EMOTION AS A FEATURE OF ARISTOTELIAN EUDAIMONIA AND AFRICAN COMMUNITARIANISM

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Key concepts
Aristotle; emotion; eudaimonia; ergon; African communitarianism.

ABSTRACT

Taking it to be the case that there are reasonable grounds to compare African communitarianism and Aristotle's eudaimonia, or any aspect of African philosophy with some ancient Greek philosophy,[1;2] I suggest that it is worthwhile to revisit an interesting aspect of interpreting Aristotelian virtue and how that sort of interpretation may rehabilitate the role of emotion in African communitarianism. There has been debate on whether Aristotle's ethic is exclusively committed to an intellectualist version or a combination of intellectualism and emotion. There are good arguments for holding either view. The same has not quite been attempted with African communitarianism. This paper seeks to work out whether African communitarianism can be viewed on an exclusively emotional basis or a combination of emotion and intellect.

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to chart a path of how African communitarianism can be understood in Aristotelian terms of ergon (the human function) and whether this function, following debates on the Aristotelian inclination, has an emotional basis or a combination of an intellectual and emotional basis. The success of this paper largely depends on making a case for the correlation between some aspects of the role of emotion in African communitarianism to Aristotle's ergon. Thus the first task of this paper is to successfully establish a correlation between Aristotelian ergon and African communitarianism. Secondly, the paper seeks to establish what it may mean for African communitarianism to be seen in terms of the

1 See Oguejiofor (2012) for a comprehensive and historical discussion of this point.
2 Another interesting comparison comes from Cloete (2012) who charts an informative comparison between Plato and Hountondji.

competing interpretations of an intellectualist or an emotional ethic. Thirdly, the article develops a novel argument of how the African communitarian ethic could be seen as couched in an emotional base that is aligned to reason.

ERGON IN HUMANS

Success, in Aristotelian ethics, is found in the given satisfaction of a function. Aristotle holds that if there is to be any good that is attached to a particular object or trade, it has to depend on the proper execution of what its perceived function is. Each object or trade has a specific function that it alone can satisfy. For it to be good it has to satisfy that particular function in the best conceivable manner. A shovel, for instance, is good in as far as it satisfies what a shovel is supposed to do. In the performance of that particular job of a shovel, is how a shovel is measured for its goodness or lack thereof. If this particular shovel can perform the function of a shovel well, it is taken to be the case that it is a good shovel. Also, the goodness of a builder, for example, depends on how this particular builder satisfies the known function of a builder. If a builder's job is to build houses then that is taken as her function. If we must measure how well this particular builder does, we look at how she succeeds in satisfying this function of erecting houses. If she satisfies that function well, we take it to be the case that the builder is good.

The same applies to the ethical life of a human being. A human being is not just a thing that exists in any form and for any purpose. It exists to fulfil a particular function. For Aristotle, the human function is the exercise of reason. When an individual exercises reason as she must, then she has satisfied her function, thus attaining good. From this it can be said that the individual who lives in accord with the satisfaction of this good, ultimately leads a life of virtue. It is in the attainment of this virtue, as illustrated in aiming for the mean, that the individual is taken to lead a life of eudaimonia (happiness or human flourishing). This, for Aristotle, is to be understood as the highest good. What makes it the highest good is that it is desirable for itself, it is not desirable for the sake of some other good, and that all other goods are desirable for its sake. Summed up as human flourishing, it cannot be for any other end except itself. The human function, for Aristotle then, is the activity of the rational part of the soul in accordance with virtue. The proper function of the human being must set her apart from all other things. For Aristotle, what distinguishes the human being from the rest of existence is the exercise of that rational part of the soul. Other parts of the soul can easily be seen to share in the existence of other entities. But the proper exercise of the rational part of

the soul not only tells us of what the function of the human being is, but also what the good is.

COMMUNITARIANISM AND ERGON

I am persuaded that there are compelling similarities in manner of proceeding and arguing between Aristotle's ergon and the African communitarian ethic.[3] I will start my view by making an argument for what I take to be those interesting similarities. The definitive starting point is that Aristotelianism and communitarianism are both practical. But what could this postulation possibly mean? What does it mean to say that communitarianism and Aristotelianism tally in this practical respect? The hint lies in that the Aristotelian ethic seeks to make a recommendation, in line with the human ergon, of how to live a worthy life. For Aristotle (in *NE* 1985), the kind of ethical discussion he has in mind is not to be restricted to theoretical postulates but has to be translated into practice and conduct of the ethical subject. For virtue he maintains that "…we acquire, just as we acquire crafts, by previously having activated them. For we learn a craft by producing the same product that we must produce when we have learned it, becoming builders, e.g., by building and harpists by playing the harp; so also, then, we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions" (Aristotle in *NE* 1985: 1103b). What we must observe here is the parallel that Aristotle draws on ethical excellence and excellence in a particular trade. Both are obtained through practice and repeated acts aimed at attaining the good of the intended objective. To be considered perfect at practical affairs, an individual who wishes to attain such perfection has to constantly direct her practical activity on the desired trade. No apprentice builder ever went on to become the finest builder, merely by thinking about the art of building. Whosoever wishes to be an excellent builder has to learn the art of building well by repeatedly engaging in the acts that excellent builders engage in. Aristotle equally suggests that whosoever wants to become a person of virtue, a mark of human excellence, has to equally engage in those acts that are routinely considered to be virtuous in nature.

The same line of approach applies to communitarianism. Communitarianism seeks to make practical recommendations on what a worthwhile life is not only conceived, but actually taken to be lived out. Traditional thought, which is cited as underpinning communitarianism, places human life in a special category. This special category can be said

3 The same point of favourable comparability between Aristotle's eudaimonia and African ethics is made by Metz (2012: 100).

to be specific to human beings. While all things that exist contribute to a holistic view and interpretation of life, with each facet having a function of its own; the human being too, has a specific aspect of her existence which is understood as a specific function that the human can only fulfil. For example, Tempels's hierarchy of existence explicitly outlines the things that are said to matter in the conception of life for Africans.[4] What is important in that outline is that each entity is given a specific function that it has to satisfy, or better, that is specific to it. At the top of Tempels's hierarchy is God, followed by the founding fathers of the clan, then the ancestors, followed by the living (humans), then animals (animate things), and finally inanimate things. All these things have a specific function that they do not only have to meet but which makes them to be what they are. If they satisfy these things in an excellent way, then they are taken to be good instances of what their categories are (Tempels 1959: 41-42).

