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Abstract. Self-discovery leads to the development of the ethics of self-mastery. Many ethical systems prescribe how the individual could attain self-mastery by means of critical self-examination or self-analysis. Once such critical self-examination or self-analysis is successfully carried out, the individual begins to use himself, his personal preferences, as the standard of what is right or wrong. This is the background to the Confucian, Kantian and Existentialist ethics of categorical imperatives. Even in religious ethical systems that attribute the source of the moral law to divine authority, the individual still has to take a leap of faith to discover God's purpose for his existence, which he then internalizes. In the final analysis, any ethics that truly works must issue forth from the self. Hence self-mastery is the absolutely fundamental premise upon which to erect a sound moral character.

Keywords: self-discovery, self-mastery, self-analysis, categorical imperatives, essence or purpose of life, divine purpose of life.

INTRODUCTION

The question “Who am I?” invariably sets the stage for a journey to self-discovery. It is not a biographical or historical question that seeks information about a person’s origin or social status. It is an ontological and ethical question that seeks an understanding of the essence of a person’s existence and the life strategy required to attain that essence. It is a question that seeks to understand a person’s possibilities or potentialities, which he can leverage to add value both to his existence and to the pool of mankind’s heritage.

All such questions that seek to unravel the purpose, meaning and essence of human existence are fundamentally anchored to the ethics of self-mastery. It is the ethics of self-mastery that can assist the individual
to actualize his potentialities. Thus, the ethics of self-mastery is a means to an end, the end being the actualization of a person’s purpose or essence in life.

Now, the issue of self-mastery is an ethical issue. It is about how a person should conduct himself to discover who he is, attain self-mastery and achieve his purpose in life. So, it is an ethical issue. All ethical issues are moral issues. However, a distinction can be made between ethics and morality. While morality is about the rightness or wrongness of human actions, ethics deals with the criteria or standards for evaluating human conduct. While morality discriminates between right and wrong actions, ethics stipulates the evaluative yardstick for determining wrong and right actions. Morality is the subject matter of ethics. Ethics is the systematic study or normative science of morality (Omoregbe, 1979). In some cases, however, ethics analyses moral terms and seeks to assign meaning to the sentences of a moralizer (Unah, 1990). Thus, ethics is not just about right and wrong actions but is about any criteria of evaluation that ultimately promotes human conduct.

Accordingly, I argue in this essay, that the ethical issues involved in the question of self-discovery, self-mastery and self-actualization, or questions concerning the essence or purpose of human life, are not simply those of the rightness or wrongness of human actions but fundamentally those of authenticity, choice and purpose. This is so because the ethics of choice, purpose and spontaneous conduct, which arises from self-discovery and self-mastery, is not necessarily defined in terms of rightness or wrongness of human actions but is construed as the task of decision for a living person confronted with a situation in which he must re-define personal values while contributing to a positive social purpose.

THE BROADER QUESTION ABOUT THE PURPOSE OR ESSENCE OF HUMAN LIFE

There is an ontological setting for the personal question “Who am I?” since the question concerns the meaning, purpose and essence of human existence in general. This question does not arise because the questioner has forgotten his name, place of birth or where he comes from. It arises basically because of the predicament of the human situation. Now, what is the human predicament that necessitates the question “Who am I?”? It
is simply this: at one moment you are in love with someone; at another moment you are out of love with that same person; at one moment you feel secure with your accomplishments; at another moment you are insecure; at one moment you are in control of everything; at another moment you are in control of nothing. Nothing seems to give perpetual succour, security and happiness. Nothing is absolutely guaranteed for anyone. This state of affairs gives rise to the most disturbing anguish and provokes the question “Who am I?”

There are different answers to this question from different thinkers in the history of scholarship. This undercuts the view that there is or that there could be just one answer to the question of who I am, and consequently that there is one essence to human life in general (Omoregbe, 2001). The point of interest here is that there are different access routes (orientations) charted by different thinkers to self-discovery and self-mastery, which result in self-actualization.

To restrict ourselves to the easily recognizable examples in available literature, let us examine the African, Oriental, Greco-Occidental, Existentialist and Rosicrucian access routes to self-discovery and self-mastery. I begin with the African orientation.

