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Robert Frost's Poem "The Road Not Taken". Some Notes and
Comments.

The Road Not Taken"

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
And where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden back.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence;
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less travelled by,

And that has made all the difference.¹

I

In this our world, some people are comfortable with doing what others have done. They copy and repeat what others are doing or have done. They follow the footsteps of the so-called successful people. This is what the late Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, the inimitable and irrepressible Nigerian folk lore musician, referred to as the "follow-follow mentality".

Let me, immediately, add that my culture taught me to imitate and follow the good and shun the bad. Unarguably, other cultures has a similar message (instruction) for their people. Indeed, this may lead to success, wealth, affluence and recognition for some people. It may also become an albatross for others. All in all, whether it makes for success or failure, something is lost for those who embrace this mindset. What is lost is personhood.

A person is a human being and an individual. It is the individuality of each human being that is lost. Frost's poem lucidly emphasizes this individuality in terms of the insistence that we blaze new traits and break away from the status quo. It advocates individualism and perseverance. Both are required for acute moral life.

II

While we are the emblems of our common humanity, each and everyone of us has a uniqueness and a peculiarity of its own. For example,

Group A

- Cultural and social conditioning,

¹ Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken", Robert T. Kiyosoki, **Rich Dad Poor Dad**, Scottsdale-Az; Plata Publishing, 2012,8. The Poem was first published in **The Atlantic Monthly**, August 1915 issue. It was re-published in his Poetry Collection, **Mountain Interval**, 1916.'

- Family history and background,
- Psychological background and conditioning,
- Environmental and climatic conditions,
- Religious and spiritual orientations,
- Language and linguistic codes,
- Music and dance forms,
- Clothing,
- The other wordly, and many more

Group B

In addition to Group A, there are transmittable characteristics in human beings which are not the same,

- Body shape or stature,
- Shape of nose, head and ear,
- size of nose, head and ear,
- Color of skin, hair and eyes,
- Characteristics of voice or speech,
- Intelligence,
- Blood grouping,
- Baldness,
- Sickle cell anemia,
- Hemophilia,
- Colour blindness,
- Finger prints,
- Ability to taste (etc).²

The items in group B cannot be regarded as an effacement of those in group A. The converse is the case. On the contrary, both strengthen and edify each other. They complement each other.

In particular, items in Group A, for emphasis, mean that we are each culturally determined and grounded. We are continually regrouped in our socio-cultural milieu and values. Furthermore, it

² M.C. Michael, Essential Biology for Senior Secondary School, Lagos: Tonad Publishers, 2018, 528-529.

ensures that our views and opinions are always different, and often diametrically opposed. It means that while we all live, participate and share in what the objective world out there (UWA ANYI NO) has and can offer us, we do so from the cocoon of our own private, individuated worlds: UWAM.

It has to be stated and admitted that the objective world out there: UWA ANYI NO, embraces my private world UWAM. UWAM has neither meaning nor relevance outside UWA ANYI NO. While we dream dreams and build castles in the air at the level of UWAM, those dreams and castles depend on the objective world out there for their success or failure. And most times we are haunted by the spectre of failure.

III

We come to the world with no plan of action in terms of success or failure, we are born with neither virtue nor vice ingrained in us. We are born without the inherent knowledge of "The Road" to be "Taken" in order to succeed or "The Road Not Taken" in order not to fail. We do not know beforehand whether the road "less travelled" leads to either success or failure. Nor is it the case that the "less travelled" road can indeed make "all the difference".

We fail not because we did not do enough or that we consciously planned to fail. We succeed not solely on the basis of good plans, strategies and choices. We are doomed to succeed or fail without knowing why, when, how or where, simply because we are programmed to

Grope in the open darkness of the world stage.
Open because neither pregnancy nor death can be hidden, therefore life and death are in the open. So is history.³

This history is the record of successes or failures. Against this background, there may be the desire to repurpose life, if we know

³ Nkeonye Otakpor, "The World is a Market Place", The Journal of Value Inquiry, 30, 1996, 521-530, Particularly 525.

the purpose of life in the first place. Yet as Peter Caws has argued, perhaps, to good effect,

Life worlds are radically individual, no intersubjectivity is given....The diversity of genetic code, of epigenetic formations, and of child development, produce in each individual idiosyncrasies of constitution and behaviour, so that nobody, not even identical twins, can live the same life, spend the same day, or say or do exactly the same thing, as any body else⁴.

