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BINWELL SINYANGWE'S *A COWRIE OF HOPE*: A TRIBUTE TO WOMANLY COURAGE AND FRIENDSHIP

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Abstract:
Using *A Cowrie of Hope* by the late Zambian novelist, Binwell Sinyangue, as a stepping-stone, I set out in research paper to explore the redemptive powers of courage and ties of friendship. Informed by a philosophy and psychology-based perspective, the tack of the argument is that pain and suffering (although they attend existence) can be rolled back if we tap into humanity's best, to wit, such virtues as courage, friendship, and compassion. The paper posits that the possibility of enacting agency gives humanity a scope to curtail big time the ravages of Evil which, by the way, raises its ugly head where courage and solidarity take a backseat to despair, fatalism, and the absence of solidarity. But dogged refusal to be cowered into submission by the forces driving pain and suffering coupled with a willing espousal of what American philosopher Martha Nussbaum calls "*narrative imagination*", the paper argues, can conduce to a better world. The paper concludes that an existential crisis in a world hallmarked by crass destitution and lack of sympathy can bring the worst as well as the best in mankind.

Keywords: courage, friendship, agency, narrative imagination, evil, good

1. Introduction

A short story writer, economist, poet and novelist all into one, Binwell Sinyangwe (1956-2013) was a Zambian whose service to literature shines through the authoring of two fictional works (*Quills of Desire* and *A Cowrie of Hope*) cum a bunch of poems and published articles. His second novel, to wit *A Cowrie of Hope* (2000), is, in no small measure, a jaw-dropping tribute to courage and friendship that play out against a backdrop of despicable poverty. Accordingly, the theoretical framework of this research paper will discuss the dyadic notions of courage and friendship from a philosophical and psychological perspective with an eye towards getting a fix on their centrality in *A Cowrie of Hope*.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the moral value of Courage and friendship, using *A Cowrie of Hope* as a stepping-stone. Arguably, courage and friendship are human attributes which can drive human motivations towards a good or bad goal. Little wonder that many a philosopher has given them their undivided attention. The Oxford Learner's Dictionary

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defines courage as "*the ability to do sth* (sic) *dangerous, or to face pain or opposition, without showing fear.*" As regards the meaning of friendship, the said dictionary boils it down to "*relationships between friends*" (Eighth edition). One of the hallmarks of a courageous act is the lack of fear and defiance of danger for the sake of a noble cause that betrays itself in it: "*It is from a noble motive that the courageous man endures and acts courageously in each particular case*" (Aristotle 83). In his Nichomachean Ethics, the Greek sophisticated philosopher expounds on courage as follows: "*The term courageous, in the strict sense, will be applied to him who fearlessly faces an honourable death and all sudden emergencies which involve death, and such emergencies mostly occur in war*" (81). Courage springs from a grim determination to face danger for a lofty cause. The loftiness of the end game of a courageous move is so overriding that fear of death takes a backseat to it. An eighteenth-century uber-percipient thinker, Arthur Schopenhauer sees eye to eye with Aristotle on his characterization of courage as commensurate with a nobility of character, unlike cowardice, "*for the reason that it* [the latter] *betrays an over-great apprehension about one's own person*" (8). Schopenhauer's exposition on Courage is all-encompassing as it reflects somewhat a defense mechanism against present threats and potential ones in the future: "*Courage…may be explained as a readiness to meet ills that threaten at the moment, in order to avoid greater ills that lie in the future; whereas cowardice does the contrary*" (8). C. H. Woodard's definition of Courage views the notion as "*the ability to act for a meaningful (noble, good, or practical) cause, despite experiencing the fear associated with perceived threat exceeding the available resources*" (174). So, for an act to qualify as courageous, it has to be geared towards a noble, redemptive aim to which any rational being can relate. As regards twentieth-century American theologian and philosopher of German stock, Paul Tillich, he regards Courage through the lens of ethics, and foregrounds its centrality to human existence: "*Courage can show us what being is, and being can show us what courage is*" (2). Tillich conflates the two-pronged dimension of Courage-that is, ethical and ontological- to work out an all-encompassing theory that provides a glimpse into the meaning of Courage:

> *Courage as a human act, as a matter of valuation, is an ethical concept. Courage as the universal and essential affirmation of one's being is an ontological concept. The courage to be is the ethical act in which man affirms his own being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation.* (3)

Indeed, the beauty of Courage lies in its affirmation of a readiness to pay the ultimate price for an ethical cause to prevail. To be courageous is, to all intents and purposes, a mode of being. The enactment of an act of courage, despite its potential life-threatening edge, is nothing short of an indictment of injustice translated into a dicey effort to remedy a wrong at any cost. Courage epitomizes an unflagging stomach for the triumph of an ideal at the same time that it reflects a feisty pushback against evil; so, the case can be made that it is a tribute to ethics as well as a scornful knocker to cowardice: "*Courage does what is to be praised and rejects what is to be despised*" (Tillich 4). The purport of courage in human life led the likes of Schopenhauer to elevate it to the status of virtue: "*Courage is, through the medium of patience, at least akin to virtue*" (8). Building on from the wisdom of the ancients, Schopenhauer describes Virtue as "*every excellence or quality that was praiseworthy in itself, it might be moral or intellectual, or possibly only physical*" (10-

11). The brave man unwittingly goes up in the esteem of his community and, by extension, in that of humanity, while the coward reaps ridicule and disdain. Courage and Cowardice do not go together as they spring from contradictory human motivations. Hence thinkers' proclivity for contrasting them so as to better flag up the humanness of the former and the hallmark of hypocrisy, and refusal of self-sacrifice that the latter bears. Conversely, Courage and Friendship are, arguably, two sides of the same coin as they are all geared towards a redemptive outcome. Like Courage, Friendship is, in Aristotelian philosophy, raised to the cult status of virtue (251). More to the point, Aristotle posits the unbearable nature of life without friends: "*…no one would care to live without friends, though he had all other good things*" (251). He defines Friendship[ii] as mutual well-wishing: "*One who wishes the good of another is called a well-wisher, when the wish is not reciprocated; when the well-wishing is mutual, it is called friendship*" (254). At the heart of the renowned Greek thinker's views on friendship lies the notion of the lovable which is either "*good or pleasant or useful*" (253). Sincere love and friendship belong together. Courageous and friendly acts can be life-altering towards betterment. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in *A Cowrie of Hope* on which this research paper is based.

