

The Primacy of Duty and Its Efficacy in Combating COVID-19

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Nyansa nye sika na w'akyekyere asie. ('Wisdom, unlike money, cannot be kept in a safe') (Appiagyei-Atua 2000).

One critical factor that has contributed to the spread of the virus COVID-19 and resulting illnesses and deaths is both the conceptual and the ethical confusion between the prioritization of individual rights over social duties. The adherence to the belief in the priority of rights over duties has motivated some individuals to refrain from social distancing and, as a result, has placed themselves and other individuals at serious risk to health and life. My argument is that the ethical enjoinder of social duty possesses priority over the ethical value of individual rights especially in times of global crisis. I demonstrate this point by arguing that the concept of individual right is derivative from the concept of social duty and through the argument that the concept of social duty is more efficacious in addressing global threats to human life than is the concept of individual rights. What is needed is an in-depth revision of the moral ordering of rights and duties and a vision of the human being as inherently other directed with duties toward others. I shall examine two specific ethical systems, that of Confucian and African, Akan moral philosophy that exemplify such a revision of the moral order.

Overriding Human Rights with Duties

The relationship between duty and rights is exemplified in the African, Akan tradition. Kwame Gyekye writes: . . . [in] the communitarian moral framework, rights would not be given priority over the value of duty . . . it might be appropriate occasionally to override some individual rights for the sake of protecting the good of the community itself' (Gyekye, 2004).

The pressing, contemporary case of the practical, real-time application of this principle is that of China, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan's handling of the coronavirus pandemic and their individual and collective success in *saving human lives* compared to the disproportionate valuing of 'individual rights' over communal concerns as was reflected in the handling of this pandemic crisis by the USA.¹ The scientific background for the origin and spread of the virus has been well documented (Peeri *et al.* 2020). It has been argued that the 'Big Dragon' and the 'little Dragons' practiced consistent and comprehensive testing, well-organized contact tracing, social distancing, sheltering, isolating

and quarantining and that was why their success in *saving human lives* was so much better. For the case of South Korea, cf., Dawoon Chung and Hoon Sahib Soh, 'Korea's response to COVID-19', Early Lessons in tackling the pandemic (Chung and Soh, 2020). For the example of Taiwan, James Griffiths of CNN reported that '... Jason Wang, a Taiwanese doctor and associate professor of pediatrics at Stanford medicine said, "Taiwan rapidly produced a list of 124 action items in the past five weeks to protect public health"' (Griffiths, 2020). The USA, on the other hand, has been widely criticized because of its slowness in response. The theme of this article is that the reason that these five countries followed these practices is because there were similar deep underpinnings in the psyche of these cultures' moral principles. In a word, they valued the duty to the society over the concept of individual liberty. The argument of this article is that the following of these practices is the effect of the priority given to the valuing of duty to the community over a value of the right of the individual to liberty.² *The cause of the willingness to follow these practices and the commitment to the discipline of maintaining them reflects the primacy of the value of duty in the value system of these countries.*³

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From a conceptual point of view, the marked lack of understanding of the fundamental social nature of the human being and the primacy of duty over individual rights has unfortunately given rise to the behavior of valuing individual license of action and its disregarding of the values of social distancing, facial mask wearing, sheltering and even isolation or quarantine, because of the adherence to the concept that individual rights should not be infringed. This is an example of how not understanding the relation between duty and rights can have deleterious consequences, possibly contributing to the death of large numbers of human beings. The first conceptual priority is the exegesis of the explanation of the conceptual relationship between duty to the community and individual rights. The thesis of this article is that once the conceptual relationship between duty and rights is understood, there is a better prospect that the practices of testing, tracing, social distancing, using facial covering, using sanitizers, avoiding hand shaking, sheltering, isolating and quarantining will be followed by all members of the society.

There are numerous factors that have been pointed to as key contributions to the spread of the virus and deaths from the virus in the USA: chronic lack of sufficient funding of public health; lack of warehousing and sole reliance upon just in time production from foreign suppliers; lack of universal health care; structural racism; marginalization of certain groups such as the aged in nursing homes, the poor, those in prisons and devaluation of expertise. All of these factors, and this is not an exhaustive list, with the possible exception of the last, are reflections of the lack of an ethical prioritization of social duty over the individual liberty of those individuals who occupy positions of relative power in society. The lack of sufficient funding of public health is a flagrant disregard of the needs of a society; sole reliance upon just in time production from foreign suppliers with the result of a shortage of critical, life-saving supplies is a reflection of a lack of ethical concern for the consequences to all society's members if a pandemic occurs; lack of universal health care is a reflection of a lack of ethical concern for the other who either cannot afford private insurance or possess access to employer-provided insurance; structural racism and marginalization of certain groups are obvious examples of a lack of duty to certain classes of others; devaluation of expertise reflects a disproportion of valuation of one's individual judgment over the judgment of a special class of others, considered to be experts. In the five Asian countries with the best record of handling the spread of the virus, respect for others