Life, itself, is variety on a universal scale. So in our world where we cannot “live the same life”, in our world with “individual idiosyncrasies and behaviour” and where “Two” or more “roads” diverge in a yellow wood”, or in a thick equatorial forest, or in a savanna, or in a desert, how do I determine which “Road” leads to success and follow, and then abandon the “Road” which ensures failure? Is it not the case that in our unbridled quest for success there is often no room for deep reflection?

“Yet knowing how way leads
to way,
I doubted if I should ever
come back”⁵.

How on earth is it then apodictly the case that the “The Road”

“Having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted
wear”;⁶

does not lead to despair, agony and even death. After all, all that glitters is not gold. Yet, life can be extra-ordinary in a plainly

⁴ Peter Caws, “Physical Universe, Cultural Worlds” Journal of Value Inquiry, 30, 1996, 515-520

⁵ Robert Frost “The Road Not Taken”

⁶ Ibid

ordinary way. In this connection Joseph Conrad has reminded us that

There is the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance, for there is nothing more mysterious about life but life itself which is the mistress of human existence and is as inscrutable as destiny. Hence we live in the mist of the incomprehensible which is also detestable.⁷

Indeed, we live in a flicker, and it may last as far as if it is socio-biologically possible and permissible. The explanation for this is, perhaps, that "life itself" is a "mystery" of its own. Human beings are the most organized living mystery. They carry with them, and within them the wonder and mystery they seek outside themselves. Above all, it re-invigorates Conrad's "life itself" as "the mistress of human existence".

In retrospect, it is certainly the case that success or failure and all of life's conundrum do not depend on hard work or the lack of it. It may depend on the decisions/choices we make or fail to make. Hence some work hard even harder than the average person and there is nothing to show for it. Some others expend little effort and success smiles on them. So "The Road Not Taken" is individuated. While either of these "Roads" is open to all of us, we blindly embrace and appropriate one of them. This is an act of free choice, not a symbolic one. Fundamentally, it is humanly, perhaps, naturally ordained engagement which is an essential aspect of our historical presence and CONDITIO HUMANA: our human condition. The conceptual trinity of language, work and life makes this engagement even more problematic, albeit, compelling. "The Road Not Taken" or "The Road Taken" are a pair of inseparable companions that haunt and hurt human life for good or bad. The two "Roads" are a binary pair like a binary digit: either one of the two. They are disjunctive rather than conjunctive,

⁷ Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, London; Vintage Books, 2007, 6-7.

though not in the strict logical sense of conjunction⁸. “The Road Not Taken” or “The Road Taken”, life or death, success or failure and others like them are coeval. We have no idea of “The Road” that leads to either life or death, success or failure. We simply do not know whether either is incubated in any of “The Roads”. Or is it that there is a third option which then makes all of these figments of our fertile imagination.

IV

Let it be clear at this point. We make choices and take decisions on a daily basis. This is an ethical commitment. But there are some choices and decisions we never made. These are (a) to be born or not to be born, “no one asked to be born” (Foucault); (b) the biological agents responsible for our birth; (c) when, how and where we were born; (d) when, where and how we will die; (e) some other incidental and circumstantial factors which are part and parcel of the drama of each life.

From (a) to (e) in the preceding paragraph, it does not necessarily follow that we have no hands in what happens to us while here and doing time in this planet. Most often, if not always, we are the architects and contractors of what happens or does not happen to us. There is no escape from individual responsibility for every act or omission. Every act or omission has its consequences, immediate, near term or long term; sometimes with the dirge of a damning doom and misery or a bird like melodious song of triumph and happiness as the case may be.

The dirge of a damning doom and misery or the melodious song of triumph and happiness are also binary like a binary digit: either of the two. Unfortunately for us as humans we have no control over events after the consequences of an act or omission has become overly evident. We reap what we have sown in

⁸ A conjunctive reading of a binary pair will be logical nonsense, that is general opacity because there is the failure to make a successful reference. A binary pair is by its logical structure not reducible to any other logical formula. It is sui generis, that is, “of its own kind and unique”.

appropriate measure but not determined by us, and at the time and place not equally determined by us.

