

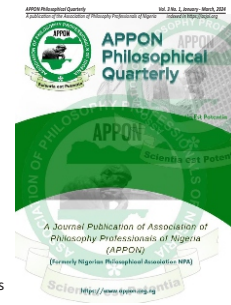
A RE-EVALUATION OF MEANINGFUL LIVING IN THE POST PANDEMIC ERA

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Abstract

One of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic is that it caused a heightened consciousness in the vulnerability of the poor. While the corona virus does not discriminate based on economic status, the poor, who often constitute the masses, especially in Africa, were more susceptible to the attack since they lacked the necessary financial wherewithal to purchase or follow the necessary precautionary measures. This was exacerbated by the fact that some African leaders selfishly hoarded Covid-19 palliatives that were meant to provide relief for the poor. This state of vulnerability and fear necessitated the question of the meaningfulness or otherwise, of human life. Hence, this paper re-examines the class ideology, a dualistic perspective that “the rich” and “the poor” belong to entirely separate “worlds.” The re-evaluation of the class ideology becomes necessary in the light of the experience of the pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic that started in faraway China found its way to other countries of the world. It exposes the artificiality and in-authenticity of the class approach to life, and shows the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of the “here” and “there.” The paper considers an understanding of the ideology behind the ever-increasing gap between the rich and the poor important to achieving meaningful living in the post-pandemic era. It provides a theoretical framework that can overcome economic injustice, inequality and encourage a moral responsibility towards the poor, especially in Africa. The paper recommends an Earth-Eco-Socialist system where the principle of cooperation is emphasized. It is grounded on the socialist moral attitude which is communalistic in nature. The paper concludes that a meaningful living is often a product of a communitarian lifestyle hinged on the consideration of the needs of others.

Keywords: Covid-19, Poverty, Meaningful living, Earth-eco-socialism, communalism

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as a global crisis, unprecedented in modern times, impacting every aspect of human life and profoundly reshaping societal norms and economic structures. Beyond its immediate health ramifications, the pandemic has spotlighted and exacerbated existing socioeconomic inequalities, raising

profound questions about the essence of meaningful living in a world marked by stark disparities. This paper embarks on an exploration of how the pandemic has intensified class divides, with a particular emphasis on the lived experiences of the impoverished, and scrutinizes the adequacy of current socioeconomic frameworks in addressing these deepened inequalities.

In the face of the pandemic, the vulnerable and economically marginalized communities, especially in African nations such as Nigeria, found themselves disproportionately affected. Not only did they face higher health risks, but the socio-economic fallout further endangered their livelihoods, exacerbated by inadequate access to healthcare, social services, and economic relief measures. These observations prompt a critical examination of the underlying class ideologies that perpetuate such divides and call into question the sustainability of the prevailing economic systems.

Building on this foundation, the paper then pivots to a theoretical exploration of alternative frameworks for constructing a more equitable society in the aftermath of the pandemic. It advocates for an Earth-Eco-Socialist approach as a transformative solution that emphasizes communal values, cooperation, and a profound moral responsibility towards the economically disadvantaged. This model presents a radical departure from the individualistic, competition-driven paradigms that currently dominate, proposing instead a vision of society where meaningful living is defined not by material accumulation but by communal well-being and solidarity.

Covid-19 and the Vulnerability of the Poor

When the corona virus came, it was not selective in its attack. Everyone was a potential victim. As such, everyone had to take the necessary precautions in order to minimize exposure and susceptibility to the attack of the virus. However, some groups of persons were more vulnerable to the

attack of the virus. According to the 2020 reports from The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), “the short and medium-term impacts of COVID-19 will be particularly severe for the most disadvantaged and risk compounding existing socio-economic divides.”¹ From a medical perspective, examples include the aged and those with underlying health conditions that may have had severe impacts on their immune systems- cancer, diabetes, liver disease, lung disease, severe asthma etc. But from socio-economic perspective, we have the poor as a top-tier vulnerable group. This is because it takes a good deal of financial resources to be able to apply the necessary precautions, ranging from the very simple ones like staying indoors, wearing of nose masks, proper social distancing, frequent washing of hands to sophisticated ones like sterilization, disinfectants and the likes. Since the poor lacked the finances to adequately apply these measures, they suffered a lot of casualties.

