

The necessity of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics in Curbing Social and Ecological Vices in West Africa

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Abstract

The West African sub-region made of the countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is plagued by many social and ecological vices. The word, “vice” is used here to designate social ills, negative human behaviours causing environmental degradation, crimes, unhealthy human proclivities, inclinations, etc. Social vices include armed robbery, hostage-taking, kidnapping, human trafficking, internet fraud, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, electoral violence, and so forth. Ecological vices are inclusive of oil bunkering, deforestation, illegal mining, marine and atmospheric pollution, destruction of endangered species, inhumane treatment of animals, etc. Many of these vices certainly take place in West Africa. Vices harm social development, peace, and governance; invariably they equally impact the natural environment. The cardinal position of this paper is that society needs persons of virtuous character to tackle and conquer vices. In light of this, Aristotelian Virtue Ethics (AVE) is critically appraised and evaluated. A critical hermeneutics of AVE is done and the situations of social and ecological vices in the region are also deciphered. The relevance of AVE to the region to combat these vices is also presented. The paper finds and concludes that aspects of AVE are still relevant and can be helpful to the region.

Keywords: Aristotle, Virtue, Ethics, Social, Ecological, Vices, and West Africa

Introduction

The world is inundated with various social and ecological problems such as corruption, inept leadership, terrorism, nepotism, deforestation, marine and atmospheric pollution and other forms of environmental degradation. Though the great Greek philosopher lived in ancient times, aspects of his thoughts can be relevant in resolving some of today's problems. The paper aims to situate the relevance of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics (AVE) to the region of West Africa. West Africa like other regions of the world such as Southern Africa, North Africa, Middle East, South East Asia, North America, etc can be a proper area of study in its own right. While the implications of AVE can be applied to other regions of the world, the concern here is with West Africa. West Africa in this paper will be used to designate the members' countries of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS). ECOWAS (2016) lists the countries as: “Togo, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, The Gambia, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Cabo Verde, Burkina Faso, and Benin.”The fifteen countries of this region share many things in common. ECOWAS (2016) writes that they have geographic and cultural ties, common economic concerns and interests, and some have cultural and ethnic lines cutting across one another.

It is a shared common interest of the member states of the ECOWAS that crime, social evils, vices, and other things that trouble the region should be eradicated. If vices are not curbed in the region it will impede the goals of ECOWAS which include regional integration, economic growth, political development, stability, etc. Terwase, Abdul-Talib, and Zengeni (2015) state that among the challenges the region is facing are bad governance, the poor state of technology, insufficient diversification, infrastructural problem, lack of transparency and accountability, etc. There is equally much environmental degradation in the form of deforestation, desertification, and terrorism, atmospheric and marine pollution taking place in the region.

Social and ecological vices are impediments to the good life that should be obtainable in this region and for the people of the region. This is why it is important to propose what can help in promoting the good life in the region. This paper examines critically AVE to understand what it is and how it can be applied to the above area of study. The paper also does hermeneutics which is interpreting some key concepts in Aristotle. The paper applies the ideas of Aristotle to the region of study. Parts of its findings and conclusions are that there are ideas from Aristotle which are useful to the contemporary situation in West Africa.

Conceptual Explications

What is virtue ethics? According to Hursthouse and Pettigrove (2018), “A virtue is an excellent trait of character. It is a disposition well entrenched in its possessor—something that, as we say, goes all the way down, unlike a habit such as being a tea-drinker—to notice, expect, value, feel, desire, choose, act, and react in certain characteristic ways” (sec.1.1). Virtue is rooted in the inwardness of a person. Dimmock and Fisher (2017) cite Aristotle saying: “virtues are character dispositions or personality traits.” They both state again that “Aristotle refers to virtues as character traits or psychological dispositions. Virtues are those particular dispositions that are appropriately related to the situation and, to link back to our function, encourage actions that are in accordance with reason.”

Asogwa (2012) notes that while morality is concerned with the imposition of rules on what is right and what is wrong, ethics philosophically seek an understanding of what is considered moral in the light of right and wrong to ensure they are in line with first principles. He notes also that ethicists evaluate the standard, criterion, and fundamental basis for what is right or wrong. Asogwa (2012) states it in another way saying:

Ethics investigates value concepts such as good, bad, right or wrong to know whether there is a common ground in their understanding by individuals and groups and also to know whether these values are arbitrarily informed by emotions, etc or whether they are objectively part of reality, of existence beyond subjectivity. (p.34)

Echekwube (1999) defines ethics as the “philosophical discipline” that rationally examines human behaviour in the light of human responsibility and freedom to see their acceptability or non-acceptability. Mautner (2000) says ethics is a rational enquiry on standards of wrong or right concerning human conduct and character.

