

INDIVIDUALISM VERSUS COLLECTIVISM: THE MEDIATION OF HUMAN SOLIDARITY

Celestine Chidozie KEZIE
Pan-Atlantic University.
Lagos, Nigeria.
ckezie@pau.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper explores the human attributes of individuality, by which a person is one and consistent with himself, and relationality by which the individual opens himself/herself to others in a dynamic relationship of mutual dependence and solidarity. Thus, a balanced and authentic life is one in which the assertiveness of one's individuality does not impede or conflict with one's relationality. It is pertinent to recall that there has arisen, over the course of the centuries, the tension between self and others as a result of the inability of the self to reconcile with others. This tension engendered two conflicting ideologies; Individualism and Collectivism. The proponents of individualism argued that the interests of the individual ought and should take pre-eminence over the interests of the community or society (the collective) while the proponents of collectivism countered with the claim that, in as much as the individual is a member of the community, the interests of the individual ought to be mainstreamed into the overall interests of the society for the common good. I examined the arguments on both sides with a highlight on extreme individualism to which collectivism was a reaction. This paper is structured into three parts. The first part deals with the conceptual expositions of individualism and collectivism, and cognate concepts. The second part is on the idea of Authenticity understood as a balance of forces between the I (individual) and They (community) based on Martin Heidegger's existentialist philosophy. The paper concludes in the third part with a discussion of the socio-political and moral necessity of human solidarity in contemporary society.

Keywords: Individualism, Collectivism, Communitarianism, Existentialism, Human solidarity.

The Idea of Individualism

Individualism is often used in varied contexts thus making it prone to varied meanings. For instance, in the field of social psychology, individualism stands for a social theory that advocates for the liberty, rights or independent action of the individual. In the domain of philosophy, individualism is a doctrine which holds that only individual things are real or the belief that all actions are determined by, or at least take place for, the benefit of the individual rather than the society as a whole. Triandis (2019: 2) defined individualism as “a social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as

independent of collectives; are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contracts they have established with others; give priority to their personal goals over the goals of others; and emphasize rational analyses of the advantages and disadvantages to associating with others”.

According to Hofstede (1980), individualism is “a focus on rights above duties, a concern for oneself and immediate family, an emphasis on personal autonomy and self-fulfilment, and the basing of one's identity on one's personal accomplishments”. He further explained individualism as a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of only themselves and their immediate families. Similarly, Schwartzopines that individualistic societies are fundamentally contractual, consisting of narrow primary groups and negotiated social relations, with specific obligations and expectations focusing on achieving status (n.d).

It follows from the above that the common understanding among the proponents of individualism is that the interests of the individual stand in pre-eminence over the interest of the collective or the society. This does not mean that the proponents of individualism are ignorant of the importance and gains of social relationships for the individual, they just see such social relationships and belonging to a community from a purely individualistic and utilitarian standpoint. Theorists assume that individualists apply equity norms to balance relationships' costs and benefits, leaving relationships and groups when the costs of participation exceed the benefits and creating new relationships as personal goals shift. In other words, for individualists, relationships and group memberships are impermanent and non-intensive and to be committed only to the extent that it is in the individual's personal interests (Oyserman, 2002). Triandis (2019: xiii) puts it more succinctly:

In individualistic cultures, people are more detached from their collectives. They feel autonomous, and their social behaviour maximizes enjoyment and depends on interpersonal contracts. If the goals of the collective do not match their personal goals, they think it is "obvious" that their personal goals have precedence. If the costs of relationships are greater than their enjoyment, they drop the relationships. They change relationships often, and when they get married, they do it on the basis of personal emotions, which often change over time, and thus divorce is frequent. They raise their children to be independent of their collectives. Freedom from the influence of the collective is a very important value.

Individualism is contrasted with collectivism. Collectivism connotes a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Oyserman, 2002). As study have shown, contrasting the European American and East Asian cultural frames, social scientists assume that individualism is more prevalent in industrialized Western societies than in other societies, especially the more traditional societies in

developing countries.

Historically, individualism was birthed in the enlightenment period even though some traits of it dates back to the thoughts of some ancient and medieval thinkers. Nonetheless, the growing influence of individualism in contemporary society is of grave concern given the threat it poses for human solidarity. Consequently, contemporary society, imbued with postmodern values is witnessing high cases of loneliness and narcissism as a result of the radical pursuit of individual 'rights'. Postmodern for its acceptance of undifferentiated plurality and near valueless ideal undermines shared moral values and collective ideals. The more traditional norms and values, which are the adhesives for social bonding are jettisoned in pursuit individualism which pretend to *liberate* the individual from the shackles of the collective the more the "I" is pitched against the "we".

Robert P. George (2013: 28) asks, "... liberation from what"? He goes on to answer thus: "in their (referring to the liberal ideologues) conception it is liberation from traditional social constraints and norms of morality – the beliefs, principles, and structures by which earlier generations... has been taught to govern their conduct for the same of personal virtue and common good." Although liberalism, postmodernism and individualism are different, they seem to unite in their attempt to absolutize the individual over the collective as if there could be such without jeopardizing human fulfilment. The consequence is a society in which survival will be based on the might of each individual with little or no place for the weak and dependents. This is reminiscent of the state of nature.

