



East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion

ejtr.eanso.org

Volume 4, Issue 2, 2021

Print ISSN: 2707-5362 | Online ISSN: 2707-5370

Title DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-5370>

ENSO

EAST AFRICAN
NATURE &
SCIENCE
ORGANIZATION

Original Article

Àgbájo ọwọ: An African Moral Theory of Survival in the Age of Covid-19.

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajtr.4.2.490>

Date Published: ABSTRACT

01 December 2021

Keywords:

COVID-19,
Àgbájo ọwọ,
Survival,
Human Nature,
Selfishness

This paper examines some of the moral questions surrounding the novel coronavirus, the cause of a new pandemic that just hit the world between late 2019 and early 2020. Coronaviruses are highly contagious and deadly infectious diseases, and victims are urged to do all within their power to ensure that the infection is not spread to healthy people. The central questions involved include the following: why should a person suffer and possibly die alone due to an infection that they must have contracted from someone else? Why should they choose to act ethically in the face of impending death? What is the point of protecting others from contracting the disease if they themselves have contracted it through no fault of their own? In summary, why should a person who has contracted coronavirus act selflessly? When the cure is eventually discovered, why should knowledge of it be democratized in a capitalist world? These are some of the questions that this paper addresses by juxtaposing Hobbes' argument that human beings are fundamentally selfish with the African ethical theory of Àgbájo ọwọ. The paper argues that the moral theory, which enhances survival is best in the age of the COVID-19 pandemic.

APA CITATION

Ipadeola, A. P. (2021). Àgbájo Ọwọ: An African Moral Theory of Survival in the Age of Covid-19. *East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion*, 4(2), 12-21. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajtr.4.2.490>.

CHICAGO CITATION

Ipadeola, Abosedede Priscilla. 2021. "Àgbájo Ọwọ: An African Moral Theory of Survival in the Age of Covid-19." *East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion* 4 (2), 12-21. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajtr.4.2.490>.

HARVARD CITATION

Ipadeola, A. P. (2021) "Àgbájo Ọwọ: An African Moral Theory of Survival in the Age of Covid-19." *East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion*, 4(2), pp. 12-21. doi: 10.37284/eajtr.4.2.490.

IEEE CITATION

A. P. Ipadeola, "Àgbájo Ọwọ: An African Moral Theory of Survival in the Age of Covid-19." *EAJTR*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 12-21 Dec. 2021.

MLA CITATION

Ipadeola, Abosede Priscilla. "Àgbájo Owó: An African Moral Theory of Survival in the Age of Covid-19." *East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion*, Vol. 4, no. 2, Dec. 2021, pp. 12-21, doi:10.37284/eajtr.4.2.490.

INTRODUCTION

Death, which refers to the cessation of life or existence, is a phenomenon that happens to every living being, as immortality has remained elusive despite efforts by different generations of humans to pry into the secrets of staying perpetually alive. Death occurs through different means in different circumstances. For some people, death comes suddenly, while for others, it becomes evident to them at some point that death is looming. When a person is aware that death is close by, different emotions and reactions, ranging from self-pity to fear, anger, despair, distress, indifference, or numbness, follow such a realization.

There are times that certain terminal diseases do not allow the victims to be conscious of the imminence of their death. The most recent novel coronavirus, the source of a new pandemic that hit the world in December 2019, is not in the category of diseases that make their victims oblivious of their state because it does not truly tamper with the consciousness of its victims—at least not immediately. Therefore, there may be decisions that the victims need to make after becoming infected. A very important decision is to self-isolate once a person is aware that he or she has contracted the disease. For a person to be able to do this and take other necessary measures to keep other people safe, especially when that person is already infected and has no need to fear becoming reinfected, there must be a compelling moral theory that serves as a guiding principle for the person's actions. Similarly, considering the globe-wide impacts of COVID-19, it is also imperative to identify a moral theory that can guide diplomatic and international relations in response to the challenge of the pandemic.

Different moral theories have guided people's actions from time immemorial. Each one has its selling points as being consulted as a rational theory in a moral decision-making situation. However, it is important to identify a moral theory that can persuade people to be selfless in the face of a pandemic such as that caused by COVID-19. This is imperative because the survival of the human species at this delicate time largely depends on how

well people can reason beyond the tendency of selfishness. Many notable theorists have argued that human beings are naturally selfish, and some of them maintain that humans cannot overcome the life-threatening attitude of selfishness. This is the high point of the theory of the renowned philosopher Thomas Hobbes.