including special respect for the elderly to be valued and treasured led to special regard for the elderly. The cultural value of paying respect and honor for those with learning led to a more ready willingness to listen to those with expertise. This is not to say that there is not structural racism and marginalization in these countries, but since they are more homogenous societies, these cultural disvalues did not play a significant role in spreading the disease.⁴ To illustrate how profound the impact of the lack of ethical values held have had on practices that have led to illness and death counts, we can choose how the impact of a lack of respect and value for the elderly in the USA has had on deaths in nursing homes. In a recent article, Dylan Matthews reports that 'The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that in the 23 states for which data exists, 27% of deaths from COVID-19 have occurred in nursing homes' (Matthews, 2020).

The line of argument presented in this article is designed to demonstrate that if a society understands the priority of duty over right, especially in times of crisis, that it is more likely that responsible, caring, empathetic behavior will follow that will result in the saving of human lives. It is true that in times of crisis, many traditions focus on the common good. People come together to help one another. In this sense, the COVID-19 pandemic response is not unique. It is, however, an extreme ongoing danger in real time, and, thus presents itself as an urgent case to investigate. In other crises, countries that prioritize duty ethics over rights ethics almost instinctively exhibit more concern for others as do the Maori. The example of the occurring public behavior of individuals in the case of earthquakes in Japan and the USA are cases in contrast. In Japan, there was virtually no looting; in the USA, looting was endemic.

The argument that the primacy of duty is efficacious is consequentialist based. It is based upon empirical results that demonstrate the lower rate of COVID-19 infections among countries that prioritize duty ethics over rights ethics. Once the primacy is accorded to duty-based ethics, the argument is that COVID-19 infections should be reduced. What will have been removed is the misunderstanding of the concept of individual rights that blocks the proper understanding of the primacy of social duty over right. This argument is intended to suggest that the proper understanding of the primacy of social duty need not be restricted to the cultural values of particular countries, but can, especially in times of crisis, be universalized. The neglect of social duty to others, to the community of man, to humankind is, in a word, a reflection of a lack of ethical

care for the other. The neglect of social duty is not solely a matter of cultural differences; it is a matter of a diminishment of core, ethical values. In short, the empirically based cultural existence of the primacy of social duty in certain countries reflects the presence of deeper, core ethical values, namely, a greater concern for the community, that is, for the other, rather than for the individual self. The proposal of this article is that the universalization of the prioritization of the values of community concern over individual liberties will issue forth in attitudinal and emotional changes leading automatically to behavioral changes that will result in the decrease of COVID-19 cases. This is not to say that duty ethics must be theoretically justified on the basis of consequentialism. Duty ethics may be deontologically justified; that is, it is simply right to avoid harm doing to others. Duty ethics may also be justified on a naturalistic ethic; that is, it is in accord with untainted human nature to be concerned for the other. However, the theoretical value of social duty is justified, the proposal of this article is that in terms of reducing COVID-19 infections in the world, the prioritization of social duty over individual liberty would be efficacious. Without a fundamental shift in attitude and emotional commitment to others, government recommendations to test, to practice social distancing, wearing facial coverings, etc. will have limited success. A radical, transformative shift in conceptual and ethical foundations is needed.

How Did We Come to Equate Freedom with Individual License?

In Western philosophy, at least since the time of John Locke, the emphasis in ethics has been on the concept of human rights. John Locke was very concerned with the rights of individuals, the right to life, liberty and the possession of property. In the American adaptation of this, it became the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (happiness won over property by a single vote). Nowadays, the focus on the concept of rights or individual entitlements has mushroomed immensely. The Charter of the USA specifies a number of rights or entitlements to which, it states, all human beings deserve equal entitlement. The concept of duty does not enjoy a similar status. According to Fernando Berdio Del Valle and Kathryn Sikkink, ‘...no former British colony (including the United States) features a duty of the individual in its constitution’ (Del Valle and Sikkink, 2017).

