An African Theory of Moral Conflict Resolution: A Kwesi Wiredu's Paradigmatic Approach

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Abstract

Kwesi Wiredu, a renowned author and a specialist in African philosophy, an author who hails from Ghana, a distinguished philosopher and an intellectual giant in the field of African philosophy, speaks of his moral theory of "consensus" as a resolution to all moral conflicts. This paper interrogates his theory of "ethical consensus" as a method of moral conflict resolution or moral conflict reconciliation within an African society. It is an exercise in critical and comparative philosophy. Conflict is inevitable, based on differences in values, attitudes and belief systems. conflict is one of the dialectics of diversity. The Nigerian society, for example, is bedevilled with moral crises and conflicts, characterised by growing criminalities, widespread violation of human rights, social and political mistrust, value conflict and corruption. Wiredu, proposes his theory of ethical consensus as a way out. He points to intellectual or mental de-colonisation as the basis for his ethical theory. He attempts a formulation of an indigenous ethical theory that will be adequate to resolve or tackle the moral crises/conflicts of African societies, which originated because Africans took over western value system hook, line

and sinker without critical reflection and without situating these values within an African socio-cultural paradigm. In fact, the propelling force of Wiredu's ethical theory is the disturbing observation that the Africans today live in a cultural flux, characterised by a confused interplay between an indigenous cultural heritage and a foreign cultural legacy of a colonial origin. Implicated at the deepest reaches of this cultural amalgam is the superimposition of western conception of the good on African thought and conduct. Hence, his clarion call for indigenous and authentic African moral and ethical values. Against the background that ethical theories, even though are of universal character, inter-subjective and global cannot be divorced from the culture of the people, Wiredu reflected and explored the ethical concepts of his own people – the Akan of Ghana. We apply Wiredu's ethical theory of conflict resolution to modernity and conclude that *human interest and welfare*, not just *human reason* (as Immanuel Kant wants us to believe), is the basis of an African moral/ethical conflict resolution. Hence, we posit a humanistic theory of conflict resolution which complements Wiredu's ethical consensus theory of conflict resolution.

Key words: Ethical Consensus, Humanism, Morality and Conflict Resolution

Introduction

Kwesi Wiredu[1], a renowned author and a specialist in African philosophy, is one of the foremost and distinguished philosophers and

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[1] Wiredu was born in Kumasi, Ghana on October 3, 1931. He had his university education at both the university of Ghana, Legon and the University of Oxford. He taught Philosophy at the University of Ghana for 23 years, during which time he became the first Head of Department and then Professor. He was until his death recently, a professor of philosophy at the University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, USA, where he taught since 1987. He has published articles in African philosophy, logic and epistemology. He is also the author and editor of numerous books. He has held visiting professorship at the University of California Los Angeles (1979-1980), University of Ibadan, Nigeria (1984), University of Richmond, Virginia as a

intellectual giants in the field of African philosophy. Wiredu's entire philosophical career is focused on casting his philosophical net into his own indigenous conceptual waters. His objective was to "mentally de-colonise"[2] the African mind, especially because of the way in which foreign philosophers and colonialists have intervened in the African culture. Wiredu formulates an indigenous moral theory that will be adequate to resolve or tackle the moral crises in African societies. The reason for the moral crises, according to Wiredu, is that Africans took over western value systems hook, line and sinker without critical reflection. Colonialism, especially, has social, moral, religious, cultural, political and economic effects on Africa. The most devastating of all these is the social and moral, because they go deep into the mind-set of the people and take longer period to eliminate. Today, we are in search of foreign, regional and individualistic moral values, rather than harmoniously utilising our existing African value system.

The propelling force, serving as a catalyst to Wiredu's moral theory of consensus is the disturbing observation that "the African today, as a rule, lives in a cultural flux, characterised by a confused interplay between an indigenous cultural heritage and a foreign cultural legacy of a colonial origin. Implicated at the deepest reaches of this cultural amalgam is the super-imposition by western conceptions of the good on African thought and conduct."[3] Hence, his clarion call for indigenous and authentic African moral values.

