

**Poverty and the Philosophy of Aid in Africa: Beyond Odera  
Oruka's Theory of the Right to a *Human Minimum***

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*Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK)*

*New Series, Vol.5 No.2, December 2013, pp.19-37*

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*http://ajol.info/index.php/tp/index*

*ISSN: 2076-7714*

## **Abstract**

Poverty in Africa has gained the attention of social activists, Non-Governmental Organizations, scholars from diverse fields, as well as governments. The contemporary reality of poverty, as revealed by various indices, shows that this problem has resisted the interventions so far. In view of the failures of earlier and current approaches to alleviating poverty in Africa, this paper explores the ethical and prudential approaches to setting anew, viable trajectory for poverty alleviation in twenty-first century Africa. It raises the fundamental question of whether or not the affluent individuals in African societies on the one hand, and the wealthy Western nations on the other have any obligation towards the poor in Africa. On the basis of a critical consideration of some ethical theories in relation to the question of poverty, the paper contends that for the sake of stability and progress in the continent, it is necessary to develop programmes for the effective assistance of the poor on altruistic and prudential grounds.

### **Key Words**

Africa, poverty, ethics, morality, prudence, society

## **Introduction**

The late Kenyan philosopher, Prof. H. Odera Oruka, worked assiduously to demonstrate the philosophical capacity of indigenous Africans in spite of the handicapping effect of illiteracy. No wonder that whenever Oruka's name is mentioned, what readily comes to mind is philosophic sagacity. However, focus on philosophic sagacity tends to take our attention away from other works by this prolific scholar. While many of these works are less popular, their importance, especially to the current African situation, cannot be overestimated. One of such is Oruka's exploration of an ethical path on the issue of poverty and the place of foreign aid in Africa. He was convinced that all humans, irrespective of race or creed, have the right to a human minimum consistent with the notion of human dignity. He thus attempted to make a case for genuine aid as an imperative which flows from the demands of global justice.

Consequently, this paper examines Oruka's concern about the alarming level of poverty across Africa. We attempt a conceptual clarification of poverty and its ethical dimension, and specifically, Odera Oruka's proposed ethical solution. The central argument of the paper is that whereas the ethical clamour for aid as a way to bringing an end to poverty in Africa is plausible, it appears to be inadequate in the light of our present experience. While noting that poverty in Africa is largely man-made and hence the proper subject for ethical scrutiny, we highlight the

limitations posed to the ethical case, especially when conceived as a sufficient rather than a necessary factor in the fight against poverty in the continent. We conclude by noting the prudential basis for aid in Africa, which in itself ought not to take the place of self-help if the continent is to truly emerge from the abyss of underdevelopment.

### **The Meaning of Poverty**

Due to its multi-dimensional nature, it is difficult to offer a concise conception of poverty. Thus the problem is more easily recognized than defined (Aboyade 1987, 3). However, some scholars who have shown interest in the subject have tried, from their different perspectives, to describe poverty. Poverty is a form of human suffering which often entails hunger, starvation, and other forms of physical deprivation. It is the state of lacking the means to live adequately. In other words, poverty reflects the relationship between the minimum needs of people and their ability to satisfy them. Adegboyega (2001, 187) recognizes the difficulty of defining poverty when he contends that the problem centers on the "minimum needs" and the amount of resources required to satisfy them. The point of emphasis in his argument is that the "minimum needs" of individual members of any given society vary, as also do the amount of resources required to satisfy them. Thus while the "minimum needs" of some citizens have to do with the essentials of life such as shelter, food and clothing, others may need things such as cars, telephones etc, which they may not be able to afford.

If one subscribes to the account above, one can easily accept the view that sufferings of different types can result in lack of the means to live adequately. While illness, hunger, starvation or lack of clothing are instances of lack of means to live adequately, the need for things such as a telephone, car or television set may be considered non-basic (depending on one's understanding of minimum needs) in the conception of poverty. The inaccessibility or unaffordability of various goods constitute suffering on the one hand, and on the other some forms of poverty.

Harry Johnson's definition corroborates the above explanation when he asserts that poverty is "a situation when the resources of individuals or families are inadequate to provide a socially acceptable standard of living" (Johnson 1971, 13). In other words, the individuals live below the conventional poverty line demarcating the poor from the non-poor. For Sam Aluko (1975, 2), poverty refers to the lack of command over basic consumption needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Such lack of resources to meet even the most basic needs renders the individual incapable of protecting himself against social, economic and political deprivations. Perhaps subscribing to this school of thought, the German government (1992, 13) outlined the manifestations of poverty as follows:

Not having enough to eat, a high rate of infant mortality, a low level of life expectancy, low educational opportunities, poor water, inadequate health care, unfit housing and a lack of active participation in the decision making process.