AFRICAN ORIENTATION

Generally, self-discovery and self-mastery come from self-examination. And self-examination happens when an individual begins to ask the fundamental question “Who am I?” In African traditional settings (more specifically amongst the Ika, Edo, Esan, Igbo and Yoruba peoples of southern Nigeria), to answer the question “Who am I?” the individual is taken through a process of divination. This is so because for a person to understand who she is and master herself, she needs to undergo self-examination and determine her personality. Through divination a person’s guardian spirit or destiny is known. By the process of interrogating a person’s spirit, the personality of the individual and what she is best suited for is determined. This is self-discovery, and such a determination opens the way of the individual to self-mastery.

For example, the Ika, Edo, Esan, Igbo and Yoruba peoples of Nigeria analyse the self through the concept of “ehi” (Ika, Edo and Esan), “chi” (Igbo) and “ori” (Yoruba). The individual self is the same as a person’s destiny, which is “ehi”, “chi” or “ori”. The answer to the question “Who
am I?” is received through “efa”, “afa” or “ifa” respectively, a divination process that reveals an individual’s personality; that is, who a person is, what he is best suited for and why he behaves in a particular way, often with a view to redirecting the person’s destiny and character in the desired socially acceptable direction.

However, once a person’s destiny has been determined, and treatment or the proper rites are performed, the individual would henceforth begin to live a life of choice, responsibility and purpose. This is different from the practice of Buddhism and Taoism to which I now turn.

**BUDDHIST ORIENTATION**

Self-mastery or self-control, according to Honderich (1995: 818), is the capacity to conduct oneself as one deems fit when tempted to do otherwise. Self-control contrasts with what is called akraasia or moral weakness. In this connection, Aristotle distinguishes self-control from temperance. The latter, which is a moral virtue, is possessed by individuals who have no improper or excessive desires regarding bodily pleasures and pains; self-controlled individuals have such desires but characteristically resist them, acting as they judge best.

In a complicated, confused and diverse social order, self-mastery or self-control is imperative for man to cope with the stresses and desires that accompany human activities. This position prompted the Buddha to articulate a philosophy of self-mastery.

Capra (1984: 83) points out that the Buddha was not interested in satisfying human curiosity about the origin of the world, the nature of the divine, or similar questions. He was concerned exclusively with the human situation – with the suffering and frustration of human beings. His doctrine, therefore, was not one of metaphysics, but one of psychotherapy. For him, the origin of human sufferings and frustrations and the way to overcome them form the bedrock of self-mastery and liberation. For this reason, the Buddha adapted the traditional Indian concepts of Maya, Karma, Nirvana, etc., giving them a fresh, dynamic and directly relevant psychological interpretation.

The existence of human suffering and frustration is the subject of the Buddha’s First Noble Truth. This truth, in his view, is grounded in the human condition, which comes from our difficulty in facing a basic fact of life. The Buddha observed that everything around us is temporary and
transitory: “All things arise and pass away.” The notion that flow and change are basic features of nature lies at the root of Buddhism (Capra, 1984: 85). The origin of human suffering can be traced to our resistance to the flow of life and the clinging to fixed forms of reality that are represented by things, people or ideas.

The Buddha maintained strongly that his doctrine of impermanence includes also the notion that there is no ego, no self, which is the persistent subject of our varying experiences. He holds the view that the idea of a separate individual self is an illusion, an intellectual concept, which has no grounds in reality; to anchor one’s position on this concept leads to the same frustration that arises from rigidity in thinking (Capra, 1984: 85).

The Second Noble Truth deals with the cause of all suffering which, according to the Buddha, is the clinging to or the grasping of things. According to him, it is the futile grasping of life based on a wrong point of view or ignorance that complicates the crises of human existence. Out of this ignorance, we divide the perceived world into individual and separate things and thus attempt to confine the fluid forms of reality in fixed categories created by the mind. As long as this perception of reality persists, we are doomed to frustration. Clinging to things, as the Buddha observed, because we erroneously think they are solid and permanent, leads to a vicious circle, where every action generates further actions and the answer to each question poses new questions. This vicious circle is known in Buddhism as Samsara, the eternal cycle of birth and death, and is driven by Karma, the never-ending chain of cause and effect (Capra, 1984: 85).