Thomas Hobbes and the Selfish Nature of Humans

For Hobbes, humans must be compelled to do what is right, especially if it is not going to benefit them directly because they are naturally selfish. Humans do not learn to be selfish and self-centred; it is part of their nature. Hence, from childhood, humans' moral decisions are made from the standpoint of seeking their interest alone. This nature, according to Hobbes, is the origin of all the ills in the state of nature. There is chaos in the state of nature because everyone pursues their own self-interest and does not care about the wellbeing of other persons. Hobbes describes the state of nature as the state of 'war of all against all', and all of this emanates from the nature of humans as fundamentally selfish beings. Life in the state of nature is not only unsafe but also uncertain. Hobbes, therefore, proposes that something must be done to engender peace and social stability in the state of nature.

Although there are rival narratives about human nature that do not see humans as essentially selfish and avaricious, most of these alternative narratives are less popular than Hobbes' idea. In the seventeenth century, for example, there was a view of human nature that maintained that humans are essentially good and sociable. More specifically:

Over the course of more than half a century, several philosophers – including the third Earl of Shaftsbury, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith – began to theorize a moral sense guiding human action. Reacting against the Calvinist doctrine of original sin and the selfish state of nature proposed by Thomas Hobbes, these thinkers claimed that human

beings were naturally sociable, not selfish; such a view, in turn, heightened the emphasis on both sympathy and benevolence. The fellow feeling became not just a basic tenet of human nature but a pillar of virtue that could be exercised and trained (Engen, 2015, p. 7).

However, having experienced the inhuman and inhumane cruelty that people perpetrated and suffered during the war, Hobbes thinks otherwise. For him, humans are hopelessly selfish and bellicose unless coerced to exhibit civility. Hobbes does not believe that humans can act selflessly when they stand to gain nothing, unless, of course, they are forced to do what is reasonable, even if it is not in their interest, by a higher power. Hobbes believes that children are born with proclivities for selfishness; he holds a rather debased view of human nature. For him,

Humans [are] self-interested, anti-social, power-seeking animals. They are no different from any other animal that is driven by basic biological urges. Hobbes did not believe that our ability to reason enabled us to control these urges. Our intellectual abilities merely made it possible to satisfy our basic urges. Of course, Hobbes also witnessed times when humans showed compassion and generosity, but he believed that even these were self-motivated. He believed that when we show compassion to people in need, we are conscious that one day we may be in the same situation ... We are generous, but our motive is pure self-interest (Clydesdale, 2016, p. 6).

Hobbes, therefore, believes that a grave problem requires a radical solution. Hence, he proposes the guardianship of the Leviathan to safeguard the continued existence of the newly formed civil society, the social pact that people have enacted to guard against the self-destructive nature of existence in the state of nature. This, for him, is imperative to ensure that people live morally by jettisoning the destructive propensity toward selfishness. For Hobbes, a sovereign that is dictatorial is the only antidote to society relapsing back to the state of nature, where life is unbearably “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” Without the powers of a sovereign in place to check people’s excesses, they cannot obey the laws of nature or

abide by the terms of the contract that is the basis of the establishment of civil society. In Hobbes’ words,

For the Lawes of Nature (as Justice, Equity, Modesty, Mercy, and (in summe) Doing To Others, As Wee Would Be Done To), if themselves, without the terrour of some Power, to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural Passions that carry us to Partiality, Pride, Revenge, and the like. And Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all. Therefore, notwithstanding the Lawes of Nature, (which everyone hath then kept when he has the will to keep them when he can do it safely), if there be no Power erected, or not great enough for our security; every man will and may lawfully rely on his own strength and art, for caution against all other men (Hobbes, 1996, p. 152).

The problem with Hobbes’ proposal is that by recommending that the Leviathan is the elixir for curing people of the maladies of the state of nature, he merely proposes a political solution to a moral problem. The problem of selfishness that has the potential to destroy social order and negatively impact existence is one of character deficiency, a moral problem. However, enforcing the law to ensure that crimes are not committed is a political matter. In a way, Hobbes also acknowledges how limited his solution is, because according to a reading of Hobbes,

The selfish drives described by Hobbes are indelibly stamped on human nature. They are never erased. They are simply controlled or moderated. The Leviathan provides a kind of secular deliverance and salvation from the hellish state of nature in a manner similar to the way in which divine grace does the same thing according to some theists. In terms of the nature/nurture debate, Hobbes clearly falls into the nature camp. The Leviathan nurtures man, in a manner of speaking, by providing for the conditions necessary for human civilization; however, the raw power of the Leviathan does not change human nature itself in any way, i.e., there is nothing that might be called the ‘rehabilitation’ of human beings ... For Hobbes,

human nature remains brutish and nasty (Harris, 2017, p. 10, emphasis mine).