The import of the outline of manifestations of poverty above, which we find acceptable within the context of this paper, is that the presence of the conditions listed depicts the capacity of poverty to prevent an individual from living a minimally decent life. Further, poverty can be conceived as a situation in which the individual, under an unpalatable economic condition, lacks sufficient income to obtain minimum necessities of life, such that living becomes devoid of motivation and expectations. In other words, poverty reflects a state of despondency in which life assumes the dimension of daily survival devoid of meaning, realistic construction of goals and the wherewithal to actualize them. In such a state, people struggle to stay alive rather than to live in pursuit of any propelling purpose.

What is more, poverty manifests itself in different forms depending on the nature and extent of human deprivation. There are several aspects of poverty such as structural, economic, social and political deprivation. The structural dimension appears more permanent and manifests a vicious cycle, reflecting limited productive resources, lack of skills for gainful employment, vocational disadvantage and inadequate income (Central Bank of Nigeria 1999, 1). The social dimension relates to issues such as gender and age group, especially where the greatest weight of poverty is borne by women and children. The social indicators also measure access to health, education and welfare facilities. The health indicators include those of life expectancy at birth, mortality rate across the age-segments of the population, prevalence of malnutrition, level of access to safe water and sanitation among others. For education, literacy level, balanced across gender and spread within the relevant age groups of the population, determines significantly the depth of lack in a given society (OECD 2013).

Various programmes, many of which are at best ill-conceived and at worse deceitful, have been designed to address the problem of poverty in Africa. While some of them were designed in foreign countries removed from the realities of the recipient countries, the few that are locally conceived have adopted a trickle down approach that equally fails to mirror the true conditions of the poor. These programmes are often anchored on ideologies that proclaim capitalist values necessarily characterized by individualism. As a corollary, poverty is viewed as something that can be empirically verified and quantified. Yet the poverty indices of many nations of the world - Third World countries especially - are fast assuming a frightening dimension, which now portends negative consequences spilling beyond the borders of immediate experience. More than ever before, governments and organizations, both locally and internationally, are constantly working at strategies to cope with the problem of stark deprivation made more nerve-wrecking

by the experience of suffering amidst plenty. Structural adjustment programmes, Millennium Development Goals, and various forms of global and regional strategies, have proliferated among countries with high levels of poverty. The question that agitates the mind is whether specified objectives are being met. It cannot be over-emphasized that various studies and policies on poverty, in spite of touted gains, still leave much to be desired. Most of what has been achieved can at best be described as exercises in futility when the level of poverty across the continent is juxtaposed with the resources committed to the battle against it (Sachs *et. al.* 2004, 122; Sasaoka 2006, 239).

Given his concern with the state of affairs in Africa, both intellectual and material, it is not surprising that Odera Oruka would be engaged in the articulation of a philosophy of rescue, so to speak, from the scourge of poverty. It is equally not surprising that an appraisal of the question of underdevelopment in Africa ought to take into consideration the ethical dimension if it is to be meaningful. This is because many of the factors responsible for poverty are as a result of human choices and actions which are often avoidable.

However, it is apt for us at this juncture to make a salient clarification, namely, that our appraisal of poverty from the prism of ethics is within the ambience of our conviction that being poor is a moral issue if it is as a result of human actions (Adegboyega 2001, 186) and involuntary, for the issue of morality does not arise in a situation where a people choose to remain poor. It is perfectly possible for one to choose to live under the kinds of conditions we earlier described as symptomatic of poverty. This has to be said, bearing in mind the possibility of an individual or a people remaining contented with destitution, for reasons ranging from their religious, moral or social dispositions. There is no obligation to help those who are responsible for being poor, and certainly no obligation to force on others a policy of helping them. Magnanimous people may be generous enough to help even those who are responsible for their poverty, but such actions are beyond the call of duty: there is no justification for laying it on people as a moral requirement (Kekes 2006, 154).

Nevertheless, there is need to distinguish between the instance just cited and the classical description of the level of poverty in the less developed parts of the world allegedly as a result of the people's choice or attitude to life. The comment above is not in any way an endorsement of a certain strand of classical liberal theory which seeks to explain poverty in Africa as a product of the conscious choice made by Africans. What this fallacy of global marathon (Onigbinde 2003, 21) seeks to do is to mask exploitation and plunder as the result of the people's deliberate choice.