A page-turner, Binwell Sinyangwe's *Cowrie of Hope* (2000) recounts the story of a single-minded woman buffeted by fate. A thirty-year-old woman and mother of an only daughter and child, Nasula is a byword-for "*loneliness and aloneness*" as "*Suffering was her life*" (4). At the death of her husband, known as Winelo Chiswebe, her in-laws, angered at her utter refusal to be taken over by her hubby's younger brother as his wife, stripped her of what little he left her with. Nothing daunted, she does not wallow in despair. Rather, Nasula strives flat out to find in her woes the physical resources to better her plight and, by extension, that of her daughter. Uneducated, and parentless at a young age, she, nonetheless, knows only too well that the way out of her predicament is to throw everything in the kitchen sink in order for her daughter to continue with her studies. Failing that, she'll be condemned forever to a life of destitution. Her daughter, Sula, has just successfully completed grade nine at Senga Hill Basic School and is supposed to move on to grade ten at a "far-away boarding, secondary school". The likelihood

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[ii] Interestingly, Aristotle conceives of friendship as being three-pronged: accidental and perfect. If anything accidental friendships are of two kinds-that is, friendship based on utility and that based on pleasure. Aristotle's preference goes for perfect friendship as it "*implies mutual trust, and the certainty that neither would ever wrong the other, and all else that is implied in true friendship*" (259-260). Perfect or true friendship is built around the call of two men to love each other and do each other good. These friends "*love each other for what they are, i.e., as good men*" (260). The philosopher goes on to write respecting true friendship: "*But the perfect kind of friendship is that of good men who resemble one another in virtue. For they both alike wish well to one another as good men, and it is their essential character to be good men. And those who wish well to their friends for the friends' sake are friends in the truest sense; for they have these sentiments towards each other as being what they are, and not in an accidental way*" (257). Given that something of an innate element underpins perfect friendship, Aristotle regards it to be lasting: "*their friendship* [good men], *therefore, lasts as long as their virtue, and that is a lasting thing*" (257). Conversely, "accidental friendships" are short-lived since "*the object of affection is loved, not as being the person or character that he is, but as the source of some good or some pleasure*" (255-256). A friendship based on pleasure or utility will fizzle out once the self-serving motive that underpins is gone: "*…the useful is nothing permanent, but varies from time to time. On the disappearance, therefore, of that which was the motive of their friendship, the friendship itself is dissolved, since it existed solely with a view to that*" (25"). In light of the foregoing, it's safe to say that for a friendship to be meaningful and lasting it has to rest on gravitas and trust as well as selflessness.

of Sula's dropping out of primary school is high as her mother lacks the one hundred thousand *kwacha*[iii] necessary for Sula to start her secondary school studies. Going forward, Nasula leaves no stone unturned to secure the requisite sum. She has run through the gamut of unspeakable suffering for the sake of her daughter's future. Thanks to her rock-solid courage, and her unyielding friendship with Nalukwi, Nasula eventually sees the light at the end of the tunnel.

A Cowrie of Hope is a study in the meaning of courage and friendship. A blow by blow analysis of the narrative reveals courage as being a bulwark against despair while friendship fosters solidarity. In the novel at hand, the lead character's life and times bear testimony as she finds herself, through no fault of her own, in a situation where only courage and stamina enable her to get off the hook. To get a sense of the raw deal that Nasula has got from life and the depth of her fighting spirit, it might be no bad thing to listen to the narrator describe the overwhelming odds facing her from the get-go:

> *"Nasula was poor, illiterate and clothed in suffering, but she was an enlightened woman possessed with a sense of achievement. She had not tasted success in her own life, but she wanted her daughter to achieve much. She wanted her daughter to reach mountain peaks with her schooling and from there carve a decent living that would make it possible for her not to depend on a man for her existence."* (5)

The fag end of the quotation provides an interesting insight into the driver of Nasula's courage. She was born in a society where the strictures of patriarchy[iv] are so overbearing as to stifle any womanly move with an eye towards emancipation. Nasula's no-nonsense drive is shaped around the premise that an educated woman cannot be ridden roughshod over. Education acts as a beacon of light in an ocean of darkness. Eighteenth-century sophisticated German thinker, Immanuel Kant, posits that but for education man is a man of sorts: "*Man can only become man by education. He is merely what education makes of him. … It is delightful to realize that through education human nature will be continually improved, and brought to such a condition as is worthy of the nature of man*" (6 and 8). Relying upon someone else for one's existence is tantamount to abdicating one's freedom, that is, the freedom to enact agency for the purpose of effecting uplifting betterment. Kant is justified in foregrounding the innate love of freedom in man: "*The freedom of freedom is naturally so strong in man, that when once he has grown accustomed to freedom, he will sacrifice everything for it*" (4). Nasula knows better than most what it feels like being a woman without means, being a woman compelled to ride a man's coattails for survival. When she casts her mind back to her nonentity status at the hands of Winelo, she cannot help but fight tooth and nail to spare her daughter future trials and tribulations:

[iii] The unit of currency in the English-speaking Southern African country of Zambia and Malawi.

[iv] I will not overly expand into the notion of patriarchy. I'll rather refer the reader to my paper "Education as a Stepping-Stone to Push Back Against the Strictures of patriarchy and the Scourge of Ritual Killing: An Examination of Unity Dow's *The Screaming of the Innocent*" published in *International Journal of English and Literature* (IJEL), Vol. 8, Issue 1, Feb 2018. Actually, my purpose in this paper is to highlight how thanks to courage and friendship, man was able to overcome the stultifying hurdles of patriarchy in order to achieve her ambition.

> *"Nasula had not forgotten. She would not forget. How could she? They had turned her into a servant, a slave in a chief's palace. They had turned her into a stream in which to wash and kill the stink of their humanity. They had turned her into the hunter's flat stone on which to sharpen their spears and axes. Into* icisongole *to play* iciyenga[v] *with during the day, a fruit to be eaten at by the chief during the night. Into a source of laughter."* (6)

If we see eye to eye with twentieth-century American psychologist, Abraham Maslow, that "*Man's need for love, for respect is quite as 'sacred' as his need for the truth*," (3) then the psychological toll exacted on Nasula by her ordeals at Winelo's house bear testimony. Deserving elaboration is her suffering, and her continual lamentation about it. Indeed, she wisely stops short of repressing her travails. Rather, she agonizingly gripes about them at every turn, thereby vindicating Ackermann's view of lamentation as "*a language for dealing with, although not solving, the problem of suffering*" (100). In the case of Nasula, language acts as something of an outlet through which she unburdens herself. Granted, suffering has not dented her stunning capacity for agency[vi] but it has emasculated her sense of human dignity:

> *"But misfortune had not caged the woman's soul. Poverty, suffering and never having stepped into a classroom had not smoked her spirit and vision out of existence. Her humanity continued to be that which she had been born with, one replete with affection and determination. It was this which fanned her desire to fight for the welfare of her daughter."* (5)

Nasula finds in suffering a powerful spur to action. The here and now for her is demoralizingly bleak. Even so, failure to physically grapple with the 'unspeakable' will make the future unbearable. Eric J. Cassell's submission that "*to suffer, there must be a source of thoughts about possible futures*" (73) is exemplified in Nasula's preoccupation with the object of her suffering, viz., her daughter's schooling. Cassell is at pains to hammer home the point that pain differs from suffering. He writes that:

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[v] isisongale and iciyenga are italicized in the novel; so, it is I who underline. These are Mambwe words, Mambwe being a language spoken by a huge chunk of people in the English-speaking African countries of Zambia and Tanzania.

[vi] Agency is the brainchild of famed British sociologist Anthony Giddens. In his 1985 book *A Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Anthony Giddens describes agency as a powerful tool for change: "*Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct. Whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened*" (9). Agency cannot be divorced from acting in the spirit of making a difference. Refusal to act in a given context (that necessitates it) means acceptance of the status quo. From Giddens' perspective, it is capability as opposed to intention that hallmarks agency: "*Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing things in the first place*" (9). Put another way, what matters in the eyes of the sociologist respecting agency, is the concrete result of acting. Intention only cannot be effective; it has to be coupled with capability to pack a punch, "*which is why agency implies power*" (9). Little wonder that Giddens adopts the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of the performer of agency as someone who "*who exerts power or produces an effect*". Come to think of it, the primary rationale behind the performance of agency is to bring about improvement.