Theoretical Foundation of Individualism

In Locke's political philosophy, a man in the state of nature was the master of his *Will* and reigned over his life and basic liberties. Locke believed that although the state of nature was tranquil, the absolute expression of man's natural rights - to act as he chooses, was bound to lead to a clash of rights/interests. This is due to the understanding of natural rights as absolutes (Lawhead, 2007). Locke is of the view that the individual as the possessor of rights; naturally endowed and not conferred, enjoys interests that are absolute. But the pursuit of those absolute interests gave rise to conflict among the individuals. Consequently, there arose the need to establish some form of institution or agreement – a social contract, to ensure the preservation of individual self-interests. Social Contract gave birth to a civil state charged with the responsibility of promotion and preservation the inalienable rights of the individual in the society (Lawhead, 2007). Locke acknowledged that man by nature is a social being that is naturally inclined to seek attraction and interaction with other human beings with whom he/she shares the society. But the s acknowledgement, arguably, did not admit that being in a society is something fundamental for the flourishing of the individual. Lawhead (2007:313) explained:

Though man could survive without society, men are naturally inclined towards it...there are a number of reasons why government and laws would make life better. First, even though there is the natural law, we need a written and agreed on

law to resolve controversies among individuals. In this way, human bias will not enter into judgement concerning individual cases. Second, even though each individual in nature may punish wrongdoing, an officially appointed, indifferent judge could apply the laws in a manner more equitable than the person whose personal interests were at stake. Third, we need a government to enforce the laws on behalf of the powerless. According to this account, people unite together for their mutual benefit and transfer some of their individual power to a political body. There is an initial contract to form a government which is decided by the majority vote of the people. For those who did not sign the contract, Locke says we have given our tacit consent to it by virtue of the fact that we have lived in our society and received its benefits.

What Locke means, by the above, is that the civil state was to safeguard the fundamental rights of the individual. Those inalienable rights include; the right to life, the right to property and the right to liberty. Locke insists that these rights are at the root of human coexistence and that society and its institutions have inherited the obligations to uphold the rights. He further suggests that society cannot exercise control over the individual except in furtherance of his basic rights and where society does otherwise, the individual is at liberty to revolt. Locke's argument, for inalienable rights of the individual, laid the foundation for his theory of property rights. Suffice to note that in the state of nature property rights were non-existent as there were only common goods for which every individual was an interested beneficiary – by all and for all. The idea of private property rights evolved as a consequence of a civil state.

In his *Two Treatises of Government* Locke described original property as a common right possessed by all of the members of the human race. A right of exclusive use; a right to something that belonged to everyone and which was subordinated to the fulfilment of a concrete purpose: survival (Ruiz-Gallardón García De La Rasilla, 2020). Natural resources (air, water, soil, trees) are common property, free to all to use as they need. However, if I mix my labour with a part of nature, then it becomes my property. For example, the soil is freely available to everyone, but if I clear the land and till the ground and plant seeds, then both the land and its harvest belong to me. This account is called Locke's labour theory of property. So, the moral basis for the property is in the labour performed by man when he extracts things from their natural state, rather than in consent. The appropriated thing becomes a product of will, something which involves labour and also intentionality which seeks to place it under the exclusive control of the person who has appropriated it (Ruiz-Gallardón García De La Rasilla, 2020).

Similarly, in his famous essay, *On Liberty* (1859), J.S. Mill addressed the struggle between the liberty of the individual and the authority of the rulers. Mill's attempt was aimed at protecting the rights of the individuals, which in his view, is stifled by the tyranny of the majority in the form of government or society. Mill insists that within the spheres of our personal lives, we should have the fullest amount of freedom to do as we wish, provided that we do not harm others. Consequently, the principle that a good

society should follow is, according to Mill (1909:18), “that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection. The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.” The individual must be free to pursue his/her own interests. There should be no restrictions on freedom of speech and thought except when it threatened to cause immediate harm to other members of the society.

Mill further asserts that individuals are the best judges of their own interests but are not always the best judges of the interests of others and it is best to allow individuals this choice, simply because it is their own choice. Personal autonomy is one of the highest social values in Mill's vision of society. As he puts it: “The only part in the conduct of anyone, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign (Mill, 1909:19).” The implication of Mill's idea of liberty is that the individual is placed above society with his interests taking pre-eminence over the interest of the common good. Mill's theory of personal liberty was an inspiration for the proponents of individualism.

On the other hand, Hobbes presents an account different from Locke's. In the Hobbesian state of nature, life was nasty, brutish and short. There was an atmosphere of unbridled pursuit of self-interests and unrelentless quarrels between one and the other. Hobbes highlighted three principal causes of the quarrel: competition, diffidence, and glory. Competition makes men invade for gain; diffidence for safety; and glory for reputation. Hobbes went further to indicate that the arbitrary pursuit of individual interest led to anti-social consequences. Hence, the need for a common sovereign – the *Leviathan* to whom all must surrender their might for protection in return. Hobbes (1651:77) opined that “it is manifest that during the time men lived without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man ... Nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law, where no law, no injustice.”