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distinguished Professor (1985), Carleton college Minnesota (1986), Duke University North Carolina (1994-1995) and 1999-2001. He has held fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars (1985) and the National Humanities Centre North Carolina (1986). He was also a member of the Committee of Directors of the International Federation of Philosophy Societies from 1983-1998, Vice President of Inter-African Council for Philosophy and Professor Emeritus at the University of South Florida.

[2] By mental decolonisation, Wiredu means analysing and criticising language, values, structures and institutions introduced by the colonial powers.

[3] Kwesi Wiredu, "Custom and Morality: A Comparative Analysis of Some African and Western Concepts of Morals" in Albert G. Mosley (ed), *African*

This paper grounds conflicts resolution on a philosophical foundation, using Wiredu's consensus theory or principle. The engagement is an ethical or moral one. It may be instructive to note that contemporary Africa and Nigeria in particular, is in the grip of social insecurity, political instability and economic crisis due to unrelenting insurgency, mindless criminality, deep seated corruption and ethical/moral decay or crises. Because of these malaise, Nigeria is still struggling to promote peace, justice, unity and sustainable development since her independence over 50 years ago. Hence, our attempt to develop, in this paper, some principles of African moral theories in conflict resolution strategies and mechanism, that will adequately equip policymakers and agencies. We begin by putting in perspective our concepts of "conflict" and "conflict resolution".

Conflict and Conflict Resolution: A Conceptualisation

Etymologically speaking, the word conflict means "clash" – it could be the clash of power, interests, religion, values, cultures, etc. Conflict is a common feature of human existence, action and reality, where there are competitions or incompatible aspirations between one or more parties, groups or individuals. The nature of conflict is that it could be personal, inter-personal and international. It could be pursued by peaceful means or by use of force, i.e. armed conflict. It could also be civil, military, social, economic, political, religious and ethnic, institutional, governmental, cooperate, inter-state, internal,[4] international or moral. This paper addresses the moral aspect of conflict and its resolution strategies. Conflict is a deviate social behaviour of one or two parties struggling for something desirable to

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Philosophy: Selected Readings, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc Englewood Cliff, 1995), p. 390

[4] Examples of internal and inter-state conflicts include civil and ethnic conflict, anti-colonial struggles, secessionists and autonomous movements, territorial conflicts, religious conflicts and battles or struggle for control of government and resources.

them – it manifests in behaviour or disposition. Onigu Otite posits that conflicts arise from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individual and or groups in defined social and physical environments.[5] Conflict can be an opportunity for change, if constructively managed and it can lead to violence and war if mismanaged. In fact, C.S. Momoh reminds us that the conceptual spinal cord of conflict is "response".[6] This means that there must be a reaction to any action for conflict situation to erupt. So, conflict is as a result of competitive engagements in reaction to a set of goal.

The foundation of conflicts is psychological as Sigmund Freud would want us to believe, economic, as Karl Marx would argue, socio-cultural, as sociologists and Anthropologists would posit. A plural and multicultural society, according to Onigu Otite, for example, is characterised by co-existing but distinct cultural diversification and compulsory social institutions, which determine and guide the individual and group behaviour of the incorporated people.[7] There is a desire to resolve conflict, hope for harmony and cooperation. It is precisely this desire that leads to conflict resolution.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is finding solution to a problem or discord. It involves the process of bringing harmony to bear among warring parties or conflicting interests, with a view to promoting integration and peaceful co-existence. It is an interventionist approach, which:
  • addresses the fundamental causes or root of the said conflict

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[5] Otite Onigu & Albert Olawale (eds), *Community Conflict in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation,* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 1991), p. 1

[6] C.S. Momoh, "Philosophy and Principles of Conflictology" in C.S. Momoh & J.I. Unah (eds), *Nigeria Integrative Discourse*, Vol. III (Lagos, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, 2005), p. 17

[7] Otite Onigu & Albert Olawale (eds), op. cit., p. 2

- produces solution which are mutually acceptable to all parties using methods or techniques like negotiation, cooperation, non-confrontation, arbitration, reconciliation, mediation, diplomacy, peace talk, counselling etc.
- addresses how to reach a non-violent and non-imposed situation
- promote peace, unity and justice
- promotes change, development and stability and
- encourages brotherhood, solidarity and mutual respect.