It is in the Third Noble Truth that the Buddha stated that suffering and frustration can be ended, by maintaining that it is possible to transcend the vicious circle of Samsara, to free oneself from the bondage of Karma, and to reach a state of total liberation called Nirvana. This is the state of total mastery of the self. It is a state of consciousness in which the individual is immune to suffering. One becomes indifferent to pain and pleasure, sweetness and bitterness.

The Buddha gave in the Fourth Noble Truth a prescription to end all suffering. This he referred to as the Eight-Fold Path of self-development. The first two of these parts centre on right seeing and knowing, with the aim of gaining a clear insight into the human situation. The next four deal with right action, which centres on the way of life; while the last two deal with right awareness and right meditation, which provide
moderation and temperance in human actions (Capra, 1984: 86). Life-mastery, as a philosophical disposition, requires maturity, which makes one stand firm and decisive when faced with practical problems of life situations. This view is given a strong backing by Billington (1997) when he maintains that strong desire and attachment to the world are responsible for some of the crises of human existence. Anything that we cling to that is unattainable results in pain and frustration. Self-mastery is attained when we detach ourselves from craving the things of this world. The Stoics were among the first to teach men the art of self-mastery. The Stoics were of the view that one should not regret any unavoidable suffering or deprivation, as these were clearly part of the overall purpose of things. They thus advocated *apatheia* (passionlessness) as the most desirable state of the mind. It is this kind of disposition that led to the understanding of Stoicism as a kind of “stiff upper lip” attitude to the world (Mautner, 2000: 542). The point being made about Stoicism here is that one should not be passionate over certain things in life. If one wants to achieve inner tranquillity, effort should be made to be indifferent to the desires and pleasures of the world.

Presenting the Buddhist perspective of self-mastery, Ketcham (1968: 3) observes that nothing has disturbed the contemporary man more than the loss of his secure, sophisticated, predictable, insured, little world. With the double indemnity of goods and services provided by his technological age, man has lost the sense of wonder. The influence of the technological age has derailed man’s ability to wonder, wonder being the basis of metaphysics. Aristotle, “the master of them that know”, expressed the view that it is through wonder that men began to philosophize. The capacity to philosophize provides an insight into self-mastery, which holds the key to our confused world today. A similar point about self-mastery in made in Taoism.

**PURE TAOIST ORIENTATION**

With the Confucian Taoists of ancient China, self-mastery was calculated to result in sagacity and longevity for the individual that attained it (Unah, 1996). In attaining self-mastery the individual becomes a person of *jen*. *Jen* means “human heartedness”, “all round Virtue”, “moral high ground” or “perfect virtue”. A person of *jen* is therefore a kindhearted person, a person of all round virtue; a person of moral high ground who
talks and acts from a pinnacle of virtue. It is the cultivation of this virtue of kindheartedness that enables the individual to perform his duties to the family and even to the whole community. But how is this wonderful virtue of self-mastery to be cultivated?

There was divided opinion amongst the Taoists as to how the individual could attain the virtue of human heartedness or kindheartedness, which they equate with sagacity (wisdom) and longevity (healthy living and long life). The pure Taoists, led by Lao Tzu, and subsequently Yang Chu, thought that sagacity and longevity could accrue from a number of well-thought out life strategies, which they defended somewhat admirably. The individual is admonished, among other things, to (i) value life and despise things, and (ii) do nothing to save the world or be useless to society.

The argument of this category of Taoists is that human life is the only thing ultimately worth valuing and treasuring. This is because not even the dignity of being an emperor can compare with a person’s life; human life can neither be exchanged with the wealth of possessing the whole world nor can it be regained when carelessly lost. Valuing life means preserving life and maintaining what is essential in it without letting oneself to be entangled and encumbered by things. The point here is that a lost kingdom may be regained, a stolen car may be re-acquired and a destroyed house may be rebuilt but, once dead, one can never live again (at least not in this life).

