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Kantian Ethics in an African Perspective: Implications for Professionals in Zimbabwe.

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to examine Kantian ethics and Afrocentric ethics in an attempt to show how the two perspectives can contribute towards the realization of ethical and responsible professionals in Zimbabwe. This paper is arguing that it is not more prisons and stiffer prison-terms that is called for to curb this menace but rather a particular ethic among our professionals. A number of explanations such as economic reasons have been advanced for this kind of behavior by our professionals. Notwithstanding these reasons this paper is hypothesizing that this type of behavior by professionals point to an absence of some ethical dimension in their professional training. This paper is arguing not for any ethics, for indeed there already exists some, but for Afro-Kantian ethics as a possible way of realizing responsible and ethical professionals in our society-professionals who will be able to balance the 'external good' versus 'internal goods' equation. This paper is one of the noble ways of contributing towards national efforts geared towards curbing this menace that has almost reached crisis proportions.

INTRODUCTION

"Some authors suggest that, in contrast to the spirit of altruism or service commonly attributed to professional status, professionals are becoming exploiters rather than enablers in society as they expend more effort in seeking rewards rather than in expending services" (Stark, et. al, 1986 : 62).

This paper draws its interest from the concern raised above by Reeck (1982) in Stark et. al. (1986) concerning the behavior of professionals in executing their various professional duties and obligations which seems to be standing in direct conflict with what
can be regarded as the ideal. The concern that is being raised above is that whereas professionals are expected by society to be altruistic in their various professions they are now constantly being found to be exploiters rather than enablers to society. Thus, they are now spending more time seeking rewards rather than rendering service to society. These exploitative tendencies raised above are also evident in our society through professionals who are involved in all forms of unprofessional and unscrupulous behaviors that include cheating, bribery, theft, corruption, misuse and abuse of power and privilege. These crimes by the professionals have come to be known as 'white-collar' crimes or 'crimes of the educated' to distinguish them from other forms of crime. This reference to them in this way seems to be intended to vindicate and camouflage the gravity of the crime. What seems clear in all these crimes is that the professionals are motivated by self-interest to exploit the clients to their own advantage. Admittedly, this has become a great concern for society that depends on these professionals for expert service. Accordingly, society is becoming suspicious of the services rendered by these professionals.

A solution to this menace has to be found before the problem gets out of proportion. As a sign of acknowledgement of the problem, the government has established a particular ministry - The Ministry of Anti-Corruption and Anti-Monopolies to try to combat this problem. We are yet to see the results of this ministry. However, this paper, in an effort to complement government efforts in this regard is proposing that professionals be exposed to Afro-Kantian ethics in their various professional training. In other words Afro-Kantian ethics informed by hunhu/ubuntu should be the basis of all professional ethics in Zimbabwe. This paper is not claiming that presently professionals have no code of ethics that inform their professional practice. Far from it,

this paper is however, questioning "such codes of ethics or codes of practice adopted by professional bodies which, in some instances appear more concerned with protecting practitioners against legitimate claims for accountability to clients and to control relationships among practitioners themselves rather than to give the edge to
clients in the client-practitioner-relationship (Holy, et al., 1995: 8). It can be argued that these codes of ethics seem to be designed to exploit the client as they appear to be informed by affective neutrality that is the tendency by professionals to treat clients as 'objects'. This view was also corroborated by Holyle,(1995) who contends that affective neutrality distances the professional from the client and limits the opportunity for the client to engage in a dialogue with practitioners or to call to question their professional practice. The erroneous assumption by the professionals being that the client is ignorant and it is on the basis of this assumption that professionals are found exploiting clients and yet we are persuaded to contend with Freire (1973: 119) when he argues that "no one can know everything, just as no one can be ignorant of everything". The assumption informing this paper is that if professionals' code of ethics is founded on Afro-Kantian ethics then our society can hope to have responsible and ethical professionals in Zimbabwe- professionals who are not motivated by a desire to make money exclusively but rather and more importantly a desire to render service to society and not to exploit it.