When conflict persists over resolution, then the role of external parties becomes inevitable and critical in creating a balance of power – enhancing sanctions or incentives[8]. Conflict, if not well managed can result to violence.

The Concept of Morality

The idea of morality swings inconsistently in meaning, usage and application, depending on the society or people. Morality has to do with the question of right and wrong actions. The area of philosophy which studies morality is known as ethics – the principle or moral behaviour or conduct. The idea of morality goes with good and bad, right and wrong actions. Morality is essentially an effort to discriminate between the set of behaviour acceptable and those unacceptable to people. It is an effort to regulate inter-personal behaviour among people. It is a social system of regulation. Morality can be individual or social.

In its individual aspect, it is personal and in its social aspect, it is inter-personal and universalisable. William K. Frankena highlights certain factors in morality as follow:
- it is a form of judgement which goes with obligation; responsibility and duties
- it is a function of human reason and rationality

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[8] C. Miller, *A Glossy of Terms and Concepts in Peace and Conflicts Studies,* (Geneva: University Press, 2005), p. 84

- it goes with rules, principles, ideas and virtues and
- it goes with praise and blame or punishment.
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Wiredu's Moral Consensus Theory or Principle

Wiredu's moral theory is formulated against the background of his conception and distinction of two cultures: *universalism* and *particularism.* Wiredu informs us that particulars are those aspects of life that have no essential bearing on questions of either human well-being or truth or falsehood.[9] These include procedures, customs and usages, such as language, style of dressing, dance, music, recreation and style of courtship, etc. All these, according to Wiredu, are contingent. Adopting one form or another of the above mentioned qualities makes no objective difference to human well-being or to one's belief about the world. Consequently, they are not open to change or re-construction to introduce a change is to suffer loss of identity, Wiredu posits.

The universals, on the other hand, are those elements of culture that are anchored on truth values and have essential bearing on human well-being. These include areas such as philosophy, science and religion. In these areas it is not desirable, even if it is possible, to ignore developments in other cultures.[10] To Wiredu, a position of universality can be established based on our common biological identity, human 'beingness' and human experience. Wiredu then situate his moral theory within the context of universalism precisely because morality is a way of life, which can be seen, evaluated, compared and it can be trans-cultural.

Wiredu's moral theory can also be understood against the backdrop of the two opposing views on the question of what the basis or

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[9] Kwesi Wiredu, "Society and Democracy in Africa" in *New Political Science*, (vol. 1, number 1, 1999), p. 65

[10] Ibid

foundation of ethics in ancient African thought systems is. On one hand is the view held by John Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu. The former held that the African lives in a religious universe, that religion is the basis and foundation of African morality, while it is the latter's view that Africans are notoriously religious in all things. K.C Anyanwu (1981) and Akin Makinde (1983) also attempted to defend the religious foundation of African system of morality.

Opposed to the religious views are those expressed by Wiredu (1980) and Sophie Oluwole (1982), claiming that the moral outlook in ancient African taught system is logically independent of religion: morality is not founded on religion. To Wiredu, all values derive from and are founded on human interest, hence his humanistic conception of African morality. This led to his concept of "good". What is good in African moral system, according to him, is what promotes and harmonises human interests[11] and whatever is detrimental to human welfare or interests are considered evil or bad.

Wiredu's main concern in his theory of consensus is to explore and philosophically reflect on indigenous African moral concepts, especially those of his own people – the Akan of Ghana and apply them to modern Africa, in order to help resolve moral problems. He informs us that among the Akan, consensus is the basis of inter-personal relationship, decision making and of common action. Consensus is a principle that makes it possible for the interest of all concerned; both the minority and majority, to be taken into consideration and respected in the process of decision making. It is a process of *securing substantial representation of interest*. Consensus, according to Wiredu, emanates when there is in existence at least two different opinions which have to be harmonised in order to allow for a common action. Consensus is realised through a process of deliberations and rational discussions.