It can be inferred from the foregoing that although, in the natural state, there exists absolute liberty to further individual interest; individuals came to realize that such interests risk injury against others who are likewise in pursuit of their own interests. So, self-preservation or preservation of one's interest necessitated the birth of society; a surrendering of and transfer of each individual's will to the society for preservation and this preservation was arrived at through reason. The idea of a common authority to which all men surrender their will instigates the idea of common law, and where there exists a law, then it can be meaningful to speak of justice. Hobbes collapsed political rights with moral rights. Right no longer means the individuals' liberty but also what is acceptable. Consequently, no one enjoys special rights outside what is covered by the law. Looking at

Hobbes' theory of the *Leviathan*, one can infer that Hobbes argued for the sanctity of individual rights and the promotion of the same.

Rousseau began his theory of the *General Will* in agreement with Locke and Hobbes, on the importance of a social contract. But Rousseau attacked Locke's political theory for promoting a kind of systemic individualism which emphasized selfishness and self-interests. Unlike Locke, Rousseau does not acknowledge the presence of private property in the state of nature. Also, *contra* Hobbes, Rousseau does not observe any constant personal hostility among men in the state of nature (Gündoğan, 2008). For Rousseau, the state of nature (man's natural state) is neither brutish nor characterized by war, but instead was a peaceful state of man. This is a state devoid of anarchy, inequality, immorality, and oppression amongst other vices inimical to the peace of man. Hence, Rousseau's formulation of his theory of the *General will*. A General Will is a collectively held will which aims at the common good or common interest. It is central to the political philosophy of Rousseau and an important concept in modern republican thought. Rousseau argued that freedom and authority are not contradictory, since legitimate laws are founded on the general will of the citizens. In obeying the law, the individual citizen is thus obeying himself as a member of the political community (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). Thus, Rousseau insists that the freedom of the individual is not compromised by the commonwealth and that general will is the will of the commonwealth. Furthermore, since the general will is a culmination of the surrendered wills of each member of the society, the “will” of the society is therefore moral and wills for the good of all members in that society. The general will is a product of reason and cooperation. It originates from the members and serves the common interest of all and all men consent to the legislations of the general will through what Rousseau calls 'voluntary obedience or consensual slavery' (Gündoğan, 2008:172).

Gündoğan (2008) explained that Rousseau believes that entering a political society is neither for the sake of individual security nor a fact of compromise since political associations rests on the acceptance of a form of interaction with other men in which no one stands to lose and everyone stands to gain. Every society had a general will and a great society was composed of small societies rather than individuals. Consequently, it is in the best interest of the individual to collaborate with the general will in the achievement of its own personal ambitions. The individual is a product of his existing community. When all the individual wills are oriented towards the promotion of the general will, the community portrays some form of close-knit bonds similar to a family hood (Gündoğan, 2008:173). Rousseau's general will theory is in consonance with the ideals of communitarianism in which the society precedes the individual and the individual is to act in accordance to that which promotes the goals and objectives of the common good. In what follows, we are going to look at the notion of collectivism and a related concept – communitarianism.

Collectivism as a Reaction to Individualism

In collectivist culture, the detachment of the individual from the community is minimal. In such cultures, people conceive their identities and well-being as being inseparably tied to that of their collectives. They do not give up relationships unless the relationship becomes extraordinarily costly or life-threatening. A collectivist society is more stable than an individualistic society. However, there exists no society in which either a collectivist or individualistic way of life is absolute. In other words, individualism and collectivism co-exist in every culture but at varying proportions. The one with the most dominant hold on the normative sensibility of the people orients the economic, political and juridical philosophies of the society or culture in question. Collectivists are of the understanding that human identities are largely shaped by different kinds of constitutive communities (or social relations) and that this conception of human nature should inform our moral and political judgments as well as policies and institutions. In other words, the well-being of the individual is to a great extent community-dependent. Similarly, from a communitarian perspective, individuals belong to many communities, not just one. Therefore, individuals have more than one identity, not only through the course of a lifetime but simultaneously and depending on circumstances and context- a person might be said to belong to their family, neighbourhood or tribe; to an ethnic group or be a citizen of a state; a member of one religious faith or the other (Dalacoura, 2002).

A variant of contemporary communitarianism, associated primarily with Michael Walzer, identifies the community with the state. According to this view, cultural norms-attitudes towards outsiders, family relations, attitudes towards political processes, and the metaphysical views underlying these, including religious views- must be incorporated into political life. Hence a cultural community becomes a political community (Dalacoura, 2002). According to Myles (2018), communitarian writers are unanimous in their regard of the moral rules of the community as the higher level of morality and the only way to achieve genuine autonomy, rights and moral freedoms of the individual. It is the strong position of communitarians that without belonging to a cultural group or community that sustains and nourishes, an individual's life would be impoverished.