THE NATURE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

It is necessary to first examine the terms 'profession' and 'ethics' as these two terms are crucial to an understanding of the term, professional ethics, a concept that is at the centre of this discussion. Many definitions of the term, profession, can be advanced but none can claim to be exhaustive because of its popularity and hence the high likelihood of distortions. However, in an attempt to examine the term, certain features have been generally and widely accepted that they can provide some general idea of what the term means. To a very large extent, a profession is viewed as an 'occupation' characterized by three or four common features namely; extensive training, a significant intellectual component to practice, the provision of an important service and credentialing from an institution of some repute (Bayles, 1991). Thus for an occupation to be regarded as a profession it should have the above features. In light of the
above the following submissions must be made with respect to the term, profession- firstly in as much as a profession is an occupation, not every occupation qualifies to be a profession for the particular occupation might not be beneficial to society. However, those that meet the above conditions are referred to as 'genuine' or 'traditional' professions. It must be submitted that there are indeed other occupations that, though they might fail to meet the above criterion, they are nonetheless and should be regarded as such due to current developments surrounding the idea of profession. For instance, currently we now have other occupations that have come to be regarded as professions but which do not quite meet the criterion outlined above and which previously were not regarded as professions.

These developments have led to the creation of other classifications of the term such as 'pseudo-profession', 'semi-profession and 'quasi-profession'. Notwithstanding these variations, these occupations should be united by one purpose, namely, to serve society and not exploit it. In other words, whether one is a member of a genuine profession, a pseudo, quasi- or semi- profession everyone is bound by the same obligation i.e. to serve society. This has further implications for our developing and liberal economy which is experiencing a boom in many service occupations through the influence and impact of the 'Ministry of Small to Medium Enterprises'. This particular ministry is creating a lot of professionals who though they may not satisfy Boyle's criteria, are nonetheless offering genuine services to society and contributing greatly to our national economy. In fact statistics show that this sector is employing more than 60% of our employable citizens and the other 40% being employed by the so-called genuine professions. These, we are saying in view of the role they are playing in our economy and national development should qualify to be called 'professionals'. In view of the preceding, what the paper is arguing especially within the Zimbabwean context is that we have both 'traditional' and 'up-coming' professions and professionals and both have significant roles to play within the economy and to national development.
However, it has been observed that these professionals in most of the times have a tendency of being ‘exploiters’ rather than being ‘enablers’ to society (Stark, et. al, 1986). In other words, professionals have been found not to be executing their professions according to expectations. Following these realizations regulations or codes of behavior or codes of ethics had to be put in place to monitor or regulate their professional practices so that their various clients benefit from their professional practices and expertise. Not to imply that all professionals are way-wand, indeed there are others in the minority though, who execute their professional duties very well. Thus, these codes of ethics or norms of behavior constitute what is called ‘professional ethics’. Professional ethics therefore refers to codes of behavior, codes of ethics, laid down system of norms to be followed by the respective professionals in executing their professional duties and obligations to their clients and to society at large. Admitted, professions are different and so are their codes of behaviors, however in those differences they are united by one thing namely, ‘rendering service’ to society. Service to society has to be rendered differently because of differences in professionalisms. In view of the prevalence of new professions, it must be admitted that certain professions may not have articulated codes of ethics, in spite of that the overall ethic which should inform their practices should be service to society in a socially acceptable manner.

From the preceding discussion the following submissions can be made namely, that a profession is an occupation, the aim of which should be to render service to society, secondly in Zimbabwe there are two types of professions and professionals, notably those who have been to formal colleges and universities and those who have come through the informal way. Both however have the same obligation i.e. to render service to society, thirdly to curtail malpractice and for the various clients to benefit, both professions and professionals either have or should have some professional ethics or codes of behavior.

Accordingly, whether one is a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, a scientist, an engineer, an economist or one is a ‘kombi’ driver, a ‘windi’, a ‘mahobho’, a ‘scania’, a carpenter in Siyaso, all these are
engaged in some professions and are accordingly offering some service to their clients at different times of need, they are therefore professionals. Precisely because they are professionals, they should offer their services professionally and to ensure that they do so professionally, all should have some professional ethics to guide and to regulate their interactions with their clients so that both parties benefit. Above all, everyone irregardless of 'one's occupation / profession should be guided by one principle, namely, to serve society within the context of his/her occupation/profession.

KANTIAN ETHICS WITHIN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT.

Immanuel Kant in arguing for a basic moral principle upon which human behavior can be judged as either right or wrong, rejected other moral principles that had been proposed such as utilitarianism and intuitionism. In place of these two, he proposed what he called the categorical imperative which has come widely to accepted as the basic moral principle upon which all human conduct can be judged.