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[11] Kwesi Wiredu, "Custom and Morality…" op. cit.

Wiredu intimates us with a general loss of moral orientation among the younger generations in Africa. The reason for this, according to him, is that African countries took over Western values uncritically. He then invites us to imbibe unadulterated African knowledge and values in modern moral or ethical conceptualisation and apply them to African context. By so doing, we will decolonise ourselves mentally. Decolonising ourselves mentally means we have to analyse, criticise and critically evaluate language, values, structures and institutions introduced by the colonial powers.

As regards African moral theory, Wiredu refers to the pre-colonial traditional values, world views, political institutions and conflict resolution strategies of his own people; the Akan, where the interest of the individual and community are taken into consideration. Decision making and conflict resolution, according to him, is by the rule of consensus rather than by vote. Consensus, as a way of mediation, recognises individuals or representatives that are qualified by age, experience and sagacity for meetings. The underlying factors are: experience, history, interests of the whole community; people, both living and dead are taken into consideration. This type of consensus, according to him, makes it impossible for the minority to be excluded in the process of decision-making, as it happens in western or modern democracy with its party system and politics.

Wiredu maintains that there is a fundamental principle underlying moral or ethical consensus, which is: "adjust your interests to the interests of others, even at the possible cost of some self-denial"[12]. This means that between individual and society's interests, a certain principle of consensus comes in. The individual, according to Wiredu, is more often than not a beneficiary of the forbearance of others than a sacrifice of self-interest. So, the interest of the individual is protected. Consensus is, therefore, simply an agreement or a reconciliation of divergent and opposing interests, by taking adequate account of all parties' point-of-view. He puts it thus: "Consensus is an affair of compromise and compromise is a certain adjustment of the

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[12] Kwesi Wiredu, "Society and Democracy…", op. cit, p. 34

interests of individual to the common necessity for something to be done."[13] This enhances peaceful coexistence.

Pre-conditions for Consensus

The first condition for consensus is found in our moral sympathy for our kind. Because of this, we adopt in our conduct the principle of "sympathetic impartiality" (empathy). The underlying principle here is to always "act in such a way as to avoid doing things that have effect on others, that would not be welcomed were one to be in the same situation"[14] or if the action in question is to be re-enacted. So the theory puts a check on the pursuit of self-interest, and help in reconciliation. It is the "natural sympathy of our kind". The second precondition is the will to live in harmony with each other and secure the well-being of the people. Here, consensus is a compromise based on willingness, understanding and agreement. "Agreement here needs not to be considered as unanimity, concerning what is true or false or even about what ought or ought not to be done. It only needs to be what is to be done"[15]. A third pre-condition for consensus is the existence of common interests which is shared by all human beings – essentially, people that share common and the same interests. Furthermore, consensus is basic for moral action, through rational discussions and insights. A fourth pre-condition which also serve as the basis for consensus, is the principle of adjustment – adjusting one's interest to the interests of others even at possible cost of some self-denial. This principle has been analysed along the "golden rule" principle in African ethics and Immanuel Kant's "Categorical

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[13] Ibid, p. 35

[14] Ibid.

[15] Anke Graness, "Ethics of Consensus: Model for a Global Ethics" in Olusegun Oladipo (ed), *The Third Way in African Philosophy,* (Ibadan: Hope Publication, 2002), p. 257

Imperative"[16]. So, to Wiredu, consensus is a reconciliation of divergent interest for the sake of stable community.

Critical Discussions

Wiredu puts reconciliation into the centre of moral conceptualisation. This, according to Anke Graness, has opened new frontiers in modern ethical theories. An example of the use of reconciliation in moral action in a multi-ethnic society has been said to be in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa in 1995[17], that resulted into revelations, confessions and reparation payment, rather than punishment. But there are a number of fruitful as well as some questionable and problematic points in Wiredu's theory. First, the fruitful aspects. In the heart of Wiredu's moral consensus theory lies the African sense of:

- interpersonal relation and communalism
- respect for constituted authority and elders
- fellowship, hospitality and extended family systems.