Myles (2018) opined that communitarians defended the communitarian view that morality and our sense of self cannot be built in a vacuum but only through the historical experience of our society of which liberalism and its ally individualism impoverishes us by homogenizing our experience. Historically, communitarianism is a 20th Century political which sprouted in reaction to John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Rawls assumed that the principal task of the government is to secure and distribute fairly the liberties and economic resources individuals need to lead freely chosen lives. The term communitarianism was rarely employed until the 1980s when it was used to refer to the works of Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor, and Michael Walzer. According to Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2020) Michael Sandel, particularly, was associated with the communitarian criticism of liberalism, the main theme of which was that there must

be common formulations of the good rather than leaving it to be determined by each individual by him or herself, for themselves. For to have character is to know that I move in a history that I neither summon nor command, which carries consequences nonetheless for my choices and conduct. This compels the individual to tailor his needs and inclination to that which is beneficial and demanded of him by the community (Etzioni, 2014). These key observations, communitarians warned, should not be interpreted to mean that people have no degrees of freedom and are fully socially determined, but rather that the range of these choices is limited by people's social bonds and the socio-moral obligations arising therefrom (Etzioni, 2014).

Individualism and Collectivism in the African Experience

In the African thought system, the individual is a product of the community. At birth, a child has no social identity but through his/her cultural incorporation into the community, the child sets forth to define himself/herself in relation to the community or the society at large. In contrast, Western thought proposes that the idea of the community begins with the individual. The individual born into the world possesses freedom and choice, and as such acts forthwith to define his/her. In Africa, the society is collectivist, implying that the community is prior to the individual and the individual proceeds from the community, defined by the community and is subject to the community. As Menkiti (1984:180) explains:

African societies tend to be organized around the requirements of duty while Western societies tend to be organized around the postulation of individual rights. In the African understanding, priority is given to the duties which individuals owe to the collectivity, and their rights, whatever these may be, are seen as secondary to the exercise of their duties. In the West, on the other hand, we find a construal of things in which certain specified rights of individuals are seen as antecedent to the organization of society; with the function of government viewed, consequently, as being the protection and defence of these individual rights.

From the African perspective, the question of whether the individual's life belongs to him or to the community would be an unintelligent question to ask because. As far as Africans, like Menkiti, are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of the individuals' life histories, whatever these may be (Menkiti, 1984). In the words of Senghor, (cited in Myles) "Negro-Africans societies put more stress on the group than on the individuals; more on the communion of persons than on their autonomy. Ours is a community society. Myles (2018:242-247) argued that "Negro-African society is collectivist or, more exactly, communal because it is rather a communion of souls than an aggregate of individuals". According to Mbiti (1969:108), it is the community that makes the individual to the extent that without the community, the individual has no existence. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and vice versa. Hence, the individual can only say: "*I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am*". This is to say that nobody is an isolated individual; none is capable of a fulfilling life as a monad. Each one is several people's relatives and

contemporary. Mbiti (1969:108) further argued that "...the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of a whole. At this point, we now turn to the idea of human solidarity by which the good of human relationality, belongingness and shared lived experiences will be further illuminated.

The Idea of Human Solidarity

Solidarity connotes a sense of reciprocal sympathy and responsibility that members of a group hold for one another. As a concept, solidarity has both descriptive and normative senses. In its descriptive sense, solidarity refers to a kind of connection to other people, to other members of a group, large or small. As a normative concept, solidarity connotes a "*we-thinking*" attitude towards others that stands in opposition to anti-social egocentrism and individualism (n.d). Solidarity is a typical human virtue. Animals are incapable of solidarity, what they have is the instinct for mutual dependence. The normative or moral sense of solidarity speaks to a human obligation and responsibility towards the members of his or her which presupposes the ability of each member to take up the thinking and role of the others (Zijderveld, 2006). This is indicative of man's capacity to give himself to others. Other human virtues that go with solidarity include sympathy and trust. With sympathy, the individual identifies with the suffering of the member(s) of his community and at the same time counts on them that they (would) feel the same towards.

The term *solidarity* was first introduced into Sociology by August Comte but it was the French Sociologist Émile Durkheim who popularized it. Durkheim made a distinction between what he called the 'mechanic' solidarity of traditional communities and the 'organic' solidarity of modern societies. Most sociologists conceive society as essentially a functionalist social order. Durkheim, Zijderveld (2006) opined, shares the view of the functionalist conception of society but unlike most functionalists, he also viewed society as a moral order. Durkheim argued that in traditional societies there exist, only rudimentary forms of division of labour. The members of the tribe or clan perform tasks which are passed on from generation to generation, sanctified by a usually magically conceived tradition. These tasks are performed in a taken-for-granted, non-voluntaristic, mechanical way. Hence, their solidarity is 'mechanical'. It is also better called 'traditional solidarity'. A dominant trait of this type of solidarity is the fact that 'like' prefers to cooperate with 'like'.