Having defined virtue and ethics, what then is virtue ethics (VE)? Hursthouse (2018) writes that normative ethics has as one of its three main approaches VE, which chief concern is virtuous life or ethical character; and this makes it different from consequentialist ethics (that focuses on actions’ consequences) and deontology (that focuses on rules or duties). What are the subtle distinctions, Hursthouse (2018) states further that in any situation for instance if there is a need to render help to a needy person the utilitarian thinks of the outcome, the creation of wellbeing, and the deontologist is concerned with acting in accord with the moral rule, while the concern of the virtue ethicist is that helping is the benevolent or charitable thing worth doing. For the Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica (2017) who concur with the above, they note that VE centres on "traits of character that are essential to human flourishing" (par 1). Swanton (2015) writes that VE as a subset of normative ethics is opposed to Kant and Consequentialism, and it is rooted in the tradition of “eudaimonism” championed by Aristotle. Swanton (2015) says that excellence of character for acting rightly and striving for the good life and right dispositions characterises this form of ethics. VE is concerned with examining and studying human behaviour concerning wrong and right from the perspective of what is virtuous or vice. AVE is VE as propounded by the philosopher Aristotle.

Other terms worth defining are social vices and ecological vices. Nordquist(2019) affirms that vice means an “immoral or undesirable practice.” Harak (2007) asserts that a vice “is a bad habit, things one consistently and repeatedly does and/or feels that are morally bad” (p. 1457). Harak (2007) rightly notes that in Thomistic philosophy the vice has as its opposite virtue. Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division (1997), “vices are dispositions to commit sins. As repeated

good actions produce virtues, disposition to make good choices, so repeated sins produce dispositions to make bad choices: vice” (p. 693). Both social and ecological vices emanate from human beings who engage consistently in immoral, undesirable human and social practices, and wrongs that impede social progress and environmental wellbeing. What is called a social vice does not only negatively affect humans or the social environment. Many social vices also cause environmental harm. Take for instance greed, corruption, oil bunkering, etc. In this work, ecological shall be used interchangeably with environmental.

Literature Review

Dimmack and Fisher (2017) discuss AVE which is agent-centred and how it is different from act-centred ethics. They also discuss its doctrine of “eudemonia” and teleology. They note that because his ethics are not rule-centred some persons disagree with him. Sachs (2019) examines the meaning of habit, the mean, and noble in Aristotle’s ethics. In their work, Kucukuysal and Beyhan (2011) examine moral values and right conduct in the light of AVE as spelt out in the *Nicomachean Ethics* showing that virtue can be cultivated and learnt. Simpson (1992) shows that VE is traceable to Aristotle, and its contemporary form arose to critique Kantianism or deontology, and utilitarianism or consequentialism. VE focuses on the judgment of the acting agent and not on acts, and a good person is a person of moral virtue. For Papouli (2018), Aristotle’s notion of VE is relevant to social works and workers for through it they can learn moral character and conduct. The virtues mentioned in Aristotle are discussed in this work and criticisms of his ethics are also examined. Ohayi (n.d) exposes and describes the notion and types of virtue in Aristotle and equally states the contemporary relevance such as helping in building moral characters in leaders.

There is a dearth of research on the issue of social and ecological vices in West Africa. A Google search of that phrase on 10th December 2019 yielded little or no relevant result. Marc, Verjee, and Mogaka (2015) examine the problem of fragility with security in the region. They examine the issues of conflicts, migration, the inclusion of young people, challenges in the extractive industries, and the role that ECOWAS can play in all of these. Key lessons in resilience after conflict are drawn from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire. Marc (2015) devotes his paper to examining six key areas that can promote security and stability in the region. For him, the key areas are reduction of regional and country inequalities, improvement of land

