

KANT'S DEONTOLOGY AS A CRITIQUE OF AFRICA'S IDEOLOGICAL AMBIGUITY

Michael George KIZITO¹

INTRODUCTION

Immanuel Kant is one of the most prominent thinkers of the 18th century whose philosophy has remained universally relevant in contemporary times. A number of African thinkers have labeled Kant as a despicable racist hence ignoring the broad spectrum of his ethics, epistemology and metaphysics. Kant's racist utterances against Black people and other non-white persons are just unfortunate specs in his philosophy. The racism espoused by Kant "is a regrettable and appalling fact that lies at the periphery of philosophy" and hence ought to be "isolated from the core of his critical philosophy" (Kleingeld 2007: 582).

Although philosophers are expected to be conscientious objectors with the ability to rise against the prejudices of their societies, a plethora of these thinkers have turned out to be ideologues of the epoch. For instance, Plato's defence of Aristocracy in his political philosophy has been associated with his *locus standi* as an Aristocrat. In his *magnum opus, Truth and Method* (2013), Gadamer argues that our ideas are a product of cultural biases and prejudices. Although his philosophical hermeneutics has been criticized by critical hermeneutists like Jürgen Habermas for propagating relativism, Gadamer's insights demonstrate the difficulty in breaking free from the cultural biases of one's society.

Kant is a typical example of a great thinker who failed to break through the cultural horizon of racism that was characteristic of 18th century Europe. Like Kant, a number of African Philosophers who subscribe to Ubuntu philosophy have adamantly refused to

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acknowledge the sexism and discrimination espoused by this philosophy. Ubuntu philosophy espouses patriarchal and androcentric perspectives on African society. It winks on as women are subjected to gender injustices, such as widow inheritance, denial of certain foods and denial of the right to property inheritance.

The sexism of African Ubuntu philosophers is as evil as Kant's racism. This sexism however is caused by the failure to rise beyond tradition and social prejudices. Analogous to African Ubuntu philosophers, Kant was also a sexist. He articulates most of his sexist views in his work *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764).

Pauline Kleingeld (2019:3) argues that:

Immanuel Kant is known as an ardent defender of the moral equality and inviolable dignity of all humans. Yet he also contended that men are naturally superior to women and—for much of his life—that “whites” are naturally superior to other “races.” Sexism and racism were endemic features of the Western philosophical discourse of his era and of the belief systems, social practices, and political institutions that form the historical context of this discourse.

Kleingeld astutely surmises that Kant:

... is one of the greatest philosophers of all time, he was able to break with received opinions on many other issues, and he formulated egalitarian moral principles that he claimed to be valid for all human beings—and indeed more broadly still, for all rational beings. Yet he long defended European colonial rule over the rest of the world and the enslavement, by “whites,” of those he racialized as being “yellow,” “black,” “copper-red,” and “mixed”- race. Late in life, around his 70th birthday, Kant dropped the thesis of racial hierarchy and began to criticize European colonialism, but he never made parallel revisions to his account of the status of women (2019:3).

This paper argues that although Kant's racism and sexism should be condemned, this should not lead us into a total disregard of the applicability of his universalist philosophy to Africa. The paper therefore advocates for a Kantian Copernican revolution in African moral and political philosophy and contends that Kant's deontology is necessary in the wake of Africa's encounter with international human rights as well as the preponderant Western neo-liberal capitalist ideology.

THE KANTIAN COPERNICAN REVOLUTION IN EPISTEMOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS

Copernicus has been credited for masterminding a revolution in astronomy by challenging the geocentric view that the sun moves around the earth. Copernicus was able to scientifically prove that it is earth that moves around the sun. This created a paradigm shift from geo-centrism to helio-centrism (Chalmers, 2013:93-95). Immanuel Kant followed into the footsteps of Copernicus by bringing the debate between rationalists and empiricists to some sort of logical conclusion. Unlike the rationalists who categorically argued that knowledge is

innate or inborn, the empiricists argued knowledge comes from sense experience. Kant solved this problematic by arguing that knowledge has both innate and experiential dimensions.