The 2020 OECD report also noted that most persons living below or at the threshold of the poverty line live in crowded places, making it difficult to identify and isolate or socially distance Covid-19 symptomatic persons from the other members of the household or community.² There is also the challenge of access to basic sanitation, making it difficult to limit the spread of the virus in areas where people live together in close proximity. Also, to really apply the precaution of social distancing, the alternative of virtual communication needs to be in place. Sadly, most of these poor persons cannot afford the necessary computer/mobile devices

¹ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development- OECD. “Covid-19: Protecting People and Societies.” <https://www.Oecd.Org/Coronavirus/Policy-Responses/Covid-19-Protecting-People-and-Societies-E5c9de1a/>. Policy Brief- Tackling Corona Virus (Covid-19) Contributing to a Global Effort. (2020), 2.

² Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development- OECD, “Covid-19: Protecting People and Societies...”

necessary to communicate with one another, connect with e-learning platforms, link up with medical aid, and keep in touch with the outside world. Without these alternatives, many could not avoid the traditional person-person communication mode, which made a lot of them vulnerable. Now, if these conditions are already precarious for the poor who can afford basic shelter, it is going to be much worse for the very poor ones who are homeless and live in open community spaces.

Beyond the poor being vulnerable during the active period of the Covid-19 pandemic, we also see that the Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated

existing inequities and undermining ambitions for those 'furthest behind' to be reached and supported through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)... contributing to increased poverty, with women particularly affected, and worsening mental health, with people experiencing fear, frustration, and depression.³

The Covid-19 pandemic truncated the livelihood of the poor who live in the rural areas, especially those who depend on seasonal labour, farming, fruit/vegetable market, trading etc. The ceasing of transport systems and local markets left them with little or nothing. It was an excruciating period for internally displaced persons (IDPs) globally. This is because most of the IDPs survive either through taking on menial jobs or the charity of others; and the restrictions on movement made it difficult to

either undertake their menial jobs or for their benefactors to reach them, especially as their settlements were considered to be a high-risk place where one can easily contract the virus.

Observations of the impact of the corona virus pandemic have shown that its impact has wiped out years of advancement in reducing poverty. World Bank projections revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused an increase in abject poverty at a global level affecting between 194-124 million people, marking the largest increase in poverty rate since 1990.⁴ Looking at this ginormous impact, it was unsurprising for World Bank to also reveal that while cases of extreme poverty were more common among the poor in rural areas, the new class of poor persons now includes those from urban regions that are more educated and serve in various formal and informal industries.⁵ This shows that the Covid-19 had the double effect of both being easily contracted by the poor due to their vulnerable state and also exacerbating their poverty. The sum effect of this situation is that it further stretches the inequality between the rich and the poor.

Now, since countries were on lockdown during this period, several governments and well-meaning individuals initiated the distribution of palliatives in order to cushion the effect of pandemic on the general populace, especially the poor. However, in certain places, we see that some rich persons, who had higher chances of meeting their needs, worsened the situation of the poor by hoarding palliatives that were meant to ease the burden, risks, and challenges caused by the pandemic. In Nigeria for

³ Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development- CREID. "Vulnerability and Poverty during Covid-19: Religious Minorities in Nigeria." *CREID Policy Briefing*. (2021), 1.

⁴ Lakner, C., Nishant Y., Daniel G., Andres C., and Haoyu, W. "Updated Estimates of the Impact of COVID-19 on Global Poverty: Looking Back at 2020 and the Outlook for 2021," January 11, 2021. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-looking-back-2020-and-outlook-2021>.