management with reduction of land conflicts, improvement of the management of revenues from extractive industries and the benefits, improvement of migrants' rights, fostering economic participation of youths, enhancement of the justice and security sectors. Using examples from Ghana and Burkina Faso, Brown and Crawford (2008) aver that climate change is no longer just an issue of energy or environment but that it now impacts international peace as it causes conflicts, tensions, food insecurity, and redistributes populations. Adu and Denkyirah (2018) study the relationship between economic growth and environmental quality. They conclude in their paper on the need for improved policies of intervention to combat environmental degradation. Alemika (2013) is another work that discusses issues of social vices in West Africa. It does not use the term vices but discusses criminal activities in West Africa. The work states different kinds of crimes such as human trafficking, forgery, drug trafficking, internet fraud, cigarette smuggling, arms trafficking, robbery, etc. All these organised and often transnational crimes are rooted in violence and corruption and negatively impact governance, society, stability, rule of law, stability, etc in the region.

As noted above, there are resources on AVE but these resources that speak of the contemporary relevance of Aristotle do not apply the findings to the social and ecological predicaments in the West African sub-region. The innovative contribution of this paper is that it applies AVE to combating social and ecological vices in West Africa. While the papers dealing with West Africa above do not use the word vices in describing wrong and bad behaviours or crimes or ills in the region; the reality is that they are vices. It is from this perspective that social and ecological ills in West Africa are called vices. It is to some of these vices that the paper now turns.

Some Social and Ecological Vices in West Africa

The West African region like any other region of the world can be studied in its own right. There are studies on Southern Africa, Eastern Africa, South East Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, the Caribbean, etc. The common economic and political interests of the regional organisation, ECOWAS, and its resolve to act as one unit to mitigate the predicaments of the region justify looking at the region as one and proposing a common solution that can apply across the region.

All the social and ecological vices in the region cannot be outlined and discussed in a little paper like this. Some vices will be taken at random and examined. One vice that pervades the region is terrorism. Terrorism is immoral and bad behaviour and is a vice. Terrorist attacks by Boko Haram have taken place in Nigeria regularly for many years now. Nigeria's North East is being regularly rampaged by Boko Haram fighters. Terrorist attacks have also affected Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, etc. Thousands of lives and properties worth millions of Naira have been destroyed in these attacks. Munshi and Peel (2019) corroborate this fact of terrorists attacking the Sahel region of West Africa. There is no doubt that terrorists lack human compassion and have an evil character as they care nothing for the well-being of society. All that they care for is their dysfunctional and pernicious ideology; maiming, killing, bombing, and destroying to achieve their negative goals.

Violence is another undesirable human behaviour in the region. Unjustified violence is a vice. Violence destroys human lives and properties. It makes society unstable. Marc, Verjee, and Mogaka (2015) reveal that while conflicts of large-scale and civil wars have dropped, other forms of violence such as political violence, electoral violence, drug trafficking, extremism, maritime piracy, and ethnonational tensions have arisen. Marc (2015) relates that a country like Guinea Bissau has experienced a civil war and many coups in the last 15 years. The author just mentioned notes that Guinea Bissau is also experiencing sporadic power and water supply. What is said of this country could be said of countries like Nigeria, Togo, Benin, etc concerning water and power supply. In many West African countries, social services are very poor, and social infrastructures are in a weak state.

Corruption and embezzlement of public funds are rampant in the region. Corruption is a major vice in the region. It has led to crippled social amenities, poverty, malnutrition, poor governance, environmental insecurities, etc. Money that should be used in the development of social amenities, consolidation of democratic institutions, alleviation of poverty, and equipping educational institutions and health facilities are stolen and deposited in foreign bank accounts to the detriment of the people of the region. Onwujekwe et al.(2019), Open Society Initiative of West Africa (2019), Atuobi (2007) and many other studies confirm the reality that corruption is rampant in Africa and killing the region. The United Nations (2003) in her *Convention against Corruption* states that "corruption is a threat to ...to the stability and security of societies,

undermining the institutions of democracy, ethical values and justice and jeopardizing sustainable development and the rule of law” (preamble). Corruption is a vice, a social evil, and unethical. Social vices in the region also come in the form of organized crimes or criminal activities. Alemika (2013) shows that social crimes in the region include internet fraud, advanced fee fraud, human trafficking, forgery, diamond smuggling, oil bunkering, armed kidnapping, robbery, etc.