A human person, according to Menkiti (1984), for example, is not a person by virtue of possessing certain attributes that are taken to be specifically human. Menkiti (1984) argues that the Western conception of attributes as constitutive of an entity do not hold in African thinking. What holds is the performance of certain functions that are seen as specific to that entity.

For human persons, Menkiti (1984) argues, what makes them persons is the idea that they excel at something that is peculiarly seen as definitive of what persons do. A person is considered as such, in as far as they are able to discharge their duties and obligations. These duties and obligations are taken not only to be specific to humans but also to be definitive of what an excellent human person is. An excellent human person is one who is able to recognise what her duties are. These duties are then transferred to play a role of defining what an excellent human person is. This excellent human person is one who is attuned to communal demands that are placed on her (Menkiti 1984: 172-175).

I take the liberty to extend Menkiti's (1984) idea to argue that the specific requirements that are placed on the individual in the communitarian scheme can be seen as falling under the same scheme as Aristotle's ergon. While Aristotle locates the proper function of a human as the exercise of the aspect of the soul that has a rational part, for Menkiti (1984) it is the exercise of the duties. Both respects are strictly human. Both respects can only define what a human does. And most importantly, both respects are about sketching

4 My citation of Tempels should not be seen as an endorsement of Tempels but as merely illustrative of the communitarian position. Indeed I am aware of the controversy that Tempels's position has caused (see Matolino 2011: 331) for a topology of the criticism against Tempels. Over and above the accusations leveled against Tempels, I have sought to show that his notion of force is steeped in philosophical racialism (Matolino 2011: 336-341).

what the finest account of being human can be. In both accounts, excellencies are definitive of what a human person who is flourishing, is. Failure to attain those excellencies means the loss of something fundamental and distinct about what the best account of a human life is.

Although there is considerable difference in the coinage and interpretation of communitarianism,[5] there are at least two characteristics that are common to all communitarianism. The first characteristic is the agreed notion that an individual is a product of her community. By this communitarians refer to the idea that the individual is bound to her community for both her physical and psychological well-being. The second characteristic places the attainment of individual excellence under a successful discharge of duties within the specific frameworks of expectations in one's community. This activity, all communitarians are agreed, is specific performance of a particular task, a practical task.

I interpret communitarians to be committed to the idea of human excellence as determined by the conduct of an individual in response to, or as a fulfilment of communal expectations. When the community has developed a framework in which individual behaviour could be directed at certain set expectations, it also enables the actual direction of individual behaviour towards that stated goal. Once that is attained, then the individual can be said to be excellent at the task of being human. Being human becomes a practical affair in that it does spell out in clear terms those actions that are considered to be in keeping with the community's own account of excellence. In this framework, the question whether one is a successful human being is settled by referring to the characteristics that are taken to be a mark of a good person. What determines whether this is a good person is the actual conduct that one either engages in, or is known to engage in, within that given framework. It is a practical matter of how one does the tasks that are considered to be the marks of human excellence.

A simile can be drawn between Aristotle's observation that what makes us just is doing acts that are just, with communitarians' insistence that what makes us communal (therefore excellent) is to discharge our communal obligations as is expected of us. On the Aristotelian account, we are just, brave, and so forth when we engage in those acts that make us just, brave, and so forth. If one succeeds at these tasks, then one has a mark of virtue. On the communitarian account, one is successful by showing that she is a communal entity. A communal entity is one that consistently engages in those acts that are in sync with what the community expects of any of its given members. The individual in community, on the

5 See, for example, Gyekye (1997) and M.O. Eze (2008).

African scheme, is oriented towards other individuals. This is the sole purpose of human existence – to be – to others. To be – to others, means a realisation on the part of the individual of what is important. What is important is to be present to the reality of others through a shared and participative communal existence. An individual who diverges from this shared and participative interpretation of life (and the importance of it, in giving meaning to a life of plenitude – a real life – excellence – life that a human person must live) is seen as a failure in the project of being a human person (on the extreme version) or as leading a life that does not fully apprehend the importance of being in community (on the moderate version). Gyekye (1992: 118) writes: "The natural relationality of the person thus immediately plunges him into a moral universe, making morality an essentially social and trans-individual phenomenon focused on the well-being of *others*. Our natural sociality then prescribes or mandates a morality that, clearly, should be weighted on duty, i.e. on that which one has to do for others." On this view, success in morality is determined by success in relationality. To emphasise the idea that relationality is not a self-contained and self-sufficient attribute, Gyekye (1992) emphasises its sociality and trans-individuality. The point, perhaps, is that in overcoming their self-sufficiency and in being oriented towards others, the individual shows not only an ability to abide with communal expectations but to be actually living up to a practical requirement of what a person of virtue is. A person of virtue is one who is other-regarding. She is considered to be other-regarding by the manner in which she has developed her relational capabilities to a point where she takes the needs of her fellows as of inalienable importance. This in turn influences both the status of the community and the individual.

Gyekye (1992: 118) makes the point well when he notes:

> The success that must accrue to communal or corporative living depends very much on each member of the community demonstrating a high degree of moral responsiveness and sensitivity in relation to the needs and well-being of other members. This should manifest itself in each member's pursuit of his duties. Also, the common good, which is an outstanding goal of the communitarian moral and political philosophy, requires that each individual should work for the good of all. The social and ethical values of social well-being, solidarity, interdependence, cooperation, compassion, and reciprocity, which can be said to characterise the communitarian morality, primarily impose on the individual a duty to the community and its

> members. It is all these considerations that elevate the notion of duties to a priority status in the whole enterprise of communitarian life.

From the foregoing, I am inclined to suggest that there are very strong grounds to think that the notion of ergon is used in the same sort of way both in the Aristotelian ethic and the African communitarian ethic. For Aristotle there is only one sort of human function – a certain activity of the rational part of the soul. From this activity he makes conclusions about the nature of human conduct that makes an individual of a virtuous and excellent sort. On virtue and the human function, Aristotle writes:

> It should be said, then, that every virtue causes its possessors to be in a good state and to perform their functions well; the virtue of eyes, e.g. , makes the eyes and their functioning excellent, because it makes us see well; and similarly, the virtue of a horse makes the horse excellent, and thereby good at galloping, at carrying its rider and standing steady in the face of the enemy. If this is true in every case, then the virtue of a human being will likewise be the state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his function well (Aristotle in *NE* 1985: 1106a5).