⁵ Zumbrun, J. "Coronavirus Has Thrown Around 100 Million People Into Extreme Poverty, World Bank Estimates." *The Wall Street Journal*, 2020.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/coronavirus-has-thrown-around-100-million-people-into-extreme-poverty-world-bank-estimates-11602086400>.

example, due to the lockdown, a lot of persons could not go to work. As such, it was expedient that the government stepped in to provide some means of support for the citizenry, especially for those who were depending on daily work for survival. To ameliorate the hardship, the Federal Government of Nigeria and some private individuals of goodwill offered to provide some palliatives. These palliatives came in the form of loans and grants, and distribution of food and money. Sadly:

many citizens complained of not receiving any of these palliatives from the government, private firms, and individuals. It was later discovered that the palliatives meant for the citizens were stocked up in some government warehouses in many parts of the country. This made many of the citizens go in search of these warehouses and loot them.⁶

During this period, the number of persons who came out to scuttle for palliatives unmasked the extent of distributive injustice and inequality to the poor. This is all the more worrisome when you consider that this happened in a country filled with abundant mineral and human resources; hence, holding the potential to become an economic giant in the world and be able to give its citizens a better standard of living. During the looting, we saw young and old men and women, and even children carting away with food items like rice, noodles, cassava flakes (commonly called *garri*), vegetable oil, spaghetti etc.⁷ According to a World Bank Report, the rate of poverty in Nigeria rose from 35.00-

38.88% of the entire populace from 2011-2016. This was followed by a three-year exponential increase in poverty and inequality from 2018-2019.⁸ In the opinion of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), about 40% of the people in Africa's most populous country were living below the poverty line of ₦137,430 (\$381.75) a year. In figures, this amounts to about 83 million people.⁹

During the pandemic, a lot of abuses were witnessed with regards to the palliatives. To the shock of many, souvenirs that were shared at some birthday parties by those in government had inscriptions that depicted that they were Covid-19 palliatives. In other instances, it was also observed where there were even attempts to share these palliatives; it was done with political sentiments, to favour the adherents or supporters of the ruling party.¹⁰ According to some interview reports by The Guardian Nigeria News, many disgruntled Nigerians lamented that:

The food was shared with party members, and we did not get it because we were not members of the party.... During that period, the chairman of our street called one Saturday morning to show us the so-called food that was to be shared. It was one DeRica of rice, one DeRica of beans, and one sachet of tomato paste for a street with about 80 houses. The chairman told us that only three of the palliative bags were sent to the Community Development

⁶ Aluko, O, Oyeбанjo, P and Ayegboyin A. "Looting of Covid-19 Palliatives in Government's Warehouses in Nigeria: The Viewpoints of Christianity and Pragmatism." *Humanus Discourse* 3, no. 1 (2023): 1.

⁷ Aluko, Oyeбанjo, and Ayegboyin, "Looting of Covid-19 Palliatives in Government's Warehouses in Nigeria..." 2.

⁸ Aluko, O., & Ibukun O. "A Socio-Historical Perspective on Ponzi Schemes and Development in Nigeria: The Role of the Christian Church." *World Journal of Social Science* 8, no. 2 (July 18, 2021): 41.

⁹ Akwagyiram A. "Forty Per cent of Nigerians Live in Poverty: Stats Office." *Reuters*, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-economy-poverty-idUSKBN22G19A>.

¹⁰ Aluko, Oyeбанjo, and Ayegboyin, "Looting of Covid-19 Palliatives in Government's Warehouses in Nigeria..." 5.

Association (CDA), which comprises eight streets with over 500 houses. When they want to share electricity bills, they come to our doorsteps, but when they want to share food with the masses, they will not deploy that same system.¹¹

The insincerity and selfishness of those in power is just appalling. How can a bag of rice be shared among 500 households (not even 500 persons)? It is a guarantee that what will reach each household may not be enough to give an individual a single satisfactory meal. Concerning this sorry state of affairs, the head of Social Action Nigeria- Vivian Bellonwu berated that:

To think that certain persons could lock down this quantum of food and materials as we see them on their premises, in their custody, and watching. In contrast, people wallow in poverty and difficulty, which is unthinkable... I think that it is pretty mean; I think it is highly insensitive, and I believe that this is a betrayal of the trust of the people.¹²

Even now that it seems as though things have returned to normal, many are still yet to recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic- economically. So, for the average Nigerian, it is evident that the Covid-19 not only made the poor worse-off, but added to their number. Due to the hopelessness and despair experienced by many during the pandemic; and even now as many persons are still trying to piece their lives together in a society where the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, a lot of questions and discussions arose concerning the meaningfulness of life.

