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ARISTOTLE'S HUMAN VIRTUE AND YORÙBÁ WORLDVIEW OF ỌMOLÚÀBÍ: AN ETHICAL- CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

Bosede Adefiola Adebawale and Folake Onayemi

Abstract

This paper gives an interpretative ethical-cultural analysis of the Aristotelian concepts of virtue in ancient Greece and Omoluabi in Yoruba worldview through the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, courage and temperance. Generally, virtue and vices are common terminologies in ethical theories. They constitute significant principles or rules for moral actions. Virtues are ways of describing the habit of following those principles and rules. However, Aristotle, rather than explaining right or wrong in terms of rules, appraises the human characteristics through actions that make a person virtuous, enabling him to act ethically or acceptably under different circumstances that cannot be covered by rules or principle. Aristotle developed a significant description of human virtue in two of his texts, the Nicomachean Ethics and the Eudemian Ethics and reached several conclusions on what it means for a person to be virtuous. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle describes virtue as qualities needed to live morally and to achieve the overall purpose in life - happiness. He maintains that striking a balance between a deficiency and an excess of a trait is important. He considers virtue as a state of being which abets a person to live according to reason. Aristotle's virtue relates to the Yoruba ideology of Omoluabi the philosophical and cultural concept used to describe someone of good and virtuous nature. An omoluabi is expected to display and exhibit great virtues and values translating the core moral conduct in Yoruba culture, such as humility, good-naturedness, bravery, good will, diligence among others.

Key words: Omoluabi, Aristotelian, Yoruba, Virtue, Moral.

Introduction

In the history of moral philosophy, the concept of virtue is one of the most fundamental theories because it has to do with the ability to judge actions with regards to appropriate actions at a given time. The theory of virtue started in the pre-Socratic era, but earnest debate commenced with Socrates, who questioned the values and beliefs of fellow philosophers, especially, the Sophists on the issues relating to virtue. The theory became

significantly advanced by Plato, but became more elaborate by Aristotle. The Greek word for virtue, ἀρετή (arête), which means moral excellence, gives the indication that the primary concern of ancient Greek philosophers on ethics was the good life for humans. From the Greek notion of the good life for human comes the concept of *eudaimonia* which literally means well-being, but often translated as happiness.

However, with Aristotelian ethics, the major interest became what humans should pursue in order to achieve this happiness. The debate on the theory of virtue did not end with Aristotle, but continued to be a major philosophical theme of later philosophers such as, the Stoics, Epicureans and Cynics. Stedman (2011:57) claims that “Aristotelian thought was preserved by Arab scholars during the so-called Dark Ages” and was later “rediscovered by Christian thinkers during the High Middle Ages” and incorporated into Christian moral theology, particularly by Thomas Aquinas. Today, virtue ethics survives and persists as the “dominant approach in Western moral philosophy” (Hursthouse 2007:1). The term ‘virtue’ is derived from the Latin word ‘*virtus*’ which is the personification of the Roman god, Virtus, which connotes manliness, honour and worthiness of reverential respect. Guthrie (1960:154) explains virtue as:

A state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to ourselves, determined by a rational principle and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.

Rand (1961) defines virtue as the “act by which we gain/and or keep virtues” and identifies certain virtues such as justice, pride, integrity and honesty. According to Rand, virtue must be justified in terms of the requirements of life and happiness. The Yoruba word that most describe the theory of virtue ethics is *Omoluabi*. The word ‘*Omoluabi*’ is a Yoruba word ethically used to describe a person of good character. The concept of *Omoluabi* signifies courage, humility, respect, strength, worth, moral excellence, wisdom, as well as moral goodness. The objective of this paper is to give an interpretative ethical-cultural analysis of Aristotelian and Yoruba concepts of virtue and *Omoluabi* by adopting an interpretative analysis method.