These set-ups negate western capitalism and individualism. The question of moral responsibility that individuals should have to their community has been eroded by western civilisation, values and thought pattern. This has led to alienation and moral conflicts.

Wiredu's consensus theory is close to the Golden rule principle, where individual interests are to be adjusted to those of others and society. Both moral theories are absolute principles, but there are differences. Whereas, the Golden rule does not protect the interest of the

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[16] See, Godwin Azenabor, "The Golden Rule Principle in An African Ethics and Kant's Categorical Imperative: A Comparative Study on the Foundation of Morality" in *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy,* (vol. xxi, 2007), pp. 229-240

[17] Anke Graness, "Ethics of Consensus…", p. 266

individual, the consensus theory does. Secondly, consensus theory is mediatory; it mediates between individual and group interests. Thirdly, consensus theory allows for compromises between different opinions.[18]

Wiredu's kind of moral theory characterises all communalistic societies, where the individual interests are adjusted to those of the society. Here, the interests of every member of the community will have to be gathered and then majority or preponderating interest will be considered and minority interests will be sacrificed for the greater interest or good. This is the basis of freedom, justice and solidarity. Another fruitful point in Wiredu's moral theory is his idea of reconciliation; the pivot of his theory. This idea has been seen as universal with far reaching implications for universal ethics.

Furthermore, Wiredu's position can be better appreciated against the background of the realisation that a universally valid moral norm cannot easily be founded, precisely because of the multi-ethnic society and plurality. This is why there is the need for consensus by all those concerned or affected. In Graness view, however, Wiredu's theory of consensus has even the potential of being universalised, especially because, "it is founded on reconciliation, which offers a practical basis for peaceful mediation of different interest"[19].

Again, the consensus theory might be helpful in finding a way to an ethics which can be fundamental to the solution of global problems, especially because of it human dimension. The theory is better understood against the Yoruba popular proverbs:

- *Ejo l'a nko, ai ko'ja*

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[18] Godwin Azenabor, *Modern Theories in African Philosophy*, (Lagos: Byolah Publishers, 2010), p. 163

[19] Anke Graness, op. cit. p. 266

> Meaning: it is more worthwhile to learn how to state your case consensually than to learn how to fight it out or fight it well

- *Agba osi'ka l'o ngbo t'enikan da'jo*
  Meaning: It is only a wicked and bias elder that listens to only one side of a case or dispute and pronounces judgment.

The moral value derivable here, like the consensus theory is the principle of fair hearing, equity and justice. The idea of justice is prevalent in an African moral system. One cannot talk about common good without justice. This justice is not the western traditional conception of a constant disposition of "giving everyone his due" or the utilitarian "greatest happiness of the greatest number" or the Machiavellian or Nietzsche's "interest of the stronger", but that inherent disposition intrinsically conferred on human beings by nature, which makes one a person. This brings us to the idea of moral personhood.

Moral Personhood

The concept of a person (not the physical or non- physical parts i.e. constituent parts, but the moral or behavioural i.e. normative conception) is fundamental to understanding the idea of a people's mortality. Moral personhood is the sort of status which has to be attained and it is attainable in direct proportion to one's participation or communal and social life through the discharge of one's obligations, defined by one's age and status. It is the carrying out of the obligations that transform one from the "it status" of early childhood, marked by an absence of moral function into the "person status" of later years, marked by a widened maturity of ethical sense – an ethical maturity without which moral personhood eludes one[20]. Such a concept of a person explains the role the society expects the

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[20] Ifeanyi Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thoughts" in Richard A. Wright (ed), *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, Third edition, (Lanham: Maryland University Press of America, 1984)

individual to play in the attainment of an orderly society. In fact, it is a society's concept of a person that defines its ethical code of conduct, characterisation and idiosyncrasies. So, the concept of a person is functional and has relevance only in the scheme of things, with others in relations – it is commitment to social values and responsibility. John Mbiti puts it better when he wrote:

> Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people. When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group, when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbour and relations whether dead or alive. The individual says 'I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am'[21]