Historically, the United Nations Charter of Universal Human Rights can be dated back to the Enlightenment. The need of the Enlightenment to embark upon the Age of Reason, directed by Science, was focused on individual freedom, because it arose, in part, as a rebellion against the dominion of the Church as well as the hostility of the Church to rational and empirical scientific discovery. The Enlightenment was not focused on the goal of achieving a harmonious interaction within humanity. The individualism of Enlightenment humanism was to see freedom as its essential characteristic and its concept of freedom was identified with the throwing off of shackles, as in throwing off the authoritarian clamp-down on freedom of inquiry that characterized the all-encompassing authority of the Church or the absolute Monarch, and not with building a *community* of free and equal agents.

Individualism, for the Enlightenment, was to be free from the supervision of authoritarian, secular and transcendental rule and the rule of religious institutions. Hence, it was focused on negative freedom, that is, the freedom from any restriction, the freedom of the self. It was but a short step from this idea of freedom to the identification of freedom with individual license, with no restraint or consideration of others.

The Correction

The dominant ethical traditions across much of the world are duty-based rather than rights-based. In order to illustrate this fact, I refer to two traditions, the Asian Confucian tradition and the Akan African tradition. Though it is true that the majority of the countries that have achieved the greatest success in reducing COVID-19 infections are characterized by Confucian ethical traditions, the inclusion of the Akan African tradition demonstrates that duty-based ethics is not limited only to Asian ethical traditions.

Humanism, understood in the African Akan and the Asian Confucian sense, is not characterized by the above concept of individualism. This difference is the important difference between Enlightenment and Akan and Confucian Humanism. The ideal human, for Confucius, is already ethically directed. When the nature of the human being as depicted by Confucius is understood, it becomes clear that the key driver of ethics for Confucian Humanism is natural beneficence. For the noted African philosopher, Kwame Gyekye, the same concept is captured by his argument that in African Ethics, there is no such thing as supererogatory duties. Ethics is naturally supererogatory (Gyekye, 2004).

Kwame Gyekye argues against Rawls by quoting from Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (p. 117): 'It is good to do these [supererogatory] actions but it is not one's duty or obligation' (Gyekye, 1997). For Rawls, such actions involve risk or loss to the agent and hence are not enjoined. This ethical constraint is foreign to Akan, African Ethics or Chinese Confucian Ethics.

Natural beneficence (there is no English equivalent for the words and concepts of *ren* or *ubuntu*) is more closely associated with the idea of duty, not the idea of rights. One's duty as a human being is to develop the true essence of the human being, that is, to be compassionately concerned and caring for others, not for the self. In this sense, one does not really need the idea of rights for one, as a human being, is already, inherently directed toward respect for others.⁵

It does imply (as duty and right could be viewed as correlative concepts) that the other possesses the right to be respected, attended to and well treated. The subtle but important difference is the source of the direction of the ethical action that is being enjoined. When duty is the primary motive, the incentive is in the hands of the subject actor, the ethical agent, not the passive demand of entitlement of the receiver to get what he or she believes he or she deserves. The advantage of the primacy of duty is that it is more likely that the ethical action enjoined will be actualized. The possession of a right is dependent upon the ethical action of an other to respect and fulfill that right.⁶

Kwame Gyekye takes note of another consequence that ensues from the notion of rights entitlement or expectation. He writes that '... if I insist on my rights to all my possessions ... I may not be able to show sensitivity to the needs and interests of others ...' (Gyekye, 1997: 73). He writes that 'It is conceivable that individuals in the communitarian society that espouses social morality or the ethic of responsibility may not be obsessed with insisting on their rights, knowing that insistence on their rights could divert attention to responsibilities that they, as members of the communitarian society, should strongly feel that they have toward other members. ... The danger or possibility of slipping down the slope of selfishness when one is totally obsessed with the idea of individual rights is, thus, quite real. ... The communitarian society will thrive on the high sense of the morality of the individual. ... In terms of the communitarian morality, then, love or friendship or concern (compassion) for others may be considered the first virtue of social institutions, rather than justice, which is fundamentally about, or crucially allied to, rights. ... Questions of social justice may not constantly arise in a society whose practices are shored up by communal

values and other moral virtues' (Gyekye, 1997: 66).⁷ This vision is quite different from that of Plato's whose idea of justice is a society divided up into units (rulers, soldiers, police and merchants) that practice different values (Allinson, 1982).

If one's primary ethical duty is toward others, the practices of social distancing, wearing masks, sheltering, isolating oneself when needed, would be natural to follow. One would not consider it to be an infringement upon one's individual rights, because the concept of an individual right would not be one's ultimate value. One's value orientation would automatically be toward others. The concept of a human right as a first priority value would not arise, and hence, would be otiose.