This binary relationship is emblematic of other basic human problems subtly presented by Frost in his "The Road Not Taken". For example, tears on laughter, night or day, wet or dry, tall or short, weak or strong, justice or injustice, right or wrong, and so on. In the words of an American popular musician "that is just the way it is, it will never be the same". In other words "The Road Not Taken" or "The Road Taken" will never be the same. So are all other pairs in a binary relationship in which there are "no rival loyalties or parties".

V

Frost's poetic message has a universal appeal. Written more than a century ago that message continues to resonate with vigour and earnestness. Frost was not only "an agent" of American Society. He was "an agent" of humanity itself. In the words of Okot Bitek,

The poet is the agent of his society... has the talent of distilling the thoughts, joy, fear and sorrow, not only of the individual but of the group, and presenting these in melodic poems.⁹

Against this background, what does Frost's "The Road Not Taken" mean when juxtaposed with the Igbo order of knowledge? An examination and analysis of some names given to Igbo children at birth may be helpful¹⁰. Some of these names are:

1. UZO CHUKWU KWA, for short, UZO CHIKWA
2. UZO CHUKWU DIMMA, for short, UZO DIMMA
3. UZO CHUKWU KAMMA, for short, UZO KAMMA
4. UZO WULU

⁹ Okot P Bitek, *Horn of My Love*, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1974, 9.

¹⁰ Reference is to the Igbo in Aniocha North LGA, Aniocha South LGA, Oshimili North LGA, Oshimili South LGA; Aboh, Ukwuani, Ndokwa, Owa and Agbor areas in Delta State, where the different dialects of Igbo language are spoken may be affected by my thesis and conclusions. Some communities in South East are included.

5. CHUKWU BUUZO, for short, CHIBUZO

The above does not exhaust the Igbo names with the combination of UZO and CHUKWU. These are taken, merely, for illustrative purposes, with a view to illuminating the problem at hand. In addition, in (1) and (5) CHI is often used as a short hand for CHUKWU. In (1), (2), (3) and (4), UZO is a suffix, while in (5) UZO is a prefix. Whether as a prefix or suffix, the meaning is unchanged. Now let us see to their meanings.

UZO: It has multiple meanings, but the one that is most relevant in this context is “way, road, path”¹¹

BUUZO, BUZO: “lead, precede”¹²

CHUKWU: “The great God, the greatest of all Gods”¹³

CHI: “God, a guardian deity”¹⁴

DIMMA: “Be good”¹⁵

KAMMA: “Be better than”; UDO KA AGHA MMA-Peace is better than war”¹⁶

KWA: “Pack, carry off, clear away”¹⁷

WULU: Be firm, established”¹⁸

From these definitions the following are the possible meanings of these Igbo names:

UZO CHIKWA: The “Way, road, path” cleared and ordained by God.

UZO DIMMA: The “way, road, path”, God has ordained to “be good”

UZO KAMMA: The “way, road, path”, that is “firm and established” perhaps by no other than God.

¹¹ Kay Williamson, ed., Igbo English Dictionary, Benin City: Ethiope Publishing, 1972, 54, 542.

¹² Ibid, 70.

¹³ Ibid, 77

¹⁴ Ibid,77

¹⁵ Ibid, 93

¹⁶ Ibid, 200

¹⁷ Ibid,237

¹⁸ Ibid,549

UZO WULU: The way, road, path, that is “firm and established”

CHIBUZO: God “leads” and takes “precedence” in all things. God shows the “way, road, path” in all things human.

How do these definitions, their meaning structures and explanations, shape and reshape Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” within the context of the Igbo order of knowledge? From an Igbo perspective “The Road Not Taken” means that “way, road, path” “Not taken” because that “road” has not been ordained by God to “be good”, “better than” any other, and is not “firm and established”. On the flip side, “The Road Taken” is that “way, road, path” ordained by God to “be good”, “better than” any other, and is “firm and established”. In all these there is the assumption, or is it simulation, that God-CHUKWU, “the greatest of all gods” “leads” and takes “precedence” in all things human.