Durkheim further argued that following the increase in the division of labour, as has happened in Western societies ever since the Industrial Revolution, the understanding of solidarity and law have transformed fundamentally. In a functionalist organic sense of the human society, the various sub-systems, performing their own specific and different functions, will have to co-operate in order to maintain a basic measure of order and coherence. Solidarity now changes into an 'organic solidarity' which is better called a 'functional solidarity'. Law changed also from being repressive and expiatory into being restitutive and cooperative. In traditional societies based upon 'mechanical (traditional)

solidarity' law was predominantly penal law, whereas in modern societies, characterized by a radical and ever-expanding specialization of tasks and functions, based on 'organic (functional) solidarity' the centre of law will rather be administrative law, procedural law and contract law (Zijderveld, 2006).

Human solidarity both in its traditional moral sense and modern functionalist social sense, involves individuals in a community or society developing close inter-personal relationships and being members of some well-functioning and strong communities. That in itself is an important aspect of human fulfilment. Every human being needs another, not only because of what he/she stands to receive from that “other” but also because he/she has to give back in an expression of his social nature and for the facilitation of his/her own fulfilment (Elegido, 2018). We shall return to this later in the work when we discuss the human being as a 'being-with-others'. From the foregoing, we can deduce that individualism cannot foster the virtue of solidarity for the reason that individualism promotes thinking and acting that prioritizes the life and interests of one or few over the lives and interests of the rest of humanity. Proponents of individualism would like to argue that individualism guarantees the freedom of each person to determine the course of his or her life which will make for the authenticity of life. The debates between individualism and collectivism touch on man's search for how best to live – the authenticity of life. In the following paragraphs, we would explore the idea of 'authenticity' in existentialist philosophy in view of distilling from it a theoretical framework that could reconcile and address the tension between individualism and collectivism.

Authenticity in the Existentialism of Martin Heidegger

Existentialism is one of the major schools of contemporary philosophy. Its thesis holds that man should be considered in his individual concrete existence as opposed to the traditional metaphysical sense of *essentialism* or idealism. As Igboanusi (2009:1) puts it, “Existentialism is the philosophy that insists on standing for something and that something is taking a stand itself about issues of personal experience and decisions with peculiarly enthusiastic individualism”. Existentialism as a hermeneutics of existence focuses on the individual in his concrete situation. It arrogates to the human person absolute freedom and control of his actions without alluding to any external force as being responsible for man's actions. Historically, existentialism was influenced by the writings of the Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, who vehemently opposed the absolute idealism of Hegel as well as other forms of *essentialism*. Existentialist tradition parades the likes of Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Buber, Albert Camus, and Karl Jaspers as some of its prominent figures. Even though there are nuances of existentialist ideas, existentialists are unanimous in the view that philosophy is not about system-building but an activity – a 'way of life'. Philosophy, in existentialist perspective, is a personal adventure in which questions surrounding our existence are answered by investigating lived experiences.

Following the German occupation of France after World War I, in the early years of the twentieth century, the absurdity of the human condition was made palpable by the events of the war and its aftermath. It awakened the spirit of existentialism in France and Germany as a deeply experienced response to the crumbling of the economic, political, and intellectual structures of authority. As their appearances of legitimacy became doubtful, their overbearing influences on the individual were felt intolerable leading to their collapse (Onyeocha, 2009). On that basis, existentialists turned to the individual man as the centre of philosophy and the sole legitimating authority (Lavine, 1984). Notwithstanding that the existentialist movement is historically situated in the early twentieth century, its spirit predates the modern period. There were traits of existentialist ideas in some ancient and medieval philosophies so far as existentialism is understood to stand for individuality and personal responsibility. The famous Socratic dictum "Man know thyself" is a testimony in this regard. It was a forerunner to Heidegger's *call of conscience* by which he summoned the man to live in the awareness of the anxiety and finitude that characterise his existence and to choose for himself whatever meaning he wants for his life within the horizon of possibilities available to him until death calls. In the medieval period, there were elements of existentialism. For instance, Augustine of Hippo once asserted: "The God who made you without you cannot save you without you".

The statement underscores the necessity of each man's responsibility in giving meaning to his life. Also, in St. Paul's charge to the Philippians (Holy Bible, Philippians 2:12), he enjoined his audience thus: "... continue to work out your salvation in fear and trembling". Paul could not have said it any better by drawing the attention of his addressees to the fact that life is a struggle which each man must confront head-on. It is evident from the above that amongst the common ideas in existentialism are that existential experience is rooted in personal choices; in total rejection of fixed *essence* and, in the primacy of human freedom. Consequently, authentic existence is measured by how it corresponds to the above mentioned common existentialist values. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss existentialist idea of authenticity.