This primacy of duty and responsibility is noticed in African philosophy even in a scholarly article devoted to expounding the concept of rights. Consider this argument made by Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua: 'The exercise of rights is made possible by the members placing duties on themselves to accommodate each other's interests and needs and cooperate to help the other realize his or her potentials and talents' (Appiagyei-Atua, 2000).⁸ The crux of this argument is that individual rights cannot ever be realized without the essential concept of duty of all human beings to observe and respect the rights of others. Duty is the primary concept; right is its consequence and hence, conceptually, its derivative. *Duty is the condition for the possibility of the existence of the fulfillment of right.*

The advantage of the emphasis of the concept of duty is that it provides a more pro-active incentive to action. Since societies such as China, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore are influenced by Confucian ethics and are thereby duty-oriented societies, the fact that they took quicker and more effective action toward others that entailed some self-sacrifice, is due to their understanding of the primacy of Duty over Human Rights.⁹ Ghana, the country in Africa that is most influenced by Akan ethical values, also possesses a good record in saving human lives. Tofe Ayeni, in his article in *The African Report*, stated that 'On a per capita basis, Ghana has produced the best testing results in Africa' (Ayeni, 2020). Ayeni proceeds to credit Ghana's record of *saving human lives* on its practices of testing and quarantining. The disciplined following of these practices, as is argued in this article, is due to the prior presence of the ultimacy of the ethical value of social duty toward others (Ghana Health Service, 2020).

If good behavior toward others is based on the rights of others, it is possible that one may not see oneself as a responsible actor to ensure that the rights of others are regarded. *Duty ensures that each individual will take it*

upon herself or himself to be responsible for the other.¹⁰ As Louis Henkin writes, ‘Confucianism and human rights differ in how their values are to be realized. Confucianism addressed the actor – the ruler, the scholar, the sage, the official, human rights focus on the “rights holder,” on the object of action, on the “victim”’ (Tu, 1998).

Normally, the primary problem with the idea of right, in my view, is that it is too easy for the would-be ‘ethical agent’ to shuffle off responsibility for the other. One may easily acquiesce to the belief that ‘someone else can take care of that’. When the issue is not spreading an infection by practicing social distance, there is no one else who can take care of that. With the idea of duty, the advantage lies in the fact that each subject actor is always enjoined to be ethical. When it is a question of rights, then the recipient demands to be treated in such and such a fashion. *However, there is no correlative enjoinder upon anyone to perform or enact the deserved treatment.* The problem with this source of the direction for ethical behavior is that it may not be natural to the giver to give and the giver may give it unkindly, begrudgingly or not at all. In the absence of the concept of duty, the idea of rights is passive and may not be actualized. In the case of COVID-19, even if it is recognized, however, dimly, that others possess a right to be protected from infection, without the concept of duty, there is no imperative for every individual to assume the active responsibility to protect the rights of others. The concept of duty, whether or not it is consciously explicit, must be paramount in order that each person recognize that it is each person’s responsibility to take care of the other even at the cost of personal inconvenience. The Confucian values of diligence and perseverance no doubt contributed to the enduring of inconvenience of sheltering, maintaining social distance and the wearing of masks.

The False Equation of Freedom with License

Freedom can never be equated with the license to do whatever one liked, regardless of the consequence to others. To properly value freedom one must value freedom for every person. To value freedom for every person is to accord freedom to the other. In order to accord freedom to the other, one must limit one’s own freedom. The concept that freedom is equivalent to unlimited action is to equate freedom with individual license and to deny freedom as a part of the fabric of society.

If the idea of freedom is identified with individual license, and there is no concept of responsibility for

others nor for society at large, such a society cannot be ultimately deemed a free society. One must perpetually ask the question, freedom for whom? For freedom to be for all, the concept of the individual must borrow from the Akan and the Confucian model: the individual must be considered inherently social. The implication of the social nature of the human being is that one’s individual nature is to be concerned for the other.

The Lone Ranger Mentality

The idea of individual freedom can also issue in the Lone Ranger mentality. The Lone Ranger mentality is the belief that not only is one not responsible for the other, but, by the same token, the other is not responsible for the Lone Ranger. Dependence on the other, for the Lone Ranger, is perceived as a sign of weakness. As a result, the Lone Ranger may feel obliged not to ask for help when needed. Individualism often carries with it the mask of machismo. Such a belief of perceiving oneself as not needing help, not wishing to reveal vulnerability where an opening is created to build trust and interdependence may manifest itself in such actions as refusing to wear facial masks, refusing to maintain social distance and ignoring medical advice to maintain scrupulous hygiene by frequent hand washing, because of a sense of individual invulnerability. The Lone Rangers can ignore symptoms they might have, because of their sense of personal machismo. These individuals believe they do not need to be tested because this would reveal a sense of vulnerability. They believe that they can take care of themselves, until it is far too late to be taken care of. These twin senses of invulnerability and invincibility can result in both endangering the health and life of others and the health and life of the “invulnerable” one.