VI

There are too many problems to be confronted here. First, how do we account for agnostics, humanists, atheists, secularists, heretics and others who do not believe that there is an unseen hand directing human affairs? How do we account for those who are adamant in their protestations that God has no business meddling in human affairs?

For these groups of people, humanity has the tremendous capacity to take care of itself, and has survived the unspeakable trauma during its long, difficult and chequered history. Each human being has an enchanting presence, a way of being and of living in our world, notwithstanding the pains of living. In addition, the visceral elements of universal experience and collective memory is our common heritage.

In the Biblical Garden of Eden, God solemnly instructed Adam and Eve on “The Road” to “Take”. Adam and his wife Eve, consciously, deliberately and determinedly decided on another “way, road, path” to follow, that is “The Road Not Taken”. This was for their own good, perhaps, for the good of humanity itself.

They intentionally rejected the authority of God in human affairs, and successfully inaugurated free will and choice as important and integral components of human existence. This was the first human rejection of the authority of church and state as manifested by God. Indeed, “to break through the carapace of mind that insists that with God, human interests are best served is one of the singular achievements of secularism and humanism”.¹⁹

Second, for religionists of all shades and hues, it is no easy matter. Making the choice between “The Road Not Taken” and “The Road” to take is ostensibly not a God affair as most of them seem to suggest. It is simply an important decision to be made by human beings in virtue of their humanity. There are costs on both sides no matter the degree and extent of one’s religiosity. If the depth of a religious conviction has anything to do with this, then there would be endless spectacles of smiles, jubilations and celebrations, everyday and everywhere. This does not happen and when it does, it is not as frequent as it is wanted and desired.

VII

We make and will continue to make blind choices no matter how religious or irreligious we are, and no matter the extent to which we think that God is on the driving seat. Interestingly, religionists would thank God when they succeed but would exonerate God from their failures. For the Igbo, CHUKWU ENWENEIWE: God has neither ill feelings nor grudges towards human beings. So God cannot be held to account when there are failures.

There are no good reasons why God cannot be held to account when failure becomes the norm. There are, equally, no good reasons to thank God when success prevails. Success or failure episodes are transient. These are fleeting moments in human life. Nevertheless, is it not cowardly, even disingenuous to emphasise one side of the binary pair only when there are

¹⁹ Nkeonye Otaḱpor, “Secularism, Humanism and God” Segun Ogungbemi, ed. God, Reason and Death: Issues in Philosophy of Religion, Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2008, 73.

celebratory moments. Is God not the author of the pair according to religionists? For them there are no fortuitous moments or events.

Those who do not subscribe to the tenets of any religious code or dogma, and even some of those who do would blame their enemies for their failures. These enemies are human beings bogged down with their own existential problems. They could be neighbours, friends, even children, siblings from both sides of the family, mothers, grandmothers, fathers, grandfathers, uncles, aunties, nephews, cousins and so on. The list of those to take the blame is inexhaustible given the power of the human mind, in addition to the deleterious effects of superstition.

When there are no potential enemies to account for failures and mishaps, witches and wizards are always available to account for them. They take the blame. Despite the incremental advances that has been made in the education and secularization of minds;

The belief in witchcraft is still widespread, is still prevalent in both rural and urban areas serving as a means of explaining the misfortune that beset people at home and urban centres.²⁰

When witches and wizards are not taking the blame, the devil and Satan are the potential and real candidates to be held to account for failures. There are then prayer sessions during which the devil is loudly declared a liar: "the devil is a liar". The prayer sessions are specifically designed to negate the power and the effectiveness of the work of the devil, after the devil has finished its work. Hence the prayers and supplications are avowedly pro-tem: pro tempore, for the time being.

At the same time, the members of the congregation will transform themselves into AK49 and AK47 rifles with which to fire life shots at the devil and satan. There is then a fire fight with the devil and satan: kpo-aa, kpo-aa, kpo-aa, kpa, kpa and so on. This action

²⁰ Nkeonye Otakepor, Superstition: A Philosophical Analysis, Lecture Delivered at the Dept. of Philosophy, Tansian Univeristy, Anambra State, Benin City: Mindex Publishing 2016, 29.

is not at the level of the mimetic because for those deeply concerned and are diligently involved, it goes far beyond imitation or mimicry. Here again, those involved would seem to have intentionally and consciously glossed over the fact that for them, God created the devil and satan. For them, a benevolent God can neither permit nor engage in devilish and satanic things. Really.