A cursory survey of Oruka's argument would very easily reveal its Kantian leaning. The idea of an ethical minimum required to be human cannot be divorced from the deontological emphasis on human dignity, duty as an imperative and the idea of universalizability. This understanding makes an examination of his position within the context of Kantian ethics more appropriate.

### **Odera Oruka on the Philosophy of Foreign Aid as a Question of the Right to a Human Minimum**

Our intention here is to present an outline of Odera Oruka's philosophy of foreign aid and to highlight its ethical basis. Oruka never sought to contest the fact that foreign aid is largely an economic issue. However, according to him, what opens the door for its ethical assessment is that it falls under the category of normative economics as opposed to positive economics. While positive economics is economics as a pure empirical science with its own laws and methods, normative economics possesses the attributes of the former, but goes on to utilize the findings of positive economics as a basis for recommending ethically appropriate actions and the rational reorganization and redistribution of resources (Oruka 1988, 465).

Oruka goes on to contend that the idea of foreign aid is situated within the assumption of two principles of international justice. The first is the principle of territorial sovereignty, which guarantees the right of a state to preserve its territorial boundaries and resources against external interference. On this principle, a military incursion into a sovereign state would amount to an illegality, and the same would be true of economic interference. The second principle is that of supererogation, which protects a state from blame if it remains indifferent to the needs of those outside its borders even if they are starving. The principle simply affirms that a state is not under any duty to cater for those outside its own territory (Oruka 1988, 466). For instance, Britain or Kenya is not under any duty to cater for those suffering in Nigeria or Pakistan. On the strength of these principles, foreign aid has come to be seen not as acts of global justice but as voluntary acts of charity. To this end, charity has become the propelling force behind the idea of foreign aid.

Still, according to Oruka, the conception of foreign aid as charity is largely restricted to donors rather than to recipients. While a donor may choose to revel in self-righteousness about its intervention in a supposedly troubled state, the preponderance of opinion on the part of the recipients does not reflect the perception of generosity with regard to such gestures. Oruka (1988, 467) outlined two arguments that describe the different perceptions. The first argument is the one which sees foreign aid as an instrument of modern international trade designed to secure beneficial trade terms. Aid in the thinking of such a set of people amounts to a little more than a poisoned chalice which benefits the giver while impoverishing the recipient in the long run. It is

argued that aid is basically a key that opens doors to markets, capital, and the exploitation of natural resources. The second argument sees aid as atonement for past injustices done to underdeveloped nations by the developed ones through their imperial activities (i.e. slavery, colonization and neo-colonization). These injustices, it is argued, account for the developmental gap between the developed and undeveloped nations - a gap so wide that foreign aid can only reduce but not erase.

From the above observations, it would seem that only three conditions account for foreign aid. The first is the charity mindset (often that of the donor), the second and third being the law of international trade and the principle of rectification. According to Oruka, the three conditions taken separately or together are inadequate to provide an ethical rationale for global justice in our time (Oruka 1988, 467). Oruka summarises the failures of the three conditions thus:

Currently nations which give aid to others do so as a matter of supererogatory action (i.e. as an altruistic self sacrifice on their part); but nations that receive aid or loans, especially the technologically underdeveloped nations, often feel or are made to feel a sense of self-pity .... The humiliation is psychologically characterized by feelings of the following kind: If aid is a form of international trade, why do poor countries come out on the disadvantaged side of unequal exchange? If on the other hand they are the rectification of historical mistakes, why were they so weak as to allow such mistakes? If, however, they are forms of international charity, then we are back to a position where donors are protected by the principle of national supererogation (Oruka 1988, 468).

The rectification principle attracted Oruka's interest further. Such a principle, he says, cannot be a universal policy for all kinds of aid. This is because, firstly, it excludes from any obligation to provide aid any affluent nation which can prove that it was not a party to past historical injustice. Conversely, it also means that any country whose state of poverty is not as a result of past injustice cannot legitimately enjoy aid from foreign nations. Consequently, there is need to provide a fourth condition which fills the lacuna created by the earlier outlined principles. This condition is such as to provide a basis for the justification of aid from one state to another as a global ethical obligation and can help ensure the practice of justice to the inhabitants of the globe regardless of the question of racial or geographical origins and political affiliations. Such a principle should also help to invalidate the use of "national supererogation" in the relations between nations without thereby discrediting the principle of national sovereignty and equality of nations (Oruka 1988, 467).