Furthermore, in a work on the “Fundamentals for the cultivation of life”, a Taoist admonished thus: “When you do something good, beware of reputation, when you do something evil, beware of punishment. Follow the middle way and take this to be your constant principle. Then you can guide your person, nourish your parents, and complete your natural term of years” (1975). The point that is made here is that there is a problem with being exceptionally good or evil. If an individual is exceptionally good, he runs the risk of being envied, plotted against by others or used up completely by favour and assistance seeking humanity. But if the individual is exceptionally evil and notorious, he also runs the risk of being hated and brought down by society. Thus, the preservation of life would seem to reside in striking a balance between being exceptionally good and being exceptionally evil. For neither fine reputation nor notoriety would appear to be helpful in the preservation of life.
From here, we are treated by the pure Taoist to the philosophy of uselessness. The second admonition above, “do nothing to save the world or be useless to society”, would seem to assume a superb ontological character. The principle of the virtue of uselessness is expounded thus: “Mountain trees are their own enemies, and the leaping fire is the cause of its own quenching. Cinnamon is edible; therefore, the Cinnamon tree is cut down. Chi oil is useful; therefore, the Chi tree is gashed.” In the same way, a sacred oak tree is reported to have confided in somebody in a dream thus:

For a long time I have been learning to be useless. There were several occasions on which I was nearly destroyed, but now I have succeeded in being useless, which is of greatest use to me. If I were useful, could I have become so great?

From the foregoing, the fundamental principle of early Taoism for attaining self-mastery and personal purity is the preservation of life and the avoidance of injury. Here, the principle of self-mastery is the same as the principle of self-love, which is good. Unfortunately, this pure Taoist step to self-mastery results in the propagation of escapism and uselessness; in this, there is no fulfilment of obligation to the family and society. This serves as the point of departure for the more vibrant and socially responsible Confucian Taoism.

CONFUCIAN TAOIST ORIENTATION

The Confucian prescription for the attainment of self-mastery, which the individual radiates to the family and society, hinge on three principal doctrines, namely:
- the doctrine of rectification of names;
- the doctrine of “human heartedness” and “righteousness”; and
- the doctrine of Ming.

According to Confucian Taoism, what the individual requires to move up in the ladder of self-mastery is not the abandonment of society or escape to the mountains and forest but self-discipline, which results in social engineering of the human family and community. This self-discipline is inculcated by the doctrine of the rectification of names. This doctrine states that every name in a social relationship (such as father, mother, son, daughter, ruler, governor, banker, etc.) has some self-imposed moral duties attached to it. The recognition and acceptance of
The moral undertones attached to the name an individual bears is a critical step to self-knowledge and self-mastery; it means that the individual so named knows and understands the essence of the name he bears, for the name implies duties and responsibilities. If every man and woman performed the obligations implied by their names, there will be self-knowledge and understanding and this adds value to society. If a ruler performs his duties as a ruler without let or hindrance, there would be no bad ruler and there would be no misrule of human communities. Most rulers, presidents, fathers, mothers, governors, etc. do not know or understand the implications of their names. That is why there is mediocre performance by public functionaries at every level of our society.

The second important doctrine of self-mastery in Confucian philosophy is that of “kindheartedness” and “righteousness”. Righteousness for the Confucian is a categorical imperative. This implies that every situation we find ourselves in the society has a duty or set of duties attached to it, which we should execute for their own sake.

Differently stated, there are morally obligatory and morally right things to do. Righteousness means acting out of duty, not out of profit motive. Acting because of the reward in view is to act out of profit motive. Although this appears to be the vogue in human conduct, it is socially and spiritually very dangerous. Each time we act because of the reward in view, we corrupt the entire content of the action. Acting out of righteousness leads to happiness and tranquillity of the soul, but acting out of a profit motive leads to frustration, aborted hopes and sadness. The first part of Confucian ethics deals with “conscientiousness to others” or “human heartedness”. Kindheartedness or human heartedness is called Jen in Chinese, as I stated earlier. A person of Jen is one who, in trying to help himself, helps others. Jen implies conscientiousness to others or showing concern or consideration for others.