To all these, there is a pungent reply from Hegel. While I am not a fan of Hegelianism, his philosophy of history has its foundation in his Christian Religion. Hegel writes,

That the history of the world with all the challenging scenes which its annals present, is the process of development and realization of spirit-this is the true Theodecaea, the justification of God in history. Only this insight can reconcile spirit with the history of the world-viz that what has happened, and is happening everyday, is not only not, without God, but is essentially His work²¹.

While I concede these points to Hegel, it is possible that he has not said all there is on these matters. If Hegel is right and if what happens in the world “is essentially his (God’s) work”, then God must take the blame. Period.

Nonetheless, blaming fellow humans, the devil, satan and God for our failures is overly subtle, detractive and diversionary. It is cowardly just as it is manifestly reprehensible. The simple, undeniable, truth is that no human being has an escape clause in terms of absolute responsibility for acts or omissions. The last stanza from the poem “The Law” by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, a Rosicruian Poet explains the issues better. Let us hear from Ella,

You are your own devil, you are your own God.
You fashioned the paths that your footsteps have
trod.
And no one can save you from error or sin.

²¹ G.W.F, Hegel, The Philosophy of History, J. Sibree, trans., New York: Dover Publications, 1956, 12-13. Emphasis not in the original.

Until you shall hark to the spirit within.²²

In addition to Ella's position John C. Maxwell reminds us that "life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make, makes you". Every decision you take, takes you invariably through that path. Therefore, each person has the key to the condition, good or bad, success or failure that features in his or her life. You choose your own path, hence the problems are your own making, your life is the fruit of your own doing, so the only one to blame is yourself. There is nothing more to be added to these profound and salutary statements.

VIII

I had earlier made reference to the education and secularization of the human mind, perhaps, as a means of preventing these demons from consuming us. What kind of education is under reference? That education provides the possibility for re-engaging reason, critical thinking, critical consciousness and rational inquiry. Erich Fromm writes that schooling;

Be it the transmission of knowledge or formation of character is only one part and perhaps not the most important part of education, using education in its literal sense of e-ducere, that is to bring out that which is within man.²³

What is "that which is within man"? It is his power of reason which is invariably, the most distinguishing aspect of human nature. "Education as e-ducere" nurtures reasons and certifies the end of its subjugation and subjunction to the devil, Satan, religious dogma, theologies of despair and violence, and superstition. There is an urgent need for the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human

²² The Rosicrucian Order, The Mystery of Life, Rosicrucian Park, State Housing Estate, Calabar, 2022, 2.

²³ Eric Fromm, The Sane Society, London: Kegan Paul 1973, 16-17.

problems. Reason and science has on a continuous, perhaps, regular basis demonstrated their capacity to trump religion and superstition in their explanation of the working of nature in a manner that makes sense.

Reason and science do not pretend to have all the answers to our problems as humans. When they fail, they fail woefully and abysmally. When they succeed they provide the much needed elixir to our permanent phenomenon of temporality in which we vigorously “pursue self possession and strive to overcome passing away with a coming forth that would establish an identity of being²⁴. Furthermore, it is no longer possible, even practicable, to live without the benefits of science. I.M. Copi writes:

the practical value of science lies in the easier and more abundant life made possible by technological advances based on scientific knowledge.²⁵

Plato, centuries ago, taught that the life of reason is the happiest and the best. So, it is only the application of reason in its chilly and uncompromising manner that enables us take informed decisions concerning the choices that are open to us all through life span. Forst’s binary pair is by no means different in this regard.

Above all, “education as e-ducere” must essentially lead to;

- a) The natural goal of the evolutionary development of man;
- b) The development of logical sophistication and conceptual clarity;
- c) The successful organization and reorganization of experience as adaptation of life, i.e. science as an end in itself;

²⁴ Nkeonye Otakpor, “Aristophanes, Agathan and Philosophy: Some Comments on Plato’s Symposium” The Visva-Bharati Journal of Philosophy, Vol. XIV, Nos. 1 and 2, 1982, 40.