This must be distinguished from the hypothetical imperative as a basic moral principle. The hypothetical imperative is conditional and it says 'Do X if you want Y' or 'You ought to do X if you want Y'. For instance a teacher acting according to the hypothetical imperative would only teach if he wants promotion into the next salary grade or because he wants a bonus at the end of the year. Similarly, a nurse would only perform her / his nursing duties because he/she wants a salary at the end of the month. The implications from the above cases being that if one does not care less about promotion or salaries then one would not care to come for work. Admittedly, this cannot be a sound moral principle for human behavior for it is highly subjective and therefore not binding. Incidentally, most of our professionals seem to be operating according to this imperative as some work only when superiors are around or when there is immediate benefit to themselves and not to the client. In view of the weaknesses of the hypothetical imperative as a universal moral
principle, Kant went on to propose the categorical imperative which has however been widely accepted as a basic moral for judging human behavior and conduct. Kant’s categorical imperative can be reduced to three formulations namely:

(i) act as if you were legislating for everyone
(ii) act so as to treat human beings always as **ends** and never **merely as means**
(iii) act as if you were a member of a realm of ends (Raphael, 1981).

The first prescription guards people especially those in positions of authority against partiality and favoritism when making decisions that affect others directly or always to act behind a ‘veil of ignorance’. Thus, before one makes a decision that affects others one should always pause to ask himself/herself the question ‘What would happen if everyone else acted like me or how would I feel if such a decision was to be taken on my behalf?’ Kant further puts the above aptly when he says always ‘act like you were laying down a universal law’. In other words, whatever law or decision one makes imagine that the decision or law was to apply to you or to your loved ones. This second prescription entreats people to have serious regard for the desires, wishes and interests of others. It further guards people against exploitative and selfish tendencies by not realizing that other people do have ends which they wish to fulfill. The third prescription which is a somewhat fusion of the first two advocates for equality amongst all people. It assumes that all human beings are capable of making moral decisions for they are all moral beings. However, the fact that others appear rather unable to make decisions while others can is purely circumstantial. Accordingly those in positions of advantage should not think that they are in anywhere better or superior to the rest.

Kant’s categorical imperative has some compatibility with the Golden Rule of Biblical ethics which says: ‘Do unto others as you would they do unto you or act lovingly towards your brother as you would towards yourself’. This rule like Kantian categorical imperative
guards against possible exploitation of people by others who might treat them as 'mere means' without due regard to their 'ends' as people too. Thus, he advocates for the treatment of other people as ends meaning “acting towards their purposes (ends, choices, wishes) as you naturally towards your own.” (Raphael, 1981: 59). In other words one should try to effect or make realizable other people's ends, hopes and ends as you would yours. Further, it means appreciating that other people too have got wishes, desires and ends which they wish to fulfill.

From the preceding some affinity between the Golden Rule and Kantian categorical imperative can be discerned and the same closeness can be identified between the categorical imperative and Afrocentric ethics. Whereas the categorical imperative seems to revolve around the person, the same is true for Afrocentric ethics summed up in the notion of ‘hunhu/ubuntu’. Whereas a moral act or moral person in the Kantian ethics is defined according to the categorical imperative, in the African context a moral act or moral persons is judged on whether or not the person has ‘hunhu/ubunhu’ or “zvaaita zvacho zvine hunhu here kana kuti kwete”. It is interesting to note that African ethics seem to go beyond Kantian ethics. Whereas Kantian ethics and other Western moral theories seem to emphasize the act as being moral or not, African ethics is not only interested in the act but even in the actor as well, for according to African ethics it is possible for the morality of an act to be made immoral by the actor.