To put this plainly, Aristotle is arguing that virtue makes whatever entity that possesses, that virtue to be good. Further, virtue makes the entity perform its functions well. If an entity has a function to perform, and possesses virtue – then it will perform that function well.

Aristotle (in *NE* 1985) points out that virtue is characteristically aiming at the mean relative to us. He argues that in all things that have a continuum, there is always going to be either more or less in relation to the given object. He characterises this state of affairs as excess or deficiency. Adopting one of these two is inconsistent with virtue. Virtue is typically aiming at what he calls the mean relative to us. "By the intermediate in the object I mean what is equidistant from each extremity; this is one and the same for everyone. But relative to us the intermediate is what is neither superfluous nor deficient; this is not the same for everyone" (Aristotle in *NE* 1985: 1106b15).

Aristotle is quite precise in defining what he means by virtue when he writes: "By virtue I mean virtue of character; for this [pursues the mean because] it is concerned with feelings and actions, and these admit of excess, deficiency and an intermediate condition" (Aristotle in *NE* 1985: 1106b15). He argues that since actions and feelings such as anger, fear, pity and confidence can be open to either excess or deficiency, it is appropriate that these are

considered as instances conducive to evaluation on whether at any given moment the ethical subject exhibits excess or deficiency or the mean. Hence his definition is stated as: "Virtue, then, is (a) a state that decides, (b) [consisting] in a mean, (c) the mean relative to us, (d) which is defined by reference to reason, (e) i.e., to the reason by reference to which the intelligent person would define it. It is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency" (Aristotle in *NE* 1985: 1106b15). Instructively, in book six, Aristotle introduces a distinction between *sophia* and *phronesis*. *Sophia* refers to intellectual virtues such as *nous* and *episteme* which are both theoretically oriented. *Phronesis* on the other hand, though combining with intellectual virtue, tends towards involving practical outcome or execution of a skill. He calls this second part of the soul "the rationally calculating part" (Aristotle in *NE* 1985: 1139a20). Hence he conceives of the virtuous person as one who has correct decision and ultimately the virtue of practical thought. On the relation between *sophia* and *phronesis* he writes: "As assertion and denial are to thought, so pursuit and avoidance are to desire. Now virtue of character is a state that decides; and decision is a deliberative desire. If, then, the decision is excellent, the reason must be true and the desire correct, so that what reason asserts is what desire pursues" (Aristotle in *NE* 1985: 1139a20). What this effectively shows is how Aristotle differently construes the horizons of the good as constituted by the theoretical and the practical. Whatever the practical tends toward would have been authored and approved by virtues encompassed in the *nous* and *episteme*. Since both the practical and the rational are capable of articulation in terms of the virtues of the mean, as defined by reason, it is plausible to argue that Aristotle's account of virtue is comprehensive.

It could be objected that the formulation of the two ethical systems is different in that Aristotle primarily emphasises the conduct of the individual as an ethically responsible entity and how she behaves. Communitarianism, it could be argued seeks to find affirmations of both the community and the individual in the reciprocities that they share as mutually bound entities. Hence, the argument can be extended, it cannot be the case that there are grounds to compare two systems that have a different emphasis in what makes an individual good.

I think that this objection would have been true had it been the case that communitarianism, in all its versions, does not make room for individual inventiveness. Not all communitarianism is in the fold of Menkiti (1984) who suggests that whatever the individual's needs or realities are, they are secondary to those of the community. I suggest that Menkiti's (1984) version is very much in the minority. Thinkers such as Gyekye (1997) and Masolo (2010) hold that there is a place for individual expression within a communitarian scheme.

With this, we can proceed to compare how ergon works out in both ethical systems. In both systems, I suggest, there is an understanding of what constitutes the good of a human person. For Aristotle it is a particular form of virtue that is expressed in actions that avoid extremes, relative to the station of the individual as informed by reason. In communitarianism, it is the performance of communally approved duties. Both systems see the articulation of what an individual must do as a proper function of what persons are.

Yet another overlap, between these two systems, refers to how they are couched in praxis. Both systems seek to find out and recommend what the best way to live a morally worthy life in accord with the endowments and functions of a human being are. Both systems are quite decided in claiming that there is a certain way of being a morally sound human being. This manner of being sound is reached through the same method of working out what the ergon of a human is. Interestingly, we may observe, both systems are quite adamant that there is only one way of working out what that ergon is. Aristotle, in arguing that everything has a function, and its good lies in the perfect execution of that function, secures a very important detail on how the very business of adjudging what is morally worthwhile, must be handled. Aristotle's move effectively disbars the possibility of there ever arising competing interpretations of what the good life is. Effectively, it gets rid of either relativist or confused accounts of what the worthwhile life is. This is crucially secured by Aristotle's move from considering what practical trades engage in to locating the same functionality of the good in what people as moral agents do. For example, there is no confusion in the mind or practice of the builder as to what she must do or what it is that she needs to do to be an excellent builder. Ordinarily, builders are never found to wonder out aloud or debate about different interpretations of what builders are, who builders are, and whether there is such a thing as the trade of building. By extending the same move to ethics, Aristotle crucially points to the idea that there is something about being a human that is common, shared, and indisputable. Just like all builders participate in the art of building, in order to be considered builders, human beings must participate in something that makes them human. This participation, according to Aristotle, is fixed by the nature of the entity that is under discussion or evaluation. Most importantly, this participation is not given to idle talk or extensive theoretical expositions of what is or what is not. Human beings must engage in those acts of virtue that are specific to their function. In repeatedly doing those acts they develop their virtue in ways that speak to what the human good is.

The same move is also applicable to the communitarian scheme. Communitarians, though not explicit, appear to be receptive to the idea that the notion of community life is

something that is symptomatic of human life and existence. While it is possible to talk of communities of all sorts, the manner in which the human community is conceived and constituted is distinct to humans and their interactions. What makes the human community distinctly human and significant on the characterisation of a human person as a success, are the inter-relations that are borne and are peculiar to participants and actors within this communal set-up. These participants and actors can only be humans who understand what it is to work within this human framework and derive their identity from this framework. In interacting in ways that enhance the other, they also testify to their understanding of what is expected of a successful human person.