²⁵ Irving M. Copi, Introduction to Logic, London: Macmillan, 1968,373

- d) The amelioration of the human predicament of meaninglessness and responsibility
- e) The encouragement of the exercise of freedom
- f) The natural and balanced growth of individuality through increasing sensitivity of value, precision of thought and creativity.²⁶

IX

At this stage, let us assemble the salient points. The poem emphasizes the supreme importance of the choices we make, because the choices shape our journey in life as individuals. It does not matter whether these choices are important or not. An unimportant choice for now, may in future become one of the most important choices ever made. As one choice trumps the others we never fully understand its importance until a future unfolds before us the indelible marks of that choice for our joy or sorrow.

Each choice we make or fail to make has an impact on our lives now, the immediate, the future or the future future. Some may lie dormant in the womb of time waiting to explode like a dynamite when the time is ripe. We never know when that time is ripe because we are not imbued with "divine" prescience. Furthermore, some of our choices possess the inherent power to mutate and then produce consequences never intended by us. Often, there is never an opportunity for a return to our original starting point in order to undo what we have done. In the womb of time joy or sorrow, success or failure have reference and are deeper than any time import.

Furthermore, "The Road Not Taken" is not an ode on bravado, bravely acts or physical strength per se. On the contrary, it is an ode on the moral strength we need in order to take on some life changing decisions in our lives. It is an ode on courage and its sister virtues. The poem legitimizes rebellion against orthodoxy in

²⁶ Milton D. Hunnex, Chronological and Thematic Charts of Philosophers and Philosophies Michigan: Academi Books, 1986, 36-38.

thinking and decision making. “it reminds us in a subtle manner that some degree of cognitive dissonance may be necessary for sanity in our lives.”²⁷ Those who turn their back on “The Road Not Taken” consciously.

Turn away from the reality of life’s intimidating complexity..... the real danger is the tendency to retreat into the obvious, the tendency to be frightened by the richness of the world and to clutch what we always have understood.²⁸

Whatever “we always have understood” is grossly disproportionate to what we have not “understood” about ourselves, the choices before us, our world and “life’s intimidating complexity”.

X

Some individuals driven by foresight were able to change the course of history in their family, community, society or country by simply following “The Road Not Taken”. Some national leaders made the “difference” when it mattered most by insisting on “The Road Not Taken” in terms of policy formulation and implementation. There are other people who blazed new trails and broke away from the status quo in many fields of human endeavour. For example:

- (a) Lee Kuan Yew was the Prime Minister of Singapore from 1959 to 1990 during which period he successfully transformed Singapore from a “Third World to a First World” country. According to him “the strategy was to create a First World oasis in a Third World”²⁹. To achieve this goal “the country could not afford to be conscribed by

²⁷ Nkeonye Otakpor, Superstition, 4

²⁸ Chinua Achebe, There Was A Country, London: Penguin Books, 2012, 59.

²⁹ Lee Kuan Yew, From Third World to First, New York; Harper Collins, 2011, 21-58.

any theory or dogma"³⁰. This means the repudiation of orthodoxy in favour of "The Road Not Taken", in socio-economic and political development of Singapore. Consequently the country was transformed within decades into a "First World" country. The rest, as they say, is history.

- (b) Late Nelson Mandela, a civil rights campaigner and one of the founding members of the African National Congress (ANC) was jailed by the apartheid South African Government for twenty seven years. Expectations were that there would be blood bathe at the end of the apartheid regime. Mandela upon release from prison took the "Road" which was unexpected. He chose "The Road Not Taken" for the resolution of the apartheid related social, economic, juridical and political problems in his country. The much expected blood bathe never happened because he chose "dialogue, reconciliation and forgiveness". UBUNTU³¹ then became the "street anthem" for a majority of South African citizens. Again the rest is history. In a related development, Late Desmond Tutu poignantly emphasized that "without reconciliation and forgiveness, there is no future"³² not only for South Africans but perhaps for humanity as a whole.
- (c) Much earlier when some colonized people and nations around the world resorted to armed struggle in order to regain their selfhood, self worth and dignity, and then govern themselves, Mahatma Ghandi insisted on another "way, road, or path" to achieve the same result. That "Road" which has never been "Taken" is "non violent resistance". According to him