That West Africa is facing ecological or environmental challenges and problems is a fact. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (2018) states that the region is facing challenges such as degradation precipitated by irregular climatic change, pollution, nuisance caused by industries and human settlement, poverty, ignorance, lack of communication and information, depletion of natural resources, etc. Many of these environmental problems or challenges are anthropocentric. They are consequences of human actions and some are caused by human vices. Out of greed for profit, resource wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and other countries of the region have been fought. Gas flaring is a daily occurrence in Nigeria. Deforestation is ravaging Nigeria, Ghana, and other countries in the region.

These are not just challenges. They are ethical matters as they border on undesirable human behaviours. It is human beings who cause terrorism. It is human beings who take hostages and kidnap them for profit. It is human beings who cause resource wars. Natural resources on their own do not cause wars. Deforestation is precipitated by human greed, poverty, etc. Ethical living has a role to play in ending these vices. This will be the concern of the paper after presenting AVE.

The Scope and Domain of Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics

Aristotle lived from 384 to 322. His place of birth is Stageira, northeastern Greece. He was born to a doctor-father. He is one of the greatest philosophers of the Western tradition. He enrolled at the age of seventeen and studied under Plato in the Academy, having spent about twenty years there studying, teaching, and lecturing. It was after the death of his mentor Plato that he left the Academy. And he tutored Alexander the Great for 4 years. In the year 335 BCE, he began school at Lyceum in Athens. He lived up to sixty-two years before he died of illness. Aristotle’s works cover biology, physics, ethics, politics, government, geology, medicine, etc. In

the beginning, all branches of study were under philosophy. Though his theories are of ancient origin and were written within a different context there are one or two insights from him that can be helpful to contemporary society. He was impacted by the works of Plato, though a never thorough-going Platonist. The writings of Aristotle include *Categories*, *Prior Analytics*, *Physics*, *De Anima*, *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics*, *Poetics*, etc.

Aristotle's ethics espoused in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is grounded on the notion that all human actions are teleologically aimed at *eudaimonia* (happiness). Sachs (2019) writes: "Standard interpretations of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* usually maintain that Aristotle... emphasizes the role of habit in conduct. It is commonly thought that virtues, according to Aristotle, are habits and that the good life is a life of mindless routine" (par 1). But it is important to note as Sachs (2019) indicates these are not precise translations of the ancient Greek texts for when Aristotle uses the Greek word *hexis* to name moral virtue it is not passive habituation he means but rather a state in which something is actively held unto, implying "when one holds oneself in a stable equilibrium of the soul, to choose the action knowingly and for its own sake. This stable equilibrium of the soul is what constitutes character" (par 3). A virtuous person has a stable character and does not just occasionally perform good things. Aristotle (1908) says a virtuous person "delights in virtuous actions and is vexed at vicious ones, as a musical man enjoys beautiful tunes but is pained at bad ones" (NE 9.9). Lawhead (2002) says in Aristotle, that intellectual virtue can be taught but moral virtues can only be acquired by practice.

Westacott (2018) rightly notes that VE traces its origin to moral philosophical thinking from Greek and Roman philosophers especially Socrates, Plato, and also Aristotle. About the history of VE, the author just mentioned writes that Stoic philosophers like Marcus Aurelius and Seneca emphasised character for the good life in their philosophies; the medieval philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), David Hume (1711-1776) also advocated the key role of a character in moral living. For a long period, VE was sidelined. But with the weakness of law-centred ethics, some scholars began to reflect on Aristotelian ethics and this will bring about as it is the rebirth of VE in the middle part of the twentieth century. Westacott (2018) notes that in the 20th century the writings of scholars like Elizabeth Anscombe, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Philippa Foot have brought it back to the limelight.

Westcott (2018) avers that to the fundamental questions: “How should I live” and “How should I decide to live?”; the religious answer is to abide and keep God’s rule as stated in the bible or Koran, etc; for the Utilitarianist it is to promote happiness and avoid pain; for Kantian ethicists, act rationally the way you would want a person to act in a similar situation. Compared with these ethics that put focus on obligation, duty, wrongness, or rightness of deeds; Westacott (2018) opines that Plato and Aristotle emphasised the kind of person one should be, the traits, characters, and desirable qualities he should have at all times in all situations. Westacott (2018) cites Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to say that *arête* (virtue), excellence enables a thing to carry out its function, and there are specific virtues for specific persons and situations; these virtues help rational human beings to lead the good life and flourish.

