



Crisis of the Common Good or Great Hope?

Reflections on a Concept
Borrowed from Obiora F. Ike

Ignace Haaz
Globethics.net

First published on Oct. 2022

Keywords

Common good, integrity as constitution of values, conditions for integral development and education, a space for deliberation and research on common interests and values, value pluralism, holistic playground for conflicting values.

Abstract

Obiora F. Ike's impressive amount of research texts on ethics can be found on Globethics.net Library. In general, there is no need to search for a justification of a life work and commitment to values, when a person reaches beyond a certain level of experience in life, in any field of professional work, even more in spiritual and ethical development. In the following lines, I shall focus on the value of *the common good* for a person who not only had precise notions about a philosophical and theological concept, but taught by example, believing *integrity* matters and *integral development* can be a life-long mission and altruistic commitment, even if life can be either simple or complicate.

Corresponding Author: Dr Ignace Haaz, haaz@globethics.net. To quote this article:
Haaz, Ignace. 2022. "Crisis of the Common Good or Great Hope?" *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education* 1(2022): 175–201. DOI: 10.26034/fr.jehe.2022.3099
© the Author. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Visit <https://www.globethics.net/jehe>

1. Introduction

Western societies are suffering from a lack of valorisation of the common good, but what should be considered common in our ethics and values, is there a common moral?

In his book entitled *Ethical Project for the Future of Humanity* A.A. Randriamirado describes very clearly the difference between ethics and morals and why both are important for describing a minimal axiological content to the common good¹. Let's first discover these conceptual bases and clarify our idea of the common good before showing models of the common good in the organisation of our society and then showing Obiora's own view on the matter, and assessing his contribution more specifically. Ethics and morals differ, but:

“ Let us first note that in general, from the point of view of content, ethics and morals indicate the same thing: it is the set of rules of conduct or prescriptions accepted by a group of men at a given time. Each people can have its own morality; this can vary in time and space. The morality of our ancestors is no longer ours. The goal of morality or ethics is the life of a group of individuals, that is to say, to live it together. We adopt a certain number of rules of conduct in order to be able to live together. In this sense, there is no difference between ethics and morals. The two words can even be considered synonymous. What differentiates the two is that ethics is of Greek origin and morality is of Latin origin.

¹ Abdon Alphonse Randriamirado. 2022. *Projet d'éthique pour l'avenir de l'humanité*, Globethics.net Philosophy Series, No. 3, Geneva: Globethics.net, ISBN 978-2-88931-488-1. Our translation from French. Abdon Alphonse Randriamirado, *Projet d'éthique pour l'avenir de l'humanité*, Éthique universelle/globale, 19-20, op. cit.

Randriamirado shows well the corrective nature of morality over ethics. Ethics opens options, even though one might ask if it makes sense to speak already of norms instead of ideals of good life whereas morals are often trying to fix some problems in life, and therefore are more pessimistic in nature:

“ But despite this, there is still a certain nuance between the two. Very often, when we speak of morality, we immediately think of commandments, duties, laws, obedience. Morality is defined as a set of duties and prohibitions accepted to safeguard and facilitate living together. It is prohibitions and duties that make life together possible. This is why, for example, through Moses, God gave the Ten Commandments to the sons of Israel according to the Bible. Likewise, in the New Testament, Jesus himself left the commandment of love to the disciples. The purpose of the commandments is the life of the group: to live it together. In this sense, we can say that morality is more interested in the conditions of common life: we need prohibitions so that we can live together. This means that morality is not so much made for the good and the just, but for the wicked. It is the bad ones who need the commandments in general. Whether there are commandments or not, the good can always live with others.

On the contrary, ethics does not just prohibit; it goes beyond morality. Certainly there are prescriptions, duties, commandments and laws in ethics, but all this is only a part of it. Reducing ethics to a law of pure obedience is a mistake. Morality, as a set of prohibitions and prescriptions, is only part of ethics. Ethics is, indeed, an art of living”.

If we focus on ethics and the art of living, we open our options on competing values to a plurality of possible ways of defining the good.

2. Ethics as pluralistic playground for values

The sceptical and liberal playground

Should a place for a pluralistic association exist and be defined in a way that its affirmation is seen always as deeply valuable, because members of a democratic association see deliberative procedures as sources of legitimacy and ways of resolution of diverse preferences? We could on this first line of argument, easily think that there is no particular common and unique ideal or set of preferences and convictions received as mandatory². Similar views highlight the diversity and relativity of values and shows that suspending the judgment could be more desirable than committing to a dogmatic stance on the nature of all things, including the good and the just, as well as on the injunction to do, as there is a lack of regularity across cultures and religions about what one ought to do or not³.

This observation might look far from the starting point of our attempt to draw *a common view*, a perspective sharable across the multitude. It does not follow from a sceptical invitation to refrain from precipitation on the existence of something good by nature, that customs and religious practices should not be respected, and that we should not follow everyday life rules of good conduct. For a sceptical mind-set, we should *keep calm* and *carry on* good work⁴.

A second way of thinking a space for universally agreeable set of values comes from the concept of human rights. A simple example suffice to show

² If we don't think mandatory in the proper sense of the word to think we have discovered the reality of some truth, or moral and ethical real values, we take a sceptical orientation based on the idea that truth or moral and ethical value are not found or universally apprehended, therefor we should be still investigating about these values.