Therefore, Hobbes' proposal does not address the whole problem since it is only possible for social order to be maintained under an illiberal regime for just a while. However, this cannot be sustained because such a society's maintenance of social order is based on fear rather than conviction. Hobbes' position suggests that there can only be the possibility of controlling human conduct through the fear generated by a powerful political authority (Harris, 2017, p. 10). When excessive fear without conviction is the power that moves and maintains the polity, people look for ways to outsmart the system, so the peace that is enjoyed is short-lived. Humans are creative beings, and their creativity is not displayed through positive inventions alone. At times, they also display ingenuity in negative acts. Therefore, Hobbes' suggestion is grossly deficient.

In addition to surreptitiously disobeying a dictatorial sovereign, people can even revolt openly. There is a limit to how much human beings can be suppressed against their will. Shortly after Hobbes proposed the Leviathan, Locke realized this problem and addressed it by underscoring people's inalienable right to revolution when a ruler becomes dictatorial.

Finally, there may be times when certain acts are not criminal, but somehow morally reprehensible if rooted in selfishness. It is not strictly speaking a criminal act to refuse to assist someone in danger, especially if one has no duty to do so (for instance, in a situation where there is a fire outbreak and one is not a firefighter). However, this can have grave implications for the safety of lives and property in society. In other words, while it may be possible for the sovereign to maintain social order in political matters, it is the conviction that one should do the right thing that can ensure that social order is sustained beyond the reach of the sovereign.

In the case of COVID-19, it is imperative to ensure that beyond laws and legislation, people are truly convinced that the right thing to do is to protect other people, even when they do not particularly need such protection. Although people have a tendency toward selfishness, what are the most appropriate moral theories to guide us in these uncertain times? Additionally, in international

relations, it is important to have a moral theory that can serve as a rational ground for strong nations to assist countries that are not economically or medically advanced. There is, no doubt, a constant tussle for hegemonic domination and supremacy among the nations of the world. This introduces many complications that engender different kinds of manmade challenges that humans must confront from time to time. That is why it is important to tame the selfish tendencies in humans with rational conviction so that humanity can survive and not bring self-destruction upon itself. Before considering the proposed moral theory, which is not popularly known but is very important at a time like this, it is pertinent to attempt a brief analysis of what COVID-19 truly is.

COVID-19: THE EMERGENCE OF A PANDEMIC

The human race has been struggling against different forces of nature for many millennia to survive. Perhaps struggling against nature is part of our biological make-up because the evolution theory holds that the incapability to cope with unfavourable natural conditions caused the extinction of the immediate ancestors of humans in the evolutionary line. Therefore, from natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, tsunamis, and drought to the onslaughts of microbial bacteria, fungi, and viruses that cause all kinds of diseases. To survive, humans have been forced to deal with these and other existential threats. Of microbial attacks, viral infections are usually most dreaded because they are, in most cases, lethal. "Viruses are small strands of genetic material that rely on infecting other living cells in order to reproduce. Once in there, they build replicas of themselves and then break out of that cell to find lots more cells to repeat the process, either in that host's body or another one." (Hudson, 2020, p. 2). One such deadly viral attack on humanity emerged as 2019 ended, and just a few weeks into 2020, the disease began to wreak frightening havoc in different parts of the globe: COVID-19.

While COVID-19 is a new virus that just emerged around December 2019, novel coronaviruses are not entirely 'novel.' For example, in the Middle East, as far back as eight years ago, cases of coronavirus-associated infections were reported.

Saudi Arabia reported the first case of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus (MERS-CoV) in September 2012. Also caused by a coronavirus, it is not unlike SARS. World over, a total number of 965 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection, including at least 357 related deaths, have been reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) as of 3 February 2015 (Joseph, 2015, p. 318).

