeit in different ways and levels. His humanism, in other words, seems to be guided by a simple but important maxim prevalent in most pre-colonial Africa: “each for all and all for each.”79 It is such a sagacity that properly defines what he we might call traditional African humanism or communalism (not communism): a way of life that made every member feel “at home” with other members. It also made one feel fairly treated – despite there being elaborate normative measures like taboos, customs and precepts - because of such humanistic values as solidarity, generosity, respect, care, tolerance, etc.80

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78 I do not mean that it is only humans who are social beings in the world; most animals and birds tend to be social, but their “socialism” can hardly be due to their being rational, ethical and self-conscious.
Now Odera Oruka can be seen as applying such values to construct a kind of humanism that would ensure possibility of enjoying justice at the global level. First, it is important to note that in most pre-colonial African societies, resources were equitably distributed, each according to their needs so that nobody would have exuberantly too much while another lacks in the basis of sustaining life. Among the Akan in Ghana, for instance, just like among the Agikuyu in Kenya, land (which is the most vital means of livelihood) traditionally belongs not to individuals but the clan; and the clan consists of the living, the ancestors, and the unborn - all of whom have a socio-psychological reality that knits them together as community. Here, the driving principle, was communalism properly defined in terms of striving to equitably share resources for the common good, however meagre these resources were. And it is that spirit of communalism, informed by the intuitive consciousness that human beings are interrelated and interdependent, that made the majority in traditional African societies to be ethically responsible towards the wellbeing of each other. It also led to a sort of “reciprocal justice”, which Oruka says is the basic “social ideal” for establishing a more globally humanized society (Graness and Kresse 1997, 124).

Oruka’s humanism, furthermore, alludes to a traditional African wisdom on ecology, which he says can offer “an eco-philosophy that throws some light on the problems that confront modern civilization” (Oruka 1997, 251). Now according to that traditional African wisdom on ecology, the world is conceived as divided into two related parts: the visible realm comprising of humans, trees, soils, waters, animals, plants, etc., on the one hand and the invisible realm having the ancestors, the unborn, the heavenly bodies, the spirits, etc., on the other. The two realms together form what Oruka calls “the totality of environment or simply the reality of existence” (Oruka 1997, 252).

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81 See Wiredu “Philosophy, Humankind and Environment” in Oruka 1994, 301-305.
Thus, while human beings might appear more privileged than any other member of the visible realm (given that they can think and talk), that privilege, Oruka says, was nonetheless understood simply as a matter of being lucky; it was a gratuitous gift from the invisible reality, meaning they (humans) have no real right to hold absolute power, ownership or control over other members of the visible world. Hence, plants and animals could not be carelessly destroyed at will. In fact, some plants and animals couldn’t be touched or destroyed at all because of their relationship to the invisible reality – the other part of the entire environment (Oruka 1997, 252).

Indeed, among the Agikuyu in Kenya where I belong, it was anathema to cut the Mugumo (fig) tree, for instance. Of course, the folk sagacity given then was that Mugumo tree is sacred because it is where sacrifices to Ngai (or God) were offered (Kenyatta 1953, 4). But the philosophic sagacity behind this was really to preserve the environment. It must be remembered that the Mugumo tree is so enormous, with widespread strong roots (to avoid soil erosion) and wide supportive branches (to shelter birds and other animals). Similarly, no one was allowed to cultivate along river banks for the same reason: to preserve the environment, although the explanation given was that some Daimono (evil spirit) would make the farmer in question infertile. Other plants were also jealously preserved because of their beauty and medicinal value. Each clan, moreover, was named and associated with a specific wild animal, and it was anathema for people to kill their own animal, even for food. The point here is that ecological conservation was highly regarded in most traditional African cultures even when that did not offer direct material benefit to the people; they understood that every being is intrinsically good and invaluable. Oruka explains why:

The belief is that the environment is a community whose members are both human beings and non-human [beings]; and that although the humans have privileges, they have no right to destroy any of the other visibles except on consultation with the members of the invisible [reality] (Oruka 1997, 252 emphasis mine).
Such “ecological wisdom” was based on the fact that the invisible reality has greater power and knowledge than the visible world (humans included); hence, the fate of the latter was directly dependent upon the prerogative of the former. That seems to explain why a traditional African, as Mbiti observes, seems “notoriously religious” (Mbiti 1990, 1). No wonder nearly every human activity in traditional Africa would be accompanied by prayer to invoke the divine power from the invisible reality. And that also points to yet another dimension of traditional African way of life: human existence is extended to and depends on the rest of the world. It also underscores the fact that ecological balance (at least in the visible realm) is not a human creation; thus, it is sheer vanity for humans to think or pretend to be owners or masters of the world (Oruka 1997, 252).