³ *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (OH) in: Sextus Empiricus, *Works*. English & Greek, vol. 1, Bury, R. G. (Ed. and transl.), London and Cambridge, Mass. 1933-49. First vol. contains OH. On ethics see: Book III, 23 [179], 24[235-238]. "If divine worship and illicit things would be natural everyone would use it the same way" 24[226].

⁴ OH, III, 24[235].

that here again, there can be easy objections, as by those who say that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights may not have a truly universal scope. Remember that some countries still dispute the universality of human rights. It is considered too Western, therefore linked to a particular culture. This is why the elaboration of a common good on the ground of human rights is not so straightforward. At this sceptical remark, we should add that Obiora Ike, who might agree on the challenge of universalisation of rights, notices in his works, that first the Christian Church has deeply rooted human dignity and human rights in a social mobilisation and transformation, which should not be underestimated and seen as specific to a narrow Western context. Each historical and spiritual context can be the ground for an integral development of values including human rights⁵. Second, the relation between rights, Catholic faith and work ethics is the space where Obiora Ike narrows down the definition of a space for spiritual freedom, since his doctoral dissertation, the heart of both human socio-economic role on a line shared by John Locke, and extending the natural law of owning the fruit of our professional activity to the idea that the human being should be served by work, rather than suffering from the disadvantages of depending from deep historical and social unequal starting points in human life: there is a need to see hard conditions which “distort” “the fundamental right to work”, “that god created”⁶. In his work, building on 1891 Encyclical “*Rerum No-*

⁵ Ike, Obiora F. 2011. “The integral nature of African cultural and religious values as ethical values”. In: A.H. Cisneros and S. Premawardhana (Eds.), *Sharing Values. A Hermeneutics for Global Ethics*. Globethics.net: Geneva. 309-322.

⁶ Ike, Obiora F. 1986. *Value Meaning and Social Structure of Human Work*, Vo. 282, Berne: P. Lang, xxi. Discover many of Obiora’s works in Globethics.net CIDJAP Collection, <https://repository.globethics.net/handle/20.500.12424/55>. The proximity of O. F. Ike with J. Locke on the property of our own work draws an explicit relation between the spirit of the Catholic encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and the sceptical British thinker’s work. By doing social action, *RN* invites going sharply beyond natural rights type justification of economic and political (in)justice(s), towards mutual recognition of the abstract rights of each citizen. By doing social action, one need to tackle the real problem of *Klassenjustiz*, in the sense of the left wing German Hegelian and Marxian critical tradition of highlighting unequal access to State protection of *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education* 1(2022)

varum” Obiora Ike defines the social doctrine of the Church and grounds *social action*: “If happiness is to be real hereafter, tears must be wiped away and empty stomachs fed here and now”. Social action is required to set the boundaries of the integral nature of the Christian hope and faith. In other words, the relativity of rights and work conditions are distinctively linked to concrete contexts, because they are different in various geographical locations. Reciprocally, Catholic social action is also grounded, in order to remain effective, on an attitude of *remaining in search* for the right conditions, the just values of work, instead of accepting and submitting to brut power relations.

In many hard conditions of life, the glass of conditions for decent human rights and self-fulfilling social and economic activities is half-empty, as rightly observed by Michael Windfuhr. The universality of human rights being tight to the indivisibility of social issues globally, and not so much related to the promotion of free elections, immense challenges are present. As “Economic inequality is one of the greatest human rights challenges” in a world where “half of the world’s population lived on less than US\$5.50 per day in 2020” this simple fact considerably degraded the hope of universalisation of human rights⁷.

the workers and citizens. See historical evolution of these concepts in the 20th Century and application to development work globally and the reminder of the metaphysical definition of T. Aquinas of the common good, based on the *perfect* attributes of the Being: Ike, Obiora F. 2013. Catholic social teaching and the common good: challenges on governance and the common good of individuals in a polity.

⁷ Ike, Obiora F. 2020. *Applied Ethics: To Issues of Development, Culture, Religion and Education*, Globethics.net, 2nd Ed., 123. See also recent: Michael Windfuhr, 2022. “The Evolution of International Human Rights Protection Instruments: How Indivisibly and Universally Are Human Rights Implemented Around the World” in: *Strengthening Christian Perspectives on Human Dignity and Human Rights Perspectives from an International Consultative Process*, Peter Prove, Jochen Motte, Sabine Dressler & Andar Parlindungan (Eds.), Globethics.net Co-Publications, 137, 142-44.

On the other side, coming back to a pluralist playground of values, if we agree on this orientation of the need of an open space for deliberation in the society, then we may consequently tend to accept that disagreement about the requirements of morality is acceptable, and that it is, plausibly, a result of the free exercise of human reason. As Cohen rightly shows, there is then a place for deliberation and space for pluralism, as public reason, with John Rawls, has a direct effect of social stabilization. It is seen as a duty of civility, exercised in a mutual assurance and in the form of a consensus among the members of a well-ordered society (Cohen, 2006, 162 D3, D4, 163⁸).

Again, there will be objections to see public reason not embracing any discursive and cultural layer, as we find in the debates on a comprehensive sphere of democratic deliberation. One might then suspend the key political orientation of a democratic society and think more generally about common good, without assigning a historical value to the sovereignty of the majority, in switching to a classical representative system, which does not need conceptually, direct democratic horizontal interactions.

Should common good be then defined on a conservative line, very different from the liberal democratic enthusiasm for showing the priority of the just over the good, and simply agree that there are religious and culture-based shared preferences and traditions in a given context?