Before the emergence of MERS-CoV, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which is also a coronavirus-associated disease, was identified. In late 2002, the media began to report cases of a new respiratory infection. However,

On 12 March 2003, the World Health Organization (WHO) alerted the world to the appearance of a severe respiratory illness of undetermined cause that had rapidly infected more than 40 staff at hospitals in Vietnam and Hong Kong. ... The alert provided guidance for travellers, airlines, and crew, set out a case definition and gave the new disease its name: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) (Heymann, 2005, p. 13-14).

Since the first cases of coronavirus with the name COVID-19 were reported in December 2019, news about the “strange” phenomenon has continued to be featured in headlines in many daily broadcasts worldwide. The rate of the spread of the disease and the awareness that there is no cure or vaccine for it are some of the reasons why it is dreaded all over the world. Dreadfully, COVID-19 “is an old virus with a new mutation that doctors and scientists have never seen before resulting in a frenzy of panic. The source of this panic is due to our uncertainty” (Choo-Yick, 2020, p. 5). A virus infection, such as COVID-19, is often both immunogenic and immunifacient. It is unclear however; how long antibodies will last following recovery. It has been suggested, however, that vaccination could help minimize its effects. Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, China, India, South Africa, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Russia, and Brazil, among others, have developed vaccines. At the same time, because the virus keeps on mutating and bringing forth new variants like Delta, Omicron, etc., it seems that the ambivalence around it is heightened.

Certain questions are important: What is COVID-19? Where is it from? Why is it difficult to contain its spread? Since the disease only just broke out, studies to properly understand its nature and to discover other important facts about it are still ongoing. To put it precisely,

On December 31, 2019, a cluster of pneumonia cases having unknown causes was reported to the authorities of Wuhan, China. As in early January 2020, an investigation was launched to determine the causes of these cases. These cases had been linked to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market that sold live animals, which made them think the virus might be zoonotic (Rutakirwa, 2020, p. 10).

Apart from noting the geographical starting point of COVID 19, which is the city of Wuhan in Hubei Province in China, it is also crucial to note that animals such as camels, cats, bats, pangolins, snakes, and cattle are generally the natural hosts of coronaviruses. This does not mean that coronaviruses do not affect animals. In some cases, they probably do, but some animals are just carriers of the pathogens without necessarily being affected. The people of Wuhan, where the disease first broke out, are believed to have contracted it from various kinds of seafood, but person-to-person infection has been spreading like wildfire since it first broke out. Coronaviruses are believed to spread from person to person through physical contacts such as handshakes and hugs, from droplets released from coughs and sneezes, and from touching hard surfaces previously touched by an infected person. The infection, after the incubation period of two to fourteen days, damages the lungs of the infected. People with existing health issues and senior citizens are particularly at risk if infected with COVID-19. On the nature and features of coronaviruses, Jackwood wrote the following:

Coronaviruses are worldwide in distribution, highly infectious, and extremely difficult to control because they have extensive genetic diversity, a short generation time, and a high mutation rate. They can cause respiratory, enteric, and in some cases hepatic and neurological diseases in a wide variety of animals and humans. An enormous, previously

unrecognized reservoir of coronaviruses exists among animals (Jackwood, 2006, p. 315).

The overall impact of the emergence of COVID-19 on the entire world is unprecedentedly wide-ranging, and the disease has touched every continent of the world. COVID-19 is a phenomenon that has affected every inhabitant of planet Earth, whether directly or indirectly. For instance, those who are not infected have suffered the emotional and psychological trauma of being anxious, panicked, and fearful, or their economy has been adversely impacted. The terror that the disease has unleashed in the last few months is greater than what any country has suffered from combating or fighting terrorism. In part, this is because the pandemic does not respect geographical boundaries or social status.

Additionally, there is no country whose economy has not been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic since its onset. In an attempt to bring the virus under control, many governments have shut down vital aspects of their economies. The aviation industry was the first and perhaps the most affected sector of the global economy to directly feel the debilitating effects of COVID-19. Conferences and meetings have been cancelled or postponed indefinitely. Diehard tourists who are determined to go on vacation are denied entry into those nations of the world that ordinarily generate a great deal of income from tourism. Schools, from kindergartens to universities, are shut down, and both teachers and learners are asked to go home. In some countries, businesses and stores are shut down completely, while in others, only businesses that provide essential services are allowed to operate.