Drawing from this, it can be further inferred that the communitarian scheme, like its Aristotelian counterpart, is a practical recommendation on how to best live a life. Both schemes make clear to participants that a life is well lived when certain practical details of existence, decision-making, and conduct are observed. To be ethical is to be immersed in the practical requirements of being responsive to the prescribed functions of being human. When one fails to attend to these prescribed functions, then one is not only failing at ethical conduct but also at being human. Of course the question that has always troubled communitarians is: if one fails at being human does it mean that they cease to exist as human? I propose that a reasonable response to this worry is that although one does not completely cease to be a human, one who fails should be seen as having not succeeded at becoming a complete human. Or, put in another way, whosoever fails, is not an epitome of being human. This is hardly controversial for, I think, it is the same parlance as Aristotle's outline of the different successes that can be registered in practical trades. A bad builder, for example, remains a builder, but hardly one who can be relied on to construct the best or most solid house. Such a builder may be called upon to improve her skills, may be banished from the trade, may be penalised or not taken seriously. Builder, yes, she may be, but not of the sort that we think highly of. In the class of builders we do not take her seriously or refer to her as an epitome of that class or cluster. We may condemn her, admonish her, advise her, or avoid her altogether. The same is true for what we may hold to be the nature of being a person in a communitarian set-up. Just as there are many admissions to the competence of participants in practical trades (relative to their stations), the same is true of participants in a communitarian set-up. There is going to be those who are in need of encouragement to come to realise their best, those who need to improve, those who have attained a level of excellence, and those, unfortunately, who can't be helped because they have either sunk so low through self-inflicted neglect or simply lack the wherewithal to be of a stature that is taken seriously.

Like the Aristotelian scheme, the communitarian scheme leaves open the possibility for one who is worse off to come to learn and appreciate what her function is and what the concomitant performance/role is. Aristotle holds that virtue of character is not determined by a process of nature but by habituation. He writes:

> For if something is by nature [in one condition], habituation cannot bring it into another condition. A stone, e.g., by nature moves downwards, and habituation could not make it move upwards, not even if you threw it up ten thousand times to habituate it; nor could habituation make fire move downwards, or bring anything that is by nature in one condition into another condition. Thus the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature, rather, we are by nature able to acquire them, and reach our perfect completion through habit (Aristotle in *NE 1985:* 1103a20).

Thus whoever wishes to learn through self-application may rise from her poor station to one that is considered proper to human function – that of virtue; by conducting herself in ways that seek the mean on the Aristotelian scheme, and by becoming an individual who is present to the interests of others and her community.

With all this considered, the next question would seek to deal with what is precisely responsible for not only the development of this ethical sense, but also what is responsible for its continued appreciation by the subject.

As far as Aristotelian ethics is concerned there have been, at least, two interpretations that seek to account for the origin of the ethical sense. As far as I can work out such an interpretative attempt has not been carried out in the communitarian ethical system. In the next section, as an illustrative exercise, I refer to the work of Thomas Nagel and Nancy Sherman who interpret the Aristotelian ethic in two contrasting ways. My intention is not to work out which interpretation is plausible. Rather, the purpose of my discussion seeks to set the stage for interpreting the foundations of communitarianism. By outlining Nagel and Sherman's differing interpretations, I wish to draw on those different interpretations to work out whether such a differing interpretation is possible within the communitarian scheme.

NAGEL AND SHERMAN ON EUDAIMONIA

In this section I will focus on two contrasting interpretations of Aristotelian eudaimonia. Nagel (1980) argues that we should read Aristotle as making a case for eudaimonia as

primarily to be located in the activity of the soul that exclusively is concerned with reason. Sherman (1997), in contrast, argues that we should rather go for a comprehensive reading of Aristotle that would incorporate emotion into the account of virtue. What this debate primarily shows is how Aristotle's different horizons of the good can be conceived. On one hand there is insistence of the teleological undertone as primarily found in contemplation itself, whereas on the other hand there is insistence that there is value in the process of actualising moral good in pursuit of eudaimonia.

Nagel (1980) notes that *Nichomachean Ethics* exhibits an indecision between two accounts of eudaimonia. The one account is intellectualist while the other is comprehensive. The intellectualist account is supported by the claim made in Book 10 where Aristotle states that eudaimonia is realised in the most divine part of a human functioning together with proper excellence, and this is theoretical contemplation. The comprehensive account is supported by the claim that eudaimonia is not only about contemplation but involves other excellencies that include moral virtue and practical wisdom. Nagel (1980) has a problem with the way in which Aristotle frames the idea of ergon and his attempt at making the good of humans a function of their ergon. Nagel points out that the ergon of a human is what makes her what she is. But, humans also do a whole range of other things. These other things that humans do, are shared with plants and animals, and in some cases plants and animals do these other things better than humans. This means that these other things do not properly belong to humans. However, Nagel (1980) immediately notes that the inference being made here is that if we stripped the human of all these other functions she shares with other life, then she would not be human but something else. Nagel then wonders if it could be the case that a human being like a corkscrew has a conjunctive ergon. He dismisses such a position as absurd on the grounds that what must interest us here is the hierarchy of capacities. He knocks down all the capacities that a human shares with animals as being in service of the higher capacity of reason. "The lower functions serve it, provide it with a setting, and are to some extent under its control, but the dominant characterisation of a human being must refer to his reason. This is why intellectualism tempts Aristotle, and why a conjunctive position, which lets various other aspects of life into the measure of good, is less plausible. Neither a conjunctive nor a disjunctive view about eudaimonia is adequate for these facts. The supreme good for man must be measured in terms of that around which all other human functions are organised" (Nagel 1980: 11). He notes that although it can be argued that most of reason is in service of lower functions, it should also be equally noted that reason transcends these purposes by directing itself towards *sophia*. Further, this element is also responsible for the

cultivation of the divine which enables us to transcend the ordinary. For this reason he endorses the intellectualist version over the comprehensive view.