Oruka started outlining this fourth principle by examining the idea of preservation as it applies to the individual and the state. By preservation, he refers to the satisfaction of those needs which sustain existence. The most basic of these needs are physical security, health and subsistence. This for him constitutes the *human minimum*. Below this minimum a person may still be alive,

but cannot successfully carry out the functions of a moral agent or engage in creative activity. Without the human minimum, a person is either a brute or a human vegetable. But what sort of right does one have to this *human minimum*? Oruka's unequivocal response is that such a right is absolute. According to him, absolute rights are such rights as are basic and cannot be rationally compromised for the sake of any other right. On the other hand, rights are *prima facie* if, however important they may be, they can be justifiably overridden by other rights or something of a greater moral significance. Rights are moral if they ought to be enforced by an ethics arising from the prevailing moral system, and moral rights are universal if the obligation to blame their violation or to ensure their fulfillment is a duty of every person, regardless of his or her race, country or beliefs (Oruka 1988, 470). Universal moral rights are thus *right in rem* and not *right in personam*. The former obliges all, while the latter pertains to particular persons. Thus, the right to a *human minimum* is not only universal but also inherent, owing to its absolute nature. On this account, aid from affluent nations to those afflicted by poverty amounts to a fulfillment of the global ethical obligation to enforce the latter's right to a human minimum. This right overrides the territorial sovereignty of the poor nation. This idea thus nullifies the traditional assumption (earlier referred to), which excuses affluent nations from any duty to poor citizens in other countries. The right to a human minimum respects national sovereignty as opposed to territorial sovereignty. According to Oruka (1988, 472), national sovereignty refers to:

A people self determined to be a nation state governed by one of their number as sovereign (no matter of what kind), who oblige themselves and everybody else to recognize this self determination and treat its subjects in the community of nations as being morally and politically equal to any other people governed by a sovereign of whatever longevity and power.

Oruka also pointed out that there exists a difference between an *impracticable* "ought" and a *possible* "ought". The former refers to an "ought" which is not attainable in reality, while the latter is a class of "ought" which is realistic. While leaving to the positive economists the question as to whether the "haves" can lift every living person above the human minimum, Oruka concluded that anybody in a position to improve a fellow human being's condition is ethically obliged to do so (Oruka 1988, 474-475).

A cursory look at Oruka's notion of the human minimum reveals its deontological roots, having much in common with the Kantian notion of immutable human rights dictated by our reason's comprehension of the idea of human dignity. Kantian ethics prescribes what obligations an individual member of the society has towards the others to ensure that their human dignity, through their rights, is preserved (Kant 1955, 3).

Kant made a distinction between command and imperative. A command (of reason) is the conception of an objective principle, in so far as it necessitates a will, while the formula of the command is the imperative. Kant's categorical imperative is considered as a moral philosophy upon which actions are based. This imperative declares an action to be objectively necessary in itself, without any reference to "purpose" or any other end. According to Kant, the imperative commands that the maxims which serve as our principles of volition should conform to universal laws. He further explains: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant 1955, 324).

The first principle of the categorical imperative is the "Goodwill". According to Kant, an act is good in itself and not for any purpose or interest, inferring that nothing is good in itself without qualification except the goodwill. He goes further to say that it is impossible to conceive of anything in the world, or indeed out of it, which can be called good without qualification save the goodwill because:

The goodwill is not good because of what it affects or accomplishes or because of its adequacy to achieve some purposeful ends. It is good only because of its willing; that is it is good in itself (Kant 1955, 3).

To Kant, it is the motive of an action rather than its consequence that is important:

Whether the action succeeds in its purpose or not, if it is done with a 'goodwill' it is morally acceptable, the consequences which we consider in passing moral judgments are intended consequences implicated in the motive of the action, not the actual consequences which no man wholly foresees or controls (Kant 1955, 7).

Another important principle for Kant is duty, which is a salient feature of the moral consciousness. A will which acts for the sake of duty is goodwill. Morally worthy actions emanate from a sense of duty. Duty in this sense connotes an obligation a person has irrespective of what the consequence might be. He further distinguished actions which are in accordance with duty from actions which are done for the sake of duty. For instance, a banker who agrees to work knows that he or she will get paid at the end of the month; hence his or her action is in accordance with duty but devoid of any moral worth. On the other hand, actions done for duty sake are borne out of a sense of moral obligation. Hence, it is better to do one's duty cheerfully rather than to act out of mere desire or inclination (Kant 1955, 16-19).