Odera Oruka’s humanism, therefore, seems to recapitulate the essence of African socialism properly defined by the spirit of communalism.\textsuperscript{82} This is a way of life, a kind of ethics that tends to appeal to the welfare of the ‘other’ as a guide to every human action (Masolo 2006). And behind that ethics is the need to minimize socio-economic disparity between the haves and the have-nots as its primary goal. Thus, Oruka’s humanism, which seems firmly grounded on (although critical to some) traditional way of life in Africa can be seen as propagating a dynamic ethical shift: from our unnatural human inclination to possessive individualism, greed, pride and prejudice back to our natural (traditional) tendency to care for one another in an egalitarian-communal way.

Now that egalitarian/ communal ethics, the spirit of African Socialism, has also been advanced by the \textit{Ubuntu} philosophy that rests on a simple but philosophically rich humanistic principle: “I am because you are.”\textsuperscript{83} It helps us realize that humanity is inextricably bound up; that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{82} For details regarding his own (Luo) community’s idea of communalism (as espoused by Paul M. Akoko, one of the sages Oruka interviewed in his Sage philosophy project) see Oruka 1991a, 140-141.
  \item \textsuperscript{83} See the “Foreword” to \textit{I am Because You are} (Lief and Thompson 2015) by Desmond Tutu.
\end{itemize}
I am human to the extent that I belong to a community in which I ought to participate in building by, among other things, sharing what I have with others. Thus, as Shutte observes, the Ubuntu philosophy, albeit in its diverse interpretation, has recently become popular given that it basically aims at socio-economic and political liberation, human rights defence, and hence the quest for global justice (Shutte 1995, preface). It is also concerned about ecology and biodiversity.84

7.4. Humanism at the Heart of Philosophy

It is my hope that we can now understand how Oruka’s philosophy is humanistic in nature. It seems primarily geared toward human existential wellbeing in their relations to each other and with the natural world at the global level. As we tried to argue in chapters two and three, Oruka’s practical philosophy was largely informed by some grave historical socio-economic injustice in the world that he sought to address first. How could such human perils as poverty, war, hunger and disease be reduced, if not eliminated in the world? This was one question that prompted Oruka to develop a philosophy in search for a human minimum. As a philosopher of practical ilk, Oruka sought to pursue the ultimate and most basic standard of moral good, which for him is or ought to be humanism. He believed it is humanism that would lead to practice of justice at the global level.

Oruka saw humanism as the epicentre of philosophizing toward global justice. Apart from adopting the etymological definition of philosophy as love of wisdom, he also defined philosophy strictly as an “art of reasoning” that “provides a critical intellectual weapon and methodology for analysing and synthesizing the basic problems of man (i.e., human) and society” (Oruka 1997, 140). For him, that is what qualifies to be moral philosophy, whose nature and mandate is to

84The scope of this project will not allow me to interrogate these issues in depth. For a detailed account on Ubuntu see Battle 2009; Gade 2011; Metz 2011; Metz & Gaie 2010; Ramose 1998, 1999; Tutu 2000.
discern, analyse, safeguard and promote humanism, moral good and social order, thereby leading to a possibility of establishing justice at the global level. He says:

The main function of moral philosophy is to apply rigorous analytic and synthetic reason to the basic moral and social problems and help explain or define moral good, moral evil and the requirements of a humanistic social order (Oruka 1997, 140).

It appears, then, that for Oruka, humanism (by which he means commitment to enhance and improve the quality and security of human life) ought to be one of the inescapable functions of philosophy. It is within its “natural mandate”, he says, for philosophy to call and search for remedy where humanism seems to be in danger or in decline (Oruka 1997, 138). But as a caveat, Oruka quickly point out that in saying that philosophy ultimately concerns or ought to concern itself with humanism, he does not mean to confuse philosophy with other disciplines (religion, politics, ideology, etc.) that also in a way concern themselves with humanism.\textsuperscript{85} It doesn’t mean every philosophy is about searching for humanism and global justice either. What it means is that humanism is one of the central and perhaps most important aspect of philosophizing.

Oruka’s philosophy, being humanistic in nature, therefore, aims at establishing some ethical principles that would help ensure a genuine humanism, which in turn would see possibility of establishing justice at the global level. Key among these ethical principles, we have said, is the right to a human minimum. As chapter five tried to show, Oruka’s philosophy aims at upholding the dignity of life in every human being by seeking the minimum egalitarian fairness with regards to the enjoyment of at least some basic human needs: physical security, subsistence and health care. It underscores the humanistic values of solidarity, generosity, care, and above all, the ethical

\textsuperscript{85} For ways in which philosophy not only relates but also differs from these disciplines, see “Philosophy and Humanism in Africa” in Oruka 1997, 140-141. This point was also discussed in chapter one.
duty that helps ensure a more genuine concern for the wellbeing of those who for some reasons find their right to a human minimum denied or inaccessible.