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Mogobe B. Ramose, African Philosophy Through UBUNTU, Harare: Mond Books, 2005. This is an excellent material and treatise on UBUNTU

³² Desmond Tutu, No Future Without Forgiveness, London: Rider 2000, 230.

dfghghIt is quite proper to resist and attack, a system, but to resist and attack its author is tantamount to resisting and attaching oneself. For we are tared with the same brush... to slight a single human being is to slight the whole world.³³

Furthermore, Ghandi insisted that we should

“Hate the sin and not the sinner, a precept which though easy enough to understand, is rarely practiced, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world”.³⁴

For him, there should never be any reason “to resort to violence”³⁵ “Non hurting, non-violence and self suffering should be observed in thought, world and deed”³⁶. Hence, while the struggle for Indian independence was not won on a platter of gold, Ghandi’s choice made the “difference”. It prevented the kind of blood bathe which characterized the struggle in some other countries.

- (d) Before the intervention of science, in particular medical science, childless couples in some communities were the object of ridicule. They were shamed and suffered from socio-cultural exclusion. Barren women still bear the greater burden of childlessness. From medical science, attempts were made to provide not only psychological help and succor, but a solution which is, perhaps, better than all the preceding ones. Then came In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF) or Test Tube Baby (TTB)³⁷. This was pioneered by two

³³ Mahatma K. Ghandi, The Story of My Experiements With Truth: An Autobiography, trans. Mahadev Desai, Benin City: Beulahland Publications, 2009, 254.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid; 392

³⁶ AHIMSA-Literally means non-hurting, non-violence, Ibid, 23, 430-431.

³⁷ Louis Brown who was born in 1978 in Britain is a product of the pioneering work in IVF by Patrick Steptoe an obstetrician and Robert Edwards, a

British doctors. This is a process in which a baby grows from an egg that is fertilized outside the mother's body and is then put back inside her uterus to continue developing normally until birth. This was trail blazing not only because of the solution it brought to an endemic human problem, but because it was something entirely new. Its newness was uncommon because the two British scientists embraced "The Road Not Taken". This resulted in the introduction of ideas and methods that have never been used before.

- (e) Late Chinua Achebe with the publication of Things Fall Apart, his first novel in 1958, broke the glass ceiling. Hitherto, the literary works being read, at least in Nigeria, were those written by the English and then the Americans. At that point in time "there was no African Literature as we know it today"³⁸. Some people "found the very concept of an African novel amusing"³⁹. It was not only an object for amusement it was, to say the least, newfangled. For Achebe and his contemporaries,

It was clear to many of us that an indigenous African literary renaissance was overdue. A major objective was to challenge stereotypes, myths, and the image of ourselves and our continent, and to recast them through stories, prose, poetry and essays⁴⁰.... a major concern was the absence of the African voice. Being part of that dialogue meant not only sitting at the table but effectively telling the African story from an African perspective-in full earshot of the world⁴¹,.... my kind of story telling

Reproductive Physiologist. Miss Brown was the first human being to be born through the IVF procedure.

³⁸ Chinua Achebe, 53.

³⁹ Ibid,53

⁴⁰ Ibid, 53.

⁴¹ Ibid, 53

has to add its voice to this universal story telling before we can say: Now we have heard it all⁴².... we must hear all the stories and by hearing all the stories we will find points of contact and communication, and the world story, will have a chance to develop.⁴³

The issue that is focal, perhaps relevant, within this context is that Achebe successfully discounted and demystified the Europeaness of reason and scholarship. Reason, that is, intellectual faculty and sense (Aristotelian LOGOS) is a natural endowment of all human beings. Yet it is field dependent.

There is nothing human that is exclusively European. Europeans and their siblings around the world are not the exclusive recipients or beneficiaries of any particular natural human endowment. In the immortal words of Terence (Publius Terentius Afer); Homo sum: HUMANI NIHIL A ME ALIENUM PUTO: I am a man, and nothing human is foreign to me⁴⁴. To this extent, there is “nothing human” that “is foreign” to Africans.