Sherman (1997) on the other hand argues against this interpretation. Her starting point is to show how emotions are important in our lives. She argues that despite our attempts to either suppress or ignore them or to allocate a lower importance to them, emotions have a strong appeal and make their presence strongly felt. For example, she argues, emotions enable us to register and discern what is valuable in our lives. If we did not have emotions, we would not have been able to form attachments to things that we consider to really matter to us. If we become attached to certain things, she maintains, that attachment and high valuing that goes with it, is made possible by our capacity to have and express emotions. However, this does not mean that Sherman is not alert to the problems that are associated with emotions. She notes that throughout the ages, in moral theory, emotions have been attacked as an enemy of both reason and morality. "They are the foe of agency and control, representing our passive sides. The stories and beliefs wrapped up in our emotional experiences are those we cannot always trust in calmer and more reflective moments" (Sherman 1997: 28). She states the problems associated with emotions in moral theory as follows: firstly, there is the problem of partiality. By this she means that although emotions can respond to what is morally significant, they tend to do so in a selective manner, entertaining evidence that is too restrictive and that is not related to the rightness or wrongness of the action. Related to this, according to Sherman, within Kantian ethics, the objection against emotions is that they only connect with what is morally significant in an accidental manner. Secondly, she states that emotions have been seen as unreliable as they cannot be counted on to be always there. Even when they start off strongly they may wither away. Further, she states that emotions are seen as unevenly distributed among persons. Thirdly, emotions are seen as states we suffer, "emotions are involuntary happenings endured with little intervention or consent. They can easily overcome us, like the weather. Unlike action or belief, they appear to be exempt from direct willing. We cannot will to feel, in the same way we can will to believe or will to act" (Sherman 1997: 30). Fourthly, emotions are seen as a threat to self-sufficiency. This arises from the fact that what we attach to, through emotions, is beyond our control and cannot be permanent. Our loved ones face death, friends become foes, thus we become vulnerable and our self-sufficiency is threatened. "Emotions involve caring about certain objects or events (positively or negatively), and this makes us vulnerable to their presence or loss. To give importance to emotions is to embrace vulnerability" (Sherman 1997: 30).

Sherman argues that Aristotle meets the objection of the partiality of emotions by arguing that emotions should not be seen as completely unresponsive to reason. In actual fact, they are based on cognitive foundations and appraisals which are open to reflection and criticism. When emotions pick and choose in ways that are condemnable, all that needs to be done is for these emotions to be controlled or transformed. As far as the problem of reliability is concerned, Sherman argues that Aristotle would respond by simply pointing out that what is part of virtue are not impulses, but habituated or cultivated emotions.

> And part of what is to be cultivated is strength as well as sensitivity to the variety of circumstances in which specific emotions, such as generosity, kindness, fear, or pity, are important responses. Few of our potentialities stand us well in their raw or untutored state. So, too, virtue, on the Aristotelian view, is not natural virtue, but, rather, the developmental product of a slow and steady habituation of natural receptivities where habituation, at all stages, requires the engagement of practical reason, itself conceived of developmentally. We have the susceptibilities 'to receive virtue by nature, but they are made perfect by habit' and practical wisdom[6] (Sherman 1997: 32-33).

Sherman expands on the third problem, which is the involuntary nature of certain emotions, "being more similar to compulsion and physical disease than to intention. And these may warrant pardon or pity" (Sherman 1997: 32-33). Sherman also points out that emotions are many and a wide-ranging and complex phenomena which are subject to a large degree of consent and self-governance. Although this does not happen always or in all of the circumstances where emotions are involved, she argues that "passivity need not imply involuntarism" (Sherman 1997: 34). She claims that emotions, instead of being seen as passive, represent "active aspirations of imagination and belief. Though individuals cannot typically will to feel certain emotions at a moment's notice, they can choose to cultivate certain emotions over time as a significant part of developing moral character. More crucially, many *actions* and *activities* we care about cannot themselves be willed at a moment's notice either. They take preparation, and the planning and execution of sub-ends" (Sherman 1997: 34). Sherman argues that cultivated emotions of a mature character are then more similar to complex activities than basic acts.

6 And here she refers to the *Nichomachean Ethics* 1103a25; 1144b30-32.

Though she admits that the fourth objection, on the vulnerability of emotions to contingencies is a difficult objection, she maintains that on the Aristotelian account, we must recognise that one has a duty towards developing cultivated emotions while resisting those that are opposite to cultivated emotions. Hence she points out that: "In the case of Aristotelian character, in contrast, moral motives are themselves partially constituted by emotions, and goodness as well as happiness rest centrally in the state of one's emotions" (Sherman 1997: 35). She states her position in detail as follows:

> The Aristotelian view is that emotions, in general, can be harmonised with the judgments of practical wisdom. The orectic part of the soul (which is the *seat* of the emotion) is *alogon* – not irrational but nonrational, in the restricted sense that it lacks its own source of authoritative rationality. Even so, the emotions proper to it are cognitive-laden capacities that cannot operate without some form of ratiocination. The part of the soul 'shares in reason', as Aristotle is at pains to explain, and in a derivative sense can be said to have reason.[7] Moreover, with proper training the emotions and appetites proper to that part of the soul can be made to listen and 'obey' the more reasonable and circumspect judgments of the authority of the rational part.[8] They are responsive to reason and can be shaped by it. The ideal end state is a state of transformed and schooled emotions that support the judgments of practical wisdom (Sherman 1997: 37-38).

For purposes of my current argument, it is not necessary to assess which one of these two versions is persuasive.[9] As stated above, my reason for citing these differences is merely illustrative. My real aim is to judge what we can say about communitarianism in the African context. As stated at the beginning of the paper, the legitimacy of this proposed evaluation largely depends on successfully drawing similarities between the basis of the Aristotelian ethic and the communitarian ethic. I have suggested that the similarity between these two systems is to be found in the use of ergon.

The debate in this section seeks to illustrate the competing ways of interpreting what the proper function of a human can be. On one hand we find Nagel (1980) arguing that the life of contemplation is one that is proper to the function of the human person. He holds that all the other things that a human does are in the service of that life of contemplation. Sherman

7 Here she cites the *Nichomachean Ethics* 1102b25-26; 1103a1-2.
8 She cites the *Nichomachean Ethics* 1102b31.
9 For a comprehensive treatment of the debate in favour of the comprehensive account, see Roche (1988).