Authenticity as the meeting Point of Individuality and Relationality

Authenticity is a technical term used by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1977) to distinguish the two modes of existence possible to *Dasein*. Before we go any further on the idea of authenticity, let us first understand what Heidegger meant by *Dasein*. In his seminal work *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger undertook a hermeneutic of existence wherein he explains what it means 'to be' or 'being'. For Heidegger, as Igboanusi (2009:7) recounts, "the prospectus for the term "being" incorporates the totality of all factors that correspond to reality in the world". In other words, every reality in the world is a being including man. But the being of man is radically distinct from the being of other realities in the world. This being of man Heidegger calls *Da-sein*, from a combination of two words *Da* (there) and *sein* (being) hence *Dasein* which translates to "there-being". Heidegger chose *Dasein* to designate the

being of man as against *Mensch* which is the common German term for man. He explains that man is not a “what” as *whatness* presupposes a fixed essence. Against essentialism, Heidegger argued that man has no fixed *essence*; he unilaterally gives invents a meaning for himself in the course of his existence. Heidegger (1962:27) opined: “This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of its beings, we shall denote by the term *Dasein*”. *Dasein* is distinguished from other beings in the world by its distinct capacity for self-consciousness and understanding. Human existence is unique from the existence of other beings for the reason that the human person knows himself, knows the universe and interprets this experience of the world in a special way. *Dasein* can exist in either of two modes; authentic and inauthentic.

Authenticity generally entails a condition of self-making in which an individual through autonomous and committed choices and decisions towards a certain way of living makes himself or herself. An individual is said to be living an authentic life if he or she is fully responsible for what he or she *becomes* through personal free choices and decisions. Although one does not take responsibility for one's coming into being in the world because an essential aspect of being is '*thrownness*'. This means that man is thrown into the world without his consent. Nonetheless, whatever the individual will become will have to be the fruit of his sole responsibility over his life (Igboanusi, 2009). Heidegger's authenticity project discloses the foundational structures or condition of *Dasein* which he calls *existential*. According to Goner (2007) the most basic of *existential* is “*being-in-the-world*”. The *world* here does not mean an extended world of material objects. “Being-in” does not mean being spatially contained, as water is contained in a cup. Heidegger's world of *Dasein* is a world of *relations*; a field of human concerns. Okonkwo (2003) comments that, “worldhood” is a state of being. It is not possible to imagine the presence of a being without its actions and relationship in the state of affairs. *Dasein* expresses its state of being through its relationship with and concern for the other “beings” with which it shares a world. Thus, *entailing* 'being-there and being-with.

The above speaks to human relationality and affectivity. The human person is a being of concern and relations. This in turn discloses other *existentials*: “*being-with-others*” and “*being-unto-death*”. Being-with-others means that *Dasein* is a network of relation; he is never a monad. Aristotle's assertion that 'man is a social being' as well as John Donne's dictum: 'No man is an Island', come to mind at this point. They go to show that a human person is incomplete; and hence must seek completion by way of opening up to the “others” (fellow human beings) from whom he receives emotional and social support. We will say more on the social nature of man later in the work, for now, let us consider the last of the *existentials* - “*being-unto-death*”. To better understand the sense in which man is a being-unto-death, it is important to first consider the phenomenon of anxiety (*Angst*), a prominent theme in existentialist philosophy. Anxiety is the general unfocused apprehension regarding the sheer possibility of dangers in the universe and choices we have to make within the horizon of existence. It has its source in 'nothingness' which is a

constitutive element of *Dasein's* finitude. It is around this principle of finitude that Heidegger weaved his analysis of *Dasein's* authenticity of existence. Heidegger (1962:299) recognised the certainty and inevitability of death hence he said "Once a man is born, he is old enough to die". Man is a being towards death. Heidegger explains that death is not something that happens to man but rather it is a constitutive structure of man's being. Death is something which belongs to man and he ought to anticipate it. Death is the most personalized experience of all. Omoregbe (2004:201) writes: "The fact that he has to undergo his own death alone without the possibility of somebody else doing it for him reveals to man his singularity, individuality and uniqueness". The anticipation of death and its eventual embrace is the highest point of *Dasein's* authenticity. That implies that inauthenticity, amongst other things, consists in man's attempt to externalize death or to wish it away. Authenticity as a perfection of *Dasein* culminates in its refusal to conform to anxiety and through its wilful embrace of its own death.

Besides Heidegger, there were other existentialists that dwelt on the notion of authenticity. It will be good to briefly look at the varied nuances of the notion. Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) articulated his idea of authenticity in his famous theory of the three stages of life: aesthetic, ethical and religious, stages. According to the Danish philosopher, the aesthetic consists of a life devoid of commitment, responsibility and stability. Those at this stage of life are given to hedonism and tossed around by their desire for immediate pleasures. The aesthetic man has no stable personality, driven like a feather by the wind of pleasure he leads the life of the senses and dedicates to the pleasure of the moment (Ogbonna, 2004). When the fleeting pleasures of this stage plunge the aesthetic man into despair, he begins to seek a more satisfying lifestyle.