Aristotelian Concept of Human Virtue

Aristotle gives a detail account of virtue in two of his works, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*. In the *Nicomachean*

Ethics, Aristotle describes virtue as qualities human need in order to live morally and to achieve the overall purpose in life, *eudaimonia* - happiness. Aristotle sees happiness as the chief goal in human life and added that it is only when people display virtuous qualities that they could enjoy happiness. Aristotle adds that these qualities are necessary for man's development as a social being, and maintains that striking a balance between a deficiency and an excess of a trait is important. Aristotle views virtue as a state of being which abets a person to live according to reason. To Aristotle, human virtue is that which makes humans perform their characteristic action well and this is uniquely essential to being human, that is living a human life in accordance with reason, which is the state of character and is connected with a person's response to pleasure and pains under various situations.

As far as Aristotle is concerned, the virtuous man knows the best course of action to take and feels only pleasure without pain for taking this action. Human virtue, to Aristotle, is the state of the human soul that makes a person choose the right actions, at the right times and for the right reasons. In other words, a virtuous man is able to respond to different situation at various times in the right way as a result of his soul being in a particular state. Therefore, virtue to Aristotle is an overall property of a virtuous man and whatever action he takes is pleasurable to him. Aristotle declares:

For pleasure is a state of soul, and to each man that which he is said to be a lover of is pleasant; e.g. not only is a horse pleasant to the lover of horses, and a spectacle to the lover of sights, but also in the same way just acts are pleasant to the lover of justice and in general virtuous acts to the lover of virtue. Now for most men their pleasures are in conflict with one another because these are not by nature pleasant, but the lovers of what is noble find pleasant the things that are by nature pleasant; and virtuous actions are such, so that these are pleasant for such men as well as in their own nature (*Nichomacean Ethics*, Book 1).

He further explains:

... the lovers of what is noble find pleasant the things that are by nature pleasant; and virtuous actions are such, so that these are pleasant for such men as well as in their own nature. Their life, therefore, has no further need of pleasure as a sort of adventitious charm, but has its pleasure in itself. For, besides what we have said, the man who does not rejoice in noble actions is not even good; since no one would call a man just who did not enjoy acting justly, nor any man liberal who did not enjoy liberal actions; and similarly in all other cases. If this is so, virtuous actions must be in themselves pleasant (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1).

Aristotelian ethics emphasizes moral virtues as the basis for the common good and considers these as the habit of right desire which leads to moderation. He posits that a balance must be maintained between deficiency and excess not only in relation to habits that affect the body, but also habits that contribute to the development of virtues, hence he declares:

First, then, let us consider this, that it is the nature of such things to be destroyed by defect and excess, as we see in the case of strength and of health (for to gain light on things imperceptible we must use the evidence of sensible things); exercise either excessive or defective destroys the strength, and similarly drink or food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health, while that which is proportionate both produces and increases and preserves it. So too is it, then, in the case of temperance and courage and the other virtues. For the man who flies from and fears everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward, and the man who fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash; and similarly the man who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while the man who shuns every pleasure, as boors do, becomes in a way insensible, temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by excess and defect, and preserved by the mean (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104a11-26.)

Aristotle reiterates that virtue in itself is of no value if virtuous actions are not performed (Furley 1999). After all, the concept of virtue is the concept

that makes the one possessing it to be virtuous; just as the virtue of a knife is to cut and the virtue of a teacher is to teach. It is then that a virtuous person can be considered as being morally good or upright. Aristotle opines that there are two types of virtues, intellectual and moral virtues and explains how each of these virtues is acquired and maintained. To him, intellectual virtue owes its birth and growth to teaching and this requires experience and time, moral virtue, on the other hand, comes about as a result of habit. Aristotle claims that none of the moral virtues come by nature; because nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. He emphasises this point with the following analogy:

For instance, the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards, not even if one tries to train it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to move downwards, nor can anything else that by nature behaves in one way be trained to behave in another. Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them and are made perfect by habit. Again, of all the things that come to us by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity (this is plain in the case of the senses; for it was not by often seeing or often hearing that we got these senses, but on the contrary we had them before we used them, and did not come to have them by using them); but the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a).

Aristotle claims that virtue is not to be studied for the sake of knowing what virtue is but to become good, otherwise it will not be profitable.

