Preface

Man seeks to know not only the external things but also the reality of his own self — the reality intricately knitted together through infinite threads of values and facts. Up until recently philosophers subsumed value under the subject of ‘being’ without realizing its difference from the latter, or measuring both with the same yardstick. The Ionians in the 6th century B.C. asked themselves as to what was the ultimate principle or arche of reality. In their attempt to discover the primordial substances out of which all multiplicities of things emerged they identified particular objects such as water, apeiron or air. The outer world, then, is the first theme of philosophic research. The subsequent philosophers contemplated that besides this world, there existed another world which is of equal or greater significance - an ideal world, so to speak.

The world of humanity gained significant attention of philosophical discourse for the first time in the history of western philosophy in Socrates’ critical endeavour. Socrates had stronger interest in the questions of man and his mind than in the knowledge of the physical world. In all the conversations he held with his fellow Athenians the dominant topic was the moral ideals and virtues. He critically engaged people with the questions of right and wrong, good and bad. In the true sense of the word, it was Socrates who ignited the study of moral values. Since then quite a good number of thinkers reviewed morality in various ways.

Generally in value and particularly in moral value people search for the validity, meaning and taste of their own life and place. The moment a person asks himself, ‘Who am I?’, we understand that he is primarily concerned with the search of his value that goes into his identity, – the value that shapes, develops and guides his personality and places him somewhere in the given social settings and cosmic order. Values, therefore, are as important as this, in making the personality of the humans. However until recently they had not been studied as self-contained subjects despite the continuous search that people have been making in them. Indeed in the modern world values constitute a new theme in philosophy. Axiology, the branch of philosophy which studies values took its first step in the second half of the 19th century. But humans have not still studied and developed it as much as they have done facts.

Research on values is a daunting task to venture into. It cannot be calculated or quantified. Yet it is the essential feature of human reality that ought to be explored. Moral
value that pervades almost all human actions and behaviours is even more daunting to study than to do other forms of value because of its complexity that emanates from the intricate nature of human beings, their relationships and mental states. Although we were very much aware about the intricacies of the subject we convinced ourselves that the indigenous moral value of the Oromo society should be studied. The qualitative data of such research are of anthropological, sociological, historical, linguistic, political and religious in nature. It goes across almost all aspects of life and fields of study. Despite the formidable problems to be faced it must be started from somewhere by someone.

Apparently it is unusual to undertake research of philosophical nature on the kinds of data mentioned above. In this sense, this thesis makes a slight shift from the conventional philosophical analysis of concept to the analysis of data reflecting the empirical realities of people. The basic motif of such shift is to use the rich analytical method of philosophy to develop genuine knowledge of the human self. Although undertaking a research of this nature is wearisome to the researchers we believe that it is a rewarding intellectual endeavour at the end of the day since the humanity of humans lies more in the reality of the commonplace than it does in the transcendence.

It would have been easier to write this thesis on one or the other philosophical tradition, theory or a philosophical piece of work of a certain philosopher than taking the traditional moral value of a certain society. But a number of reasons inspired us to study the traditional moral values of the Oromo of Ethiopia. One, it is largely about the unexplored, unknown or unexamined life of people. Two, it is about our own-selves (who or what we are) or the reality of man. Three, the subject provokes the interest of search into what is there in the storehouse of the values of traditional societies. Four, there is a necessity of bringing the treasure of philosophy to the objective reality of man.

The tragic folly of human kind arises mainly from its failure to critically examine itself. With hazy eyes, blurred vision and unclear mind to oneself the possibility of creating a better society is certainly uncertain. There is no more chronic challenge to humans than the ignorance of the self. Many of the atrocities that humanity unfortunately experienced are the results of lack of self-knowledge. We suppose the Ethiopians, of whom Oromo is one, share this predicament. The confinement of human cognition merely to the knowledge of external things cannot make human life comfortable. Knowing what and who we are internally is equally important since it is the knowledge of how brilliant or
foolish, strong or weak, good or bad, right or wrong we were and we are. Human goodness develops only when it is possible to shun vices.

Although they do not commonly seem to have significant role, we think that traditional moral values have tremendous impact in making who and what we are. Even if they do not have positive role to play certainly they have negative impact to impose. This is what makes their investigation a necessity. Traditional moral values can be studied by different disciplines. But still deep philosophical reflection is required for the acquisition of its profound and comprehensive knowledge. The complexity of the subject necessitates deep philosophical analysis and synthesis.

We started this research with very fragmented, unconnected and scanty information of the subject. But we can presumably say that at the end, we came up relatively with the modest knowledge of it. We confess that the output of this research is very far from being exhaustive. We are also certain that it is something. Not any kind of something but something informative and triggering. It could be a point of departure for anyone who opts for the next venture as he/she would not be forced to start from the scratch - in so far as there is something already said and done about the subject. One important thing we discovered in the entire course of the research is that the traditional moral values of the Oromo society is the subject that can in-exhaustively be studied. The more one knows it the deeper he understands that he needs to know it more.