Integral life based playground for ethics – redefining integrity

The argument from a integrity-based view is that a liberal reason-based conception of public reason entails a lack of coherence, it is as splitting the identity of the subject, which entails costs as it prevents citizens from acting in certain circumstances following their conviction in areas which are vital domains of life (Miller, 2003⁹). There are different facets of integrity such

⁸ Cohen, Joshua. 2006. “Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy”, in: Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publ., 159-170.

⁹ *Integrity as coherence* means for Miller that “agents are not ‘wantons’ simply expressing their strongest desires, but rather agents whose actions exhibit that with *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education* 1(2022)

as “practical identity”, “focusing on what are variously called “identity-conferring commitments” or “ground projects.” (Miller, op. cit.) Is it possible to say that integrity would remain total, even if we shift across various contexts and situations? The identity-based conviction should be understood and furthermore accepted, perhaps as the unconscious collective historical drives for values in a community. If we remove the individual focus on the self and adopt a social focus, which in our view could be largely unconscious, we might escape the problem of having to respond for contexts and situations where obviously we are not as coherent and performant as when we all appears as if we master them all.

A further objection to integrity-based foundations for values is to ask about the rationality of a Cartesian cogito type of view, where I consider myself as having the role of a sovereign leader of my destiny in coherence of my sphere of competency. There is a critical view of this Cartesian self, as disillusioning of an all-power of the reason, which could be with Spinoza better understood as balancing between passive and actives affects (Wolf, 2015)¹⁰. On the collective ground, decentralizing development might be seen as dissolution of great entities such as States, great powers, in order to give a voice to local and traditional historical views or to minorities. Should not on the contrary, integration and development of values such as respect and basic liberties and competencies be recognised a unifying potential?

Common good as consensus often does not meet the level of seriousness integrity needs, in particular when discourse seems not capturing some vital domains of life. In order to assume that mutual parties of the consensus are seriously playing the game of a social assurance (or social contract), exclud-

which they identify or align themselves” as subjective constitution with H. Frankfurt work on the free will (1971). Christian Miller, “Integrity” in: *Blackwell International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, Hugh LaFollette (Ed.) 2013. 9 Vol., Vo. 5, 2640. Miller adds also “reasonability” and “objective accuracy” as other possible ways of conceiving integrity.

¹⁰ Wolf, Jean-Claude. 2015. „Menschliche Unfreiheit und Desillusionierung (4praef-4p18)“, in: *Baruch de Spinoza Ethik in geometrischer Ordnung dargestellt*, Michael Hampe und Robert Schnepf (Hrsg.), Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 197-8.

ing “noise”, “cheap talks”, there is a need to avoid non-bidding communications corroding mutual trust¹¹. There could be ways of mitigating the impression of an increasing numbers of human rights claimed without clear orientation on which should be considered most fundamental. It is interesting that although mainstream liberal views tend to place consensus at the center of the notion of a public space for deliberation, accessibility to a space of public reason is often considered as given. There is an implicit requirement not to restraint access, which needs precision (Vallier, 2012¹²). Integral development related objections play on the shareability and accessibility of public goods, because they believe most avenues for fair dialogue are closed, and citizenship is not fully realised.

A middle path between integral or more conservative views and a liberal interactionist model of public reason is based on the possible role of spiritualities, instead of given global religions, as we all witness ecumenism, inter-faith or interreligious dialogue building on religious studies without necessarily accepting the conservative tendencies of globally (dominant) religious institutions.

The spiritual education referred to here is a meditation or a path to ask what are the last founding grounds for decisions, in analysing a consequentialist set of reasons for our action¹³. We find in Buddhist meditation the example of what type of central role meditation plays in individual and collective life, without reference to one religion or faith¹⁴. An ethical education understood

¹¹ Thrasher, J. and Vallier, K. 2015. “The Fragility of Consensus”. *Eur J Philos*, 23: 933-954. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12020>

¹² Kevin Vallier. 2012. “Liberalism, Religion and Integrity”, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 90:1, 149-165, DOI: 10.1080/00048402.2011.560612, 153.

¹³ I thank James de Traz for his help to understand Buddhist analytical thinking on the last grounds for action. See also on this topic his manual: *l'art de rebondir*, Lyon: Ed. Baudelaire, 2021.

¹⁴ Randriamirado reminds us on the universal potential of Buddhism: “Buddhist ethics has a universal dimension; it can therefore unite all men, not only in the construction of a more united world, but also in the search for solutions to the problems *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education* 1(2022)

as a space for philosophical meditation is transformative in that it first offers an empty space for the interior life to grow¹⁵.

If common good is conceived as related to a place for spiritual meditation, or as interreligious dialogue, there is a place for public deliberation which is founded on some fundamental values. The assumption that deliberation is irrelevant or confuse should for this reason be rejected. Deliberation, in one way or the other, should not be seen as irrelevant because direct democracy and legislative assemblies are sufficient to institutionalize a deliberative procedure. On the contrary, sharing values in a space made for deliberation is central and spiritual communities can consolidate or create genealogic conditions for dialogue to happen (Cohen, 2006, 162 D3, D4, 163).

In putting education to the center of the question where diverse preferences shape ultimately human destiny, Obiora Ike seems to not answer directly to any of these alternatives but rather to have decided for a more specific part of the public sphere (which is not an objection against any of the liberal or conservative integral model proposed above), than any possible space relevant for deliberative association. In order to understand why education comes into the picture when we start reflecting deeply on common good we need to focus on the question what makes values universal or global as values, “but the problem is that they are misunderstood, and we have a duty to make them known”, as also shown in Randriamirado (op. cit., Conclusion). We do not need to reinvent new values, even though the world and the economy are changing, as many good solutions come from the long history of historical evolution of values.