Then he aspires to the second stage of life - the ethical stage. In the ethical stage, reason reigns on passions and emotions. The ethical man subordinates himself to moral norms as well as assumes moral duty and responsibility over his life. The "ethical sphere is the sphere of duty and task; it is duty-oriented. The ethical view is that it is everyman's duty to work in order to live" (Kierkegaard, 1974:292). So, the ethical man does not just choose to annihilate despair, frustration and suffering he encountered in the aesthetic stage but also chooses to respond to them by making choice an underscoring factor of his life. But in spite of the good the individual on the ethical stage may have attained, that stage of life is still inadequate for bringing about an enduring fulfilment and satisfaction that man yearns for. Submission to moral norms and conventional rules brings about stability to man's life but they do not assuage the deep yearnings of man. This impels the individual to opt for a higher realm of life - the religious stage. This stage of life, Kierkegaard says, is attainable through a "leap of faith". The religious man abandons himself to a transcendent divine - God. This means that authenticity in Kierkegaard's view is only attained at the religious stage. He however made a distinction between the religious stage of mere conformity to doctrines and religiousness that involves personal encounters and relationships with God. It is in the latter that authenticity is attained. So, in a rather more theological than philosophical sense, Kierkegaard submits that authenticity consists in

committing oneself to God through a leap of faith; breaking free from social consciousness and crowd mentality.

For Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) human freedom is the cornerstone of authenticity. Sartre argued that 'freedom is not what man has but as what man is'. Lavine (1984:357) argued that "there is no difference between the being of man and being free". In other words, the negation of human freedom is the negation of the being of man. Like Heidegger, Sartre made a distinction between the being of man and the being of objects. The former qualifies as *being-for-itself* (*pour soi*) and the latter qualifies as *being-in-itself* (*en-soi*). Sartre is of the view that authenticity lies in man's recognition of this fundamental distinction between *pour soi* and *en-soi* and living accordingly. To live authentic life means that man deploys, even in the most radical sense, his freedom to wage war against external influences that may attempt to foist meaning that he does not choose, on his existence. Authenticity is the radical conversion of oneself through the anguish of "throw-ness" and "aloneness" which characterize human existence. It also entails accepting full responsibility for one's existence and projecting oneself to the future without alluding or accepting any impediment. Sartre's idea of authentic existence consists of the radical expression of human freedom up to the point of choosing death, even by way of suicide.

Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) anchored his own idea of authenticity on interpersonal relationships. He argued that interpersonal relationship is in participation, communion and inter-subjectivity. An authentic existence for Marcel is in loving, sharing, and in a mutually reciprocal relationship. It is founded on the recognition and treatment of other human beings as "Thou" and not as "It"; the latter is how a man treats objects or tools. The "Thou" is the source of enrichment of the "I". Every "I-Thou" relationship is pivotal for authentic existence and *co-esse* (Lesco, 1974).

Based on the foregoing nuanced view of authenticity we can identify: personal responsibility, giving meaning to one's life through personal choices and decisions, and the recognition and treatment of other human beings as ends in themselves as opposed to means to an end; are common defining attributes of authenticity. Inauthenticity on the other hand would consist in jettisoning these common attributes of authenticity. Heidegger gave two sides to inauthenticity; the subjective and the objective. The subjective form of inauthenticity consists in allowing one's self to be lost in the anonymous crowd of the "they" or *das-man* (the one). Here, the individual uncritically submits to the commands of "the one" whose justification he knows not; allowing his consciousness and actions to be thus influenced.

On the other hand, the objective form of inauthenticity consists in allowing oneself to become a slave or object of manipulation by technology. Heidegger was very critical of technology because of its strong tendency to undermine human freedom by way of addiction. Sartre used the term "bad faith" to qualify inauthenticity. Bad faith consists in alluding to and conceding to an unseen force or determinism as that which controls man's

actions. The view that every individual human personality comes into the world with a god-given soul, nature or essence which determines its very action and from a knowledge of which its entire life history might be predicted is the most eloquent expression of inauthenticity (Olson, 1962).

The Necessity of Human Solidarity in Contemporary Society

From the foregoing, we have seen that authentic existence entails a personal responsibility over one's life. But it also follows that responsibility towards in the context of shared humanity and the social nature of man is an integral factor that makes for authentic existence. Developing close interpersonal relationships as well as being a member of a well-functioning and strong society are in themselves important aspects of human fulfilment (Elegido, 2018). Social life is a necessity for man in that in "giving and receiving" one enriches oneself. It is within the context of human social relations that each person comes to the awareness of his or her identity; rights and duties and the value of 'being-with-others'. All the full imprints of humanity, the rational categories, the scale of values, and the modes of actions, are all the givens of society and culture. Unlike the objective world of material things, the human world extends into the realm of socio-cultural symbolic interactions (Ekwuru, 2010). Hence, we speak of the human world as a field of vital interactive union with persons.

The model of human beings used in economics and management theories in contemporary times tends to depict the human person as *radically individualistic*. But this is not true. According to Elegido (2018) there is no doubt that man has an egoistic tendency and that people sometimes take advantage of one another, but it does not suffice to conclude that man by nature is radically inclined to individualism. This is not to say that such the economic model is useless; it is useful and even legitimate for economic modelling but inadequate for understanding how best to relate with people.

Individualism, which is gaining currency in contemporary time undermines human solidarity. It is not possible to achieve happiness without any commitment to or appreciation of others. There is no genuine happiness without love; for love requires the existence of others (Burke, 2007). Working and living together, collaborating in justice under a legitimate authority and inspired by love or at best by respect and mutual appreciation is a reflection of a truly human society (Burke, 2007). There is no denying the fact that there could be abusive tendencies in certain human communities or societies but those are misnomers that should not be seen as what ought to be.