Solving the Problem of Duty and Right: A Conceptual Analysis

The entire question of the relationship between Duty and Rights can be placed in a different light if one considers the polar opposites to be Duty and Need rather than Duty and Rights. This is a great insight of both Akan philosophy and Chinese Confucian Ethics.

Duty and Right are asymmetrical concepts. To adapt Kant, Duty without Rights is sighted, but Rights without Duties are lame. Duty and rights are correlative concepts, but they stand in the logical relationship of positive and privative. The concepts of Need and Duty are asymmetrical as well. In this case, we can have Need

without Duty, but we cannot have Duty without Need. The fundamental insight of both Chinese Confucian Ethics and Akan Ethics is that Need is the *sine qua non* source and *raison d'être* of ethics and it reflects the dependent and the interdependent nature of the human being.

Knowing who we are and what our relationships to others must be reminds us of the importance of that ancient Greek maxim, 'Know Thyself'. Our responsibility as human beings in society is to understand that these are not abstract, cerebral ideas or ideals reserved for intellectual contemplation, but are rather dynamic, living values and must be represented in our human lives through each of our actions toward every human being that we encounter on our life journey.

The idea of rights is a derivative idea, one that comes into existence only in the absence of the performance of duties. When individuals take care of others and both welfare and dignity are taken into consideration in the concept of 'taking care of', the idea that one possesses a right to be taken care of would not arise. The idea that one is entitled to equal treatment, right to vote, etc., only arises when one is oppressed, treated unequally, not allowed to vote, etc. The concept of rights only exists when the duties to take care of others is absent. Duties, however, exist without the concept of rights. The Duty to take care of others is part of what it means to be a human being. It is based upon compassion that others also possess needs and deserve to be treated equally. Duties can exist without the concept of rights. Rights only exist when there is an absence of duty.

While it could be argued that duty and right are symmetrically correlative notions, that one could not have one without the other; this view, I believe, is an oversimplification. The more accurate description of the logical relationship between duty and right is the logical relation of positive and privative. Duty is the positive value that can, if followed on its own, create ethical action. Right on its own cannot manifest ethical action. Right can only be actualized when there is a corresponding duty or law. Duty does not need the idea of right to exist; right requires to existence of duty for its actualization. When duty is present, there is no need for the concept of right. One demands and claims rights when duty is lacking. When duty is present, the concept of right is superfluous. The concept of right arises when there is an absence of duty. Since the West did not possess the concept of a Sage-King, this point may explain why the concept of rights arose in the West, but was not prominent in the history of Chinese culture.¹¹ Duty existed without rights.¹² In the West, in the absence of the concept of duty, the idea of rights emerged.¹³

To summarize the argument above, the concept of an individual right is an empty idea without the concept of duty. One cannot effectively possess rights unless there are corresponding duties that provide an avenue for the enactment and protection of rights. Duty, on the other hand, does not need the concept of right. If I possess the duty to take care of another, the idea of the other possessing the right to be cared for need not ever arise. I can have duties without rights, but the idea of rights cannot exist with efficacy unless there are duties to ensure the observance of those rights. The relationship between duty and right is asymmetrical. Duty possesses primacy over right.

The reason why so many human rights are ignored, trampled upon, neglected and require protesting, fighting and eventual legalization for their recognition is precisely because the idea of rights has been advanced without sufficient development of the idea of duty. Indeed, even with legalization, rights are sometimes more often honored by their breach rather than their observance. This is because the concept of ethical duty is lacking. Tu Weiming quotes from Joshua Cohen's interpolation of Rawls when Cohen states for Rawls, that individualist claims are 'regarded as having weight of their own apart from being derived from duties and obligations owed to society' (Tu, 1998: 303).¹⁴ This shows the distinction between the Enlightenment view of rights, persisting to this day, and the Confucian concept of duty. This view of human rights runs contrary to my thesis that rights are in practice dependent upon duties for their fulfillment. Tu Weiming states, 'On the contrary, the Confucian position asserts:' [quoting further from Cohen]:

The notions of persons standing in social relationships and of duties associated with positions in those relationships remain fundamental in that *rights are presented as flowing from the demands of these duties*, and an account of the worth of human beings is tied to their fulfilling of social responsibilities (Tu, 1998: 303–304). (This sounds as if it were arising from an Akan philosophy.)