Higher education as playground for ethics and common good

Higher education should be given priority over the agora as specifically future-oriented compartment of the public sphere, where young persons are

common to all humanity.” Op. cit., cf. first section of his chapter: Buddhism Facing Current Problems.

¹⁵ See again (our transl.) Randriamirado, “12. Authentic happiness, a deep joy that results from meditation”, Buddhism Facing Current Problems, op. cit.

prepared for public responsibilities and this is also where possible reasonable and universal solutions can be defined by comparison. There might be either a will to prepare by education to democratic self-legislation, because we acknowledged that some of the democratic qualities or virtues are acquired, learnt at school, not given¹⁶. In developing countries with widespread rampant corruption practices, attachment to more or less democratic values tend to be replaced by individual assessment of changes or sustaining, diffuse or specific “system support”, and quality of leadership, instead of a strong emphasis on a public space for dialogue. In times of pandemic crisis all over the world, systemic support, strong leadership and trust in government almost completely faded away the need for a pluralistic space of expression of opinions¹⁷.

Economic good practices, as the one promoted by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), business ethics professional formation, and ethics education, are based on a rationalist view of ethics in higher education, as plausibly stabilising all types of processes of political decision-making, including democratic ones (Ugwuozor, 2022)¹⁸.

In order to function in a convincing way, the whole system of education has to be reassessed and reshaped along some specific normative lines.

¹⁶ This is of course context related: in Western European countries democratic values or socialisation values are learnt very early by younger generations at primary school, whereas older generations were trained to prioritize safety and stability, as most of them experienced the war, see: Inglehart R. 1977. *The Silent Revolution. Changing values and political styles among western publics*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

¹⁷ See on this aspect Christoph Stückelberger. 2020. “A Post-Covid World Order?” in *Globalance*, Focus Series No. 57, Geneva: Globethics.net, 33-46; with a new enlarged edition 2022.

¹⁸ See in this current Issue: Ugwuozor, Felix Okechukwu “Students’ Exposure to Common Good Ethics and the Perceived Linkage between Ethics Practice and Democracy Outcomes”, *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education*, 1(2022).

We could argue, following the impulsion of Obiora, that education should be focused on moral character formation:

“ there is need to move education from mechanistic to organic or ecological conceptions; from abstract to life-centric studies; from discipline-specific to trans-disciplinary perspectives. Finally, there is need to move education from abstract principles to spiritual values and from subject to person-centered and personality-centered education¹⁹”.

It is remarkable that since ethical education is not to be found in some abstract platonic realm where dogs do not bite, because they are transcendental realities in another worldliness, common good can be defined very concretely, by looking at who we are, our character and personality, and what our needs are.

Common good

Common good is as simple as charisma and building a healthy human world of co-presence: raising a hand in the air proves that we are free and joyful in our life, sharing a good laugh or a handshake are simple communicative expedients of joy and they help moving towards the other in a very simple manner, offering true opportunities for building trust and sharing common concern. When two persons are in presence there is equal chance that fear or compassion takes over as dominant emotion: working for the common good means trying to avoid being contaminated by fear and hatred by taking the good habit of remaining active in life and opening oneself to the other. It is worth reminding the sentence of Kahlil Gibran:

“ My brothers, seek counsel of one another, for therein lies the way out of error and futile re-

¹⁹ Ike, Obiora F. 2017. “Ethics in Higher Education as a Tool for Discovering our Ultimate Destiny”, in: *Ethics in Higher Education: Value-driven Leaders for the Future*, Ed. by Divya Singh and Christoph Stückelberger. Globethics.net Education, Geneva: Globethics.net, 18.

pentance. The wisdom of the many is your shield against tyranny. For when we turn to one another for counsel we reduce the number of our enemies.²⁰

If we look back at six years of weekly exchanges with Obiora F. Ike, we could sum up the basic elements of his deep trust and joyful presence based on contrasting elements of a common good:

- Common good, should not be confounded with a tyranny of the common sense or with mass uprising
- Common good offers ways of leaving room for the expressing of great individualities and ethical experimentations: it is not to be confounded with narrow paternalism and moralism.
- There is a deep understanding of the lack of value of the political imposition of social norms for our common good whatever the level of knowledge or understanding of these norms supposedly accessible to most.

In order to make common good appear as a founded conception, among others perspectives on good life, and not only as an attitude, be it an ethical attitude, i. e. a descriptive ethical value which is enough to be characterized as a theory of values among other values, some philosophical work on clarifying ethics needs to be done. Ethics should not be seen only as an ideal among other ideals, in which case ethics will appear as not strong enough to be accepted as a norm (for reason of lack of knowledge, for ideological reasons, or because of economic-based conditions). In principle, for a compulsory doctrine for action, we need to agree on a limited set of propositions, which would refer to some reason-based set of rules for action. If we declare such reason-based foundation as optional, and that it should not be given much weight, we risk the privatisation of our system of common values. Elegant or dirty-and-easy non-conformism should not be regarded as authentic claims for the common good at all price, just because we share

²⁰ Gibran, Kahlil. 1958. *The Voice of the Master*, translated from the Arabic by Anthony R. Ferris. London: Heinemann, 66, quoted from Suheil, 9.

some instinct for lower-level pleasures. What should we think about the egoist claim of being engaged in a project of life-long ethical self-development, protected against the envy and distrust of the majority by some mechanism of filtering, against unjustified claims? As Obiora Ike writes:

“ Despite doubts as to whether egoism is properly classified as an ethical theory, it does provide a challenging answer to the fundamental practical questions of how we ought to live (Ike, 2019/2020²¹).