The Coronavirus pandemic that hit the world in 2020 highlighted the necessity of human interconnectedness and interdependence. We just need to think about the heroic sacrifice of frontline health workers who put their lives on the line to save and care for the victims of the virus. Equally heroic is the act of caregivers in old peoples' homes who stood for those they care for in the last and painful moments of their lives. And what about the garbage disposal workers that went on working for public hygiene even while the virus was menacingly taking the lives in hundreds of thousands?

Worthy of mention is the services of dispatch riders and grocery sellers who risked their lives to ensure that food items could reach people who were in lockdown in their houses. All these and more question the assumption that human beings are radically individualistic. These heroic people mentioned above did not risk their lives just for the pay; they demonstrated human solidarity with their actions.

Conclusion

Individualism is incompatible with the nature of man as a 'being-with-others'. Collectivism, as shown in this work, arose as a reaction to individualism. Contemporary thinking assumes that human beings basically find fulfilment in being individualistic and the suspicion that human communities such as families, villages, religious organizations, business firms, or trade unions are impediments to human fulfilment is gravely misleading and should be rejected for being its corrosive effect on human solidarity. Being a member of some healthy communities, in which one contributes one's fair share in the sustenance of that community is an integral aspect of authentic life. Undeniably, dysfunctional social systems albeit some in-human cultural practices tend to endanger the freedom, liberty and individuality of persons but those are misnomers; they do not represent the ideal human nature.

People who have strong relationships and belong to healthy human communities have a stronger immune system, longer life expectancy, and are generally happier than those who do not have such. Thus, individualism should be rejected for what it is, a corrosive ideology that undermines the ideals of shared humanity, openness of oneself to others, compromise and self-sacrifice. This paper hopes to awaken in the contemporary mind a consciousness of fraternity and solidarity. Individualism is at the root of many injustices and crises (both political and economic) bedeviling contemporary society. The "me-and-myself" mentality numbs one's sensitivity to the plight of others and even leaves one unfulfilled. This is premised on the truth that to facilitate the fulfilment of others is to secure one's own fulfilment. For there to be authentic life, it is not enough to focus on one's personal interests or the interests of those immediate to oneself. It also includes living in the consciousness of 'being-with-others' to its fullest social, political, economic and moral responsibilities.

References

- Burke, C., (2007). *Man and Values: A Personalist Anthropology*. Kenya: Kolbe Press.**
Ekwuru, E.G., (2010). *Basic Introductory Themes and Issues in Philosophical Anthropology*.
Owerri: Living Flame Resources.

Elegido, J.M., (2018). *The Nature of Human Beings*. Lagos: Pan-Atlantic University

Press.

George, R.P., (2013). *Conscience and its Enemies –Confronting the Dogmas of Liberal*

Secularism. Wellington Delaware: ISI Books.

Gorner, P. (2007). *Heidegger's Being and Time: An introduction*. USA: Cambridge University

Press

Heidegger, M., (1962). *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Macquarie and G. Robinson. New York:

Harper and Row Publishers.

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage

Igboanusi, E. (2009). *Contemporary Philosophy (Major Systems and Personalities)*. Vol.1.

Owerri: Living Flame Resources.

Kezie, C.C., (2016). *Postmodernism and Morality: In defence of Right Reason*.

(Unpublished

M.A. Thesis in Philosophy, University of Ibadan Department of Philosophy).

Kiekegaard, S., (1974). *Either/Or*. Trans. by W. Lowrie. USA: Princeton University Press.

Lavine, T.Z., (1984). *From Socrates to Sartre: The Philosophic Question*. New York: Bantam

Books.

Lesco, F., (1974). *Existentialism: With or Without God*. New York: Society of St. Paul.

Ogbonna, A.P., (2004). *A Preface to Kierkegaard*. Owerri: Austus Prints and Publishers.

Okonkwo, J.I., (2003). "Live world as Environmental Philosophy: A Phenomenological

Reflection on the Visual Arts". *Amamihe: A Journal of Applied Philosophy*

Vol.1. p.356

Olson, R.G., (1962). *An Introduction to Existentialism*. New York: Dover Publications Inc.

Omoregbe, J., (2004). *Metaphysics without Tears: A Systematic and Historical Study*. Lagos:

Joja Edu. Research and Publishers Ltd.

Onyeocha, I.M., (2009). *Beginning Metaphysics*. Washington D.C. USA: Paideia Pub.
The
Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.

Oyserman, D., (2002). “Rethinking Individualism and Collectivism: Evaluation of Theoretical Assumptions and Meta-Analyses”. *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 128, No. 1, 3–72

Triandis, C.H. (2019). *Individualism and Collectivism*. New York: Routledge.

Online sources:

<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/individualism#:~:text=noun,individual%20character%3B%20individuality>. Accessed 4/9/2020

<https://hi.hofstedeinsights.com/nationalculture#:~:text=The%20high%20side%20of%20this,themselves%20and%20their%20immediate%20families> Retrieved 4/9/2020