Thus, the credo of a man of Jen is: “In desiring to sustain yourself, sustain others. In desiring to develop yourself, develop others.” The implication of this is that a man of Jen applies the principle of the “measuring square”, which means using the self as the standard of morality.

From one of the six literatures of Chinese scholarship called The Great Learning (see Chang, 1975) the advocacy of the principle of Jen is rendered thus: do not use what you dislike in men of high position in dealing with men of low ranks; do not use what you hate in men of low birth in relating to men of high ranks; do not use what you could not
tolerate about your predecessor to ambush your successor or vice versa; do not use what you do not like on the left to affect the right or vice versa.

 Even in the Doctrine of the Mean, a similar injunction of using the self as the standard of morality is expressed in this way: what you do not like done to yourself, do not do to others; serve your father, as you would require your son to serve you; serve your ruler, as you would require your subordinate to serve you; serve your elder brother, as you would require your younger brother to serve you; set the example in behaving to your friends, as you would require them to behave to you.

 The third critical doctrine of individual self-development and self-mastery encapsulated in Confucian character cultivation is the emphasis on knowing Ming. Ming enables the possessor to attain inner contentment since it makes the individual conversant with the ways things are. According to Confucians, whether one’s principles in this world prevail or not is entirely dependent on knowing Ming. Happiness comes from knowing Ming. Success or failure does not depend on our doing but on Ming. A person may die of frustration and disappointment if he does not know Ming. If a man knows Ming he would “do for nothing” — he would perform his duties to family and society conscientiously, without the profit motive. If he knows Ming he would not bother about the success or otherwise of his acts. But what is Ming?

 Ming, for Confucians, is the total existent conditions and forces of the universe. The cooperation of these conditions and forces is required for the material success of our endeavours. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to decree the cooperation of these forces and conditions. Thus, knowing Ming implies understanding and accepting the inevitability of the world as it is, and so we care less about the external success or failure of our actions. Knowing Ming implies discharging our duties with commitment, regardless of the utilitarian consequences.

 Thus far, I have taken time to dwell extensively on the oriental prescriptions for self-mastery, partly because they are more fully well developed in literature and perhaps older and partly because they are more original and easy to comprehend and combine more readily individual duties to self, family and society in an admirable manner. I shall now sketch briefly the Greco-Occidental prescriptions to enable me to highlight and conclude the individual duties to the family.
GRECO-OCCIDENTAL ORIENTATION

The Greeks, and the western European humanism they influenced, emphasized contemplation and ratio; that is, dialectical and critical reasoning as instruments for leading the individual to self-knowledge and self-mastery. But the self-knowledge, self-understanding and self-mastery attained by the early Greeks was to enable them to direct attention to social and natural phenomena.

The critical self-examination of the soul in the Socratic–Platonic dialogues and the encyclopaedic works of Aristotle produced individual mind-sets that are curious, inquisitive and critical about things, such that a culture of objectivity and certainty in our ways of knowing developed and spread like wildfire all over western Europe.

Without going into sordid details, what is fascinating about the Greeks is that critical examination was to be directed at everything, including the right social conduct and the bonds binding society together. The Greeks recognized three essential parts of the soul, namely: the rational part; the spirited part, and the appetitive part.

Virtue and self-autonomy would result from the governance of the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul by the rational part. Thus, the individual who has acquired self-mastery is one who allows reason to control the emotions. Contemplation of the essence of things is the work of reason. Through contemplation, the mind or reason captures the nature of things. Only individuals who can apprehend the forms through reasoning can radiate knowledge, truth and understanding to the rest of humanity.

Developing the Greek tradition further, Aristotle designated temperance or moderation as the critical virtue to reconcile conflicting interests in society. He then expounded and amplified the doctrine of the Golden Mean in which he insisted that the Mean between two extremes is virtue. Thus, the individual who is able to strike a balance between extremes is a man who has mastered both the self and social phenomena and can therefore reconcile all interests.