We shall not be surprised that egoistical ethics is a very effective means for overcoming nihilism, which is the resolute opponent to any type of approach to ethics. It is very different from the ordinary attitude of the psychological egoist, who claims that in all circumstances all human beings only search for their own benefit. Ethical egoism opposes as well a more nuanced position, which shows that all motive in human life could be ultimately reduced to some egoistical motive. In contrast, as shown by Wolf, ethical egoism may disagree with the idea that the plurality of the motives, which may in turn be non-egoistical to large proportions, — even though exerting strong influence on the person, may not all be present to our full awareness²². By contrast to psychological egoism, ethical egoism does not need any proof on the strong impression of the value of life, not for psychological reasons but simply because *we*, as individuals and groups, do experience life, and do not need any proof for it (Wolf, 2004, 513, 514²³). If we agree on this line of argument, common good in life may be either impossible to find (as the Sceptical Pyrrho would say that we ignore the *nature* of the common good), or very simple as passive bodily impression of what matters of us as human beings. Otherwise we might doubt on the reality of our

²¹ Ike, Obiora F. 2020. *Moral and Ethical Leadership, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, African and Global Contexts*, Geneva: Globethics.net, 71-2.

²² See in this Issue Jakob Bühlmann Quero's demonstration of the natural ground for such dominant altruistic motives, based on a Darwinian understanding of the concept.

²³ Wolf, Jean-Claude, “Ethischer Egoismus”, *Erwägen Wissen Ethik* (EWE), 15(2004) 4, 514.

values, on the reality of the ought to do or not to do x. Fine grained views on the common good, taken from Obiora Ike’s approach to life seem to follow this principle basing our values on the most simple experience of life:

- Common good as serendipity is worth consideration: when chances are offered to do things right, it does not make sense to not take the options offered, provided they are harmless and oriented towards a perfectionist aim.
- Common good is not an abstract norm inherited from distant administrative powers but it answers to a principle of subsidiarity, starting from the level of the family, as child education or sexual ethics, to the level of the nation and the State, and beyond, for continental supranational conventions as the one needed to agree on large environmental problems²⁴.
- Common good is related to the capacity of perceiving unity in the dynamical nature of our process of perception called also the basis of a “transformative ethics”.

The photographer Julianne H. Newton shows that we are building unity in diverse perceptual data, in a phenomenal unity oriented toward the dynamical nature of the gaze:

“Shared agency and responsibility requires a developed sense of ethics in the pursuit of visual truth. However, the concept of visual truth is rooted in the brain’s tendency to believe and remember that the eyes see and to translate what is seen through the brain’s interpretive filters. Although the visual is a subset of perception, considering the dynamic nature of the gaze and resulting truth forms the basis

²⁴ Ike, O. F. 2019. “Higher Education in Crisis: The Role of Ethics in Private Universities for Nation Building”, in: *Higher Education in Crisis*, Ikechukwu J. Ani / Obiora F. Ike (Eds.), Education Ethics Series No. 5, Geneva: Globethics.net, 44, 57.

of a transformative ethic, one that embraces the space between seer and seen as a means for enriched seeing (...)"²⁵

Contrary to a flat ethical egoistical view, we argue that Obiora Ike's perception of the value of ethics in higher education adds foundational values and it goes beyond the perception of the experience towards high-level principles borrowed from great religious traditions²⁶. We can quote a few lines of the Archbishop Oscar Romero which present well the deep shift from egoistical values to Christian values, witnessed by Obiora Ike and which he quotes on his 40th priestly anniversary:

“ We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation realizing that. This enables us to do something and do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a process, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not Messiahs. We are prophets of a future, not our own. (Ike, 2021²⁷)

Metatheology

Common good as both theological and transformative concept goes beyond the simple result of our action to some deep forces of liberation. In order to

²⁵ Julianne H. Newton. 2017. Toward a Transformative Ethic for Seeing—and Living, *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 24:4, 243-256, DOI: 10.1080/15551393.2017.1388727

²⁶ Propositions such as “ultimate criterion for right actions?”, “Hinduism – everything essential for people, the world and nature to exist”, “Classical Chinese Ethics – around the topics of: what is the best way” etc. all show typical metatheological interrogations. Cf. “Ancient Ethics and the Great Ethical Traditions”, Ike, Obiora F. 2020. *Moral and Ethical Leadership*, op. cit., 69.

²⁷ The title of this section sums up the will of stepping out of egoistical motives: “A Future Not Our Own”, quoted from: Ike, Obiora F. 2021. *Faith and Action Rooted in Christ: Reflections on Spirituality, Justice and Ethical Living*, Geneva: Globethics.net, 17.

bring education to a high standard we cannot simply stay calm and keep on good work, even if we find an art of living in integrity and can share it in larger circles.

We argue that going beyond our capabilities can only be experienced if we borrow the elements of a notion of highest good to a *metatheological point of view*, which should be made explicit, in order to make some of the key attributes of the rational foundation of ethics in education clear on the line Obiora Ike seems to understand his “work” of life.

This theoretical step is welcome in particular in order to bring some of the normative practical conditions of the expression of ethics in education appear as non-contradictory regards to a strong principle of equality.