Against this background, Achebe was a pathfinder in African literary firmament. He chose the road “less travelled” and successfully endowed humanity with literally works which absolutely “made all the difference”. In the words of Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins, in his ARS POETICA, Achebe was among “the first instructors of mankind” on the African world view. His Things Fall Apart, claimed by this English detractors to be “unmarketable” is undeniably, a piece of genius in its delicate simplicity.

XI

⁴² Ibid,55

⁴³ Ibid, 60

⁴⁴ Terence (Publius Terentius Afer), HEAUTON TIMOROU MENOS. See Dictionary of Quotations, New Lanark: Geddes and Grosset, 2001, 228.

Our perspectives are part of the primary determinants of how we understand the world, our world. Our memory is not in isolation as this process unfolds. It is affected and it enables us to understand who we are. It shapes the person we are in terms of the stories we tell about ourselves and the world that we claim to know.

In addition, our informed decisions, informed choices, wisdom and all her sister virtues can benefit from the enlargement of mind that accrues when we think out, enter into and understand a general way of taking the world as it is. This enlargement of perspectives helps to nurture reason. Reihold Neibuhr has suggested that

The meaning of our rationality determines the degree of vividness with which we appreciate the needs of other life, the extent to which we become conscious of the real character of our own motives and impulses, the ability to harmonize conflicting impulses in our own life and in society, and the capacity to choose adequate means for approval ends. In each instance a development of reason may increase the moral capacity.⁴⁵

There is the usual salutary riposte to our tendency or is it desire, to turn our back on Neibuhr's message. To make matters worse, we are not living in a society that has sufficiently educated us on the complex relationship between reason, impulse, emotion, choice, responsibility, freedom, and motive. This is a major problem for all of us.

XII

What and how then may we conclude? What is the essence of the animus too often expressed in respect of "The Road Not Taken"? This much can be said. "The Road Not Taken" or "The Road Taken" are binary like the two sides of a coin: head or tail. A definition of a coin must account for the two sides, that is, "it must

⁴⁵ Reihold Neibuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society, New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1960, 27-28. Emphasis not in the original.

state the essential attributes of a coin”⁴⁶. Similarly, to talk about human life without alluding to “The Road Not Taken” or “The Road Taken” is inconceivable. The reason is obvious: one without the other renders human life empty even meaningless that is if life has a meaning to begin with. Does it? Erich Fromm has suggested that

There is no meaning of life except the meaning man gives his life by the unfolding of his powers, by living productivity.⁴⁷

The choices that we make or fail to make and the decisions that we take or fail to take are the determinants of the “productive” life that is available to only those able to “unfold their powers”.

Whether we like it or not making choices is an integral part of our daily routine. It is an essential aspect of our historical being here. It is inescapable whether it is “The Road Not Taken” or “Taken”. Choice is not ossified when we are presented with a binary of this kind or of any other kind. To “travel” on both roads simultaneously may be the case at the subliminal level. It is empirically, albeit, practically impossible in our world as it is. On logical and epistemic grounds no one can be in two places at the same time.

“And sorry I could not travel both and be one traveler.....”⁴⁸

Choice making is an indubitable necessity, indeed, an inherent adjunct to human living. The proverbial neutralist who sits on the fence does not provide any solution. Neutralism is an illusive option not a solution. Even then neutralism is a deliberate act of choice in itself. The decision not to choose tantamounts to a choice action that complicates rather than provide solutions to the problems of the life world. Hence neutralism is an abdication of

⁴⁶ I.M Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 3rd Ed.; London: Macmillan, 1968, 115

⁴⁷ Erich Fromm, 18.

⁴⁸ Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken”.

responsibility and amounts to cowardice of the most awkward species of human behaviour.

"The Road Not Taken" or "The Road Taken" life or death, joy or sorrow and other binaries are welded together without a joint. It does not matter which of the binary pair is the case at any point in time because binaries are inseparable companions. A cleave between them is impossible, even in their convoluted relationship with human beings. What is more, there is the eloquent denunciation of the conceit behind "The Road Not Taken".

Life, itself, has a sinister resonance and a tonality of its own. Yet, there is the untrammelled optimism of life whether or not it is dependent on "The Road Not Taken". Consider the subtlety and the provocative power of Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" and wonder at what it portends for poesis, philosophy and humanity.

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Robert Frost's Poem "The Road Not Taken"