Let us now consider the discourse on meaningful living.

What is a Meaningful Life?

In response to the existential questions heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, here we venture into an analysis of the concept of meaningful living, examining various philosophical viewpoints ranging from supernaturalism to naturalism, asceticism, the African conceptualization of life's purpose, and classical theories of happiness. This section aims to explore the diverse interpretations of what constitutes a meaningful existence, integrating perspectives that encompass divine connections, intrinsic values, disciplined self-conquest, communal harmony, and the pursuit of objective ideals. Through this exploration, we seek to offer insights into the multifaceted nature of life's meaning, encouraging readers to reflect on their own definitions of fulfilment amidst the challenges and uncertainties brought forth by the pandemic.

Supernaturalism posits that life's worth is tied to a divine or spiritual realm, with key thinkers like Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, Buber, and Fackenheim advocating for a life aligned with divine purposes as the path to meaning.¹³

Naturalism, in contrast, denies that meaning requires a supernatural basis, with philosophers like Ayer, James, Taylor, Darwall, Williams, Wiggins, Nozick, and Singer suggesting that meaningfulness can arise from personal pro-attitudes or intrinsic

¹¹ Nigeria, Guardian. "COVID-19 Palliative and Its Controversies: Interrogating the Looting Spree Dimension." *The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News*, October 31, 2020. <https://guardian.ng/saturday-magazine/covid-19-palliative-and-its-controversies-interrogating-the-looting-spree-dimension/>.

¹² Obiezu, Timothy. "Nigerians Justify Massive Looting of COVID-19 Supplies." *Voice of America*, October 26, 2020. https://www.voanews.com/a/covid-19-pandemic_nigerians-justify-massive-looting-covid-19-supplies/6197611.html.

¹³ Metz, T. "The Concept of a Meaningful Life." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 38, no. 2, 2001: 137.

aspects of our natural lives.¹⁴

Classical Theories, as outlined by Seligman and Royzman¹⁵ and Joseph & Jiyun¹⁶ categorize true happiness into the pursuit of pleasure (hedonism), engagement in fulfilling activities (desire theory), and a life aligned with objective ideals beyond mere pleasure or personal desire, advocating for a balanced approach to finding life's meaning.

Asceticism emphasizes self-discipline and the renunciation of physical and psychological desires for higher spiritual ideals or personal development, drawing from the practices of ancient Greek athletes, warriors, and philosophical traditions such as Stoicism to argue for a life of moral and spiritual excellence.^{16 17 18 19 20 21 22}

²³

The African concept of a meaningful life is relational, where personal identity and fulfilment are deeply tied to an individual's moral alignment with community values and the collective well-being. This perspective views a meaningful life as one that achieves moral excellence and

enhances community and vitality among humans.^{24 25 26}

Reflections on the Vanity

One way or the other, everyone is desirous to have a meaningful life. In fact, at the root of the cry for economic equality is the desire for people to be financially empowered, so that they can use their financial resources as one of the means towards achieving meaningful living. From a moral standpoint, one of the reasons why some rich persons and those in power set and defend unjust systems that continue to enrich them while impoverishing others is due to a toxic materialism that fails to see the true value of things in the world. A common platitude is that people are supposed to be loved while things are supposed to be used; but the challenge in the world is that people are being used while things are loved. This calls for the need for people generally to detach themselves from the inordinate desire towards acquiring material things or from the inordinate love of the material things in their possession. This is to ensure that we are sensitive enough to give or allow others have what is due to them. Doing this requires and

¹⁴ Metz, T. *Meaning in Life*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

¹⁵ Seligman, M & Royzman, E. "Happiness: The Three Traditional Theories, Authentic Happiness." University of Pennsylvania, 2003.

¹⁶ Joseph, M. & Jiyun, W. "The Pleasant Life, the Engaged Life, and the Meaningful Life: What about the Balanced Life?" *Journal of Happiness Studies* 10, no. 2, 2007: 183.