The above quotation makes it clear that from the Confucian perspective, rights are derivative from duties and do not ever stand on their own, as in the Rawlsian and Enlightenment view. A corollary of this idea of rights is that the idea of rights does not exist in a vacuum as an abstract inherent inalienable existence as in the famed Jeffersonian formulation, but is linked inextricably to and is dependent upon the ethical actions of fellow human beings. The idea of rights moves from an individual to a social imperative and social agency gains

ascendency over entitlement. Social action is required before the idea of rights can be enacted. Duty and obligation become the social prime movers.

The idealized notion of a human being as a rights-bearing individual motivated by self-interest who attempts to maximize his profit through rational calculation in the market place adjudicated by a legal framework is certainly incompatible with the Confucian perception of the self as a center of relationships and the Confucian emphasis on duty-consciousness, general well-being, rightness, sympathy, and the moral transformation of ritual. The construction of the idea of global stewardship based on duty rather than rights, communal well-being rather than self-interest, rightness rather than profit, and ritual rather than law is predicated on the Confucian concept of the 'great unity' (*Datong*) (Tu, 1998: 70).

In this passage, Tu Weiming puts forward the need to transcend the concept of 'a rights-bearing individual motivated by self-interest . . . and to move toward global stewardship based on duty rather than rights . . .'. The global ethic which Tu Weiming references earlier is one which is much closer to Confucian values than the values of the Enlightenment. If there is to be a Global Ethic, Confucian and Akan values will have much of value to contribute.

How to Advance to a New Ethical Paradigm: Epistemological, Biological and Ethical Arguments for the Primacy of the Social Nature of the Human Being

In order to change from the notion that the concept of the human being is based upon the individual as an atomic unit, I would like to advance the following three arguments. The three arguments taken together are indicators of the derivative character of the concept of an individual.

The Derivative Character of the Concept of the Individual

My first argument is epistemological. This argument states that the concept of an individual is a derivative notion. The derivative character of the concept of the individual implies that the primary concept is the

plural or the social. The argument to be made is that there is a conceptual basis for the thesis that all individuals are inherently social. My second argument is biological. This argument states that from the standpoint of biology, the individual human being is derivative from a society of human beings, namely, two parents. The individual cannot exist apart from the prior existence of a dyad. My third argument is ethical. This argument states that, given that the concept of the individual is inherently social, according to the first two arguments, it follows that the actions of the individual should be ethically oriented toward the other.

The Epistemological Primacy of the Social

This argument states that it is *inconceivable* to consider that a human being could exist as an individual. The concept of an individual is derivative from the concept of a plurality. If there only were a one, the concept that this one was an individual would not arise. The concept of individuality only arises as a differentiation among a plurality. *The very concept of a human being requires that we understand that more than one individual exists.* The concept of the individual is parasitic upon the concept of a society. This suggests that the primary concept is that of the society and the secondary concept is that of the individual.

The Ontology of Biology

It is biologically necessary that human beings can only exist if there is a union between two sexes that produces a human being. (In one of the versions of creation in the Hebrew Bible, G-d creates Adam and Eve together.) Every time a human being exists, it must be the case that there is the prior existence of a father and a mother (even considering artificial insemination, sperm banks, *in vitro* fertilization, etc.). No human being can even come into existence as an individual. Minimally speaking, it requires a prior society of two in order that one human individual exist in the first place. Human nature is already ontologically social. Two comes before one. Even in the hypothetical case of the extinction of all individuals but one, we must understand that in order for this last surviving individual to exist, there must have existed a plurality of individuals to precede this last individual.

The Metaphysics of Ethics or the Social Nature of the Human Being

All ethical rules or behaviors require the existence of the other, that is, more than one. While it could be argued that even if there were only one existing individual, that individual could possess an ethic regarding the proper relation to oneself and to nature, such an hypothesis nonetheless requires the concept of relation and the relation is either to oneself at a past or future time or to the external world that exists in the absence of other human beings. Relationship implies sociality. If the human being is inherently social, such an ontology requires that relationship to others is ethical. An inherently social being cannot be inherently constituted to be unethical toward others.

One can object that one could be immoral or amoral, but such standpoints are derivative from an ethical standpoint. The concept of immorality is a dependent concept and represents a deviation from a moral standpoint. The concept of amorality is an attempt to simply avoid the ethical standpoint. This attempt at avoidance may easily be shown to be a mode of immorality since the avoidance of ethical duties to another is a case of harm doing.