Although many nations consider liberty to be a pridedworthy inalienable right of their citizens, people's lives and activities are being regulated without giving much consideration to how much of their fundamental rights to liberty, privacy, association, and movement are being infringed upon. A number of the worst-hit countries have ordered complete lockdowns, which have resulted in people staying indoors for days or weeks. In some serious cases, law enforcement agencies are being engaged to ensure compliance. To cushion the effects on people's economies, however, some governments have released funds to take care of people's basic and immediate needs. During the

precarious period brought on by COVID 19, the governments of Germany, the United States, Canada, and the UAE released funds immediately to make sure their citizens were taken care of.

The responses to the outbreak of COVID-19, therefore, suggest that swift political and economic interventions and policies have been undertaken, but moral intervention, which is usually overlooked in the event of an outbreak such as this, is equally imperative. My fear about the current situation, however, is that just like Hobbes' recommendation of the Leviathan as the solution to the problem of selfishness in the state of nature, forcing people to stay indoors can only work for those who are healthy and are afraid of being infected, not those who are having symptoms or who are aware that they are already infected. In other words, it is important to combat COVID-19 from the standpoint of morality because people who are already infected can protect others only if they are compelled to do so by a moral conviction. For instance, there have been scary reports and recordings shared of infected people rubbing their saliva on solid surfaces in public places. Nonetheless, given Hobbes' belief that humans can only act in ways that benefit them, what moral theory would convince a person who is infected with COVID-19 to do everything in their power to prevent the spread of the disease to others? There are many important moral theories, but a moral theory that begins at the level of the individual and goes on to consider other people becomes relevant in this context.

***Agbájo ọwọ́ La fi ń Sọ'ya* (With the entire hand one beats the chest): Mitigating Egoistic Tendencies for Survival in the Age of a Pandemic**

Moral decisions usually begin at the level of the individual. For example, if someone is considering whether to tell the truth to free Jane Doe from trouble or to help Mr. Jude, who just lost his job, out of a financial mess or to bring Bingo back home to his owner, Bill, after seeing that the poor dog strayed and could not find its way back home or to not buy a CO₂-emitting car, which has the capacity to add to environmental degradation, this all begins with the individual. Even in international relations, decisions are made by a person or a group of persons (those who head governments) who reflect on issues

and weigh them carefully before deciding the plan of action for their nations. Therefore, it still all boils down to the fact that an individual, or specific individuals, in some cases, make moral decisions. However, most moral acts produce effects that go beyond the individual who carries them out. In fact, even suicide, which seems to be an act that is personal and individualistic in nature, usually has effects beyond the person who has committed the act because humans are social beings.

Therefore, a credible and practical moral theory must take care of considerations on both the level of the individual and the level of society. Horsthemke contends that “[w]hile there exists no single, unified ‘African ethic’ or ‘African moral outlook’, there are nonetheless certain core ideas that appear with perhaps surprising regularity across African (especially sub-Saharan) societies and cultures” (Horsthemke, 2017, p. 119). This paper argues for one of such ‘moral outlooks’, stressing its importance in the attempt to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. The moral theory of *Agbájo ọwọ́* is a popular theory among the Yoruba people of West Africa. It strikes a delicate balance between the moral needs of the individual and the moral needs of other people in society. Literally, the saying *Agbájo ọwọ́ la fi ní sọ̀'yà, àfẹ́jẹ ọwọ́ kan kò gbẹ̀rù d’óri*, means with the entire hand one beats the chest; “one hand cannot lift a heavyweight to the head; one beats his/her chest only with clutched (five) fingers – a cultural gesture of self-esteem” (Ajayi, 2010, p. 140). However, the real meaning of the dictum is that there is strength in the collective. The collective, in this sense, is not that which disregards the individual. Rather, the individual finds protection, strength, and affirmation within the group. This dictum is central to the spirit of togetherness that is often encouraged among the Yoruba and other Africans.

The saying warns against individualism and selfishness, emphasizing the futility of standing or acting alone or in opposition to the interest of the collective. This African relational ethic mitigates the excesses of egoism on the one hand and oppression of the individual by the group on the other hand. It is believed that the intricacies of each person’s existence are closely intertwined with every other person’s own. The matrix that ensures human survival, therefore, is the relational ethic of

seeing everyone as a necessary component of everyone else’s existence.