> *"…although suffering may attend pain, they are distinct. There may be pain without suffering. There may be suffering without pain. But there seems to be no suffering without an idea of the future. Bodies do not have the beliefs, concepts, ideas , or fantasies necessary to create a future. From the foregoing, one can conclude that, although nociception (stimuli defined as painful), bodies do not suffer. Only persons suffer."* (106)

It is noteworthy, though, that Nasula somewhat bucks the trend in terms of her handling of suffering. The key feature of the poignancy of suffering is usually the victim's inability to narrate it. According to Paul Ricoeur, the physical dimension of suffering pales into insignificance beside its dehumanizing effect. Suffering, he says, gives rise to "*the very forms of disesteem of self, and hatred of others, in which suffering exceeds pain*" (320). The mental toll of suffering can get so excruciating as to spawn loss of the capability of putting it into words. French twentieth-century philosopher of Lithuanian extraction, Emmanuel Levinas captures the incapacitating edge of suffering:

> *"Suffering, in its hurt and its in-spite-of-consciousness, is passivity. Here, 'taking cognizance' is no longer, properly speaking, a taking; it is no longer the performance of an act of consciousness, but, in its adversity, a submission; and even a submission of the submitting, since the 'content' of which the aching consciousness is conscious is precisely this very adversity of suffering, its hurt."* (157)

As already stated, Nasula is anxious to not allow the extremities of life get her down as the stake is high. What makes her tick is, to use a Kunderian term, her "*existential problem*" or "*existential code*" (Kundera 16). The appeal of her frenzied drive is its spicy gutsiness, which betokens a stubborn will to cling onto existence, despite the odds being stacked against her. Her *organic existence*, to wit, her life (Schopenhauer 350) is tied into her daughter's. From a philosophical perspective, Nasula's unrelenting resolve to successfully get to grips with her *existential code* speaks to a defense mechanism- which Anna Freud describes as "*the ego's struggles against painful or unendurable ideas or affects*" (42)- known in psychology as self-preservation. This aspect is key to emotional stability and solidity of mental life: "*Preservation and integrity of the self mean that the individual is safe in a (mostly latently) hostile social world, which is equivalent to the individual being acknowledged, recognized, and approved (as these are attitudes that signal the inhibition of others' aggressiveness*)" (Behrendt 154). Encounter with fear from the outside world always unleashes a defense mechanism. In Nasula's case, her fear is that her daughter may be forced to quit school. She then embarks upon daring, dare-devil acts to find the requisite one thousand *kwacha* for her daughter's schooling. The flame of her moral and physical courage to defy the odds for the sake of Sula's future is, to boot, fanned by the glowing feedback coming from young educated women who come to the village so as to raise their younger sisters' awareness about the overriding necessity of education as a key to throwing off the fetters of womanly subservience:

"She had not forgotten and she would not forget. How could she? The faces and voices of those young women of good education and good jobs in offices who came to Kalingalinga shanty compound, where she lived with Winelo, to talk to the women of the compound about the freedom of the woman. What they said about the importance of knowing how to read and write and of having a good education, what they said about the rights of the woman and the need of a woman to stand on her own." (8)

Pamela Abott et al. account literacy and education "*among young women*" as "*positively correlat* [ing] *with reduced child mortality*". They go on to position that "*the more educated women are, the less likely they are to have large families, particularly at a relatively young age*" (108). What eighteenth-century British philosopher Abraham Maslow calls '*external motive*[vii]" factors into Nasula's enactment of courageous acts which, incidentally, are staggered as she navigates her ordeals.

To be sure, it took her a lot of moral courage to swallow her pride, and physical valour to embark upon a grueling trip from her home village to Mangano in order to enlist the support of her former in-laws. This in spite of her daughter's decided disapproval of the move, and her own acknowledgment that "*The Chiswebes were selfish beings who loved money more than people*" and "*hated her for having refused to marry Isaki*" (12-13). At Winelo's funeral the Chiswebes vowed that they would never help her in her hour of need as a way of registering their displeasure. By the same token, she inwardly pledged herself "*never to befriend any of them*" and would rather die of destitution than "*accept a forced marriage and the wealth her husband had left her*" (16). (Her stunning feminism-spiked stance speaks to an indictment of the straightjacket of patriarchy.) She substantiates away her defiant attitude by putting forward Isaki Chiswebe's lecherousness and polygamous status. All this goes to show how weighty a call the trip to Mangano was. At several points during the journey, in fact, she teetered on the brink of retracing her steps but "*the future of an innocent child* [being] *involved*", she couldn't help but soldier on. The narrator's description of the journey from Swelini to Mangano is telling:

"The woman walked. She walked and walked, along a meandering footpath. Grains of sand in size and colour brought to her mind the sight and smell of roasted finger millet. The forest on both sides was dense, full virginity, and a still silence as uncanny as that of the land of the dead. In that ghostly womb of untampered nature, the woman walked the distance to Mangano. Alone,

[vii] In his *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Jeremy Bentham broaches inter alia the issue of motive. He understands motive as "*anything whatsoever, which, by influencing the will of a sensitive being, is supposed to serve as a means of determining him to act, or voluntarily to forbear to act, upon any occasion*." As he expounds his thinking, he comes up with two kinds of motive, to wit, internal or interior, and exterior or external. The latter describes "*the internal perception of any individual lot of pain or pleasure, the expectation of which is looked upon as calculated to determine you to act in such or such a manner; as the pleasure of acquiring such a sum of money, the pain of exerting yourself on such an occasion, and so forth*" (Book V, 99). As regards the former, it may be "*any external event, the happening whereof is regarded as having a tendency to bring about the perception of such pleasure or such pain*" (Book V, 99). In the case of Nasula, the internal motive driving her agency is her experience of squalor as a result of structural circumstances while the external motive is to ensure her daughter's schooling so as to spare her the same predicament that she experiences.

> *unescorted by man. Nasula was courage. Days had inured her to many things and turned her into hard wood. ..."* (14)

Long though it is, this quotation speaks volumes about Nasula's feistiness and singleness of purpose. The anticipation of finding a way out of her suffering caused her to throw caution to the winds and hit the road. Her audacious undertaking shows that despair and self-pity are no wholesome fix to the woes of fate. Instead, agency provides ammunition and self-possession that shield against despondency and discouragement. Nasula looked forward to her trip yielding a positive outcome. It then came as no surprise that, on her way to Mangano, she was thinking about what a blueprint for the money:

> *"If Isaki and his father would part with the money, she would have to rush back home to make arrangements to travel to Mbala with Sula: to go and buy a mattress, a blanket, bedsheets and other things on the list that the school authorities had sent of the things students must carry with them to school. The trip to Mbala would be next week and Sula would start off for Kasama and St Theresa Girls Secondary School as early as next week."* (15)

Disappointingly, Nasula has nothing to show for her pains and suffering. The trip turns out, indeed, to be an anticlimax. At no time, though, did she build up false hopes, what with her frosty relationship with the Chiswebes, and the severe drought that utterly crippled peasants' effort to till the land. This may be construed as a "*palliative measure*"- to borrow a Freudian term- against disillusionment. As she cuts across Mangano farm, she is gripped with a sense of shock and bewilderment at how much it has become a shadow of its former self (21). She then starts to have a sinking feeling that things will not pan out her way. Still, against all expectations, her fears of being rebuffed are not realized. Owing to wildly dismal circumstances characteristically hallmarked by large scale poverty, Old Chiswebe's ill health and Isaki's incurable illness, the in-laws did not feel up to somewhat rolling out the welcome mat for Nasula even if exchanges between her and the household oozed with human warmth (22, 23, 24, 25). Through Binwell's lead character, the reader learns that human miseries can bring the best in people, and that human dignity always triumphs over the powerful forces of evil.