However, by combining reason and temperance, the Greeks arrived at a social virtue – the concept of justice – which they perceived as the bond that welded society together. For the senior Greeks, Socrates and Plato, justice meant non-interference with the activity of the soul; therefore, every part of the society was segmented in accordance with
the tripartite structure of the soul, namely: the guardian class (reason); the soldier class (spirited part), and the artisan class (the appetites).

Each of these was to function without encroaching on the other. But Aristotle was to characterize justice as that which is fair and equal, giving everyone his due, i.e. fairness. In any event, whether or not justice was construed as strict division of labour amongst the three strata of society or the fair and equal treatment of persons, or indeed the Thrasy-machusian “interest of the strong”, the varied conceptions are all products of ratio, of critical reasoning.

The tradition of critical discussion or reasoning spread to the French, who advanced it to assure certainty in (our) ways of knowing by instructing that nothing was to be accepted as valid which was not clearly and distinctly presented to the intellect, and to the Germans, who turned it into a tool of totalizing abstractions. While Hegel celebrated reason as the law of the world, Kant subpoenaed it (reason) to defend itself as the ultimate legislator for experience. Yet, Kant had to establish that man’s rational and social natures constitute the authorship morality, making the moral law a self-imposed law – a categorical imperative.

Now, if morality is a categorical imperative, a self-imposed law, it means that morality flows from the self, from man’s rational and social nature. If this is true, then the individual is duty-bound to obey the moral law. Not to obey the moral law is to try to run away from man’s nature as a rational and social being. This is self-destructive, as evidenced from the woes bedevilling the morally bankrupt and corrupt societies of humankind.

Thus, the ultimate duty to the self is the self-realization that the individual is the source of the moral law. If the self is the source of morality, self-love demands obedience to the moral law as a duty to qualify as a fit and proper person to expect other persons to obey the moral law.

The test to prove this is the universalizability test of Kant. It is simply this: will any action you perform do as a universal maxim. If you would be satisfied and happy were other people anywhere in the world to perform a similar action, then it is a valid moral maxim; if otherwise, your action is immoral, self-destructive and destructive of the social fabric. This is a sophisticated version of the golden rule: do unto others, as you would want others to do unto you.
EXISTENTIALIST ORIENTATION

Existentialism, otherwise called the philosophy of existence, is basically a philosophy of self-discovery, self-understanding and self-actualization. It teaches, among other things, that “existence precedes essence”; that man first of all exists, turns up, and only afterwards defines himself. It maintains that the human person has a capacity for self-analysis, self-orientation and self-determination.

A cardinal doctrine of existentialism is that man is free and can spontaneously bring about any desired state of affairs and that, although life is meaningless and absurd, it is still worth living only if the existent individual could explore his infinite possibilities and commit himself to a consistent course of action. For the existentialist, self-discovery comes from constant self-analysis and commitment to a chosen set of values. What counts is not this or that isolated action, but the totality of one’s acts. It is this that gives meaning and purpose to existence.

Existentialism further teaches that there is no universal moral code to which the individual should advert his conduct; that the existing individual should break with the ethical universal, to do something distinctive and spontaneous and add value to the pool of humanity’s heritage. Man can and should, by deliberate choice, change the status quo. Nothing is sacrosanct as there is no settled question on anything. Man should not allow himself to be dictated to or castrated by the artificial social milieu, by mass opinion, by what people say or think, by the public world or by the anonymous dictator of everyday human affairs.

From the above, it follows that there is no single purpose or essence of human life. The essence or purpose of one person’s life may not be the same as another’s. The essence or purpose of life is what every man discovers and works out, in the course of living, for himself. The essence of Bill Gates’ life (that which becomes conspicuously associated with him) is computer software; that of Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the spiritual tutelage of mankind; that of Leonardo da Vinci, the Mona Lisa; that of Obafemi Awolowo, the introduction of free education; and so on and so forth.

The summary of all of this is that self-discovery and, by extension, self-mastery are attainable if we take the following steps:
- Begin from the self. Know your strengths and weak points and how to manage them.
- Then proceed to master others, that is, the intricacies of the human entity as individual and as group.
- Then proceed to the mastery of the environment and this includes the environment in totality.