(1997), in contrast, argues that emotions should not be ruled out. She makes it clear that she is not referring to any impulsive emotions but cultivated emotions. She finds the idea of cultivated emotions at home with Aristotle's idea of contemplation. While both positions rely on Aristotle's view, the difference between them is quite significant. What they are agreed on is the importance of ergon in Aristotle, but as to what it really constitutes, they differ vehemently. Just a word of where I believe the real difference between Nagel and Sherman appears to really lie. Nagel's objection seems to be much wider than Sherman's considerations. Nagel appears to want to include all things that humans do, including some basic appetites and other functions as digestion. He notes that there are other animals that do better at these things than humans, hence, he argues, there should only be one thing that humans do well. This is quite different from Sherman's strategy. While Sherman is cognisant of the idea that humans can do a whole range of other things, she chooses to limit her consideration to how emotions feature in our moral life. Her reason for that lies in her recognition of emotions as an important part of our moral scheme. In my view Sherman's consideration is much narrower than Nagel's. This is the route I seek to take in evaluating the communitarian commitments. While humans are capable of a whole range of things, I seek to establish the role of both emotions and reason in our communitarian ethical scheme. In the following section I chart how emotions are made to be important in the communitarian ethical system.

AFRICAN COMMUNITARIANISM AND EMOTIONS

Negritude, as advocated by Leopold Sedar Senghor, is the most explicit account of how emotions feature prominently in both epistemology and ethics in African communitarianism. Epistemologically, Senghor (1995) argues that the African's manner of acquisition of knowledge is different from the European's. According to Senghor, the European's manner of acquiring knowledge is discursive analysis. The European tends to break down the object of knowledge into small parts and then analyses those parts as if they were not part of the whole. When the European analyses the object of her knowledge she puts a distance between herself and that object. She sees it from a distance. The African on the other hand does not engage in discursive analysis when she wants to know an object. She becomes one with the object, hence he writes:

> Let us stay with the *e-motion* of the African negro, and take up the thread of fantasy. Here, then, is the subject who leaves his I to *sympathise* with the *Thou*, and to identify himself with it. He dies to himself to be reborn in the Other. He does not assimilate it, but himself. He does not take the Other's life, but strengthens his own with its life. For he lives a communal life with the Other, and in *sym-biosis* with it: He knows [and is thus born with] it. Subject and object are dialectically confronted in the very act of knowledge [and thus of common birth]. It is from a long caress in the night, from the intimacy of two bodies confounded with one another, from the act of love, that the fruit of knowledge is born …'I think therefore, I am,' wrote Descartes, who was the European *par excellence*. The African negro could say, 'I feel, I dance the Other, I am.' Unlike Descartes, he has no need for a 'verbal utensil'…to realise his *being*, but for an *objective complement*. He has no need to think, but to live the other by dancing it. In dark Africa, people always dance because they feel, and they always dance someone or something. Now to dance is to discover and to *re-create*, to identify oneself with the forces of life, to lead a fuller life, and in short, to *be*. It is, at any rate, the highest form of knowledge. And thus, the knowledge of the African negro is, at the same time, discovery and creation-recreation (Senghor 1995: 120).

I do not think that this quote needs any detailed explanation as it is self-explanatory, save to re-emphasise three crucial elements Senghor raises. Firstly, the Negro's way of knowing identifies with the other and is communal. Secondly, Negro knowledge is unlike Cartesian knowledge in that it seeks to feel the other as opposed to thinking. Thirdly, this Negro form of knowledge which is discovery and recreation, is the highest form of knowledge.

Senghor (1995) then addresses an objection raised against him that he essentially reduces the Negro's knowledge to pure emotion. Senghor argues that those who raise this objection are inspired by a misunderstanding of Karl Marx. Citing the very same Marx, he seeks to show that Marx had always understood that reason had always existed, though not in a rational form. Further, Senghor states that Marx argues that there are two types of experiences: one external material, and the other internal. Additionally, forms of thought are passed through hereditary modes. However, reason is made for purposes of apprehension of the other, though it varies from place to place and in mode. Thus while the mathematical axiom is obvious to the white person, it is not to the bushman or the Australian Negro (Senghor 1995: 121). Hence Senghor states the case of the nature of the Negro's reason as follows:

> The vital force of the African negro, that is, his surrender to the Other, is thus inspired by reason. But reason is not in this case, the *visualising* reason of the European White, but a kind of *embracing* reason which has more in common with *logos* than with *ratio*. For *ratio* is a compass, T-square and sextant; it is measure and weight. *Logos* on the other hand was the living word before Aristotle forged it into a diamond (Senghor 1995: 121).

It is instructive to note that Senghor (1995) cites Aristotle as the engineer of the transformation of reason from logos to ratio. If we follow the distinction in terminology above, between Nagel and Sherman, we can see Senghor's depiction of Aristotle's source of ethics to be closely aligned to Nagel's, for Senghor sees Aristotle's ethical foundations as based on the function of reason to the exclusion of emotion. Though Senghor (1995) does not condemn the development of visualising reason, he thinks that it is an aftermath of the logos borne of Aristotle's efforts. However, Senghor thinks that of the two types of orientation (though dissimilar in make) the Negro's form of reason, which is based on emotion, is superior to the white's instrumental reason. The basis of the superiority of the Negro's mode of reason is that it is wholesome as it seeks to *be*, by processes of creation and recreation. These processes are the highest form of knowledge, according to Senghor (1995).

Senghor's definition of emotion is not restricted to immediate and visible muscular reactions. Although he admits that emotions can be represented on the immediate and physical level, they are much deeper than that. Though emotions can be seen as a physiological response that seeks to satisfy some want or spontaneity of reflexes, Senghor maintains, they are something else. Against Sartre, and in illustration of what emotions really are, Senghor (1995: 125) states the matter as follows:

> Sartre defines an emotion as 'an abrupt fall of consciousness into the world of magic'. But what is in turn the world of magic? It is the world beyond the visible world of appearances. The latter is rational only because it is visible and measurable. The world of magic is, for the African negro, more real than the visible world: it is *sub-real*. It is animated by invisible forces which govern the universe and whose specific characteristic is that they are, through sympathy, harmoniously related to one another as well as to visible things, or appearances.