In African ethics one cannot distance or choose to ignore the actor from the action or vice-versa whereas in Kantian ethics whose ‘womb’ is western ethics, it is possible and even conceivable to concentrate on an act and proceed to judge it without too much regard to the ‘manner and spirit’ in which the act was done. In the African context a moral act or moral person is evaluated on the basis of whether or not he / she has hunhu/ubuntu or zvaaita zvacho zvine hunhu here kana kuti kwete. No wonder why even some of the so-called moral westerners especially of the missionary persuasion who
lived and worked among African communities, where never quite accepted into the African communities as 'vanhu chaivo vane hunhu' in spite of them doing or being engaged in wonderful moral activities for the community or in spite of their physiological similarities apart from differences in pigmentation. The same is also true for some Africans who have lived abroad for all their lifetimes, no matter how sophisticated and knowledgeable they may be in western customs and culture, they may never be accepted as 'whites'. They may be very moral according to western standards but may not be regarded as such from an African 'hunhu/ubuntuist perspective. If the preceding can be maintained, it can be argued that morality/tsika/ hunhu/ubuntu from an African perspective is more than simply a product of empathy or imaginative sympathy or an act done in that context for one can have or display imaginative sympathy 'asi iye asina hunhu'. A moral act or moral persons in the African context, is not only defined by what has been done but rather and equally important how that act has been done, for 'hunhu' goes beyond the moral act that has done to include the manner and spirit in which the act has been done. Put in other words, hunhu/ubuntu is concerned with the whole being of the person as it permeates into the whole life of the person, guiding, controlling, refining and defining the individual.

From the preceding discussion it can be submitted that African ethics understood in the context of 'hunhu/ ubuntu' extends beyond the imperatives of the Kantian ethics. Thus an ethic informed by the two perspectives is likely to be richer and relevant resulting in agents who are more moral, responsible and acceptable within an African context. In addition and very importantly, the two perspectives have the merit of alerting professionals that in spite of the inevitable differences in their professions, they are in fact united by the same commitment to offer a service to the same client notably society. The services could be different as indeed they should be, but this rather than separate them should in fact unite them towards the realization of this commitment. These two perspectives above all, enjoins professionals in their varied professional practices informed by specific codes of ethics related to the particular professional
practice, never to treat clients/society as 'mere means' (thus exploiting them) and to execute their professions in a manner consistent with hunhu/ubuntu.

IMPLICATIONS OF AFRO-KANTIAN ETHICS FOR PROFESSIONALS IN ZIMBABWE

Afro-Kantian ethics have significant implications for professionals in Zimbabwe especially in view of the submissions made earlier on in our introduction as well as in our examination of the term 'profession' and 'professional' where two notions of the term were submitted namely the 'strict/narrower/traditional sense and the 'loose'/wider/inclusive notions. Thus in drawing the implications, reference shall be made to both views for both are playing a crucial role in servicing the various needs of the Zimbabwean society. All professionals need a professional code of ethics informed by both Kantian and Afrocentric ethics for the professionals to have relevance and acceptability within the Zimbabwean context. What this means is that their practices must have codes of conduct informed by the categorical imperative rooted in 'hunhu/ubuntu'.

Professionals must avoid partiality, favoritism, nepotism and above all corruption now rampant in our society. Thus, before making decisions professionals should ask themselves whether they would not mind everyone else behaving similarly. For instance before a company executive, college principal, school headmaster, company recruiting officer demands a bribe from prospective applicants and candidates he/she should ask himself/herself whether he/she would not mind if his/her son/daughter/loved one was similarly treated. Thus, what is being argued for is that professionals in their daily operations should act as if they were legislating for everyone including their close relatives. Differences only arise on the nature of the service to be rendered to society. A doctor renders his/her service health-wise, a lawyer-legal wise, a bus driver-transport wise while a soldier and police officer, security wise. Thus, whoever is a professional is expected to serve society in a specific manner without and not to exploit society. Accordingly, every
professional should be aware of both the general and specific obligations of his / her profession and should respond to them without exception or loved conditions. Secondly, professionals should in their various professions / act so as to treat human beings always as ends and never as mere means. In life we often treat other people as means to our ends and we in turn are also treated as means to other people’s ends for it is impossible for anyone to be self-sufficient as to rely entirely on oneself (Shutte, 1994). For instance, myself as a university lecturer in this university, I am being as means to the university's ends of providing an education to its students as I lecture to them, while on the other hand I am also using the university as means to my ends - my ends being the desire for a salary in order to also meet my needs and ends. So, it would appear like we are always treating each other as means and it is inevitable. In fact that is the situation with any other professional be he / she be employed or self – employed. Accordingly, there is nothing wrong or immoral in treating other people as means for that is the order of life and seems inevitable. What is wrong and therefore immoral however, is to treat other people as mere means or merely as means to our ends and not as ends in themselves. To treat someone as means or merely as means is to have no regard for the interests, wishes, goals, aspirations and needs of the other person. It is to have concern with your interests and needs and not the needs and interests of the other person – in short it is to exploit the other person.