To be a human being, therefore, one must be in an ethical relationship to others. In Chinese Confucian philosophy, the word for human-heartedness or natural kindness, *ren*, is the result of coupling the character for man with the character for two. *Ren* or natural kindness is considered by Confucius and Mencius to be an inherent feature of the human being. Man is naturally related to the other. This natural relation is known as natural kindness.

To be human, to deserve the appellation, 'human', for the Chinese philosopher Mencius (fourth century B.C.E.) requires the possession of the feeling of compassion for the other. To be human, for Mencius, is to be constituted such that one automatically feels compassion for the other. There is no such thing as an individual who is entitled to the appellation, 'human' who lacks such a feeling of compassion. There is no such existence as a human being without a built-in relation to the other. These definitions of what it means to be human are normative. In Akan thought, in English translation, the word 'person' is utilized for the achievement of humanity. Though I find this terminological choice preferable, I continue to use 'human' to retain linguistic parity between English translations of the African and Chinese traditions (Gyekye, 1992; Wiredu, 1992). For Akan Ethics, according to Kwasi Wiredu, the word

'person' is used to imply a normatively honorific connotation, rather than 'human'.

Inherent Sociality and the Ethics of Duty

Akan Maxim: 'A Human Being's Brother is another human being'.

Analects of Confucius: 'All men within the Four Seas are brothers' (Confucius, 1992).

The foregoing arguments form the basis for the thesis that human beings are inherently social. From this starting point, one can derive ethical rules for relationship to others. The foremost rule is if human beings are inherently social, cooperation and beneficence, not competition, are the best forms of relationship to develop, both with fellow human beings and with the universe. Any way of thinking that promotes competition with another is doomed to be in contradiction with the way of the universe. Any way of thinking that promotes cooperation is destined to be in harmony with the way of the universe. The primary mode of cooperation, it is to be argued below, is to follow the ethics of Duty. While we possess a natural propensity for cooperation, due to exterior influences, it is necessary to encourage such cooperation with the moral concept of Duty. This argument is a defense of the concept that duty is the moral equivalent of natural kindness and forms the ethics of cooperation and beneficence and hence is natural to the state of man.

With the adoption of this new ethical framework, it is my view that if there is the arising of another pandemic or threat to the health, livelihood, quality of human life or human life itself, there is a greater likelihood that such a threat can be tackled more quickly, efficiently, readily and thoroughly and, as a consequence, that such a threat can be eliminated or minimized more effectively. To effectively withstand all threats to human livelihood, including health and planetary health, there must be an alteration in our ethical framework. The value of human rights alone is insufficient to ensure that our global lives and indeed our planet can be saved. The terrible toll of human lives from this COVID-19 pandemic is evidence of this.

Let us conclude with Kwame Gyekye's lucid discussion of the uniqueness of Akan Ethics, which, as we have seen, is shared by Chinese Confucian Ethics: 'In this [Akan] morality duties trump rights, not the other way around, as it is in the moral systems of Western societies. The attitude to, or performance of duties is induced by a *consciousness of needs rather than of rights*' (Gyekye,

2011). In the celebrated example of Mencius, compassion for the other is aroused by the *plight (need) of the other*, by the other's need for help, not on account of the right of the other to be rescued. To quote from the *Mencius*:

Here is why I say that all human beings have a mind that commiserates with others. Now, if anyone were suddenly to see a child about to fall into a well, his mind would be filled with alarm, distress, pity, and compassion. That he would react accordingly is not because he would hope to use the opportunity to ingratiate himself with the child's parents, nor because he would seek commendation from neighbors and friends, nor because he would hate the adverse reputation [that could come from not reacting accordingly]. *From this it may be seen that one who lacks a mind that feels pity and compassion would not be human; one who lacks a mind that feels shame and aversion would not be human; one who lacks a mind that feels modesty and compliance would not be human; and one who lacks a mind that knows right and wrong would not be human (Mencius, 2009).*¹⁵

How parallel this is to the Akan saying emphasized by Kwame Gyekye, that he who does not recognize the social nature of the human being, that, 'onnye onipa' (he is not human) (Gyekye, 2004).

The foregoing shows the true nature of the origin of ethics, our feeling to help others in need. If one lacks this feeling, one is not truly human. One would not be a person. Indeed, this demonstrates that we must cultivate ourselves to become human. What an amazing parallel between Chinese Confucian and Akan ethics. Duty, the responsibility of being human, is based upon the experience of compassion. Duty is the means through which we actualize the recognition and enjoiner that we are our sisters' and our brothers' keepers.