Senghor (1995) identifies this type of knowledge as mystical, which is different from the magical. The reason for its mystical state is that Africans are a deeply religious people. But

the most important point is that Senghor characterises the world of the African as more real that the white's measurable and visible world. Since the African's world defies visibility and measure, he suggests that it represents what is more authentic than what the white person perceives. He writes:

> This means that an emotion, under its initial aspect as a fall of consciousness, is on the contrary *the rise of consciousness to a higher state of knowledge*. It is 'consciousness of the world,' 'a certain way of apprehending the world.' It is an integrated consciousness, for the 'emoved' subject and the 'emoving' object are united in an indissoluble synthesis, and to repeat, in a dance of love. I have said that emotion is a higher form of knowledge. In support, let me quote this reflection by one of the great scientific minds of the twentieth century. 'The most beautiful emotion we can experience,' wrote Albert Einstein, 'is the mystical. That is the source of all art and of true science' (Senghor 1995: 127).

Senghor's thinking has not received universal praise. While Shutte (1998) has some praise for Senghor, he claims that his overreliance on Teilhard de Chardin led him (Senghor) to develop an unsystematic philosophy. "Negritude appears as a collection of insights, each bearing a certain relation to the others deriving from their common origin, rather than as a systematic philosophy embracing a metaphysics, an ethics, and a theory of the human person" (Shutte 1998: 437). Van Niekerk (1998: 75-78) neatly summarises Fanon's objection to Senghor, who appears to re-affirm the racialist attitude shown against black people by embracing and celebrating what appear to be distinct black qualities. Van Niekerk takes the matter further when she shows the irony in Aime Cesaire's[10] political criticism of Tempels, when the same criticism applies to both Cesaire and Senghor.

However, E.C. Eze (1998: 217-218) places Negritude under African philosophical trends that grew as counter colonial practice. That on its own is a significant point that goes a long way towards meeting some of the criticisms above, and others associated with them. Although I am largely sympathetic to the criticisms immediately above, I think Eze's characterisation of Negritude as a philosophical movement that sought to undermine the colonial paradigm, may be used to justify the methodological approach taken by Negritude. In the face of constant denigration by the white colonialists, black people were left with no option but to assert themselves via what was considered to be inferior. By embracing that

10 Cesaire served as an inspiration to Senghor's Negritude.

inferiority and celebrating it – they were sending an unequivocal political statement to their oppressors – that they were unapologetic about their essence but sought to celebrate and embrace it as their true an unalterable identity.

Although these criticisms may prove to be politically powerful and persuasive, for my present purposes, I suggest that they are unable to assail the point I wish to secure in order to make the analysis suggested at the beginning of this paper. What remains unassailable in Senghor's position is the explicit link that exists between his theory and the basic tenets of communitarianism. There are three things that emerge as properly communitarian in Senghor's thinking. First, his political commitments have communitarian foundations. Secondly, his characterisation of black people is either explicitly or implicitly accepted by most communitarians. In particular the view that one exists for the other and the community as opposed to pursuit of selfish interests, is routinely accepted as a truth of African communities. Thirdly, his basis of affinity between Africans in their communities is largely based on some emotional connection. Communitarians tend to express this view in positions such as: "I am because we are" (Mbiti 1970: 141); "The I is just another view from the we" (Gbadegesin 1991: 58). Further claims are made about the importance of clan identity, the deep relations based on blood relations and betrothal, the fixed nature of relatedness, and the importance of hierarchies based on structures of age and so forth. Hence these are seen as constituted communities as opposed to random communities.

This last point is very significant. Its significance lies in the affective nature of the basis of the ethic of communitarianism. Senghor (1995) makes it clear that this is the case, and communitarianism largely supports Senghor's claims or implicitly commits itself to the same position of the importance of the affective dimension in the development of ethics. The relational aspect of this ethic makes its adherents commit to developing an affective dimension to how they either view others or the execution of their duties. Unlike the Kantian who sees duty for duty's sake, the communitarian sees duties as things owed to other people by virtue of what their relational standing obligates them to do. The foundation of what an agent takes to owe the other is informed by the fact of the agent being able to identify with the other from that affective/relational dimension. This ability to identify with the other is only made possible by some serious degree of mutual recognition between the agent and the other.

If for a moment we accept Senghor's (1995) characterisation of emotion as reason, on what grounds can we accept it as reason without any prejudice to the African? Before I venture to suggest a method of answering this question, I suggest that we confront some of

the basic problems associated with emotion being a primary determinant of an ethic. If we agree that the problems that Sherman raised above have sufficiently been addressed – is it possible to then say there are no problems with emotions functioning as a base for an ethic? I think there are a couple of problems that arise for the type of emotion that communitarians are associated with.

The first problem has to do with Senghor's (1995) narrowing of the African's range of capacity of how to know. I am not convinced that it is the case that for Africans to know is to become one with the object. While it is true that this could be one way of knowing for Africans, it is not the only way to know. An additional difficulty is that the conditions of knowledge, under this scheme, are not clearly specified. Besides claiming that the individual dies and becomes one with the other – there is no clear specification of what that process actually involves, either how it comes to fruition or how it fails to materialise. Is it the case that all Africans are specifically capable of this knowledge without any exception? I hardly think this is the case. Knowledge is a sort of entity that admits of differences between individuals. It cannot be the case that a whole group of people, let alone a population or entire race will come to know exactly in the same way to the same degree. Yet Senghor (1995) insists that there are certain key characteristics that mark black people everywhere. Such a position deliberately ignores the local conditions under which the said black people operate. It is not the case that the same set of facts will have the same emotional impact say on Yorubas in Lagos as it would have on African Americans in Harlem.

The second problem has to do with the context within which the affective part of commitment arises. The references used to justify these key characteristics of black people as well as the communitarian grounding of relationality (as based on blood and betrothal) is historically limited to small-scale, highly inter-dependent communities. What makes the emotion-based ethic work in this case is the close-knit nature of these communities. Moreover, the ethic does not seem to be based on anything other than its vouched workability in traditional societies. While the emotion could be very stable and could be based on reasons for its workability, within these limited contexts, I suggest that once it is taken out of such a context its grounding becomes unsustainable. An individual who lives in a close-knit community surrounded by blood relatives as well as relatives by marriage, has a keen interest in their welfare. That interest is borne out of the relationality that grounds the affective dimension of the ethic. It is a narrow way of seeing and construing the duties and obligations one has towards her fellow human beings. In this case it is an ethic based on a kin system. In the event that the agent is removed from the kin network and is placed in a cosmopolitan

environment, her ethical sense may be seriously compromised. I suggest that what Scanlon has called "reason-giving force" (1998: 3), in issues of what we consider to be morally compelling, is in the case of the communitarian account quite parochial and not only limited in scope of application but exclusivist (as its basis cannot transcend kin networks). It is not inconceivable that when confronted with encounters of people who are not her kin, the agent who is steeped in this type of affective ethic will not reconcile herself to any sense of being obligated to these people.