In Aristotle (1908) there are intellectual virtues that are concerned with thinking and reasoning, and moral virtues are concerned with action or acting. A morally virtuous person for Aristotle habitually and continuously acts arising from the excellent character traits of good personality that the person has. Aristotle (1908) in the NE writes that virtue or human excellence is “a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e., the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.”

The person of virtue acts always to avoid extremes and acts from practical wisdom (*phronesis*) in knowing what is required in every given situation. A virtuous person will act avoiding both extremes of stinginess and extravagance. Dimmock and Fisher (2017) rightly note that in Aristotle, virtue is not feeling in itself but has to do with the inward ability and “appropriate psychological disposition” in attending with the proper response to the feeling (this is the Golden Mean). Dimmock and Fisher (2017) in the table below show what virtue is in managing both deficiency and excess

Feeling/Emotion	Vice of Deficiency	Virtuous Disposition (Golden Mean)	Vice of Excess
Anger	Lack of spirit	Patience	Irascibility
Shame	Shyness	Modesty	Shamefulness
Fear	Cowardice	Courage	Rashness
Indignation	Spitefulness	Righteousness	Envy

In addition to feelings, Dimmock and Fisher (2017) say Aristotle also suggests that we may virtuously respond to situations. He suggests the following examples.

Situation	Vice of Deficiency	Virtuous Disposition (Golden Mean)	Vice of Excess
Social conduct	Cantankerousness	Friendliness	Self-serving flattery
Conversation	Boorishness	Wittiness	Buffoonery
Giving money	Stinginess	Generosity	Profligacy

The doctrine of the mean does not mean everything has a mean. For instance, you should not say to a thief, “Steal moderately.” Some things are bad in themselves and have no mean, they are to be shunned.

As with every other issue, some scholars think that AVE is beneficial and some see no value in it. Westacott (2018) is quite helpful here again affirming that those who support AVE say it is broad ethics emphasising human flourishing and not just rules; it is flexible not just based on categorical imperative rather the morally wise person knows how to act in each situation (not just to tell a lie or break a promise), and it is attentive to inner feelings and has enhanced feminist ethics. A major criticism of AVE as Westacott (2018) notes is that it does not tell you how to act in ethical dilemmas, it just tells you to act virtuously. It is also said that character can be based on upbringing or temperaments and so it is not right to just blame people for what they have no control over.

Dimmock and Fisher (2017) write that excellence is developed over time through efforts and practice, and as regard AVE, virtuous traits are developed over time. You develop virtues by practice. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* says: "... men become builders by building" and "... we become just by doing just acts." Dimmock and Fisher (2017) state that:

We might know that a piece of brick must go into a particular place but we are good builders only when we know how to place that brick properly. Building requires practical skill and not merely intellectual knowledge and the same applies to developing virtuous character traits. Ethical characters are developed by practical learning and habitual action and not merely by intellectual teaching. (no 24)

Composta (2005) interprets Aristotle noting that: "The good act requires the support of the virtues ('arete'-an act does not make a virtue, just as one swallow does not make a springtime), which is defined as a 'habit of correct appetite' (*hexis horthes horexeos*), i.e. a stable disposition of the character towards good" (p. 285-286). As Composta (2005) writes: virtues are classified into two groups in Aristotle- the ethical virtues and dianoethical virtues; the ethical virtues are justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude, while the dianoethical virtues are wisdom, science, and 'intellectus' that regulates prudence" (p. 286). Stumpf and Fieser (2003) write that other virtues discussed by Aristotle are liberality, friendship, self-respect, and magnificence. Johnston (2006) states that for Aristotle the good life is a life of happiness, and happiness is a soul's activity in line with virtue. The just mentioned author notes that living in line with virtue is acting to avoid extremes in all things.

Mukherjee and Ramaswamy (2007) reveal that in Aristotle, education which trains human impulses and emotions; inculcates moral, civic, and social values in human beings, cultivates good citizens and good persons, and creates a good political society is given a prime place. Education teaches human beings to practice moral virtue and do right. Adams and Dyson (2007) note that in Aristotle's "polis," education is for the realisation and cultivation of moral virtues; and through it "habitual modes of behaviour" are gained through continuous training and repetition; also a person becomes virtuous through the doing of virtuous acts.