The idea of rationality is yet another aspect of Kantian ethics. Here, reason is conceived as an indispensable element for an adequate resolution of moral problems (Whitney & Bowers 1962, 195). Thus if we were all purely rational agents, the objective principle of rationality would

always govern our actions. Kant also asserts that reason is an essential aspect of human nature which gives us the awareness that our actions ought to correspond to the goodwill.

Given the central role of the categorical imperative in the ethics of Immanuel Kant and the unconditional moral obligations it imposes, it follows that for him, we must continuously put forward maxims that are rooted in the goodwill and are universalisable. It is in a very similar manner that Oruka's prescription on how to address global poverty through an ethic of the human minimum has proceeded. Although Oruka (1988, 469) referred to Henry Shue's idea of inherent necessity as the basis of his idea of "person", his (Oruka's) notion of inherent rights (Oruka 1988, 469), the absolute universality of the right to minimum human conditions (Oruka 1988, 470) and duty and obligation (Oruka 1988, 471) all reveal the underlying influence of Kant on him.

Much of the world's poverty is the result of deliberate human action. Human beings, in the exercise of their freedom to survive by owning property, have become the most important factor in the poverty crisis. When we use our freedom in such a way as to deepen the needs of others, we are responsible not only for our actions but also for their attendant consequences. Indeed, there are many factors that cause poverty, including political instability, corruption, environmental degradation, and natural disasters. With the exception of the last one, the other causes arise directly from human action or inaction. From a Kantian viewpoint, our freedom makes us responsible for our actions, and is practically a necessary condition for morality. Yet the way in which we exercise our freedom speaks volumes about our values, that is, the things we consider to be good, bad, right or wrong. Furthermore, it raises the question of why we choose to value some things above others, the type of society we wish to share with others, and how we intend to leave it for future generations. Thus human beings' freedom to act or refrain from acting is germane to the issue at hand.

Deontological ethics attempts to formulate a systematic and comprehensive account of justified values that guide human behavior. Kant's admonition that we should act only on universalisable maxims is very applicable to the issue of poverty. William Aiken writes:

Until it is true that I cannot help another without putting myself in an equivalent position of need (that is, dying of deprivation) I have a *prima facie* obligation to honor others' right to be saved from preventable death through deprivation (Aiken 1977, 93).

Thus if we agree that eradicating poverty is morally right, those who are capable of taking action should not fold their arms while others suffer. Similarly, that we should treat others with respect is in line with the categorical imperative, and "we shall be going against this principle if we allow people to suffer or die, or leave them unable to secure life's necessity because of poverty"

(Barcalow 1994, 287). Respecting people involves caring about them and taking effective steps to promote or sustain their well-being.

### **Limitations of the Ethical Justification for Aid**

The above position is nevertheless open to criticism. Imagine an ethical egoist waiting in the line, eager to assert the supremacy of individual happiness above that of a group of persons, especially if the group's happiness places an obligation on him or her to forgo his or her own happiness. Ethical egoism claims that the human person is by nature selfish and self-seeking. As such, what becomes of a fellow human being is not of concern to the ethical egoist. If we interpret this literally, it means that from an ethical egoist's point of view, the rich person is not obliged to help the poor, and it amounts to injustice to take what a person has for the benefit of another. Nevertheless, although some in society do display a significant measure of egoism, there are many who attach great value to human life, as demonstrated by contributions to welfare institutions that aim to alleviate poverty. Yet several scholars have advanced arguments that favour an essentially ethical egoist approach to the issue of widespread poverty.

Robert Nozick contends that individuals have a fundamental liberty to dispose of their property as they desire, just as they have the right to own it without any interference from the state or any institution (Nozick 1974, 155-156). For him, as long as acquisition is not through force or fraud, it is legitimate to do as one wishes with his or her property. Critics such as Nozick have also argued that a social order that requires the rich to help the poor breeds indolence and complacency among the poor, while also resulting in the waning of the initiative of the rich due to their knowledge that they will not be allowed to fully enjoy the fruits of their labor. This argument points to an absolute pessimism about the nature of the human person.

Similarly, Garrett Hardin (1977, 11) contended that the community of affluent nations, like a well stocked life-boat, ought to insure its own survival by retaining a safety factor of surplus; this would involve protecting its lifestyle against the poor who want handouts and by keeping out others who might "swamp the boat". The argument implies that even if it is moral for the affluent to help the poor, it remains a mere act of charity or beneficence, hence amounting to an imperfect obligation which is neither claimable nor enforceable.