This is the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of personhood. The community interest supersedes, if they conflict with those of the individuals that constitute it. Consequently, in an African indigenous moral system, a person is said to have three levels of existence, first as an individual, second, as a member of a group and third as a member of a community, all of which are constantly interacting and interpenetrating one another. An African Society therefore places a great deal of premium on communal values – those values that underpin and guide social relations and behaviour.[22] Also,

> the factors that determine personhood
> are believed to be acquired partly from

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[21] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophies,* (London: Heinemann Publishers, 1969), pp. 108-109

[22] Kwame Gyekye (ed), *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Society,* 1, (Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy), p. 35

> the individual's socio-ontological beginnings, but it's defining levels are only obtained through an individual's learning to apply those capacities in ways considered socially appropriate. In this sense, being a person is attained through an educational process that intensifies at every stage in ones' growth and development.[23]

The concept of a person in an African moral thought system also embodies ethical pre-suppositions. A wicked, cruel, selfish and unsympathetic human being is said not to be a person – "*eniyan k'eyan*" in Yoruba culture and "*onnye onipa*" in Akan culture. Both conceptions underline the idea of lack of moral personhood. They distinguish between the conception of "a person" and "a human being". One can be a human being without being a person, especially because there are certain ideals and moral standard or conduct of personhood which confer on him or her "*Omolúàbí*" in Yoruba culture, which means "a well-behaved person" with core moral values as forgiveness and reconciliatory spirit, good neighbourliness, help, tolerance and peaceful coexistence, all of which are moral virtues for conflict resolution. The emergence of a moral person will therefore help the development of morals in contemporary Nigerian Society.

We may therefore explain the differences in both African and European value and moral systems as those of ontological differences which are in the conception and nature of man or being. Whereas that of the African are communal and organic, the Europeans are liberal and individualistic. In spite of the plurality of social system, complexity and heterogeneity in Africa, there is still unity of thought and relatedness. There are still the historical forms of pre-colonial

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[23] D.A. Masolo, "Western and African Communitarianism: A Comparison" in K. Wiredu (ed), *A Companion of African Philosophy,* (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), p. 491

social organisation which are in existent in Africa societies that have been unpolluted with European civilisation.Can Wiredu's moral principle of decision making and reconciliation of interests, of adjusting interests of individual to the interest of others, even at the possible cost of some self–denial be applied as a global principle? Can it be universalised? Can it work outside a socio- cultural paradigm? Why not? After all, people share opinions and will agree once we can de-emphasize partisanship. Party-politics should be discontinued in Africa, in order to have a thorough-going adherence to consensus principle; a non-party approach to government is rather imperative. An alternative to parties' formation, according to Wiredu will be consensus of elected representatives, that is, government by coalition of citizens. This is a decentralisation system, which will guarantee a number of people in the process of decision making.

But then, can we really transform this to the level of modern state? Anke Graness inquires: how do we take care of highly specialised areas or areas that require expert knowledge?[24] This of course can be done by the technocrats in ministries and by appointment of special advisers. A critical point to note again, as pointed out by Graness, is how to determine "common interest" of human beings" Odera Oruka posits that "it has to do with human minimum of what makes us human, a moral agent, which are physical security, health care and subsistence.[25]

How may we ask, do we reconcile conflicting interests? To this, Wiredu posits that should there be conflict of interest, there is a reconciliation of opposing interest, for it is our common interest in survival which forces us to reconcile different interest. Wiredu's theory is also understandable against the backdrop of an African moral orientation which is a derivative of African ontology. The ontological foundation revolves round the basic assumptions about

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[24] Anke Granes, 2002, p. 264

[25] K. Wiredu, 1996, op. cit. p. 189

reality where everything is charged with life- forces, that are always in inter-relationship. This is why linage and its solidarity have continued to constitute an important aspect of Africanity. The ontological existence seeks to promote virtues like co-operation, understanding, solidarity, collective responsibility, harmony, sharing, hospitality, caring for others, sympathy, empathy, truth, inter-dependence, reciprocity, obligation, mutual help, communal values, love for others, and adjusting individual interest to those of the community. So, ontology provides a common background for understanding and relationship .It helps to show connections.