Yoruba Concept of Omoluabi

Omoluabi is the philosophical and cultural concept used by the Yoruba to describe someone of good and virtuous nature. In relation to social virtues, the Yoruba have been described as “virtuous, loving and kind” (Johnson 1921:101). The Yoruba, like the Greeks, use the concept of *Omoluabi* as standard which determines the morality and immorality of an act in the

society. Generally, for the Yoruba to describe someone as an *omoluabi*, such an individual must be well mannered and cultured. He or she must be a person of honour, who has self-respect and accords others self-respect and esteem. Awoniyi (1983) describes the word *omoluabi*, as a word that combines all virtues. The Yoruba believe that virtue helps one to acquire and put into proper use skill, knowledge and wisdom in order to improve not just one's lot but also the lot of the society. Thus, an *omoluabi* must ever be ready to give to his community not only in words but also in deeds and in action.

The Yoruba, like Aristotle, believe that certain virtues are inherent in every human but one still has to cultivate many other virtuous qualities to qualify as an *omoluabi*, hence the saying: *Ka bi eni, ko to ka tun ara enibi* – being born is not sufficient as nurturing oneself (My translation). At this point, it is important to analyse how the Yoruba came about the word, *Omoluabi*.

The word *Omoluabi* has been analysed in different ways, for instance, Fayemi (2009: 167) considers it as a compound word constituted of suffixes and refers to it as an adjectival Yoruba phrase and breaks it down thus:

omọ + ti + Olu + iwa + bi. Literally translated and separated, *omọ* means child, *ti* means that or which, *olu-iwa* means the chief or master of *Iwa* (character), *bi* means born. When combined, *omoluabi* translates as “the baby begotten by the chief of *iwa*.” Such a child is thought of as a paragon of excellence in character (Fayemi 2009: 167).

From the above, an *omoluabi* is expected to display and exhibit great virtues and values translating the core moral conduct in Yoruba culture such as humility, good-naturedness, bravery, good will, diligence among others. According to Abiodun (1983: 14), an *omoluabi* is described as “someone who has been well brought up or a person who is highly cultured.” It is not uncommon for the Yoruba to describe someone as cultured- *omoluabi*, or as uncultured- *omolasan*. When the Yoruba describe someone as an *omolasan*- uncultured, such an individual is considered as not being socially integrated or is a misfit or is a cultural deviant within a given social setting or social organisation (Oyeneye and Shoremi 1997: 253).

Oluwole (2007:12) considers the word *omoluabi* as an interrogative phrase in another semantic thought to reflect Yoruba cultural value of

good characters by rendering *omoluabi* in a manner that reflects this phrase, *omọ ti o ni iwabi*, meaning a child whose character takes after..., but sees it as an incomplete sentence. In order to make this a complete sentence that will give a complete meaning, she raises the question: *omọ ti o ni iwabitani?* - a child whose character takes after who? Oluwole (2007) then complete the interrogative phrase by harping *omoluabi* as "*omọ ti o ni iwabi ni ti a ko, ti o si gbaeko*" meaning a person acting as someone that is well nurtured and readily lives by the training and educational principles received. She rendered the concept of *omoluabi* in three unified descriptions as follow:

Omo ti o ni 'wabi –	a person who behaves like...
Eni ti a ko –	someone properly nurtured
Ti o si gbaeko –	and who behaves accordingly

(Oluwole 2007: 13).

Abiodun follows the same trend as Oluwole in describing who an *omoluabi* is, he declares that an *omoluabi* "as someone who has been well brought up or a person who is highly cultured" (1983:14). Facetiously, some Yoruba harp *omoluabi* as "*Omo ti Nua bi*," meaning a child begotten by Noah. The import of this phrase relates to the attitude and character of Noah as recorded in the Holy Scriptures, where Noah is described as a self-sacrificing, obedient servant of God, hardworking, brave and respectful. Noah is also regarded as a man of intelligence who has goodwill for others, not only by words of mouth but also by his action. The list of virtues emphasized by the Yoruba in the concept of *omoluabi* cannot be exhausted because they are varied and many. For an individual, then to be referred to as an *omoluabi* irrespective of his or her religious affiliation, such an individual must have exhibited some of the traits and characteristics considered as *omoluabi* virtuous acts as described by Abimbola (1975:390) such as; respect, truth, bravery, good will, intelligence, hardwork, character and spoken words. Adagbada (2014) defines *omoluabi* as a good and dependable person, who stands above board at all times. Oyerinde (1991) states the attributes of *omoluabi* as including:

respect for old age, loyalty, to one's parents and local traditions, honesty in all public and private dealings, sociability, courage ... and many other qualities necessary for keeping together the large centres of the population, characteristic of Yoruba people.

The above descriptions and many other underlying principles associated with the concept of *omoluabi* as conceived by the Yoruba may be viewed as perfectionism as observed by Akinboye (2015), but Fayemi and Macaulay-Adeyelure, as cited by Akinboye (2015), caution that an “*omoluabi* is not a flawless superhero or an unalloyed character, fashioned with no impurities.” He is like everyone else, fallible and imperfect. However, the man of good character is expected, not just to embrace all these qualities but also to exhibit them.

The Four Cardinal Virtues

Plato, while discussing the character of a good city-state in the *Republic*, identifies four cardinal virtues with the faculties of man, declaring that people in an ideal city will be “wise, brave, temperate and just” (427e; 435b). He associates temperance with all classes, but primarily with the producing classes; the farmers and craftsmen, and with the animal appetites, to whom no special virtue was assigned; fortitude, he assigns to the warrior class and to the spirited element in man; prudence is attributed to the rulers and to reason; while justice stands outside the class system and divisions of man, and rules the proper relationship among the three of them.

Aristotle (*Rhetoric*, 1366b1) identifies the forms of virtue as justice, courage, temperance, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, prudence and wisdom. The Roman philosopher and statesman Cicero, in line with the Platonic classification of virtue, limits the list to four virtues. To Cicero, virtue has four parts namely—wisdom (*prudentia*), justice, courage and temperance (*De Inventione*, II).

The word “cardinal” is derived from the Latin word *cardo*, which means hinge. The term cardinal virtues literally mean those virtues on which all other moral behaviour depends. These virtues are not considered to be just good in themselves but a means to an end. Cardinal virtues then refer to these virtues as being fundamentally important. There are four principal moral virtues referred to as the cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. These cardinal virtues are interconnected and serve as practical principles guiding everyday life covering a large part of the realm of human life perfected by habit. The cardinal virtues imply the qualities of full humanity—strength, courage, capacity, worth, manliness, moral excellence, as well as moral goodness. Russell (1982: 343) considers the four cardinal virtues as a guide to the practice of moral duties and conformity of life to the practical law; uprightness and rectitude. Njoku (2006:86) contends that the cardinal virtues are there to help man realise active and moral life by the exercise of practical reasoning.

Generally, ethics is concerned with action and in order to act morally; it requires investigation and deliberation followed by a decision and the corresponding right action. In other words, ethics is concerned with volition and action. Prudence serves as the standard of volition and action; but the standard of prudence is the *ipsares*- the thing itself. Meaning that the decision made prudently, shapes human free actions when it becomes a reality.

The word prudence is known in classical Greek as *phronesis* and is derived from Latin word *prudencia* contracted *providencia* meaning foresight, wisdom, good judgment or sagacity. Prudence refers to ability to exercise self-control by the use of reason. In the classical antiquity, prudence is considered not just as one of the cardinal virtues but also as first and mother of all the other cardinal virtues of fortitude, justice, and temperance (Pieper 1965:3). A man can only be regarded as good only if he is prudent, for only a prudent man can be just, brave and temperate. The ancient Greeks considered prudence in three different perspectives in connection to other virtues. They view it as the cause, the measure and form of all virtues. Pieper (1965:6-7) explains how prudence is the "cause" of the other virtues as follow:

.... There may be a kind of instinctive governance of instinctual craving, but only prudence transform this instinctive governance into the virtue of temperance. Virtue is a "perfected ability" of man as a spiritual person; and justice, fortitude and temperance, as "abilities" of the whole man, achieve their "perfection" only when they are founded upon prudence, that is to say upon the perfected ability to make right decisions. Only by means of this perfected ability to make good choices are instinctive inclinations towards goodness exalted into spiritual core of man's decisions, from which truly human acts arise.