The implication of the view taken by scholars such as Nozick and Hardin above is that even if the Kantian maxim of the intrinsic goodness of an act is the measure of what is right, it is not enough reason to take a leap to the conclusion that beneficence is itself a good action. A good action

could be the protection of self-interest above that of others.<sup>1</sup> Again, the idea of a right to a human minimum is such that it entails a claim, specifically against the affluent of the world; But as Feinberg (1970, 248) noted, to have a right is to have a claim against someone - a claim whose recognition as valid is called for by some set of governing rules or moral principles. In other words, having a claim against a person, a group of persons or an institution entails an articulation of such a claim and the conditions justifying it in a manner that makes it clear and binding on all the parties concerned. In some cases, this may require a codification of such claims into laws, statutes and treaties. Indeed, in the opinion of Jeremy Bentham, the whole idea of rights, emanating from the idea of morality, can best be described as nonsense upon stilts because rights require social recognition (by all, probably), one that a moral claim does not enjoy (Bentham 1987, 53). What this implies is that compelling as the ethical argument for poverty alleviation may be, it can only translate into a meaningful claim if the moral argument being appealed to has the recognition of the party against whom the claim is being made. It seems that Oruka himself recognized the limitations of the ethical basis for aid, hence his description of it as a *possible* ought (Oruka 1988, 474).

Odera Oruka, in his robust response to Hardin's life-boat scenario, argued that the poverty situation, especially in Africa, is not properly captured by the analogy of boat occupants and swimmers pleading for rescue. Rather, it is a case of many boats in which some hitherto poor sailors robbed their fellow sailors and became affluent in the process (Oruka 1993, 22). Yet Oruka's case for aid does not rest on this argument, for the implication is that it takes us back to the historical injustice argument which he regards as inadequate for making a universal case for aid against the rich nations.

Oruka's argument is that the aid case is further made plausible by the fact that the resources of the earth are a commonwealth to which all races have a claim. In summary, Oruka's contention is that the world is not an ahistorical entity in which some are well-off while others are poor as a result of individual, uninfluenced choices. Instead, we ought to conceive the different nations as siblings from the same parent, in this case earth. This will help us to see that what becomes of each child is a product of individual and collective circumstances (Oruka 1993, 20-28).

With his metaphor of a family of six children, Oruka (1993, 24-26) proposed a set of rules reducible as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Most libertarians may regard being labeled as egoists an extreme interpretation of their rejection of altruism, but it is hard to find any other ethical correlate.

*Rule 1: Parental Debt Principle.* This states that none is solely responsible for his or her fortune or misfortune: the shame of one is the shame of all (same as wealth); and the survival of the family is the duty of all. It also highlights the moral burden which every member of the family bears in ensuring judicious and maximum utilization of the commonwealth at their disposal. This is emphasized by the possibility of forfeiture should others perceive misuse or indolence.

*Rule 2: The Individual Luck Principle.* This recognizes the fact that individual effort determines to a large extent what becomes of one in the future, and the right to dispense with one's possession as one deems fit. It also stipulates punishment for interference with others' property.

For Oruka, Rule 1 is prior to rule 2, so that it should take precedence whenever there is conflict between them. This is because going by common sense, when there is conflict between common and personal interests, common interest ought to prevail.

Although Oruka's parental earth ethics is a development of his idea of the ethical minimum, there is much to be said about it outside the scope of this paper. Yet it must be mentioned that even if the multiple boat scenario has a historical, empirical basis, the parental earth hypothesis would not necessarily follow. The account, if factual, would be an "is", while the claim to aid would still be an "ought". In other words, even if Hardin's lifeboat analogy is incorrect and the historical version presented by Oruka is factually accurate, it still would not follow that the affluent ought to help the poor. A case in point is the debate on reparation for slavery. While there is a near-unanimous recognition of the fact of slavery, the assertion that reparation ought to be paid has remained contentious. There is also an easily overlooked difference when we compare, through analogy, the duties of individuals towards one another on the one hand, and, on the other, those of nations to one another. Concerning this Gomberg has written:

Our ethical uneasiness about the persistence of global poverty is about precisely that: the persistence of poverty. It is not focused on specific individuals - as are our duties to rescue. It follows that causality is a concern, as it is not with respect to drowning children. We don't ask ourselves why the child is thrashing about in the water or wandering through a railway tunnel when we assess our ethical duty in those instances. But in deciding what we should do regarding global poverty, it becomes crucially important to know why there is persistent poverty in the face of material abundance. We need to understand causality in order to assess the effects of our actions - not on the specific (though nameless) individuals who could be aided by our charity - but on the problem motivating our concern, namely global poverty itself (Gomberg 2002, 44).