In spite of its opulence, splendour and glory, there are some questionable points in Wiredu's theory. Wiredu's universalism has been attacked. The claim to validity of consensus reached in moral discussions and the attempt to establish criteria for universality of moral norms is suspect, when it comes to truth claim. Consensus can never claim universal validity or rightness of moral judgment. "The plurality of world views, systems of values and ideas about the 'good life" makes it impossible to find in practical moral discourses an inter-subjectively valid consensus."[26] So, the reality of a universal consensus is problematic, precisely because, ethical values are cultural. There are no independent standard of morality that are applicable to all cultures, all places, all peoples, at all times. This is objectively speaking impossible. Even though theories and ideas of universal character are propounded in ethics, they do not diverge from their age, challenges of the time, history, traditions and civilizations that they find themselves.[27]

Wiredu's consensual way of decision making is a way of pre- colonial, ancient or traditional organisation. But there are now in existence new forms of social, political and moral orientations as a result of colonial and post-colonial developments in Africa. Now, the questions

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[26] Anke Graness, op. cit. p. 261

[27] Godwin Azenabor, "Golden Rule Principle…", op. cit., p. 232

are: can Wiredu's moral principle of consensus work outside the pre-colonial ancient or traditional setting? How can it be transformed to apply to modernity? How can people with different knowledge, values, trainings and background be enabled to participate in consensus decision, with regards to highly technical and specialised areas? In other words,

"How do we solve problems which affect everybody but need expert knowledge? Here are a number of questions which have to be answered"[28] or resolved. This is precisely why consensus cannot be more than a regulative idea. It cannot claim universal validity or the rightness of a moral judgment.[29]

Conclusion

Resolving conflicts that threaten peaceful co-existence between people is necessary for survival and has a strong moral value. To put consensus and reconciliation into the centre of a moral theory is quite interesting, curious and unusual. But in the context of our experience of wars, recurring genocides, with social, political and religious upheavals and mistrust caused by moral and value conflicts, the longing for moral concession is rather imperative. Moral conflict resolution in Africa must therefore be a product of African humanism, history, tradition, culture and experience, which must be based on a keen sense of solidarity and fraternity, coupled with human interest and welfare not just human reason (as Immanuel Kant wants us to believe). When a society ignores the foundation of a social and orderly life the result is conflict, disorder and chaos. We need to first *develop* not *abandon* our conception of personhood. It is with this that we can have the will to live in harmony and moral sympathy of our kind in order to tailor our actions along the interest of others.
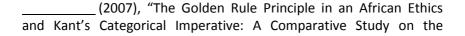
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[28] Op. cit., 2002, p. 265

[29] Ibid, p. 261

Wiredu's moral theory is indeed a contribution to the resolution of the moral crisis of our time. His theory may not claim universal *validity* but it does have social *application*; for it is always easier to find an agreement about common actions without necessarily having unanimity. Wiredu's theory offer important ideas which can help African nations out of their contemporary crisis and also solve global problems. But moral reasoning, like that of Wiredu, may not be enough; we must complement this with right sense of leadership. The trouble with most African countries today is that of leadership and that of uncritically taking over some Western moral values without situating them within our cultural paradigm. Hence, we posit a humanistic theory[30] of conflict resolution which complements Wiredu's ethical consensus theory.

Other types of conflict resolution mechanisms or theories such as arbitration, adjudication, mediation, reconciliation etc., incubates defeat, grudges, resentment, hate and harbour fertile grounds for violence, destruction and cold war. But Wiredu's theory creates a pre-dispositional reciprocity and empathy that facilitate a veritable resolution, creating a synergy that is devoid of remorse, bellicosity and endless vendetta. It is a live and let's live solution, hinged on the nature of things. Consensus attempts to merge the individualistic divergent views and positions with a synthetic whole. The end result of consensus is compromise among the belligerents.

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[30] See, Godwin Azenabor, *Modern Theories in African Philosophy,* op. cit, pp. 110-133

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