¹⁷ Deeza, Burabari Sunday. "Asceticism: A Match Towards the Absolute." *IAFOR Journal of Ethics, Religion & Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (2017).

¹⁸ Klosko, G. ed. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

¹⁹ Thurman, Robert A F. "Tibetan Buddhist Perspectives on Asceticism." *Asceticism*, May 23, 2002, 108.

²⁰ Thurman, R. "Tibetan Buddhist Perspectives on Asceticism." *Asceticism*, May 23, 2002, 108–18.

²¹ Mastin, L. *The Basics of Philosophy*. London: University of London Press, 2008.

²² Sharma, G. "Relevance of Arthur Schopenhauer's Pessimism in Modern Times." *Anthropology* 4, no. 3. 2016.

²³ Encyclopaedia. "Hindu and Buddhism Asceticism," 2019.

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/hindu-and-buddhist-asceticism>.

²⁴ Molefe, M. "Personhood and a Meaningful Life in African Philosophy." *South African Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2, 2020: 194.

²⁵ Metz, T. "African Theories of Meaning in Life: A Critical Assessment." *South African Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2, 2020: 113.

²⁶ Fayemi, K. "Personhood in a Transhumanist Context: An African Perspective." *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 7, no. 1, 2018: 53–78.

understanding of the transient nature of things, commonly called vanity.

What then is vanity? While the idea of vanity can be traced back to the puritan worldview of the Stoics and Cynics, its popular usage in contemporary times, gained currency from the biblical book of Ecclesiastes. The authorship of the book is often attributed to Solomon. The introductory lines of this biblical passage reads: “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”²⁷ This avowal is also found at the end of the book.²⁸ As such, this idea forms the backdrop upon which the main message of the book of Ecclesiastes is based. Understanding the contextual application of vanity becomes important at this point in order to avoid misreading this idea to mean an invitation to a life of meaninglessness.

The book of Ecclesiastes was originally written in Hebrew. The repetitive use of the phrase, “vanity of vanities,” is a product of translating from the way in which the Hebrew language creates superlatives. For example, consider the way the Hebrew Bible uses “Lord of Lords” to describe the supreme Lordship of God over the universe. Hence, “vanity of vanities” was a way of describing that which is most vain or futile.²⁹

Vanity is gotten from the translation of the Hebrew word הֶבֶל (*hebel*), which means “vapour” or “breath.” Literally, it is difficult to pursue and catch vapour because it easily fades away; it is taken to mean that which is difficult grasp; that which is fleeting or transitory. It is used figuratively to designate the futility of life. Other words for vanity would be worthless, meaningless, absurd, and unbeneficial.³⁰

The repeated use of the word “vanity” calls for a philosophical, ideological, anthropological, theological and ethical consideration in order to comprehend the enigmatic issues of human existence raised by Solomon. Robert Chisolm observes that “To appreciate fully the meaning of a text, one must understand the historical context from which it derives and the cultural realities that it reflects and assumes.”³¹ As such, the literature of Ecclesiastes, like every other biblical book, grew out of the social, political, economic, and cultural trajectory of the time it was written. Biwul Joel suggests that the use of “vanity” in the book of Ecclesiastes denotes the oppressive economic and political lifestyle of behaviour that was predominant in Hellenistic and/or Ptolemaic Palestine at the time.³² As such, the address of vanity brings to the fore the wisdom obtained from observing the lives of the wealthy and self-confident people in the society, when juxtaposed with those of the powerless and poor.

Being unable to reconcile why the lives of rich aristocrats, royal officials, and other Jews with affluence and power were characterized by insensitivity to plight of the oppressed and the poor; the author of Ecclesiastes “attacks the prosperity theology prevalent in his day which correlated character and the attainment of wealth.”³³ Biwul argues that:

The purpose was to evaluate critique, caution and deter by offering wise practical counsel to people in governance and those with the privilege of riches to tread life with

²⁷ Eccl. 1:2

²⁸ Eccl. 12:8

²⁹ Morrison, J. *Ecclesiastes: Discerning Life's Purpose*. Georgia: Lakewood Press, 2020.