Plainly, Nasula's emotions[viii] seesaw between hope and fear. These dyadic notions act a fillip to her moral and physical courage because they reckon hugely in her scheme of goals and

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[viii] In her signal book *Upheaval of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, American philosopher Martha Nussbaum tackles at length the vexed issue of Emotions. Although it is not within the purview of this paper to discuss emotions, it might no bad thing to adumbrate some of the key characteristics of emotions as laid by Nussbaum. She conceives of emotions as "*intelligent responses to the perception of value*" (1). So, there are more to emotions than mere cognitive processes. The significance of emotions, in Nussbaum's estimation, lies in their ethical edge (1). Nussbaum criticizes the tendency of a crop of philosophers to give short shrift to the theory of emotions, and posits that "*a central part of developing an adequate ethical theory will be to develop an adequate theory of the emotions, including their cultural sources, their history in infancy and childhood, and their sometimes unpredictable and disorderly operation in the daily life of human beings who are attached to things outside of themselves*" (2). Put another way, a theory of ethics and that of emotions are not mutually exclusive. Nussbaum underscores the symmetrical relation between ethics and emotions. Her proposition that "*emotions have rich cognitive/intentional content*" debunks the theory that "*they are*

ambitions. The flame of hope allows her to keep discouragement at bay. She knows full well that if she caves in to fear, then her daughter's future is doomed. There is nothing for it but to endeavour with the utmost stamina to stick it out. The choice to fly blind with some hope for success outweighs that of sinking into despair. American philosopher Martha Nussbaum's vistas on the notions of hope and fear locate their commonality in love: "*In fear, one sees oneself or what one loves as seriously threatened. In hope, one sees oneself or what one loves as in some uncertainty but with a good chance for a good action*" (28). Nasula's realization that "*her journey to Mangano had not the colour of a journey to salvation*" does not by any stretch of the imagination dent her humanness or courage for that matter. Isaki Chiswebe passed away on the very day that she arrived in Mangano. The illness that has cost him his life is not revealed in the story but, reading between the lines, it is safe to bet that it is AIDS: "*It was the new, unmentionable disease of the world that came of the flesh, the one that made you thin before taking you, the disease of today*" (27). With the benefit of hindsight, she feels vindicated in her adamant refusal to be inherited by Isaki in shadow of her hubby's death: "*She only watched the sick man and reeled with horror at the thought of what would have been had she agreed to marry Isaki after the death of Winelo*" (27). Having drawn a blank in her search for help with the Chiswebes, starved not to mention exhausted from fatigue, Nasula could have elected to go back home to Swelini. Rather, she took it upon herself to stay overnight as a way to throw in her lot with her in-laws. This move is not devoid of ethical meaning altogether. Nasula's dignified departure from Mangano is suggestive of a mindset nourished by regard for social decorum. She returns home empty-handed and, lo and behold, on an empty stomach. Still, out of human decency, she stops short of apportioning blame to her in-laws: "*Nothing had been given her, not even something to eat or drink on the way: she knew and understood it was not out of ill intention*" (32). It was emotionally draining for her to fail to bring home the bacon, as it were. Her anguished disenchantment was writ large on her face, and showed in her seeming inability to sustain the look of Sula as she recounted to her the twists and turns of the journey. Despite a spate of sobering setbacks in her frantic effort to ensure the future of her daughter, she is not about to throw in the towel. Nasula's unflattering past, and status as a poor woman living in a male-dominated world inform her agency. Unsurprisingly, she makes no bones about decidedly pushing back on Sula's melting advice to let go. Her

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blind forces that have no selectivity or intelligence about them" (11). Key to Nussbaum's analysis of emotions is the assertion that "*they are forms of evaluative judgment that ascribe to certain things and persons outside a person's own control great importance for the person's own flourishing*" (22). All this, according to the philosopher, goes to show that "*Emotions are, in effect, acknowledgments of neediness and lack of self-sufficiency*" (22). Arguably, a situational evaluation of the self conduces to the development of emotions. That assessment is geared towards an action the end game of which is what she calls "human flourishing". Hence her use of the neologism "aboutness" to characterize the purpose towards which emotions are directed. She is at pains, nonetheless, to emphasize the intricacy surrounding the "aboutness" of emotions: "*Emotions are not about their objects merely in the sense of being pointed at them… Their aboutness is more internal, and embodies a way of seeing*" (27). Nussbaum mentions compassion, love, envy, hope, grief, pity, jealousy, fear, anger as part of emotions (34). *Upheaval of Thought* offers potent insights into the working of emotions. Applying Nussbaum's analysis to *A Cowrie of Hope*, the case can be made that Nasulaes emotions stem from an appraisal of her situation, and that she is under the grip of two emotions, two wit, fear and hope. The aboutness of her emotions are pointed towards the future of her daughter, namely the requisite money for the continuation of her schooling.

daughter's spiel that "*I will not be the first or last person to stop schooling because of lack of money*" is met with a cast-iron rebuke:

> "*You must go to school. You don't know what suffering I have gone through because apart from being poor and a woman, my parents did not send me to school. I don't want you to suffer the way I have suffered. I want you to grow up and stand on your own feet and not to look to marriage or men for salvation. Marriage and men are not salvation but the ruin of any woman who can't stand on her own feet.*" (37)

Here, Binwell Sinyangwe concretely emphasizes education as key to women's emancipation from male bondage. Success in developing autonomy and financial independence from men allows women to stand their ground in, say, conjugal life. Actually, the stranglehold of men over women is mediated through power. To be sure, breaking male power necessitates getting out of the quicksand of literacy in order to go down the empowering path of education. In Gerder Lerner's estimation, the concept of emancipation is a broad-church from a feminist perspective which can serve as a roadmap for women:

> "*What is women's emancipation? It is freedom from oppressive restrictions imposed by sex; self-determination and autonomy. Freedom from oppressive restrictions means freedom from natural, biological restrictions due to sex as well as from societally imposed ones.… Autonomy means earning one's status, not being born to it or marrying it. It means financial and cultural independence, freedom to choose one's life-style regardless of sex.*" (37)

Nasula's unfailing courage is strenuously geared towards enabling her daughter to achieve *self-actualization* through education. This term is the brainchild of Kurt Goldstein but Abraham uses it "*in a specific and limited fashion*" in his powerful book *Motivation and Personality* (47). The American psychologist fleshes out on self-actualization, stating that:

> "*It refers to man's desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is idiosyncratically, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.*" (74)

In the context of a male-dominated society, the politics of female *self-actualization* takes on a particular meaning. Nasula's *motivational life*, to use a Maslowian term, also reflects a stubborn motherly concern to not have a guilty conscience about Sula's eventual future, should she fail to act. The locus of her courageous action is situated in her consciousness about her parental duty. Schopenhauer's theory on the duty of parents to their kids doubtless gives more insight into Nasula's agency:

> "*Whoever brings a child into the world, has incumbent on him the duty of supporting his offspring, until the latter is able to maintain himself; and should this time never come, owing to*

incapacity from blindness, deformity, cretinism, and the like, neither does the duty never come to an end. It is clear that by merely failing to provide for the needs of his son, that is, by a simple omission, the father would injure him, indeed jeopardize his life." (189)

Nasula contrives coping strategies as she experiences back-to-back failures in her all-out attempt to secure the one thousand *kwacha*. It is noteworthy that a new political dispensation in the country, referred to in the narrative as the "nineties", compounds her situation. The leadership's grim resolve to remedy the ills facing the country is steeped in the spirit of good governance that brooks no malfeasance of any ilk: "*New people in government and the sons and daughters of the land were breathing with a new spirit*" (30). With this novel era, the loopholes in the procedural rules to secure agricultural input such as fertilizer, seed, and farm implements got corrected, thereby putting small peasants at the mercy of cut-throat landed gentry. So, when Nasula seeks to overcome her *existential problem* by turning to maize cropping, she hits a dead end: "*An idea crossed Nasula's mind. She should borrow fertilizer and maize seed and grow maize. When she asked about how one borrowed from the fertilizer agent, she found out that she would not qualify. Her field was too small and she had no money to pay the deposit the agent was asking for*" (38). This hurdle does not take the wind out of her sails. Instead, it eggs her on: "*She did not give up. She talked to a villager of Swelini who had managed to borrow the fertilizer agent and convinced him to give her a bit of what he had received*". Pupila, the villager, obliged. But his help came with heavy strings attached, for the repayment rate "*would be more than the agent would ask for from the villager at harvesting time*" (38). Acting on the saying that Beggars can't be choosers, Nasula agrees to the plan. In spite of the fact that "*Together and alone with her daughter, she toiled and toiled*" and was able to "*plant all the seed, apply fertilizer and weed it,*" (39) an awful shortage of rain dashed her hopes, so that she harvested next to nothing. To makes matters worse, her lender refused to buy into her case as to why she could not pay back in full and, unsurprisingly, "*wrested all his five and a half bags from her and left her with only a bag, which only lasted a couple of months as a source of mealie meal for her and her daughter*" (39). This vindicates Gerner Lerner in her assertion that "*In order for women to have autonomy, the handicap of male orientation and male domination in social institutions must first be removed*" (37). Anyway, with an effort of the will, Nasula "*tried to raise money by doing piece work*" but yet again got her fingers burnt. Needless to say that a streak of bad luck dogs her. People she does work for drag their feet when it comes to fulfilling their part of the bargain, and "*plead being coinless and pay her in kind, things that no one could buy if she tried to sell them*" (39).

Lack of empathy and understanding doubtless represent an albatross around female drive towards emancipation. And Nasula's man-made woes are a stark reminder that will and courage do not suffice to face up to the challenges threatening humanity, not least women. Compassion and mutual aid are key to combatting the pervasiveness of suffering. It is not for nothing that Arthur Schopenhauer regards Compassion along with Malice and Egoism as the three fundamental springs of human conduct (172). He describes Compassion as "*the direct participation, independent of all ulterior considerations, in the sufferings of another, leading to sympathetic assistance in the effort to prevent or remove them*" (170). As a consequence, according to the thinker, no action has moral worth which does not derive from the phenomenon of Compassion. Conversely, Malice and Egoism don't redound to the betterment of humanity, for

the former "*desires the woe of others, and may develop to the utmost cruelty*" whilst the latter "*desires the weal of the self, and is limitless*" (172). Consequently, the commonality of Malice and Egoism lies in their moral worthlessness (168).

Harking back to *A Cowrie of Hope*, it is Egoism that glaringly betrays itself in Papula's offhand attitude to Nasula. Schopenhauer's submission that "*Egoism may lead to wickedness and crime of every sort*" (157) is illustrative. Much as Papula's wantonly egotistic move vis-à-vis Nasula is rooted in insufficiency and fear of finding himself trapped in a tight spot down the line, the fact remains that he has at least something to get by, unlike Nasula who lives in utter destitution. Papula does not have it in him to exercise compassion because of his selfishness. Yet one way to cultivate humanity, to paraphrase Martha Nussbaum, is through what she calls *narrative imagination* into which she expands as follows: "*This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions, wishes, and desires that person so placed might have*" (271). From Nussbaum's perspective, the capacity to identify with the lot of a fellow human being is the yardstick by which humanness is measured.

It deserves emphasizing that Evil may be pervasive in the world, yet it cannot triumph altogether as there exist human beings deeply steeped in the consciousness of the ethical values of friendship and solidarity who push back against it with every fiber of their being. In the world of *A Cowrie of Hope*, one such person is Nalukwi. A friend of Nasula's, she is kindness personified. Her espousal of the ethical concept of "narrative imagination" is a foil to Papula's egotistical mindset woven into hard-heartedness. Nalukwi is possessed of a mind-blowing capacity for sympathy coupled with an equally stunning outspokenness. She spares Nasula a potentially shattering disenchantment, indeed, by impressing on her the den of vice that Lusaka (the capital city of Zambia) has become. Her blunt statement that "*Children as young as my Sula are becoming wells for every man on every street of the city-for money*!" (52), made Nasula sit up and take notice. She presses home her point, admitting that "*People are suffering in this our land*." But "*The city is worse because it even eats at your dignity, which the village doesn't*" (52). Friendship does not exclude frankness.

Nalukwi is somewhat Nasula's road to Damascus. Having been pretty much moved to tears as Nasula recounted her long tale of misery, she could not help trying to alleviate her friend's woes. Her charitable action speaks to the deep ties of friendship linking her to Nasula. When she sees that Nasula depends for survival on the beans that she sells, she advises her about a more efficient way of ramping up what little she gets from her activity: "*Beans are very expensive in Lusaka at this time of the year, there are very few kinds available, especially the type that you grow here in Mbala, the yellow and white bean. Even if you have just one bag, it will give you the one hundred thousand kwacha that you need to send the child to school*" (53). In the same breath, she quickly allays Nasula's incubus about transport money and lack of bags into which to put the beans, by offering practical help as well as taking precautions to ensure her a safe journey:

> *"I have grain bags in Vimbe," nalukwi said. "I will give you one big one, the ninety k.g., and one two fifty k.g. ones, the new ones the new government has introduced. One of my brothers will be escorting you to Senga Hill with a bicycle. I will talk to him and two of my sisters to help us carry*

> *the beans on Wednesday. The one with the bicycle can carry the ninety k.g. bag, we carry one tin each, and share the travelling bags between us."* (56)