Notes

1. A larger investigation of the crucial role of ethics in saving human lives can be found in Robert Elliott Allinson, *Saving Human Lives: Lessons in Management Ethics*, Boston and Dordrecht, Springer 2005.
2. It is also the case that respect for the aged is valued by each of these countries. The respect for the aged is a special example of the prominence of duty as an

ethical value, in this case, a duty to care for the elderly.

3. Andy Slavitt, Ex-Obama health care head reports that some countries, such as Germany, the Czech Republic, Greece and New Zealand did better in their response to COVID-19 than others and this fact points to a need for further research into their cultural values. It is arguable that thorough, consistent, attentive and tenacious leadership played a large role in the European countries and in New Zealand. It is also the case that these countries are characterized by more community-minded approaches to politics and ethics. Excepting New Zealand, the best response was from China, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan <https://twitter.com/ASlavitt/status/125747774220066827>). Accessed 15 August 2020. There are many variables including the number of visitors a country may receive, the amount of testing a country would choose to conduct, etc. The argument of this article is that specific behavior, such as conducting testing, is motivated by countries that are primarily motivated by social duty ethics.
4. This is not to say that there are not factors contributing to morbidity in the USA that are not due to a lack of the prioritization of the ethical value of social duty. For example, the higher percentage of the presence of co-morbid factors in the population of the USA is not the result of the lack of prioritization of the ethical value of social duty. Even in this case, however, it could be argued that if improper diet and consequent overweight were the principal causes of co-morbid disease factors, that such dietary habits reflected a viewpoint that did not perceive one's individual self as important to preserve for the sake of its contribution to the society, but only as a self to cater to its individual appetites and desires.
5. Tu Weiming's discussion of T'ang Chün-I's distinction of 'duty-consciousness' and 'rights-consciousness' is a valuable resource. Cf., Tu Weiming, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought*, Boston: Cheng and Tsui Company, 1998, pp. 26–7.
6. Examples of the extent of rational justifications and exceptions that either can or need to be made when there is no natural enjoiner to act from a sense of duty are provided in (Miller, 2020). Though Miller's subject is the issue of if and when to rescue, the dilemmas raised can *mutatis mutandis*, be applied to the question of adhering to social distance or the wearing of masks to prevent harm.

7. I have taken the liberty of altering the order of some of these sentences.
8. It is apparent that the words 'interests', 'needs', 'potentials' and 'talents' are specific to what is known about a particular person while the word 'right' is abstract and needs definition.
9. It could be argued that in the case of China and its method to prevent the spread of COVID-19, severe government derived edicts were involved. The point here is that in general such edicts were issued because of the belief in the value of the good of the society and were followed, not only from fear of punishment, but because of the built-in value of social duty.
10. This is not to say that a significant number of altruistic front-line workers and first responders in the USA did not risk and, in some cases, sacrifice their own lives for others in need, from a deep commitment to personal, moral values. The problem is the existence of the percentage of aggressive individuals who would instead place their rights over the needs of others.
11. As Chung-ying Cheng writes, '... the rights of man have never occupied a prominent place in Chinese thinking ...', Cf., Chung-ying Cheng, 'Transforming Confucian Virtues into Human Rights: A Study of Human Agency and Potency in Confucian Ethics, Wm. Theodore de Bary and Tu Weiming (eds), *Confucianism and Human Rights*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 144.
12. This is not to assert that Duty always guaranteed that subjects were cared for. Julia Ching has written that 'In ... [certain] circumstances the Confucian doctrine of benevolent government from above was insufficient to guarantee the rights of the subject below ...' Cf., Julia Ching, 'Human Rights: A Valid Chinese Concept?' Wm. Theodore de Bary and Tu Weiming, (eds), *Confucianism and Human Rights*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 77.
13. For Mencius, there is the right to rebellion, a right that is asserted two millennia before its assertion by John Locke in the West. However, for Mencius, this right arises precisely because and when the ruler is not observing his duty to his subjects. Right arises in the absence of duty. Kant and Hegel's ideas of duty diverge from each other and would require discussion that exceeds the limits of this chapter. Duty as

an ethical notion finds exponents in the nineteenth-century philosopher, T. H. Green and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosopher, F. H. Bradley, but these philosophers do not assume a dominant position in Western philosophy and their ideas did not exercise a great influence on the popular mind.

14. The original source from which this quotation is taken is, Joshua Cohen, 'Comments on Tu Weiming, "A Confucian Perspective of Human Rights"', at the China Forum sponsored by the MIT International Science and Technology Initiative, April 29, 1996, manuscript, p. 9.
15. For a more full-length discussion of Mencius' child in the well example, cf., Robert E. Allinson. A Hermeneutic Reconstruction of the Child in the Well Example. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1992, pp. 297–308.

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