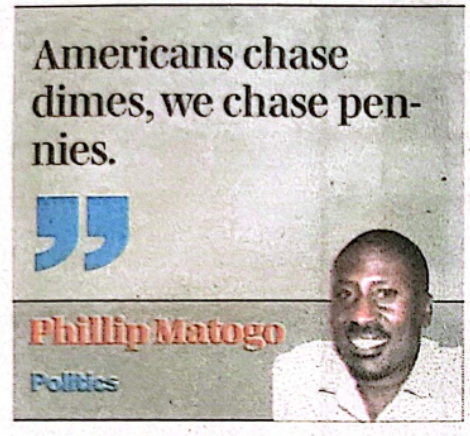
Should we thrive or survive?

I was reading an online article which made these words its focus: "Not by possessing much, but by commanding one's values, does a man become truly wealthy" These words belong to Friedrich Nietzsche, the 19th-century German philosopher whose work reshaped modern views on "self, society, and personal power." The Economic Times News article allowed Nietzsche's words to throw into sharper relief a telling pattern: "In 2024," the article read, "the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the average American household earned more than $78,000 a year. Yet surveys by Gallup show fewer than 34% of U.S. workers describe themselves as "thriving" in life. The data reveals a sharp contradiction. Income is rising. Satisfaction is not. This gap explains why Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of wealth feels more relevant today than ever before. Corporate America is undergoing a measurable shift. According to PwC's 2024 Trust Survey, 87% of employees say they are more likely to stay with organizations whose leadership reflects clear ethical values. Pay matters. Purpose matters more."

If we apply this reality to Uganda, we will find a slight difference. Yes, purpose is important to Ugandans. Our values majorly shape our moral conduct and conduct of thought. Indeed, we believe in fairness, honesty, fidelity, hard work, talent and conscientiousness.

However, Karl Marx, observing similar circumstances, argued that the values, beliefs, culture, and ideas of a society (the "superstructure") are shaped by its material conditions.



Accordingly, Americans may have reached a higher rung on the ladder to material civilization, so their priorities are different. Ugandans are Third World-poor; this expression is self-evident and requires not the supporting litany of statistics to prove we are hollow-pocketed.

Americans chase dimes, we chase pennies. As a consequence, an entirely different set of values have usurped our values to reflect a survivalist ethic. This is a moral framework or philosophy that prioritizes the continuation of life—both individual and collective—as the foundational, and often supreme, value. It argues that because all other moral values or human endeavors (such as justice, creativity, or happiness) are impossible without life, ensuring survival is the primary, necessary precondition for all ethics.

Granted, all humans live and die by this ethic. But it is more pronounced in societies where survival is an end, not a means to a better life. That's why the survival ethic in Uganda often precludes other values we otherwise hold dear.

Although, to be clear, our survivalist ethic can coexist with our ethical values. However, the latter will be inert. That is why Ugandans can identify unethical leadership, but choose to do nothing about it because it might affect their "survival".

Yet if we allowed our ethical values to determine our actions to the extent that we endure, thrive, and contribute to the world despite enduring decades of poverty, we could impose better standards on our leaders. In turn, their politics will reflect purpose over prosperity in the short run.

Hence, we are presented with two options: wait for the economy to improve so that our ethical values return when we are less financially embarrassed. Alternately, we can choose to ensure our ethical values are equal to our efforts, regardless of the social or economic cost in the short run.

It is really a "now or never" proposition in the sense that now is the only time we have any control over. It is only now we can sit down and mend our situation. To some, I am sure, this sounds alarmist. But if we can command divisions to "keep the peace", we must be able to command our values to make meaningful that peace.

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