Aristotle emphasizes that the commonality of persons bound by true friendship lies in their essential character to be good men, namely that neither pleasure nor utility underpins friendly acts (Book VIII, 257). Sheer selflessness and what Schopenhauer calls "loving-kindness" guide Nalukwi. The latter and Nasula are not fair whether friends. Actually, they go way back. Their friendship withstands the test of time and geographical remoteness, for it does not rest on self-interest but, rather, on love. That's why, from an Aristotelian philosophical perspective, true friendship is lasting. The shout-out that the narrator gives to Nalukwi for her track record of good deeds in favour of Nasula bears testimony:

> *"When Winelo Chiswebe had died, Nalukwi had acted as someone who was her own relative during and after the funeral. She had sat and stood next to her through it all, consoling her and holding her place.*
> *When the Chiswebe family and relatives arrived at the funeral house and no one came from Nasula's side, as she had no one in the world to do so, Nalukwi organized her own friends, relatives and village friends to stand by Nasula and represent her to the family of the deceased and answer their incessant queries and demands. Nalukwi herself spoke for her in everything. She saw to it that Nasula was not harassed into talking unnecessarily…Without her tenacity and strength, Nasula would have been harangued to her own death by the Chiswebe family over the death of Winelo Chiswebe."* (43)

Nalukwi and Nasula's friendship manifests itself through thick and thin. Come to think about it, the ties of friendship can be equal in strength and symbolism to the bond of flesh and blood. Generosity and sympathy born out of friendship can heal the emotional hurt induced by parentless state. This explains why Jeremy Bentham posits the quasi impossibility of remaining impervious to the ordeal of a friend. The significance of friendship may be second only to that of blood relations. He writes that, "*few persons can contemplate altogether without uneasiness the sufferings of a fellow creature, especially if presented in a particular manner to their perception or imagination, still less can they witness with indifference those of a friend*" (169). Through Nalukwi's friendship-driven praxis the reader learns that when people act on the virtue of true friendship, they mean well.

Nasula jumps up and down at the prospect of selling her bag of beans to Kamwala market in Lusaka as it "*was the last piece of firewood at the hearth of her desire to send Sula to secondary school*" (61). She did not suffer overly from lack or want in Lusaka. Whatever she needed in terms of bedding was given to her unbidden by Nalukwi. Everything seemed to be going her way. Her beans were snapped upon as potential buyers stopped by, some enquiring about price, others haggling because of the dire circumstances. As if on cue, her mind flashed back to Nalukwi, whom she called "*a dependable spirit*". As the shouldering embers of her misery started being dampened down by the hope of a happy end, something sadly went down which set her back- that is, she got swindled out of her bag of beans. Going forward, a new life of uncertainty tinged

with gloom starts for Nasula. Her anguished face and downbeat mien catch the attention of passers-by who are mostly stumped for words over what happened. The villain of the piece is a man on the wrong side of 40 who outbid a woman whom he found already haggling with Nasula. According to the narrator, you could be forbidden to think that butter wouldn't melt in his mouth: "*Well built and in his late thirties, the man has well-cropped brown hair, a scanty brown beard and broad shoulders. He wore an immaculate checked suit, dark shoes, a white shirt and a red tie*" (82). Rather than playing it safe owing to the man's "*scar-marked face and bright eyes*," Nasula allowed herself to be deceived by "*the gaiety of his disposition*" which "*was charming to the eye and the mind*" (82). Once a price is agreed upon by the seller and the (bogus) buyer, the man asks three men to lift the bag onto a waiting truck. The narrator describes the fag end of this gut-wrenching story of theft:

> *"Reaching the spot where Nasula had been selling the beans, he told her to wait there a bit longer.*
> *'Let me see if I can find some more beans like yours,' he said walking northward towards another part of the market.*
> *Nasula waited and waited and the man did not come. She became impatient and decided to follow him. She followed the passage along which he had walked, there was no sign of him. She walked down every passage where produce was sold in bulk, searching for him but in vain.*
> *She decided to go and wait for him by his car. The yellow car had gone.*
> *The nearby vendors confirmed her fears. It was clear that the man had cheated her out of her bag of beans."* (84)

A struggling woman who lives in reduced circumstances falls prey to a galling heist in broad daylight. This morally and physically debilitating mishap, beyond the mere fact that it vindicates Nalukwi's uncharitable judgment about townspeople, is a measure of the treacherousness of 'Pretending'. English twentieth-century Gilbert Ryle considers that the notion of pretending is that "*which is partly constitutive of such notions as those of cheating, acting a part, playing bears, shamming sick and hypochondria*" (234). So, hypocrisy and a blatant intent to deceive for pure self-serving ends are inscribed in the politics of pretending. Ryle underscores the lack of gravitas in pretending by calling it "*mock-performance*" (237). Although it is lacking in seriousness, pretending can yield adverse consequences, nay life-threatening ones. There is a two-pronged edge to Pretending, namely that one can pretend for fun or for harm[ix]. Doubtless,

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[ix] In his signal book, *The Concept of Mind*, Gilbert Ryle insightfully discusses the notion of pretending in Chapter VIII. After giving a pithy definition of pretending, he delves into a pretty much comprehensive analysis, highlighting its characteristics. He states that there is no such thing as one form of pretending. There are as many acts of pretending as pretenders. Similarly, Ryle stresses that pretenders are not always driven by identical motives or criteria: "*There are lots of different sorts of pretending, different motives and different criteria from which pretenses are assessed as skilful or unskillful. The child pretends for fun, the hypocrite for profit, the hypochondriac for morbid egotism, the spy, sometimes, from patriotism, the actor, sometimes, for art's sake, and the cooking instructress for demonstration purposes*" (237). Nalukwi's to advice to Nasula to push back on naivety and pretense are telling: "*Don't you remember me saying something about men who look decent and well-to-do but are something else, judging from they do to survive*?" (88). Thus, depending on the form of pretending, its purpose may be geared towards goodness or badness.

the pretender that blighted Nasula's hope for a happy end acted upon the latter purpose. Gode Silavwe, as his name goes, is a nasty piece of work that flouts the pricks of conscience that guide the likes of Nalukwi. He is part of that bunch who lives by their own wits in total disregard for the humanity in the other. Nasula broke up in tears right in the midst of Nasula's recount of what happened to her at the hands of Gode Silavwe. Nalukwi is both raw and emotional about the reasons why folks should befriend Nasula. Not only does she try and buoy her up, saying "*Nothing will come of tears. What has happened to you has already happened. Rise up and we'll go home*" (88) but she also stops at nothing to have lots of specifics about the heel, including his name, in preparation for legal action. After unavailingly doing the rounds of the market place in search of Gode Silavwe along with Nasula, Nalukwi advises her friend to return to the village. Even so, a rub no less stands in the way of her acting upon her friend's wise advice: she does not have the bus fare to go back home. True to form, Nalukwi manages to enlist the support of an old man, and vendor by trade at that. The introduction of this character in the narrative is significant as it is thanks to him that the name of the evildoer is known and that Nasula secures the transport money back to her village. The old man is another role model when it comes to compassion and selflessness:

> *"'I am a poor man myself. I need every coin I come across. But when I heard you say that you do not even have money for the journey back to the village, I thought of keeping all the little money I have raised from the beans I came with, and my heart became heavy. I understood what the spirits were saying to me. And so, while you were going round the market, I asked some people how much is needed for one to travel to Mbala. They told me it is anything from fifteen to somewhere nearing twenty thousand kwacha. So, I decided to give you this, mother of our children.'"* (94)

Binwell Sinyangue looks on humanity as a mixed bag made up of the lowest of the low and the jewel of the crown in terms of "loving-kindness". But while greed and hypocrisy as well as callousness somewhat strive to bring humanity down, friendship and solidarity attempt, in no small measure, to reveal its best. Witness, for instance, the portrayal of Nalukwi through the narrative. According to Martha Nussbaum, virtuous behaviour even plays out in the unlikeliest of circumstances: "*The world of the poor…is rich in love, friendship, and spirituality; it also contains orderly norms and a code of mutual aid. The poor people are never too stricken to take thought for the equal or greater needs of others*" (410). She goes on to make the emphatic contention that "*they* [the poor] *do not remove humanity, that the capacity for goodness remains when all else has been removed*" (409). Poverty and humanity are not mutually exclusive. In the world of *A Cowrie of Hope*, cowardly acts, lack of empathy define the actions of a callous bunch. On the other hand, courage and friendship serve to mitigate the searing suffering spawned by poverty, despair, disillusionment.

Nasula's personality rests on a three-tiered pillar: physical and moral courage, a huge sense of dignity, and an undimmed belief in the future of her daughter. The fact that she calls the latter "*a cowrie of hope*" says a mouthful. No matter how devastated she may be over her seemingly endless woes, she always takes things one day at a time and tries to make do. In the aftermath of the theft of her bag of beans, she snapped and hit the road bound for home. But as

if something beyond her ken advised her against home return, she asked to be dropped off halfway through the journey, only to travel back to Lusaka. Drawing a line under Gode Silawe is, indeed, anathema to her. Strangely enough, beyond her courage and friendship with Nalukwi, good luck factors into Nasula's ability to always pick herself from the floor and carry on. The happy outcome of the spat between her and the bus conductor is illustrative. When she insistently demands that the fare be given back to her, she is met with a stern refusal from the conductor, on the grounds that "*I cannot waste a seat for such a long distance*". Notwithstanding, she sticks to her guns, telling the conductor to his face "*If I had a way I would forget about the money, but I am a woman of no means and a big problem has afflicted me. I have no money to use apart from I paid you for this ticket*" (109). As things were about to come to a head, the driver stepped in, ordering the conductor to "*Give her back the money*" (110). It was then that she returned to Lusaka.

Nasula, it needs stressing, does not rely on hard luck story to extricate herself out of trouble. There is no emphasizing enough that unflagging courage is ammunition to her drive. When she came back to the Kamwala market in Lusaka, looking for Gode, she met another old man who, after having sympathized with her, gave her a counsel of despair, which she cleverly dismissed outright. (113-4). The old man's suggestion is predicated on the hard fact that Gode Silavwe is somewhat a household name as a crook who knows people in high places; and that trying to find him is a mug's game. Even though Nasula acknowledges that "*there was nothing she could do in her own defence*," she takes heart from "*the passion within her* [which] *drove her onward, and urged her to find the man who had stolen her bag of beans*" (115). Her strong belief that "*The pain of her loss called to her and she would rise to the call*" meant that she put herself into harm's way by physically confronting Gode Silavwe whom she eventually found after a week's search in Lusaka, during which she went through blood, sweat and tears (119, 120-1). Her chance face to face encounter with Gode next to an up-market shop, named Shoprite Checkers, reveals the depth of Nasula's courage:

> *"You will not go anywhere until you give me my bag of beans or the money for it,' she cried out. Then gripped by a sudden fit of madness, she stepped forward and threw herself at the man, grabbing both lapels of his jacket in her hands and burying her head in his belly and perfume. 'Give me my bag of beans or the money for it! Or you will have to kill me here and now.* (126)

Courage cuts across biological sexes. The praxis of Nasula debunks any notion of courage being the preserve of men. Similarly, her agency stamped with courage belies Levinas' position that suffering leads to passivity. The mere fact that she is prepared to pay the ultimate price to get reinstated in her rights proves that the end game of a courageous act sort of overrides the anxiety of death: "*…courage takes the anxiety of nonbeing into itself. Courage is self-affirmation 'in spite of', namely in spite of nonbeing*" (Tillich 66). The risk of death entailed in courage plays second fiddle to the ideal motive underpinning it. There are levels of suffering which compel the self to put itself on the line to the point of total annihilation if it helps alleviate the woes of existence.

That's why, for the sake of getting a better handle on the drive of Nasula, it might help to read it from an existentialist[x] perspective.

Just as the blows of fate keep bearing down on her, so is Nasula's determination to never let it go. She struggles to keep it together at moments due to a spate of back to back man-made disillusionments that seem to make a mockery of her strenuous effort to get there. The skewed handling of her case against Gode Silavwe adds to her sense of being subjected to never-ending suffering. Her physical encounter with Gode wraps up in a police station thanks to a twenty plus-year-old police officer who has witnessed the event. The narrator portrays the officer as "*a tough but good-natured young man you could depend on in a crisis*" (128). Unsurprisingly, his placatory attitude to Nasula soothed her anger a bit. At his urging, Nasula recounts to him what has happened. Thereupon he takes both of them to Lusaka Central Police Station. The narrator describes at the police station an atmosphere blunt with conspiratorial greetings between the senior officer at the "Enquiries desk" and Gode, as well as the lack of seriousness that attends the former's promise to handle the case (130). The prescient words of the man who advised the long-suffering woman against pursuing Gode literally hit home for her as she saw the protection that Gode enjoyed on the premises, and, perhaps more poignantly, witnessed first-hand the devastating pervasiveness of bribery in the country. As soon as she is done laying out meltingly her case against Gode, the police man in charge of the matter unfeelingly drops a bombshell on her:

> *"'I am sorry, madam. It will be difficult to help you. This man has denied ever seeing you before or having taken any bag of beans from anyone. I personally don't think he is the kind of man who would steal a bag of beans, and not from you. I think you are just mistaken.'* (131)

Reasonably, Nasula is caught off guard, and, quite unexpectedly, registers her puzzlement to the officer: "*I cannot understand this*" (131). His comeback is unequivocal: "*You can*