Curbing Social and Ecological Vices through Aristotelian Virtue Ethics

There are many reasons to tackle social and ecological vices. Alimeka (2013) writing concerning organised crimes, which this paper names as vices, says that they drain countries of

financial resources needed for development, weaken the capacity of governments, corrupt government business, blind public officials who are involved in their social responsibilities as they loot public funds and perpetuate electoral violence. For Alemika (2013b) crimes (and by implication vices) are a threat to international development, peace, and stability. What could be called political and economic vices endanger development and social progress. Still, on organised crimes (vices), Alemika (2013b) writes that the social and economic consequences include: infiltration into and abuse of political power by criminal entrepreneurs, the capture of the state for personal greed even by those indicted for corruption in countries like Nigeria, inability to prosecute criminals by security officers in places like Guinea Bissau, depletion of public funds and laundering public fund to places like Dubai, Europe, America, etc; drug addiction/abuse, and public health emergencies.

Making more economic and political laws and implementing them will not be enough to combat social and ecological vices, crimes, social ills, bad behaviours, and unethical practices. It is human beings in the region who will implement and ensure that laws and policies work. It is human beings who will obey the laws and lead good upright lives. If human beings lack virtuous character it will be difficult for these vices and crimes to be eradicated. Ikoh (2013) states that human capacity building is vital to combating organised crimes. This applies to combating vices and social ills. The human capacity needs to be fortified through training in moral virtues so that persons will have the capacity to resist and overcome the tendencies and inclinations to commit vices. Education in both social and environmental virtues is very important. Healthy human behaviours/virtues such as temperance, prudence, justice, fairness, and altruism will help to protect humans and the environment.

It should be stated right away that the VE of Aristotle is still relevant. Johnston (2006) writes that “Today there is renewed interest in Aristotle’s ethical teaching as societies become diverse and composed of people from many different backgrounds who seek to work out new ways of living together in harmony and mutual respect. It involves coming to terms with conflicting, even contradictory demands and achieving balance and harmony” (p. 17). The vital importance of AVE is that by emphasizing character formation and inward good dispositions in the human person, the person can act rightly in any situation. There is no place for relativism. He does not act in one manner in one situation and acts in another manner in another situation. The

virtuous person has a stable moral character to act for what is benevolent not necessarily what is expedient. In Aristotle, ethics and politics cannot be separated. Mautner (2000) interprets Aristotle thus: “For Aristotle, political theory is continuous with ethics, for man is a political or social animal by nature. Hence it is natural for humans to live in societies and to behave morally towards one another (Politics, Book 1)” (p. 43). In the sub-region, there are many in political power and public offices who see no connection between a virtuous life and politics or the public domain. They are there in power to simply enrich themselves. They commit vices like corruption, embezzling public funds, perpetuating electoral violence, and are agents of organized crime. Their way of life is rooted in Machiavellianism. This ought not to be so. Leaders both in politics and in the public sector should be persons of stable character, excellent behaviour, and seekers of the “eudemonia” of the entire people. Leaders in the region should not only have intellectual virtues but should have moral virtues.

It is human beings in the region who will solve or resolve the social and ecological problems in the region. Vices such as greed, profiteering, kidnapping, hostage-taking, killing, violence, etc are to be eradicated by human beings. These human beings need to be people of excellent character who look not for what they will gain but for the “eudaimonia” (happiness) of the community. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (2018) opines that the environmental challenges in the region need strong environmental governance, sustainable management of resources, promoting environmental information and communication, etc. USAID (2019) equally opines that:

West Africa has a rich natural resource base that includes soil, forest, rangeland, and freshwater and marine resources. Increased pressure on these resources from the rapidly growing population is compounded by the region’s vulnerability to climate shocks such as recurrent drought and rising sea levels. Sound natural resource management (NRM) and improved territorial governance are therefore critical for economic development, food security, peace and security in the region. (par 1)

The role of virtuous human beings cannot be overemphasized. The fact is that all these have to be implemented by human beings, human beings of virtuous character. Johnston (2006) states that Aristotle's emphasis on happiness should not be overlooked for utilitarianism (happiness of the greatest number) which pervades modern ethics and also stresses happiness. Though the mean should be strived at in all situations no deficiency and no excess, the fact remains as Stumpf and Fieser (2003) states:

Although a large number of virtues stand between two extreme vices, there are other actions that have no mean at all. Their very nature already implies badness, such as spite, envy, adultery, theft, and murder. These are bad in themselves and not in their excesses or deficiencies. We are thus always wrong in doing them. (p. 93)

This idea just stated can be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.6. Citizens and leaders should not misunderstand Aristotle's doctrine of the mean (mean is different for different persons) to mean that everything is permissible. Vice is vice, and evil is evil. Social evils or ecological vices should be eradicated not practiced with moderation. Corruption, embezzlement of public funds, stealing, and kidnapping, are bad and should be shunned. It is proper then to understand what moral virtue is and is not. Stumpf and Fieser (2003) aver that "Moral virtue, then, consists of cultivating habits which will spontaneously incline us to take the middle course of action-or simply avoid bad conduct in the case of actions like theft and murder" (p. 94). Vices in the region and globally do not require moderation but total eradication. You will often hear persons in West Africa say, "even if the president or governor steals, it does not matter, in as far as he does not over-steal and he does for the people what they want." This is a wrong perception of leadership. There is nothing like benevolent stealing. The leader should have in his inner being, the disposition that abhors corruption and every social vice. Citizens in the region should observe the character traits and dispositions of those campaigning for power. They should look at the history and way of life of political aspirants. From AVE they should learn to critically examine the lifestyles of aspirants. Some have not shown any traits or inclination for virtuousness in governance. People who have not been virtuous in the lower offices that they occupied should not be given a room in higher offices. Citizens of the region should shun money-bag politics or godfatherism. They should vote for trustworthy persons, not those who bring money or a bag of rice to buy their consciences.

It would not be out of place to mention some criticisms of AVE. Papouli (2018) states that the followings are some criticisms: (1) it is contextual and relative to situations, (2) it is culturally specific and has no universal relevance, and (3) it lacks emphasis on the social and communal. Papouli (2018) equally objects to these objections saying: (1) it is not true that Aristotle is a relativist for as Nussbaum stated Aristotle emphasises human flourishing and acting for the good of the human; (2) to the notion that he does not highlight the social dimensions, it

should be realised that Aristotle connects the virtues to civil life and politics, and they are to be exercised in relationship with others. It should also be noted as Papouli (2018) states that:

In support of her view, recent research findings (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) in the domain of positive psychology, as mentioned earlier, have also shown that... although societies vary in their ethical practices, they all recognize certain virtues such as courage, wisdom and knowledge, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence as universally common. (p. 10-11)

Still, in objecting to the objectors, Papouli (2018) states thus:

MacIntyre (2007), who argued that the virtues of the Aristotelian type were the most complete and attempted to modernize them, claimed that virtue is obtained from daily interaction with other people, in communities of practice and through a trial and error process. Inspired by the Aristotelian virtue theory, finally, Snow (2010) describes virtues as forms of social intelligence because they help us to put ourselves into relations with others in society and to strive to live a good life.(p. 11)

MacIntyre (2007) thinks that Aristotle's VE is still relevant, and can be renewed and reinvented to meet contemporary challenges. For MacIntyre (2007) there is a link between Aristotle and the moral values taught in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, and when religion in schools is attacked, they attack equally Aristotelianism. Ohayi (n.d) rightly notes that in a society such as Nigeria filled with selfishness, egoism, and self-centeredness on the part of leaders; Aristotle is important for emphasising human flourishing, right disposition, and virtuous life. All through West Africa, there is a vital need for both citizens and leaders to opt for virtuous living not living in vices.

Conclusion

The paper agrees with Dimmock and Fisher (2017) who opine that Aristotle did not see VE as the total panacea to life problems and troubles. It is not the sole key to "eudaimonia." Other things like terrorism, violence, disease and untimely death may all affect a person's "eudaimonia." The point this paper makes is that a virtuous life is necessary for coping with all these problems or even mitigating them. For the West African sub-region, there is a need to focus on the character formation of citizens from the moment of birth and not wait until people enter the formal educational setting. Through formation in all sectors of life, people can become

perfect and excellent in moral virtues. The intellectual understanding that moral vices are bad and immoral and should be eradicated is equally important. And through virtuous practices and constant action, people become more virtuous. Emphasizing a life of virtue and condemning vices can help to create a better West African society that is peacefully and environmentally secure and sustainable.

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