Hobbes’ analogy of the state of nature completely loses sight of interrelatedness among humans. He presents people as atomistic individual beings that totally lack relationships or any form of interconnectedness. This notion is at variance with what obtains in reality, where someone is someone else’s mother, father, sister, brother, aunty, uncle, cousin, grandmother, grandfather, colleague, friend, or neighbour. Hobbes presents a gruesome representation of a human society that is absolutely devoid of interpersonal relationships. African relational ethics of *Agbájo ọwọ́*, on the other hand, realistically shows that an individual’s existence does not occur and lacks meaning in the absence of relationships with people. That is why the Yoruba are averse to being cruel or perpetrating evil against anyone under any guise. Hence, the people say *tí a bá sọ̀ òkò l’ọ́ja, ará ilé ẹ̀ni ní í bá* (literally means that if one throws a pebble in the marketplace, it hits the person’s neighbour or relation). The actual meaning of the saying is that if one perpetrates evil, it will affect someone close or related to the evildoer.

While it is true that every individual has desires, goals, aspirations, and preferences, the moral philosophy of *Agbájo ọwọ́* encourages people to think beyond their own interests and to always consider other people. This is not to argue that there were no dissenting voices in traditional African Yoruba communities. However, with dialogue and education, individuals are made to realize the importance of cooperation. Two practices in traditional Yoruba societies underscore the philosophy of *Agbájo ọwọ́*. *Àáró* and *òwẹ̀* were very popular in pre-colonial Yoruba communities. In pristine times, the Yoruba used *àáró* to support and help each other on their farms. “*Àáró* was a system of labour pooling by a group of friends to work in rotation on one another’s farms” (Akintoye, 2014, p. 73). The cooperative arrangement entailed a rotating system of people working on each other’s farms. As a result, everyone relied on each other’s strengths within the group. *Òwẹ̀* is also similar to *àáró*. The difference, however, is *òwẹ̀* is a pure form of assistance that does not necessarily require reciprocity, although food and drinks are provided in abundance to show appreciation for the

participants' efforts. These two practices reflect how the Yoruba have employed the age-old philosophy of *Agbájo ọwó* to facilitate cooperation for centuries and to stress the importance of rising above working solely for one's selfish needs. According to Falola and Adebayo, "Aaro was practised mainly by farmers who needed extra hands for clearing and hoeing between September and March and weeding between April and June. The second was *owe*. Like the *aaro*, kinsmen and friends worked together for one person. Unlike the *aaro*, the labour was not rotational though it could be reciprocated at any other time" (Falola and Adebayo, 2017, p. 14).

It is important to note that Yoruba people do not always create a nexus between morality and ontology. The theory of being held by the Yoruba situates the Supreme Being (Olódùmarè) at the apex on the pyramid of existence, followed by the deities, the ancestors, humans, and non-human animals are held to be situated at the base of the pyramid. It is believed that this fundamental belief about the nature of life and existence has a formidable influence on the worldviews and activities of the people. Meanwhile, this does not mean that the Yoruba do not have moral concepts that are secular or which are not necessarily tied to their metaphysics or the supernatural. For instance, Bewaji notes that among the Yoruba,

The invocation of the Supreme Being, the divinities, the ancestors, and other forces in moral matters is mainly to lend legitimacy through an already available reinforcement mechanism to what is often taken for granted as incontestable. Being morally upright is not as much a matter of pleasing the supernatural forces as it is promoting human welfare. It is in this regard that the skepticism of the Yoruba people pertaining to the place of religion and the supernatural forces in morality becomes clear to understand (Bewaji, 2016, p. 183-184).

In other words, there is no necessary vinculum between morality and supernatural forces, but moral considerations are predicated upon collective existence without stifling the freedom and happiness of the individual. Yoruba people lay particular emphasis on character. Therefore, they say *iwà rere l'ẹ̀ṣọ ènìyàn* (meaning that 'good character is a person's ornaments or beauty'). Hence,

individuals are taught to imbibe good character from childhood. The entire community, not just the parents, trains a child. The Yoruba do not only believe that it is possible to teach an individual to be moral and of good character, but also believe that moral training is very vital. This is why the Yoruba lay much emphasis on *bibi ire* (noble birth). They say *bibi ire kò se é fowó rà* (nobility cannot be acquired with money). Nobility, in this sense, does not refer to being born into affluence or royalty but is rather referring to being born and raised by people who value and teach good moral character. Therefore, unlike Hobbes' supposition that humans are individualistic or atomistic beings that grow up with strong natural traits of selfishness, the Yoruba believe that when a child is born into a moral community, then she/he should be brought up to imbibe values that encourage harmonious coexistence and rendering mutual help to each other in society.