In sum, we say that the way to self-mastery is three fold: know thy self; know the other; know thy environment. This way, the individual becomes one who creates values and resolves situations.

I should probably mention that, on this issue of self-mastery, all human institutions, including the various disciplines, are designed to endow and sharpen man’s capacity for self-mastery.

Apparently, from a thoughtful study of the great traditions in self-mastery highlighted above, the Rosicrucians (Omoregbe, 1948 and 1968) have crafted a wonderful checklist for self-mastery, which should herald our concluding remarks.

**ROSICRUCIAN CHECKLIST**

According to the Rosicrucians, for self-examination to result in self-knowledge and self-mastery the individual has to take the following steps:

a. Through introspection or soul searching, determine who you are, what you are suited for, what your potentials are and act accordingly.
b. Be modest. Avoid flaunting your accomplishments. Do not be boastful and avoid taking pleasure in speaking about yourself.
c. Be decisive. Once you have taken a decision after careful consideration and much distress, act without further delay. Be resolute in executing your plans. Do not postpone till tomorrow what you can do today. Apply yourself to work always.
d. Form the habit of doing those things that are legitimate and praiseworthy. Endeavour to excel in your chosen field. Be a frontliner, not a backbencher. Avoid sharp practices in your calling. Do not run down your competitors, but emulate their accomplishments and soar higher.
e. Be prudent. Do not delight in the downfall of other people. Be careful what you say and avoid hurting people with slanderous words. Be mindful that the most destructive instrument of human life is not necessarily a loaded gun, but the human tongue. Do not reduce yourself
to the status of dumb creation by becoming a chatterbox. When you speak, create an ambience of silence for other people to speak also, so that genuine conversation can take place. Silence is the basis of authentic speech, and restrained verbiage or prudence in speech is a distinctive mark of excellence.

f. Be long suffering so as to fortify yourself against the inclemency and vicissitudes of life. Bear your own portion of adversities with fortitude and stoic equanimity of mind.

g. Be contented with what life has given you, even as you strive to attain greater heights. Do not be foolish to equate wealth, power or earthly grandeur with happiness. For the desire to derive happiness from wealth or power or grandeur is the atavistic illusion that things are not what they are. Wealth, power and grandeur, for the most part, create their own inconveniences, which trouble the soul. Goodness is the target set for the individual and the goal is the attainment of happiness. Only those who have accomplished goodness by self-mastery can attain contentment here and now and perfect happiness hereafter in eternity. Be compassionate – empathize with the downtrodden, pity and assist widows. Avoid excessive conviviality that results in grief.

h. Practice moderation in all things. Avoid base appetites and excessive preoccupation with fleshly desires, as this leads to ill-health and affliction of the body with diseases of incurable sorts. Subject all passions to temperance and enjoy healthy living.

i. Above all, self-analysis and self-criticism should enable the individual to overcome the spirit of anger. Anger brings about a life of regret as it produces disastrous consequences. Thus, overcoming the spirit of anger is the critical stage in self-development and self-mastery. Do not allow yourself to be provoked by the unruly. Devise a formula to recite in situations of extreme provocation and tower above all mortals in dignity and comportment.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Self-mastery is structurally interconnected with self-discovery. In all of the orientations discussed above, self-mastery results from deliberate choices, authentic decisions and responsible conduct. With Africans in the traditional setting, self-mastery is achieved by determining the personality of the individual through the process of divination. Amongst
the Orientals – the Buddhists and the Taoists – self-mastery means contemplation of the right social conduct, ascetic discipline and meditation. With the Greeks of old, self-mastery comes from critical self-examination as the “unexamined life is not worth living”. To arrive at self-mastery, the individual needs to contemplate eternal virtues and frequently raise critical doubts concerning his conduct. For the existentialists, self-mastery comes from striving to surpass one’s natural limitations in pursuit of authenticity, and by living a life of commitment to a deliberately chosen set of values. And, finally, the Rosicrucians provide a checklist for the moral, social, spiritual and psychological re-armament of the individual for a life of authenticity, purpose, responsibility and fulfilment.

References