It can be deduced from the above that prudence is the virtue that guides the judgment of conscience. Aristotle considers this as the most important of the virtues for it is with the help of this virtue that one can practically apply basic moral principles to other virtues.

Prudence is also described as the "measure" of justice, fortitude and temperance because it provides a model of ethically good action. Pieper (1965:7) illustrates this with the work of art, he asserts that the work of "art is true and real" only when it corresponds to the pattern of its prototype in the mind of the artist," in the same way the free action of man

is good if it corresponds to the “pattern of prudence.” The third way in which prudence is described is in terms of form. In the Greek philosophical concept, the word “form”, is used to explain the specific characteristic of a thing that makes it what it is. Considering prudence in this sense infers that prudence bestows upon other virtues the form of its innermost essence, that is, its specific character as a virtue.

The Aristotelian idea of prudence can be traced back to Socrates and Plato. Faure (2013:47) asserts that Aristotle regards prudence as an intellectual virtue, a disposition to truth and reason. Aristotle considers prudence as the most important of the virtues that must be obtained, to him attaining prudence as virtue is a must because other virtues, especially, courage require judgment to be made and for that reason he refers to prudence as practical wisdom. Aristotle explains that the virtue of prudence is the ability to reflect rightly about the right thing to do and how it affects not just oneself but others as well by making judgment through practical wisdom.

Fortitude is another of the cardinal virtues derived from the Latin word *fortitudo*; it is also termed courage, forbearance, strength and endurance. Fortitude can also be described as the ability to confront uncertainty and intimidation. It is often used interchangeably with courage. Fortitude is the virtue that enables man to remain steadfast in the pursuit of his goal and ensures firmness in difficulty as well as overcoming fear, including fear of death. Fortitude, according to Pieper (1965:17), “presupposes vulnerability” and justifies his supposition that “without vulnerability, there is no possibility of fortitude.” According to Pieper, because an angel is not vulnerable he cannot be said to be brave. To be brave actually implies the ability to suffer injury, and since man is by nature vulnerable, there is the need for him to be brave. Pieper (1965:17) asserts that all fortitude has reference to death and stands in the presence of death; it is the readiness to die.

Aristotle uses the word courage interchangeably for the virtue of fortitude and asserts that a courageous man is one that maintains a balance between cowardice and rashness. He declares:

For the man who flies from and fears everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward, and the man who fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash; and similarly the man who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while the man who shuns every pleasure, as boors do, becomes in a

way insensible; temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by excess and defect, and preserved by the mean (NE, 1103b, 15 – 20).

Here Aristotle combines the virtue of courage (fortitude) with temperance. To him, courage is holding a mean position between feelings of confidence and fear. The courageous fear mentioned by Aristotle is not that of fear of evil things, such as disgrace or punishment for the law, rather, according to him, courageous fear refers to “confidence and fear concerning the most fearful thing, death, and especially the most potentially beautiful form of death, death in the battle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1115a). At the same time, Aristotle maintains that sometimes not everyone feels the need to fear, even fear of terror, but endures fears and feels confidence in a rational way for the sake of what is beautiful. He declares that people who have excessive fearlessness would be mad and remarks that “rash people, those with excessive confidence, are generally cowards putting on a brave face.” He talks about the courage of citizen soldiers as true courage, to him, citizen-soldiers seem to face dangers because of the penalties imposed on them by the laws and the reproaches they would otherwise incur, and because of the honours they win by such action; and therefore those peoples seem to be bravest among whom cowards are held in dishonour and brave men in honour ((*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1115b -1117a).