Significant among the values that Yoruba people teach their children from childhood is the importance of living in harmony with other people in society. Emphasis is placed on the limitation of what an individual can achieve or get done all alone. The strength realizable in working together is reiterated. This is what *Agbájo ọwó* means among the Yoruba. The moral theory of *Agbájo ọwó* is similar to *Ubuntu*, another popular ethical theory from southern Africa. *Ubuntu* is "a philosophy of unity and purpose where our actions demonstrate a recognition and understanding that we are all connected" (Nelson and Lundin, 2010, p. 118). From the definition, it is obvious that both *Agbájo ọwó* and *Ubuntu* share some striking similarities. Nevertheless, they have their important differences too.

In light of the African moral theory of *Agbájo ọwó* and the COVID-19 crisis, it is essential to note the crucial role of cooperation in overcoming the problems associated with these precarious times. If humans must survive in the face of the viral infection that does not have any regard or consideration for geographical boundaries or social status, then *Agbájo ọwó* that teaches selflessness is instructive. The moral theory of *Agbájo ọwó* has been used to successfully combat insecurity in many communities in Nigeria. There was a time in the history of the country in the 1990s when armed

robbery became a monstrous threat to existence in many communities in Nigeria, especially in the Southwestern part of the country which is the ancestral homeland of the Yoruba. The crime rate was so overwhelming that the security operatives were helpless in the face of wanton killings, rapes, and theft of people's hard-earned property. That was when people residing in each community came together to form community vigilante groups and informal security outfits. This is an excellent example of *Àgbájo ọwó* as a moral theory adopted by virtually everyone. Consequently, and in no time, security was restored to many parts of the region. For example, "villages have physical gates and roadblocks to prevent unknown visitors from entering the villages at night. Keeping watch is rotational among members of the community. Human Rights Watch ... reports that because of police corruption and complicity, citizens feel obligated to establish local protection groups to protect them from armed robbers" (Onwudiwe, 2009, 94-95).

Apart from residents of villages, people residing in cities have also employed the theory of *Àgbájo ọwó* to address many of their contemporary challenges. For instance, many residents have used the method to provide basic infrastructures like water, good road networks, and electricity for their communities, especially when such amenities are not provided by the government. By pooling their meagre resources together, residents of different communities have been able to do many community projects that would have been difficult or outright impossible for only one person to do. Little wonder our ascendants say '*ìmòròṅ ẹ̀nikan kò jọ̀ bọ̀rò̀*' (only one person's idea is not usually sufficient to solve a remarkable problem).

Talking about communities using the theory to stem the tide of the pandemic, I would like to point out that this pandemic is relatively new. However, this is the advocacy of this paper – that if the theory is adopted and applied by everyone, the seemingly insurmountable problem of the pandemic would be overcome.

CONCLUSION

Occasional outbreaks of intractable diseases, such as that caused by COVID-19, are sometimes

nature's way of emphasizing the equality of all humans and their mutual vulnerability regardless of the level of their technological advancement, the height of their civilization, or the strength of their economy. At these delicate times of the pandemic and for the rest of human history, nations should learn a valuable lesson from the experience of COVID-19: the capacity for suffering should guide them always. The realization of the capacity for suffering is a mental state that influences behavior. Therefore, whether the experience is ongoing or in the past, the consciousness of the fact that all humans possess the capacity for suffering should never be forgotten. In other words, as humans, we always need each other and together we are formidable as the African moral theory of *Àgbájo ọwó* advocates.

If this realization is ingrained in the consciousness of all humans, it will be easy to overcome the problem of selfishness, which Hobbes believes fuels the chaos in the state of nature and which must be tamed by a dictatorial Leviathan in order to ensure a peaceful civil society. As argued earlier, Hobbes' thesis of the Leviathan is not an adequate solution to the problem of selfishness. For humans to overcome the problem of selfishness, a victory that is imperative for the continued survival of all humans, there must be a moral conviction that guides people's decisions and actions. *Àgbájo ọwó*, which emphasizes the imperative of togetherness and cooperation, and not our selfish nature, which Hobbes believes everyone possesses, is a sufficient moral theory for a time when humanity's survival is threatened, such as the present-day during the COVID-19 outbreak.

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