³⁰ Harrison, R. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eardmans, 1969.

³¹ Chisholm, R. *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998: 149.

³² Biwul, J. “The Use of *Hebel* in Ecclesiastes: A Political and Economic Reading.” *HTS Theologies Studies / Theological Studies* 73, no. 3, 2017.

³³ Middlemas, J. “Ecclesiastes Gone 'Sideways.’” *The Expository Times* 118, no. 5, 2007: 220.

utmost caution in view of the transitory and unpredictable nature of things and of existence itself. Such a guiding principle would redirect the affairs of people who are more concerned with the quest to amass more wealth and more recognition at the corridor of power for perpetual political and economic control.³⁴

Hence, when the quest for power, wealth, and fame springs from gross selfishness and greed that is devoid of respect for the inalienable dignity of the human person, such pursuit and the life of that person can be referred to as *hebel* (vanity). Solomon here cautions against the tendency to throw away our moral compass in the pursuit of transitory things. He draws our consciousness to “the total insecurity of life... to warn against illusions”³⁵ and the deception of wealth and power. As such, Solomon:

Uses *hebel* as a literary rhetorical device as an evaluative grid to critique and indict the negative behaviour of the politically powerful and the wealthy, to caution against the reckless abuse of political and economic power to their benefit by those who live in privilege in society, and lastly to give counsel for an appropriate application of such privileged power for the good of society vis-à-vis the transitory, transient and unpredictable nature of human existence.³⁶

By this, he meant to refocus the attention of individuals to the application of universal laws in all our affairs so as to ensure a better humane society.

One consequence of this idea of vanity and the futility of human life is a propensity towards an ascetic worldview. This could

lead to withdrawal, discipline, and simplicity of life. It is often considered as some kind of marginal living. The argument against this idea is that such a worldview lacks the necessary drive to keep the progress of the human society going forward. This position is further stretched to connote that those who practice the ascetic lifestyle end up in a self-absorbed and self-righteous attitude to life, consequently leading to a meaningless life.

However, an ascetic approach to life in itself does not necessarily lead to a retrogressive state of human affairs or a meaningless life. It depends on the ideology and philosophy behind such ascetic attitude to life. If the reason for an ascetic approach to life is because one considers the material universe in itself to be bad, then such asceticism becomes inimical to the one who practices and the society within which it is practiced. Contrarily, when an ascetic disposition to life springs from a desire to overcome the lower passions of man through discipline; not because the tangible and intangible elements of these passions are bad in themselves, but so that one is not enslaved by them, such asceticism becomes profitable to the individual and advances human society. This is because, at face value, while it may seem that such persons are disinterested in life, they end up more positively involved with life. It was Emile Durkheim who noted that “We cannot detach ourselves from (the profane) without doing violence to our nature and without painfully wounding our instincts.”³⁷ By such ascetic discipline, individuals become masters over their passions, desires, occupations, and possessions. As such, it becomes easier for them to use all of these resources for their good and the good of others.

Sometimes, in order to understand the nature of a thing, it is best to also look at that

³⁴ Biwul, “The Use of *Hebel* in Ecclesiastes: A Political and Economic Reading,” 9.

³⁵ Von Rad, G. *Old Testament Theology Volumes I & II*. MA: Peabody, 2005: 456.

³⁶ Biwul, “The Use of *Hebel* in Ecclesiastes: A Political and Economic Reading,” 1.

³⁷ Durkheim, E. *The Elementary Form of Religious Life*. New York: Collier Books, 1961: 351.

thing from outside of it- more like a spectator. That is why it is often said that one cannot be a judge in one's own case because it would impede objectivity (*nemo iudex in causa sua*). So also, the ascetic man is able to step back from reality and look at it objectively. He is then able to understand the true nature of things. He understands the illusions of life and its transitory nature. Hence, he gains wisdom on how to prioritize his desires from the highest ideals to the least. This makes him prudent in decision making so that he does not sacrifice the ultimate ideals of human life and happiness for those transitory things which do not eventually grant the satisfaction they initially promise while they were being pursued.