Odera Oruka's multiple boat scenario no doubt attempts an explanation of the *why*. Its limitation, however, consists in his attempt to make a moral case out of it. This *why* does not compel a sense of duty as Oruka would have wanted. What reality suggests is that whereas ethical arguments for

poverty eradication bring to the fore an ideal that is largely appealing, they have often come short of stimulating the required response. Recognizing this reality, Thomas Pogge notes:

The appeal to positive duties has been well-presented by Peter Singer, Henry Shue, Peter Unger and others. If citizens in the affluent countries were minimally decent and humane, they would respond to these appeals, and would do their bit to eradicate world poverty. If they did this, my argument would be of much less interest and importance (Pogge 2005, 31).

In sum, the problem with the duty argument is that global reality contrasts with the ideal scenario it tries to depict.

Given the apparent stalemate arising from ethical viewpoints on the alleviation of poverty in Africa, the question at this point is how to determine the plausible line of action. In other words, how can the moralization of the poverty crisis in Africa be made more effective by being transformed into a viable catalyst of response by the affluent beyond eliciting mere sympathy? In my view, given the failure of approaches so far explored to ameliorate poverty in Africa, an ethico-prudential approach becomes imperative. By this I mean that it is necessary to formulate a moral case for aid which makes a departure from the divisiveness that trails moral positions by finding justification in its prudential value. We refer to a reasonable position whose preference is made necessary owing to its prudential standpoint which enjoys acceptance across ethical persuasions. It is a position which compels duty more than a merely moral argument does.

### **Prudence as a Viable Basis for Aid**

In his *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls (1971) postulated an original position which corresponds to the state of nature in the traditional theory of the social contract in any form (Pojman 2001, 426). Of course, this original position is not an actual historical state of affairs or even a primitive condition of culture. Instead, it is understood as a purely hypothetical situation so characterized with a certain conception of justice in view. In Rawls' theory, participants decide on practices acknowledged to be fair and bind themselves by the duty of fair play to follow the rules when it is their turn to so do, implying a limitation on their pursuit of self-interest in particular cases. Parties to the contract are to act as rationally self-interested agents and to choose the basic principles that will govern their society. Effectively, the parties are to choose the kind of principles they could live with if their enemies were to assign them positions in society. Under this contract, the principles of justice are chosen behind the veil of ignorance. This ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or contingency of social circumstances. Here, the overriding guide to action is prudence, not morality. While such a contract may not be immoral or amoral, it derives its strength from a prudential consideration by all concerned parties, of the alternatives open to

them. It is a choice which appeals to the altruist without being offensive to the egoist. According to Rawls (1985, 11), a stable, reasonably well-off society is a "cooperative venture for mutual advantage", desired by rationally self-interested agents.

Given the high pace of globalization manifest in the infusion of cultures and economies, it has become necessary for affluent societies to take interest in the dire situation of the "have-nots" as a matter of self-preservation. Today, the high rate of immigration, cross-border banditry, and, most importantly, the "villagisation" of the world in an age of information technology and integrated economies have extended the consequences of poverty far beyond the borders of the struggling nations. This is why wealthy countries can no longer pretend that poverty is a domestic issue for affected nations alone. Many Western European countries are simply helpless at the influx of foreigners, legitimate and illegitimate, in search of "greener pastures". This development has generated vigorous debates about immigration policies in many Western countries. While opinion is divided between those who favour deportation and strict entry procedures on the one hand and defenders of accommodation on the other, little attention is paid to the underlying cause of such influx, which is the level of poverty in the underdeveloped parts of the world. Many underdeveloped countries today serve as sources of raw material for manufacturing firms in the developed ones owing to the lack of capacity in the poor nations to transform raw resources into finished products.

Admittedly, there are well-known challenges to the position advocated by a prudential approach. First, there is the problem inherent in the assumption that all men and women are desirous of a well-ordered and peaceful society. What makes prudence so compelling? Could men and women not choose to live in chaos? In the opinion of David Hume, Where a passion is neither founded on false suppositions nor chooses means insufficient for the end, the understanding can neither justify nor condemn it: "Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger" (Hume 2000, 2.3.3.6). What Hume is saying here is that it is not contrary to reason to think of men and women who would prefer a Hobbesian state of nature to an orderly one. To such persons, the idea of prudence makes little sense. In other words, the affluent may well prefer to see the world destroyed by social chaos than be compelled to share their prosperity. However, it is a bet worth taking that those who accumulate wealth to the point of surplus are not the greatest fans of collective suicide. Nothing in human psychology suggests that people who get rich prefer chaos to stability. Yet it is still possible, in line with Hardin's position, for the affluent to prefer more security measures against those who are trying to "swamp the boat". In practical terms, This position would mean tougher immigration measures, greater defence budgets, enhanced overseas protection of multinational corporations, and other

measures that secure the comfort zone of the affluent. However, in spite of the huge costs of putting some of these measures in place, their limited success across the globe is evident in the greater level of divisiveness in this age of globalization, thereby rendering the “life-boat” approach less productive in some cases and dangerous in others.