3. The education sector: playing across ethical playgrounds and/or redefining the common?

In order to build a common good, based on theistic understanding of a description of the reality of the existence of god, we need to take in consideration three concepts, which constitute essential traits of the divine presence across all religions, and shows a deep philosophical and religious foundation of perfectionist education. Philosophical and religious concepts are influential as religious possible pillars of a robust notion of the common good, distinct from a simple discussion on a plurality of values, as even a pluralistic approach may need a foundation. We argue that education as theology can be built on our capacity to recognize meaning to three set of essential attributes of the divine on a line proposed by Kvanvig (2022): a “Creator Theology” (CT), a “Perfect Being Theology” (PBT) and a “Worship-Worthiness Theology” (WWT).

Our understanding that none of these attributes can alone found a system of essential divine values, explains the transformative character of a system of

ethics in education needed to overcome some sort of original heterogeneity of the highest potentials and values in the world²⁸.

If as in our faith education brings a room for self-development as celebration of some divine essential traits of perfection which are not too far and inaccessible then we find a relation between a playground for pluralistic values and a higher interest for bringing the common as founding value of some of our ethical ideals, which gain some normative power, being shared in a community of learners.

A key aspect of many faith experiences is related to shared joy and the positive experience of worshipping together. In different contexts where learning comes to the foreground of our activities we tend to omit the symbolic power of a system of shared beliefs as we find in great religions or spiritualities, but on the contrary, this symbolic capacity should be seen as a house with plenty of space as Gibran depict it, which is not limited to one system of faith or belief.

“ a God Who is good knows of no segregations amongst words or names, and were a God to deny His blessing to those who pursue a different path to eternity, then there is no human who should offer worship²⁹.”

What does it mean to allow plenty of space to different systems of values, a space that would deserve a religious consideration of being worship-worthy?

Aiming at learning is a quality related experience, which means an education model is open to a perfectionist hope. There are different methods for

²⁸ Georg Gasser’s review of Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Depicting Deity: A Metatheological Approach*, Oxford University Press, 2021, 224pp., ISBN 9780192896452, in *Notre Dame Philosophical Review*, July 2022, <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/depicting-deity-a-metatheological-approach/>

²⁹ Gibran, Kahlil. 1965. “Iram, City of Lofty Pillars” in *A Treasury of Kahlil Gibran*, edited by Martin L. Wolf and translated from the Arabic by Anthony Rizcallah Ferris. New York: The Citadel Press, 145, cited from Suheil, 10.

characterizing this key idea that we believe in a perfectionist progress in education. Let us suppose that for a quality to qualify as great standard in education, it should either be considered as having a great-making property or some sort of perfection.

Perfect, excellent, and quality education... as less than perfect?

Historically human beings have been thinking at “divine attributes” when they were asked to think the *summum* of a qualitative property.

Perfect education attributes are qualities that in turn allow further qualities to be available: education brings sources of thinking human solidarity (“quality education for all”, as SDG 4 states).

Excellent education should be an impetus of a kind of ethics of individual and collective self-transformation in education (again SDG 4 states: quality and inclusive education as “lifelong opportunities for all” it means as we change, education accompany us on our life-journey in a constructive manner, being always adapted to each new situation of our life).

Quality education can be seen as having the attribute of perfection, one of the key aims of education. Perfection can be conceived as a great-making properties combined at maximal level. It is only by borrowing to our imagination of the most fundamental attributes of the Divine Being, that the historical tradition has found a convincing path allowing us to approach the highest peaks of an education aiming at achieving the best of our qualitative potentials.

Who would agree that quality education including a perfectionist hope, has essentially a less-than-perfect quality?

Is an education system including a perfectionist hope aiming at bringing essentially a less-than-perfect quality, credible as key target for teachers and students?

If we see perfection as an immutable thing, as a source of transcendence, it needs to keep the property of being a perfect or ideal type. We find in the God of the Ancient Testament the prototype of this fixed source of transcendence and model of perfect being.

But is this the best possible model, or even desirable as such?

If we use a model of a process, then transcendental is not so desirable, and quality and perfection are achieved in virtue of being engaged. Teachers and students are expected to become better than they are, as education overall is seen as becoming gradually what it is, in an ever changing transformation.

Human finitude: Less than perfect but not only egoistical ethical education

By thinking a process where we become gradually better than who we are we presuppose at some point to have access to a self-understanding which brings to the foreground a set of vital interests and qualities which are less than perfect but necessary for survival.

- 1) The idea that qualitative education as based on some perfectionist hope is compatible with a sceptical moderation or with the egoistical notion of prudence as long we bring the hope and invite others to share their views on their ethical art of living or the constraints of not being able of setting up concretely such an art of living in their context.
- 2) If we appeal to a hope of perfection to define our quality education, it does not show that such hope of perfection is taken to be fundamental or a kind of single pillar dogmatic foundation. It might be derived, as when we consider it achieved through engagement in a process, were our perfectionist hope as a perfect quality is derived from different starting points.