Such a disciplined man will honestly and legitimately work for money but will not collect bribe because he does not desire money to the extent of compromising his conscience and selling the rights of his fellow men. Such a disciplined man will not use power in order to oppress but to serve because he knows he cannot remain in power forever, and it would be better to immortalize his name as servant leader who helped his people realize their goals, than a tyrant who devoured the people he was meant to protect. Knowing that no one will live forever to enjoy affluence and influence, such a disciplined man will not become a prey to greed but will be generous with his resources, and be just enough to allow others have access to the just rewards of their labours. Such a disciplined man will know that no amount of money, wealth or fame is worth exchanging for the life of a human person. Such a disciplined life will deter men and women from abusing their bodies for things that cannot buy their lives or dignity.

The history of the human race even confirms that most of the greatest geniuses (e.g. Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein), philosophers (e.g. Pythagoras, Socrates and

Plato), social-political reformers (e.g. Karl Marx, Mahatma Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King Jnr), religious leaders (e.g. Moses, Jesus, Buddha, and Confucius), philanthropists (e.g. Keanu Reeves and Mother Teresa); all had affiliations towards an ascetic way of life. Consequently, rather than leading to meaningless living and retrogression in the human state of affairs, this ascetic lifestyle helped in keeping them focused on their goal and the true meaning and ultimate values of life.

Meaningful Living and the Moral Consideration for the Needs of the Poor: An Earth-Eco-Socialist Perspective

From the foregoing discourse, two broad approaches to life appear. Those who adopt an objective or transcendental poise towards life often approach it from an ascetic perspective while those who endorse personal desires are wont to approach life hedonistically. However, the recent concerns being raised about vanity direct our attention to the fact that the approach to life that is prevalent seems to be the latter. Perhaps, this trend has something to do with the growing capitalist orientation framing the socio-economic and even moral sensibility of the global community. This is a huge factor behind the oppression of the poor.

Capitalism as used here refers to the leading economic system in the Western world since the fall of feudalism. This system privatizes the means of production, and is controlled and operated via free markets. It is otherwise known as free enterprise economy, or free market economy.³⁸ According to Klein David capitalism can be defined as:

An economic and social system in which the means of production are privately owned. The owners, or capitalists, appropriate the surplus product created by the workers. This

³⁸ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Feudalism," *Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite*, Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014.

appropriation leads to the accumulation of more capital, the amassing of wealth, further investment, and thus the expansion of capitalism.

Commodities are produced for the purpose of generating profit and promoting accumulation. Within the capitalist system, individuals pursue their self-interests against competition and impersonal forces of the market.³⁹

This reveals that the incentive behind capitalist ideology is the procurement and amassing of ever-growing wealth. Much of the gains realized are then further engaged in making more profits. Thus, investments are majorly made, not with the intention of meeting social needs, but to make more money. This means that any undesirable consequence from this scheme will be treated as a mere collateral damage for the greater cause of wealth accumulation. It possesses a self-motivation that care less about human needs, will or desires. Therefore, every other forms of life are merely regarded as resources for its goal of capital accumulation.

A capitalist approach towards a meaningful life would be one that endorses the aggressive pursuit of wealth and personal gratification. With such a system that exploits labour and treats human beings as a mere means to an end, one can easily intuit how such a sensibility would weaken the moral restraint in resisting the temptation of pursuing wealth at all cost, even when the price to pay involves human lives, or other morally reprehensible actions. This emphasizes the worrisome tendency to pursue things of finite values, at the expense of things of infinite values.

As a recommendation to cushion against

this tendency, the paper endorses an earth-eco-socialist orientation, which is communalistic in nature and committed to the holistic survival of all persons in a community. This is with the view of demonstrating how earth-eco-socialism can help in achieving the meaningful life on values that are harmonious with nature and other humans. This perspective marks a departure from the prevailing capitalist emphasis on endless material accumulation and exploitation of the environment, which impacts on the capacity of others to aspire to meaningful existence.