The next of the cardinal virtue is temperance. Temperance is from the Latin word *temperantia* meaning moderation, it is also known as restraint; discretion and the ability to exercise self-control. Temperance has been described as a virtue by religious thinkers, philosophers and even psychologists. It is generally characterized as the control over excess and expressed through characteristics such as chastity, modesty, humility, prudence, self-control, forgiveness and mercy. In line with this description, Green (2011:769) defines Temperance as “moderation or voluntary self-restraint” and Schwarzer (2012:127-128) describes temperance as “what an individual voluntarily refrains from doing. Schwarzer further describes this restraint as including:

restraint from retaliation in the form of non-violence, and forgiveness, restraint from arrogance in form of humility and modesty, restraint from excesses such as splurging in the form of prudence, and restraint from excessive anger or craving for something in the form of calmness and self-control (2012:128)

Aristotle explains temperance as a mean with regards to pleasures (Niemiec, 2013:15). With Aristotle's notion, temperance can be said to be geared toward governing crave for sensible pleasure, such as food, alcohol, sex, etc. Aristotle sees man as a rational animal and feels that man needs temperance in order to govern his animal nature. Aristotle believes that if a man cannot moderate his desires, it will be impossible for him to act rightly, or give to others what they deserve. It will also be impossible to overcome adversity.

Justice, the fourth of the cardinal virtues, is from the Greek word *dikaiosyne* meaning righteousness and the Latin word *iustitia* meaning fairness. While prudence governs human actions; fortitude and temperance together tame human's irascibility and appetites. Justice deals with human rights and obligations towards oneself and other people. Justice denotes giving to others their due respect and fulfilling the obligation owed them. Justice refers to the ability and willingness to mete out exact justice to everyone, even oneself, in every relation of life, in thought, word and action.

Aristotle devotes Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to justice and describes justice in two related senses—general justice and particular justice. Aristotle explains general justice as virtue expressed in relation to other people. Here, Aristotle believes that a just man deals properly and fairly with others, he will not lie, cheat or take undue advantage of others but will rather give what is owed to them. In the case of particular justice, Aristotle defines this as a justice that has to do with people getting what is proportional to their worth or merit. In other words, particular justice is giving to people what they deserve according to the circumstance. Aristotle has it, that an educated judge is needed, in order to apply just decisions in relation to a particular case. Justice is considered by Aristotle as the only virtue thought to be "another's good," because it is related to one's neighbour and does what is advantageous to another.

The four cardinal virtues work together to make a man virtuous. Prudence recognises what is good and direct the doing of it and avoidance of evil. Justice on its part ensures that honour, obligations and duties are given to whom it is due. Both prudence and justice help man to see what he must do while fortitude gives him the strength to see it through and temperance assist man to maintain a balance. While temperance gives man the needed and necessary self-control in order to forgo short-term pleasures so as to pursue long-term goals. Fortitude is the virtue that sees man through to the end, either failure or success.

Aristotelian virtuous man is one who is able to maintain a mean with respect to all the bad passions and actions, a mean between extreme and deficiency. To Aristotle, it is normal to feel pains, pity, fear, pleasure etc, either too much or too little. Aristotle believes that both extremes should be avoided but opines that in order to have these feelings at the right times, towards the right people as well as for the right motive and in the right way, a balance must be maintained between the extreme and deficiency, which is the mean, the hallmark of virtue. To Aristotle, there is no virtue without a vice. Table 1, provided by Akinboye (2015), shows some Aristotelian virtues and vices and the mean, representing virtue:

Table 1: Aristotelian Virtues and Vices

Excess (Badness)	Mean (Virtue)	Defect (Badness)
Irascibility	Gentleness	Spiritless-ness
Rashness	Courage	Cowardice
Shamelessness	Modesty	Diffidence
Profligacy	Temperance	Insensitiveness
Envy	Righteous Indignation	Malice
Prodigality	Liberality	Meanness
Boastfulness	Sincerity	Self-depreciation
Flattery	Friendliness	Surliness
Subservience	Dignity	Stubbornness
Luxuriousness	Hardiness	Endurance
Vanity	Greatness of Spirit	Smallness of Spirit
Extravagance	Magnificence	Shabbiness
Rascality	Wisdom	Simplicity

Aristotle sees a virtuous man as one whose habits chooses the mean in regard to what is good as a determined reason, which can only be understood by a man of wisdom (table 1).