As we above discussed critically integrity as reason-based values, we showed the plausibility of a playground of more ethical egoistical dispositions (playing so to say Spinoza against Descartes and Leibniz). In this way, we see quality education not only as entailing some essential attributes, which are properties in a way not relative to any human interest (purposes, needs, intentions, cultures). We see that quality education does not deny completely the complementary relation between moral value and precepts of prudence, as long it recognizes the perfectionist value of life-long (self-) education. Self-education seen as serious engagement entails turning against

self-loathing and sycophancy. Self-education might hold the teachings of prudence and morality as complementary to some degree, being “self” directed as education, and thus part of a general and very conventional way of understanding and accepting a principle of ethical equality, as well as existentially sharing the finitude of human life³⁰. Even if there might be a therapeutic value to recognizing our finitude and egoistical preferences, as well-being and bodily experience offer access to life’s real ground, we need to remain careful to unlimited self-preference in a world of big technological augmentation of our reality.

Unlimited self-preference instead of preference limited by some norms for the common good in times of tech giants platforms (the “GAFA”) is different from the innocent self-preference related to the fact of considering oneself “as being the center of the world”, “more important than others”, which may be justified, as long as each individual except the phantasy of almightiness (Wolf, 2004)³¹. We might favour some degree of Romantic ethical egoism but the Romantic world was very different from ours, from various points of views.

As Walzel shows in the 21st Century, the situation of a naïve degree of self-preference has been heavily impacted by the fact that on internet-based spaces for deliberation each “platform for consumer goods [or naïve friendship-based deliberation on the good] [...] is also active in the sale of those goods and is therefore a competitor to its own users (so-called hybrid function)³².” A principle of naïve *laissez-faire*, which gave much weight to ethical freedom and economical initiative, seems to have totally vanished, as we become more and more captives of large systems of exploitation of our preferences.

³⁰ Haller, Markus, “Selbstvorzugung”, EWE 15(2004)4, 526.

³¹ Wolf, Jean-Claude, “Ethischer Egoismus”, op. cit., 514.

³² Walzel, Daisy. “Plattformen auf dem kartellrechtlichen Prüfstand — Grenzen der Selbstbevorzugung (self-preferencing) durch sog. Tech-Giganten” *Computer und Recht*, vol. 35, no. 5, 2019, 314.

Confronted to risks of being technologically driven to be more egoistical than we already are, it is worth reaffirming with Obiora Ike the value of some sort of common good, as an essential property different from functional engagement in low-level concrete instrumental practices.

4. Conclusion

Essential properties differ from functional relationships, which are qualities based on the human needs. Although education obviously is correlated to rights, as we find in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), higher education envelops a larger concept as the need for food, shelter, human love or security. Integrity or integral development can include conditions for access to some space for the further development of the person. As such, education be it founded on historical traditions, spirituality or a dialogue across religions, is in urgent need for the realisation of the UN SDGs. The ethical norms, founded in ethics education are different from bare needs as lifelong education or quality education refer to our perception of some highest good in life, and the concrete opportunities to pursue these goals as norms, not only as ideals. If this argument is sound, some qualities, those without any functional relation to us, are nearer to normative ethical education, as they have a greatest degree of perfection, being related to educational schemes of practices. We might find that some of the norms are distinct from egoistic ethical ideals, as they do not depend simply on our experience, but genuinely depend on non-egoistical norms, such as Christian ideals of solidarity and education.

In trying to describe philosophically Obiora F. Ike's Christian engagement for common good, we would like to conclude by pointing at his capacity to show us a given reality as some essential *eidōs*, as ideal guarantee of the reality, often via curious examples, which are philosophical and poetical. On his path we believe that education, in particular ethics education of norms

has to bring all highest types of ethical values, as a child might listen to the story of some *kind of animal*³³.

- An ethical norm and a lion is not an ethical norm or a lion because it possesses some functional qualities, which would make being-ethical or being-a-lion a human end. In itself, being-ethical or the lion-type has no functional dependency to the needs or the intelligence and understanding of the human being.
- Quality education as ethical education is a lion-kind education, it is a kind of education, which has quality and ethics at its core, and cannot be egoistically possessed.

Real ethical values, as norms, are as intentional mental acts correlated to some essential properties of life or eidetic correlates of the experience. As such, values are part of the *integral process of constitution of ethical values*. They are not functionally related to the human needs, at least in the sense of these qualities being *kinds of ethical values*, but conditions for access to fair educational resources and active communities of learners are as important as recognizing the beauty of ethical values and the seriousness of the existence of ethical norms. As the conditions for fulfilling fair access to ethical values is context sensitive and need dependant, an *integral development* model can help identifying the concrete absence of constraint for development, or when necessary, to work and remove existing obstacles for the realisation of such fair conditions, under the framework of the rule of law and in respect of and collaboration with the national structure of education in place. In some cases, a space for *democratic deliberation on values* is of great social utility in order to bring a better understanding on the *rational process of assurance and stabilisation of the social norms* by the people, in a given interactive model of social contract.

³³ See as example in this issue Kantert’s discussion of the story of the turkey and how the caterpillar might suggest a debate on ethical values. We also take the example from Kvanvig’s discussion of the essential divine attributes as “lion” type of attributes.

We take from Obiora Ike's idea that there is a tremendous importance of placing the common good, in relation to a Christian ethos or some serious spiritual basis for *personal meditation on common values*. The idea of *a divine perfection, divine creativity or the place for wise common divine religious celebrations* may inspire educators as an invitation to see bright hope as a great hope, a hope informed by a good common system of ethical education for the greatest number.

5. Bibliography

Bühlmann Quero, Jakob. 2022. "On Evolutionary Biology, the Apostle Paul and Common Good" *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education* 1(2022): 1–3.

Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace (CIDJAP), Globethics.net Library, CIDJAP Collection, <https://repository.globethics.net/handle/20.500.12424/55>.