[x] Roughly speaking, Existentialism is a branch of philosophy that foregrounds action as a way of giving a meaning to one's life. In his seminal book, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, French-twentieth century, Jean-Paul Sartre (a leading apostle of Existentialism) adumbrates the bottom line of Existentialist philosophy. Sartre posits the non-existence of God. And states that in a world conspicuously characterized by the absence of a superior being, man is left to his own devices and should, therefore, enact agency in order to make something of himself (29). Existence is not an issue since it is a given. Instead, the unknown quantity is essence which man can only discover through action. Hence his famously witty submission that "*Existence precedes essence*", which he fleshes out as follows: "*What do we mean by existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world-and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself.*" (29). Man's path to full self-affirmation is through agency. As a consequence, debilitating postures like despair, fatalism, lamentation will lead you nowhere. Sartre's use of the terms "*encounters himself*" and "*surges up in the world*" point to not only the difficulties that man is up against in a world where there is no one to bail him out, but also the action that he should undertake with an eye towards weathering the woes of existence: "*Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills…Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism*" (29). Life on earth is not for the craven or the fatalist or for those who rely on others. Real existence, in Sartre's book, is only mediated by the goal that man sets himself in life, and his drive to fulfill them: "*man will only attain existence when he is what he purposes to be*" (29). Nasula's dogged effort at pushback against the travails of existence is geared towards a purpose, that is, "*her hope of salvation, which lay in her daughter's schooling*" (115)

go, madam." Flummoxed, the distraught woman is rooted to the spot. Just like that, Gode exits the office followed by the officer. What should Nasula see but "*Gode Silavwe, in the driver's seat of his car, give the police officer money in several notes and then drive off*" (131). An agonizingly disgusting example of backscratching at the expense of a poor woman who came seeking justice after being meted out to an unwarrantable wrong. It can be inferred therefrom that the police officer and Gode Silavwe used Nasula as a means to a subjective end[xi], viz., their own happiness. By so doing, they flouted a key tenet in Kantian moral philosophy, the categorical imperative[xii] that this eighteenth-century Germany thinker summarizes as follows: "*Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*" (37). Both the police man and his sidekick would not be seen dead in Nasula's shoes. Their action lacks moral worth due to the (nastily) selfish inclination that drives it.

Ultimately, Nasula's unwavering stance grows to pay off thanks to an umpteenth wildly courageous act. She went over the inspector's head to lay her case before the superintendent. The specifics of this dare-devil act, which oozes with ingenuity and stamina, are recounted from page 132 to 134. After a one-one-one with Nasula, Samson Luhila sends for the police officer. In the superintendent's office, the inspector gets the rough side of his superior's tongue over his continual dereliction of duty. As he made to explain why "*he had taken over the case instead of leaving it to the arresting officer*," Samson Luhila cut him short, with a shot across the bow: "*Things won't end so easily for you this time. I want Gode Silavwe here and now*" (138). No vehicle at the police station being free, the superintendent asks the inspector to use his own car (138). Gode Silavwe is grilled right in front of the inspector and Nasula. What marks off Samson Luhila from Inspector John is that the superintendent has a strong sense of what Schopenhauer calls *Official Honor* about which he pithily writes:

> "*Official honor demands, further, that the man who occupies an office must maintain respect for it, for the sake of both of his colleagues and of those who will come after him. This respect an official can maintain by a proper observance of his duties, and by repelling any attack that may be made*

[xi] Immanuel Kant distinguishes between subjective ends and objective ends. The former "*rest on incentives*" whereas the latter "*depend on motives that are valid for every rational being*" (45). In light of this typology, we can postulate that subjective ends carry undertones of negativity whilst objective ones have a positive edge. If anything, Kant tells incentive from motive: "*the subjective ground of desire is the incentive, the objective ground of volition is the motive*" (45). Interestingly, Kant blames foursquare the use of a rational being as a means. The pricelessness of human life means that it has a dignity: "*What has a price is such that something else can be put in its place as its equivalent; by contrast, that which is elevated above all price, has a dignity*" (52). That is why Kant says that the human being is not a thing and should not, under any circumstances, regarded or used as such. Rather, it is an *end in itself* (47).

[xii] Basically, Immanuel Kant shapes his narrative on morality around two kinds of imperatives: categorical and hypothetical. Key to his thinking is that the moral worth of an action all depends upon the ground on which it is carried out. If the action has a shade of an inclination, it nullifies it as a moral action. Here's how he defines the two imperatives: "*All imperatives command either hypothetically or categorically. The former represents the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to attain something else which one wills (or which it is possible that one might will). The categorical imperative would that one which represented an action as objectively necessary for itself, without any reference to another end*" (31). He goes on to emphasize that only rational beings are worthy of the benefits of the categorical imperative (46). In the world of *A Cowrie of Hope*, Nalukwi can be said to act upon the categorical imperative as her action is not driven by any inclination other than the end in itself that Nasula represents as a human being.

> *upon the office itself or upon its occupant: he must not, for instance, pass over unheeded any statement to the effect that the duties of the office are not properly discharged, or that the office itself does not conduce to the public welfare. He must prove the unwarrantable nature of such attacks by enforcing the legal penalty for them."* (58-9)

In light of the foregoing, we can rightly argue that Samson Luhila has raised to the dignity of his office unlike the inspector whose dereliction of duty is tantamount to an onslaught on the institution that the police epitomizes. Samson Luhila's welcoming attitude to Nasula is in sharp counterpoint to Inspector John's uninviting gesture. In any event, the superintendent set an example as he saw to it that both culprits faced the music. He ordered that Gode "be locked up" after having forced him to pay back what he owed to Nasula, not to mention damages, to wit, one hundred and fifty thousand *kwacha* (140-141). Inspector John reaches the ultimate in humiliation when the superintendent makes him read papers containing his penalty: "'*Read what's there carefully,' he said as a medicine man about to disempower a witch. 'I have suspended you, while the charges against you are investigated, and you are on suspension starting from now*" (143).

Deserving elaboration is the fact that Samson Luhila inwardly kicks himself for humiliating the inspector in the presence of Nasula, thereby displaying again his sense of Official Honor. He lets her go. But before going out the woman gives him a shout-out that speaks to the depth of her indebtedness: "*You have saved me and my daughter. We are poor people with nowhere to clap a hand. May the gods and the spirits continue lighting the path for you in your work and wherever you go*" (144). Thereupon, she goes to the market, does some purchases (second-hand dress, shoes, cum a mattress) and then gets on a bus back home. She felt huge as "*Sula jumped on a bus for her journey to Kasama for St Theresa Secondary School*" (149). Samson Luhila reveals himself to be a knight in shining armor.

The happy outcome of Nasula's heart-rending story is a tribute to courage and friendship. Every human being has an innate capacity to face up to the ravages of Evil. But tapping into that capacity to achieve *self-actualization* requires inter alia unflagging courage. The world that is rejected is that of the likes of Inspector John, Gode and Papula. They epitomize humanity's worst. Rather than role models like Nalukwi, they are a drag on human progress towards betterment.

In the final analysis, *A Cowrie of Hope* is a novel that is a primer on what it means to suffer and what it feels like enjoying friendship. Man-made or natural pain and suffering go with the territory of existence. Granted. But the best way to prevent Evil from prevailing is to refuse to succumb to the sirens of despair and fatalism, and, instead, embrace human virtues of courage and friendship. The tug of war between Evil and Good is a zero sum game. So, humanity's future is at stake. The victory of the former over the latter will sound the death knell of mankind. Hence the driving necessity for unrelenting pushback through agency. Nasula and Nalukwi have beautifully demonstrated, indeed, that no matter the depth of the devastating powers of Evil, human agency can effect positive change; whereas the praxis of the likes of Gode does not bear copying as it not only reflects humanity's worst but it also jeopardizes progress towards a better world. In *A Cowrie of Hope*, notwithstanding the pervasiveness of Evil, Good prevails through a firm belief in the ties of friendship and the redemptive power of courage.

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