All these other virtues hinge on the four cardinal virtues. For instance, if a person finds himself in a tight spot and under severe pressure, if he lacks courage, he would lie, or do things contrary to justice. Simon (1986:128) asserts that a man who hates dishonesty can become dishonest if his lack of courage leaves him no option than to become dishonest. Courage, in this instance, does not imply a lack of fear but the right kind of fear, fear to do evil. Courage, thus, recognises and maintains the truth even under the most trying situation. The ability to maintain integrity under the most difficult circumstance is the exhibition of fortitude and application of practical wisdom.

The Yoruba Concepts of Virtue and Omoluabi

The virtue emphasised by the Yoruba concept of *omoluabi* are many and varied, this is due to the fact that the Yoruba society is dynamic. The Yoruba expect a person to be above board always in regard to the acceptable virtues regardless of corruption and rottenness around the person. The Yoruba are cultured people who take the issues of morality as the most important aspect of human life. Many Yoruba scholars and writers have described an *omoluabi* in various ways. The long list of qualities and principles provided by these scholars cannot be exhausted. For instance, Rao (2008) supplies a list of characteristics of character that is expected of a morally upright individual, such as honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, respect, integrity, responsibility, competence and tact. Parenthetically, these characteristics are what described an *omoluabi* as listed by Abimbola (1975: 389-393) such as, *orosiso* (spoken word), *iteriba* (respect), *inurere* (having a good mind towards others), *otito* (truth), *iwa* (character), *akinkanju* (bravery), *ise* (hardwork), and *opolo pipe* (intelligence). Of all these qualities, however, Abimbola (1975:393) considers *iwa* (character) as the essence of being, and that man's character is what can be used to characterise his life especially in ethical terms. Character is described as "the inherent complex of attributes that determine a person's moral and ethical actions and reactions" (Rao, 2008). It is little wonder then that the Yoruba always say that *iwalewa omo eniyan*, meaning character is the beauty of a person. Even in a poem recited by pupils in the 1970s and 1980s from J. F. Odunjo's *Alawiye*, the import of good character is stressed; the poem goes thus:

*Toju iwa re
 Toju iwa re, ore mi!
 Ola a ma silo n'ile eni,
 Ewa a si ma si l'ara enia,
 Olowo oni n di olosi b'o d'ola
 Okun l'ola, okun n'gbi oro,
 gbogbo won l'o n si lo n'ile eni;
 sugbon iwa ni m ba 'ni de saree,
 owo ko je nkan fun 'ni,
 iwa l'ewa omo enia.
 Bi o lowo bi o ko ni 'wa nko,
 Tani je f'inu tan o ba o seun rere?
 Tabi bi o si se obirin rogodo, bi o ba jina si 'wa ti eda nfe,
 Tani je fe o s'ile bi aya?
 Tabi bi o je onijibiti enia,*

*Bi o tile mo iwe amodaju,
Tani je gbe'se aje fun o se?
Toju iwa re ore mi,
Iwa ko si eko d'egbe,
Gbogbo aiye ni nfe'ni t'oje rere (Odunjo 1970:8).*

Take care of your manners, my friend!
Honours sometimes deserts our homes,
And beauty sometimes fades
The rich today may be poor tomorrow.
Honour is like the sea, the wave of wealth is like the sea
It can escape from our homes
But manners accompany us to the grave
Money means nothing to the humanity.
Manners are the beauty of humanity.
If you have money but no manners,
Who will repose confidence in you?
Or if you are a very buxom, beautiful woman
But you lack the behaviour which people like,
Who will ever take you into his house as a wife?
Or if you swindle people, and you are highly educated,
Who will ever trust you with monetary affairs?
Take care of your manners, my friend.
Without manners, education is of no value,
The whole world loves someone with good behaviour (Ogunbowale
1970:165-166).