Cohen, Joshua. 2006. Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy, in: Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publ., 159-170.

De Traz, James. 2021. *L'art de rebondir*, Lyon: Ed. Baudelaire.

Duchrow, U. 2018. Brauchen wir eine neue oder andere Aufklärung? Oder: Was der Club of Rome von Karl Marx hätte lernen können. Widersprüche : *Zeitschrift für sozialistische Politik im Bildungs-, Gesundheits- und Sozialbereich*, 38(150), 71-83. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-77082-2>

Gibran, Kahlil. 1965. "Iram, City of Lofty Pillars" in: *A Treasury of Kahlil Gibran*, edited by Martin L. Wolf and translated from the Arabic by Anthony Rizcallah Ferris. New York.

Gibran, Kahlil. 1958. *The Voice of the Master*, translated from the Arabic by Anthony R. Ferris. London: Heinemann.

Haller, Markus. "Selbstbevorzugung", *EWE* 15(2004) 4, 525-527.

- Ike, Obiora F. 1986. *Value Meaning and Social Structure of Human Work*, Vo. 282, Berne: Peter Lang.
- Ike, Obiora F. 2011. “The integral nature of African cultural and religious values as ethical values”. In: A.H. Cisneros and S. Premawardhana (Eds.) *Sharing Values. A Hermeneutics for Global Ethics*. Global Series No. 2. Globethics.net: Geneva. 309-322.
- Ike, Obiora F. 2012. The path to transformative leadership: A paper presented at the conference on Nigerian leadership summit, Lagos Dec. 2012.
- Ike, Obiora F. 2013. Catholic social teaching and the common good: challenges on governance and the common good of individuals in a polity.
- Ike, Obiora F. 2017. “Ethics in Higher Education as a Tool for Discovering our Ultimate Destiny”, in: *Ethics in Higher Education: Value-driven Leaders for the Future*, Ed. by Divya Singh and Christoph Stückelberger. Education Ethics Series No. 1, Geneva: Globethics.net, 17-30.
- Ike, O. F. 2017. *Integrating Ethics in Higher Education: The Imperative of Values-based Formation of Future Leaders*. 3rd Inaugural Lecture of Godfrey Okoye University, held on February 23, Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria. <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/164011>
- Ike, Obiora F. 2021. *Faith and Action Rooted in Christ: Reflections on Spirituality, Justice and Ethical Living*, Geneva: Globethics.net.
- Ike, Obiora F. 2019/2020. *Applied Ethics: To Issues of Development, Culture, Religion and Education*, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2nd Ed.
- Ike, Obiora F. 2019. “Higher Education in Crisis: The Role of Ethics in Private Universities for Nation Building”, in: *Higher Education in Crisis*, Ikechukwu J. Ani / Obiora F. Ike (Eds.), Education Ethics Series No. 5, Geneva: Globethics.net

- Inglehart R. 1977. *The Silent Revolution. Changing values and political styles among western publics*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Kantert, Meggy. 2022. “The Power of Stories: Inspiration to Ethical Behaviour”, *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education* 1(2022).
- Leo XIII, Pope. *Rerum Novarum*, Encyclical issued on 15 May 1891.
- Randriamirado, Abdon Alphonse, *Projet d'éthique pour l'avenir de l'humanité*, Globethics.net Philosophy Series No. 3. Geneva: Globethics.net. 2022.
- Reeskens, Tim and Quita Muis. 2021. “A New Democratic Norm(al)? Political Legitimacy Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic” in *The New Common*, Springer, <https://www.springer.com/9783030653552>
- Sextus Empiricus, *Works*. English & Greek, Bury, R. G. (Ed. and transl.), *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (OH) in: vol. 1, London and Cambridge, Mass. 1933-49.
- Stückelberger, Christoph. “The Significant Role of Higher Education in Developing a Global Ethical Culture”, in: *Ethics in Higher Education: Value-driven Leaders for the Future*, 31-52.
- Suheil, Bushrui, “The enduring legacy of Kahlil Gibran”, *Odisea*, 12(2011), ISSN: 2174-1611, <http://dx.doi.org/10.25115/odisea.v0i12.215>, 7-14.
- Ugwuzor, Felix Okechukwu. “Students’ Exposure to Common Good Ethics and the Perceived Linkage between Ethics Practice and Democracy Outcomes”, *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education*, 1(2022).
- Walzel, Daisy. “Plattformen auf dem kartellrechtlichen Prüfstand — Grenzen der Selbstbevorzugung (self-preferencing) durch sog. Tech-Giganten”, *Computer und Recht*, vol. 35, no. 5, 2019, 314-321. <https://doi.org/10.9785/cr-2019-350514>

Wolf, Jean-Claude. “Ethischer Egoismus”, *Erwägen Wissen Ethik. Deliberation Knowledge Ethics*. F. Benseler, B. Blanck, R. Keil-Slawik, W. Loh (Eds.), *EWE* 15(2004) 4, 513-519.

Wolf, Jean-Claude. 2015. “Menschliche Unfreiheit und Desillusionierung (4praef-4p18)”, in: *Baruch de Spinoza Ethik in geometrischer Ordnung dargestellt*, Michael Hampe und Robert Schnepf (Hrsg.), Akademie Verlag, 197-214.

6. Short biography

Ignace Haaz is a D. Phil. and the Managing Editor of the Journal of Ethics in Higher Education and he takes care of Globethics.net Publications department by receiving projects across 21 different Series.

Email: haaz@globethics.net