Thus the prudential motivation creates a scenario in which even the vilest of individuals in Hobbes’ State of Nature, out of a desire for self-preservation, agrees to come into a contract that improves their chances of survival. As pointed out earlier, its relevance lies in its reinforcement of the ethical ground for poverty alleviation in a non-obstructionist manner. By focusing on the overlapping interests of all parties concerned, it fills the lacuna created by divergences in ethical persuasion.

Nevertheless, it is important at this point to emphasise that the task of addressing poverty in Africa ultimately rests with its people. This reality is without prejudice to one’s understanding of the source(s) of the continent’s economic woes. Two contrasting views on the African predicament are the internalist and externalist positions. The former places Africa’s woes at the doorstep of the people of the continent, its leadership especially, while the latter identifies imperialist realities as the basis of the African situation (see Ayittey 1992; Onigbinde 2003; Falaiye 2012). While we are not directly concerned here with the detailed evaluation of either position, a critical examination of both suggests that Africa’s hope for development cannot be placed in foreign hands. If the internalists are right, Africa is in the best position to retrace its steps not only by taking responsibility for its own dilemma, but also by taking proactive measures to redeem itself. If on the other hand the externalist argument is correct, it would still amount to an act of utter naivety to expect those who benefit by plundering the continent to play a pivotal role in addressing its poverty crisis. One may even choose to endorse both positions by identifying in a non-contradictory manner the correctness of both views, that is, contending that Africa’s poverty crisis stems from both internal and external factors. Yet this position in no way detracts from the responsibility of the continent to chart its own course out of the doldrums. If anything, it reinforces the necessity of working doubly hard to confront a double-headed challenge.

The present paper departs from the notion that aid is inherently antithetical to development. This line of thought, of which Dambisa Moyo is a strong proponent, argues for the total eradication of aid if Africa is to develop. Against the belief that aid facilitates development, she contends that its damaging effect (catalogued sectorally) puts a lie to the myth (Moyo 2009, p.xix). While there is no doubt that aid packages are often designed to pauperize Africa the more and weaken its sovereignty, Moyo’s attempt to draw a correlation between the growth of aid in Africa and the

worsening standard of living seems to imply that aid in whatever guise is solely responsible for the continent's condition. What can be said against this is that aid becomes a burden only when not genuine, wrongly applied or mismanaged. The Marshall Plan demonstrates that where aid is genuinely conceived and made to complement indigenous effort, development gathers more pace.

Essentially, what the prudential approach does is to make the case that the affluent North cannot afford to be an uninterested observer of the unsavoury state of affairs in Africa; but it does not in any way transfer the primary duty of poverty reduction in the continent to the affluent North. Aid therefore, even when genuine, cannot, and ought not, be the panacea to the challenges posed by poverty in Africa. Rather, it has a complementary role to play in the continent's effort to implement properly articulated action plans capable of engendering significant and enduring improvement in the quality of life across the continent.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have examined the problem of poverty especially as it affects Africa, and the relevance of Odera Oruka's idea of the *human minimum* in defending the ethical basis of foreign aid. We have also tried to look beyond the limitations of the ethical basis of aid for poverty eradication in Africa. In this regard, we have argued that there exists a prudential basis for developed nations to show concern about the crisis of poverty in developing parts of the world, Africa in particular. This prudential basis takes care of the objections to which the ethical argument is exposed. We noted that the increasingly integrative effect of globalization has ensured more than ever before that events in one corner of the world resonate in the other. We have also advanced the view that ultimately, the task of bringing Africa out of poverty rests with Africans themselves and not foreigners. What the prudential approach seeks to emphasise is that it is in the interest of the developed world to help in whatever way it can to bring to the barest minimum the debilitating effect of poverty on Africa. In this way, it complements the ethical case, which, though plausible, appears limited in its capacity to make a strong case for genuine aid in Africa.

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