From the above poem, character is really the essence of a person, without character, all other virtues amount to nothing. It also shows that a man of good character is a man of integrity. The Yoruba values a man that can be trusted and depended on as reflected in the poem.

The Yoruba use various proverbs, folklore and oral poetry to transmit the different qualities and virtues expected of an *omọ̀lúàbí*. The Yoruba consider their proverbs as a horse on which words ride, and through these proverbs, the Yoruba convey their innermost feelings of a particular situation as well as giving needed advice on the need to cultivate and practice certain virtues. For instance, while a man of valour is valued and appreciated rashness is considered as foolishness, hence the saying: "*Mo jamosa la ni mo akinkanju, eni mo ija ti o mo sa, iru won ni boogun lo.*" Meaning: he who fights and knows when to run is the one known to be

brave whereas he who fights and does not know when to run will never fight another battle. With this proverb, the Yoruba, like Aristotle, show that a balance must be maintained between bravery and rashness and must not be confused with cowardice. A brave person will not unnecessarily endanger his life in order to be considered brave.

The virtue of respect as conceived by the Yoruba cannot be overemphasised. The Yoruba believe that honour should be given to whom it is due, for that they often say: *ikati o ba to si imu ni a fi n re'mu*, which literally mean 'it is the befitting finger that is used to pick the nose.'

The Yoruba cultural ideology of *omoluabi* also stresses the importance of hard work. The Yoruba *omoluabi* is not lazy; he is rather industrious and diligent. The Yoruba believe that a virtuous person will never depend on others or steal from others, but rather engage in hard labour.

Sadly today, focusing on the trend of current political, religious and social-economic in many African communities, including the Yoruba community, most of the virtues discussed, especially, character - *iwa*, which the Yoruba refer to as *oba awure* - king of success, have become lost gems. The prosperity, popularity and affluent of the characterless people in the society thus bring to the fore the question of whether moral virtue is still relevant in our contemporary society as it was during the time of Aristotle and as conceived by the traditional Yoruba society. The much valued and cherished traditions have become stale and old fashion by avant-gardism and a ruthless desire for affluent and recognition. The good moral conducts like truthfulness, hard work, temperance, justice and respect have been eroded by vices such as lies, laziness, corruption, cowardice, injustice, and what the Yoruba call *afajudi*- insolence. Vices are seen as prudence while moral virtues are considered as profligacy. The moral corruption in the society has been attributed not just to the individual but also to western civilization. Whatever is responsible for the moral degeneration that has enveloped the society, it is not too late to revive the lost moral virtues so as to revive the African/Yoruba culture of *Omoluabi*.

This paper is of the opinion that the virtues of an individual are the virtue of the community. In order to recapture the lost virtues and make a reconnection to the Yoruba traditional concept of *omoluabi*, this paper proposes that the moral virtues approved by Aristotle and replicated in the concept of *omoluabi* should be re-embraced and re-incorporated into the school curricula at all level. In reviving the culture of *omoluabi* in our contemporary society, Ogundeji (2009) emphasises the use of mother tongue as a means to achieving the goal. In line with this suggestion, this paper also proposes that parents, guardians and teachers should wake up to

their responsibilities of inculcating into their wards. It is imperative, especially for parents to teach their children by example after all charity begins at home.

Conclusion

From the discussion, it is glaring that the Yoruba tradition cultural concept of *omolubabi* is etched in the moral virtues of Aristotle. The four cardinal virtues work together to make an individual virtuous. Prudence recognises what is good and direct the doing of it and avoidance of evil. Justice ensures that honour, obligations and duties are given at the appropriate time. Temperance gives man the needed and necessary self-control in order to forgo short-term pleasures so as to pursue long-term goals. Fortitude sees man through to the end. Virtues, from both Aristotle and Yoruba perceptions, differentiate man from animal, because man has the ability to reason and use their power of reason to distinguish between right and wrong, just and unjust, as well as performing good deeds. Man is endowed with a sense of judgment, thus, man can acquire moral virtues through determination and regular practice by making use of his power of judgment.

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