Earth-eco-socialism is a robust eco-socialist approach to sustainable communities which recognizes the need to address the social, economic, and ecological roots of ecosystems. It is primarily based on the principle that preservation of the earth and the life it supports supersedes the interests of few persons. In this regard therefore, Earth-eco-socialism- as propounded by Ojomo Philomena (2019), is based on the belief that the need for development and social progress should be based on principles which on one hand, provide the avenue for confronting social and economic problems, and on the other hand, for arresting environmental crises through laws and democratic principles, without sacrificing the needs of humans.⁴⁰ However, in this paper, we are less concerned the ecological aspect of the theory and more interested in its socialist or communal outlook on meeting the needs of others.

Earth-eco-socialism considers the issues of poverty, global environmental pollution and economic exploitation, as interconnected. Earth-eco-socialism is more of a moral than political endorsement of the right that human beings and land

³⁹ Klein, D. *Capitalism & Climate Change: The Science and Politics of Global Warming*. USA: Amazon, 2015: 82.

⁴⁰ Ojomo, P. "Niger Delta Environmental Crises and the Limitations of Africanizing Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic: Towards an Earth-Eco-Socialist Model." In *African Environmental Ethics: The International Library of Environmental, Agricultural and Food Ethics*, Chemhuru, M. (eds). Vol. 29. Cham: Springer,

possesses. It encompasses socialism- a principle that advances the virtue of social solidarity, the collective good, mutual benefit, and collective interest. Furthermore, it accentuates the interrelatedness of all humans. This means that the while some rich persons may be living in their castles and thinking that whatever happens to the poor has no effect on them, earth-eco-socialism points out that whatever happens to the poor will not only stay with them; its effect, like a ripple will be felt by all.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought this reality into sharp focus. From a single country, the virus spread to other nations of the world, forcing a total lockdown. Almost immediately, everyone become everyone's brother's keeper, because the risk of one person contacting the virus would be the risk of all. As such, there is a sense in which we can say that the vulnerability of the poor during the Covid-19 pandemic became the vulnerability of all. But beyond the virus, there are many ways we are all connected and interrelated as humans without knowing it; the virus only made this reality more evident. So, even if the poor will not be taken care of for their sake, those who are better off can still see the care of the poor as taking care of themselves, since by making the lives of the poor better, they will be healing a larger ecosystem to which they all belong, and as a result, enjoy healthier, better and more fulfilled lives.

This theory prescribes the necessity of promoting the good of the earth and its inhabitants rather than the interests of a selected few. Earth-eco-socialism therefore emphasizes the understanding that a socialist orientation and a comprehension of the intrinsic value of the earth are invaluable to our desire for meaningful living. Hence, against the capitalist idea of living life by amassing wealth by all means necessary, meaningful living for an earth-eco-socialist would entail a purposeful consideration for other fellow humans. This explains the

theory's emphasis on cooperation rather than competition. Indeed, the resources of the earth are enough for everyone's need but not everyone's greed. The wide margin between the "haves" and the "have-nots" of the earth is due to latent greed that drives capitalism. Life would not be meaningful from an earth-eco-socialist standpoint when a person lives in abundance and those around such an individual are living in abject lack. Fulfilment in life therefore springs from the sharing with others and giving them a chance to pursue their own goals. While it seems that this places the burden on those who are privileged in the society, it is to be noted that no one is too poor that he or she does not have something to give, tangibly or intangibly.

Conclusion

From this discourse, we see that the poor were not only vulnerable during the Covid-19 pandemic, but some are still recovering from the impact of the pandemic. This has limited some persons from satisfactorily pursuing a meaningful life. As we have seen, the major factors responsible for the prevalent poverty we see are artificial (man-made). This happens because the life of vanity has blinded many persons from seeing the true value of things. Thus, many persons fail to see that we are all connected as a single system and the misfortune of some is going to affect all. This informs the need for an earth-eco-socialist sensibility that emphasizes a true concern for others, not merely as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. According to an earth-eco-socialist sensibility, in this post pandemic era where we are trying to heal from the inequalities and wounds occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic, we should all imbibe a conscious consideration for others in the society, in such a manner that the pursuit of our own goals would cohere and assist others fulfil their own goals.

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