Professionals behave in this manner quite often, consciously or otherwise. When professionals employ workers and later refuse to pay them their salaries as per agreement, or when they do pay, the wages are so low that they cannot sustain or meet the worker's needs, they are consciously or unconsciously demonstrating this behavior. What they are saying is that the needs and aspirations of the worker / employee are inconsequential, what is of consequence to themselves is the service they should get from the employee. That the worker has needs like children who should be fed and provided for like theirs (the employers')
is irrelevant. In fact the employer would be more than happy if the worker could just offer his / her service without asking for a salary. This is not only being unprofessional but this is immoral and unjustifiable. The reverse is also true for employees who demand salaries and wages for services and wages they have not rendered, in so doing they too are showing no regard for the interests of the employer. In either instance they are treating each other as mere means or merely as means. The recommended or ideal situation is to treat others as ends in themselves, that is to act towards the other’s purposes and needs as you would naturally do towards yours. For instance, if you engage a domestic worker to look after your child while you are at work, you ought to pay him / her for the services. By so doing you are acting in recognition and respect of both his / her and your needs as well. The domestic worker needs money to make his / her ends meet in as much as you need his / her services to care for your child while you are at work in order to get a salary so that you can also make your ends meet. By giving the domestic worker his / her salary timeously you are treating him / her as ‘an end’ as well as ‘a means’ to your ends and that is justifiable and moral. In view of the preceding discourse, what is being argued for is that professionals in their generality should never regard as merely means to making money and more money, but rather they should treat their clients as ends in themselves.

The third implication of Kantian ethics to professionals is that professionals should ‘act like they are members of a realm of ends’. The idea being that professionals should act as if they were members of a community of persons, all of whom are equal and competent to make decisions. The only advantage professionals have over their clients is training for some, experience for others and a bit of both for a few. Professionals should realize that in as much as the clients benefit from their expertise and experience they too stand to gain a lot if only they humble themselves and learn to listen to their clients and not only to hear them. Accordingly no one is more important than the other and consequently there is no need for the professionals to assume some complex of superiority over
their clients for they need each other hence there is need for mutual respect between the two.

What is being proposed overall, is that Kantian ethics have a potential of changing and improving the whole face of professionalism in Zimbabwe. Professional practice informed by Kantian ethics has the potential of changing the way professionals view their roles vis-a-vis their respective clients and society at large. The thinking being that professionals will desist from treating not only their clients as *mere means* but even their employers in the case of those employed.

**CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The Zimbabwean economy has been liberalized and with this liberalization many players have been taken aboard and are contributing meaningfully into the economy. With this liberalization came also the liberalization of perceptions and assumptions of reality. Accordingly, players who yesteryear were on the fringes of the economy because they were not ‘professionals’, have now been given central and key roles in national economic development. Thus, liberalization of perceptions and assumptions has resulted in the creation of another class of vibrant professionals through the creation of the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises. Most of these ‘new players’ might lack the requisite training and professionalism in their various enterprises and yet they are providing an essential service to society. Issues raised in this paper were intended to address both both are accountable and have an obligation to society. To both of these professionals this paper is arguing that their practice must be informed by a professional ethic that creates a consciousness in professionals that it is not sound business practice or professional practice if one treats clients as ‘mere means’, or if one pursues ‘external’ goods at the expense of
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'internal' goods for any obsession with concern for material benefits militates against concern for service (Treston, 1995).

In pursuit of such an ethic this paper was arguing for Afro- Kantian ethics as a possible solution in efforts towards curbing the problem of rampant unprofessionalism in both the public and private sectors of the Zimbabwean economy. It is not being suggested that this particular ethic will be the panacea to this problem overnight. Far from it, for theory does not automatically translate into practice and secondly there could be other forces and factors impinging on the behavior and practice by the professionals. What is being suggested is an inclusion of this ethic in the professional preparation and training programmes of prospective professionals so that in the end, our society can boast of doctors, teachers, domestic workers, 'mawindi', 'mahobhos', musicians, tuck-shop owners and operators, soldiers and police officers, 'kombi' owners and 'kombi' drivers, etc, vane hunhu and are capable of balancing the pursuit of external goods and the pursuit of internal goods. Thus financial resources must be made available for workshops to be organized and conducted country-wide where everyone who is in service provision sector is invited to attend and where the Afro- Kantian ethic is explained and emphasized as a foundational guiding ethic in any professional practice in Zimbabwe.

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