Oruka’s philosophy might sound to be an exaggerated advocacy for the plights of the global poor, clamouring for their rights without really challenging them to fulfil their civic duty. In other words, the right to a human minimum seems to be working for the benefit of the poor; yet, moral or philosophical principles ought to be universal. Oruka might also remotely be accused of inciting violence as means to agitate for people’s rights. But that, I think, would be missing Oruka’s point. In proposing the right to a human minimum as a normative principle towards global justice, Oruka intends it to be universally biding: challenging both the rich and the poor for a common good.

As we tried to argue in chapter five, the human minimum is an ethical minimum and a universal right; it is the minimum that any human being, by virtue of being human, can reasonably demand from fellow human beings. But that does not amount to giving licence to the poor to forcefully grab from others what they think is justifiably due, even though their natural inclination to survival might force them to do so. Here, Oruka is cautioning the global society, especially the affluent, that denying some members the right to a human minimum is not only ethically unfair but is also a threat to global security. Similarly, even though he argues that denying someone the right to a human minimum might adversely affect their capacity to function as a moral agent, Oruka is not advocating for those below the human minimum to simply act as moral patients. Like everyone else, they (the poor) ought to strive and abide by the ethical rules and legal precepts, though this might be unfair to them. But on the other hand, the society ought to strive to ensure that no one goes without their right to a human minimum fulfilled. The intention really is to enhance a global responsibility towards the wellbeing of each other.
We can therefore say that the fulfilment of what *the right to a human minimum* demands is universally biding. It has a correlative necessary duty that bides everyone. It would be desirable to have everyone in the world meet at least the basic needs through their own effort. But apparently that seems not to be the case mainly due to some historical social, political and economic injustices, among other factors. Thus, Oruka’s ethical thought seems to be challenging all those who have the means, those who somehow have benefited from the current world order, to ensure that those who have not or who cannot meet what the *human minimum* demands are assisted to do so.

That, however, does not mean that it is only the rich who have a duty towards *the right to a human minimum*; neither is the argument meant to make the rich feel guilty of their genuine earning or make them less industrious. The fact is: every human being in the world has a duty first to oneself and, second to others. That means one ought to make reasonable demands on others only after one has tried and failed to fulfil duty to oneself. The global poor, for instance, have a duty to first try and improve their existential conditions; they must critically examine the possible causes of their deprivation and work towards the removal of such causes as corruption, laziness and complacency. They cannot sit back and simply put that duty upon the shoulders of the rich. Just as much as the affluent have the duty to ensure that no one dies from starvation, disease or physical violence in the world, so too the poor have equal duty to ensure not only their own survival but also a much more dignified lifestyle for all, at least to the best their ability.

Perhaps it is important to reiterate, as I conclude, that by advancing the argument for *the right to a human minimum*, Oruka was basically attempting to “humanize” or make better the world that seems increasingly becoming de-humanized. He was trying, for instance, to reduce abject poverty and other threats to humanity in the world. But that would involve, among other things, ensuring responsible use of and equitable sharing of world resources. A question may, however, arise as to
whether the world has got enough resources to sustain the right to a human minimum for every person on earth. This is a question that requires further studies from other disciplines.

Nonetheless, considering the advances already made globally especially in science, technology and economy, one can hope that it is practical possibility to make the world better, to reduce poverty and other physical threats to human survival. What we need is proper ethics to regulate our politics, trade and other human interactions. Paradoxically, though, the effort already made in science, technology and economy seems to have led to yet another severe global challenge in terms of environmental degradation. Issues of global warming due to carbon emissions and other toxic industrial waste are threatening to cause more global havoc than before.

Now this is where Oruka’s eco-philosophy and humanism becomes handy. As chapter six tried to argue, parental earth ethics is able to achieve what the ethical principle of human minimum demands of us in two ways. First, it motivates in all of us (humans) the “spirit” of equitable sharing of wealth and world resources irrespective of our sectarian affiliations, thereby underscoring the concept of justice as egalitarian fairness. Second, it propagates a global environmental concern, thereby advancing the idea of justice in terms of ensuring ecological fairness. Put differently, parental earth ethics is a noble ethics that seeks to connect Nature as one organic or family unit. It enables us see the world as a complex web of beings that are symbiotically related. It offers possibilities of creating a global society that is not only egalitarian/communitarian oriented but also ecologically fair, thereby pointing to a possibility of establishing justice at the global level.
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