The possible responses to these problems can be stated, respectively, as follows: In the first instance, the friend of communitarianism may deny the charge that the ethic limits the way of knowing for the African communitarian. She will, instead, state that the route to epistemology and ethics is not multi-pronged, but follows two exclusive routes: the *logos* and the *ratio*. She may continue to argue that it is just a matter of fact that the African race follows the former and the white race follows the latter. However, as a matter of fact, she may continue, the African's way is superior to the white's. The reason for that does not lie in racial preference for the black way of knowing, but primarily lies in the historical fact of the *logos* being prior to *ratio*. Further, the friend of the communitarian view may state that it also just so happens that Africans have held onto this form of epistemology and ethics. To the second problem, the friend of communitarianism may respond by pointing that whoever wishes to share in the affective dimension of this ethic and epistemology, is welcome to be an equal participant and will be treated as such. Tempels (1959), for example, tells of how he was elevated to be one of the Baluba because he had shown a willingness to understand if not behave like them. The same status was also granted to Griaule by the Dogon. The communitarian ethos, the friend may further argue, recognises everyone as a creation of God, a child of God, one to whom humane consideration is due. If they are not your immediate relative, they may be a distant relative, and if they are not your distant relative, they are your kin by virtue of being human like you. The difference is artificial as all humans aspire to the same things. All it takes is to bring each other to an understanding of what our real interests are.

Although these responses may seem fair enough, they are unable to deal with two crucial issues. The first issue has to do with how African forms of reason have been targets for ridicule as either mystical (Levy-Bruhl 1995) or non-existent (Hume 1997; Kant 1997). Although these views have been largely dispensed with, it remains interesting that when they encountered Senghor's *logos*, they thought nothing of it besides being an oddity of being black. Secondly, Africans have become reputed for inter-ethnic violence and xenophobia.

Though there are current socio-politico explanations for such behaviour, it seems to fly in the face of what Africans are taken to be on Senghor's (1995) account.

I wish to bring this paper to a close by addressing the question raised above; on what grounds can we accept Senghor's (1995) characterisation of emotion as reason without prejudicing the African's very notion of reason? The need for justifying "reason" is hardly debatable in philosophical discourse. Philosophy is taken, as E.C. Eze (2008) says, as a particular march of reason. While there could be debates as to what the exact nature of that march is, there is no debate that it has to be a march of reason. If that is the case, the question then becomes – is there evidence of a particular march of reason in the account given by Senghor (1995) and as supported by communitarians? I suggest that one of the least helpful ways of approaching this question is to merely insist on the African difference. I refer here to the kind of insistence that one finds in certain thinkers' writings such as Menkiti (1984), who merely assert that there is an African way of being and it is distinct form the white/European way of being.

A helpful approach would be to articulate in what ways the African mode could be considered to be grounded in reason, or to be having an appeal to reason. My aim is not so much Senghor's strategy, who insists on the superiority of the *logos* which is the dominant mode of epistemology and the grounds of ethics. I do not think that there could be grounds to authenticate any outcome of a comparison between *logos* and *ratio*. Such a comparison will only yield intransigent insistence on the superiority of one's mode.

I therefore find Sherman's (1997) approach appealing for its ability to deal with the dilemma of insisting on one's reason while courting the danger of parochialism. I suggest that a plausible way of proceeding would seek to show, not only that emotion is reason, but that there is an external standard to emotion which is intuitively reason and which would be consonant with the operations of emotion.

I think that emotion as suggested by Senghor (1995) can therefore, be taken as reason or aligned to reason if we think of it in terms of its origins as not lying in random or other affective inclination, but necessarily as governed by some independent aims. For example, to love one's brother is natural (unless there are factors compelling one to feel otherwise), it is pure emotion. There are hardly any compelling explanations as to why any given individual loves her brother. It is something that is taken as natural (in the absence, of course, of reasons to hate or not care for him). So if the situation obtains that an individual has a brother, and she loves and cares for that brother, that this state of affairs hardly requires accounting for; it is hardly surprising. But this state of affairs is taken as normal in as far as emotional

commitment is concerned. It is a matter of how one feels, and indeed how one ought to feel towards her kin. However, if there are reasons for the agent not to love her brother, yet she still finds herself obligated to love him and has reason other than the natural affinity that exists between siblings, then we can say the emotion she retains for her brother is beyond emotion and is grounded in reason.

My suggestion, therefore, is that emotion must be grounded in something other than emotion itself. If emotion appeals to itself for its justification, it runs into the trouble of assuming what it seeks to prove. But if it finds its justification to reside in other standards, then it is explained in terms of those standards. My argument should not be mistaken for advocating a system of reason that is consistent with the Western *ratio,* as characterised by Senghor (1995). What my argument seeks to deny is that emotion is sufficient as an explanation of what reason is. What emotion must be able to do is either to exhibit those characteristics consistent with reason or proceed from that stated reason to assume characteristics that are consistent with the formula of that reason.

What then could be this other reason that informs communitarian emotion? I suggest that the justification has to lie in an account that has to do with the need for the sustenance of the community as a facilitator of all human (ethical and epistemological) possibilities. The idea of community as reason must be linked to the indispensability of the community in helping individuals answer questions of value. These questions will have to do with what individuals value, how they come to value, and what the significance of those values are to how people conceive who they are. I take these considerations to be strictly ethical as opposed to metaphysical. If this argument is persuasive, emotion does not become a type of reason to fight other types of reason, but an orientation that is deeply rooted in reason – not in opposition to reason (as some uncharitable suggestions have intimated).

CONCLUSION

Drawing on Aristotle's eudaimonia and ergon, I have sought to show that there are grounds to think that Aristotle's scheme is comparable to African communitarianism (both as epistemology and ethics). Drawing on discussions on the nature of eudaimonia, I have sought to suggest that the notion of emotion as featured in Senghor and found implicitly in most communitarian thought, should not be seen as either an alternative to reason or in conflict with reason. On the contrary, I suggest, African communitarianism must be understood as

rooted in reason that affirms some aspects of community as indispensable to ethics and epistemology.

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