He opined that *a posteriori* data from sense experience has to be processed by the twelve *a priori* mental categories in order to constitute knowledge. These innate mental categories are unity, plurality, totality, reality, negation, limitation, possibility, existence, necessity, community, cause and effect, as well as substance and accident (Amei 2018). Accordingly, Kant argues that we do not know a thing as it is itself (*noumena*) rather we are able to understand it as we are (*phenomena*). This is because our perception of reality is dependent on the twelve mental categories. Kant does not dismiss the existence of noumena, he simply argues that we do have the capacity to understand it. Therefore, our knowledge of reality is subjective and not objective. Kant argues in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787) that only God creates and knows the noumena by intellectual intuition.

KANT'S SILENT COPERNICAN REVOLUTION IN ETHICS

Kant abandoned the noumena-phenomena distinction in his moral philosophy. According to him, morality is based on *a priori* principles which he calls categorical imperatives (CIs). These CIs are not dependent on experiential conduct or consequences (*a posteriori*). Our conduct is guided the moral law which is inherent in every human being and hence objective. This moral law or conscience is an inner court of judgment for our actions. It commands us to act in a certain way and if we rebel against it, we incur moral guilt. This makes Kant a deontologist in the sense that he argues that an action is right or wrong in itself.

Racism, slavery and sexism are therefore logically evil according to Kant's deontology (duty ethics). This is so because they violate both the first and second formulations of the Kantian categorical imperative. Kant's first CI states that, "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (Robert, 2016). Not all people all over the world agree that racism, slavery and sexism are ethical. Therefore, the three are moral vices and not moral virtues. The second categorical imperative requires us to treat the human person as an end in him or herself and never as a means to an end. In his *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant articulates the CI as follows: "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only." The three evils above violate this CI by treating human beings as a means to an end. Kantian ethics therefore renders Kant's racism, sexism and support of slavery erroneous at least and fallacies at most.

Kant's Copernican revolution in ethics is evident in his synchronization of both individuality and sociality. Kant for example argues in his second formulation of the CI that the individual human person should be treated as a being with inherent dignity which is founded on freedom. However, he also recognizes the facticity of other human persons in society which necessitates the obligation on each human person to abide by certain duties. This makes both individual and social intercourse possible. This also attests to the fact that

both individualism and sociality are not mutually exclusive but rather interdependent like the two sides of the coin. Although Kant has been accused by a number of African scholars for fostering individualism instead sociality, his ethics actually harmonizes both the individuality and communicative natures of the human person.

AFRICA'S SEARCH FOR AN ENDOGENOUS IDEOLOGY AND THE FAILED COPERNICAN REVOLUTION

Africa has gone through a number of ideology experiments that aimed at making governance endogenic after attaining independence. In the 1960 and 1970s a number of African states men like Kenneth Kaunda, Julius Nyerere, Milton Obote and Kwame Nkrumah opted for socialism as an appropriate ideology for African societies because of its affinity to African communitarianism. According to them, what makes African societies different from western societies is the prioritization of society over the individual. John Mbiti a prominent African philosopher summarized the social dimension of African societies in his famous dictum "I'm because we are and since we are therefore, I'm" (Mbiti 1989). This dictum meant that in African communities, society takes precedent over the rights of the individual.

Socialist African polities emphasized social and economic rights such as health, food and water at the expense of civil and political rights like the right to vote, right to a fair hearing, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Consequently, a number of post independent socialist African states turned into military dictatorships that enslaved and killed their citizens in addition to ravaging their economies. In fact, numerous post-independence African states oscillated between so called socialism and capitalism as they made alliances between Russia and the United States of America.

The African intelligentsia and political class looked at African communism as synonymous with African socialism. This explains their alliances with so called communist states such as China and Russia. African socialism or African communism were misnomers because according to Karl Marx's dialectical materialism, it is impossible for a peasant African society to be socialist or communist for that matter. This is because these two ideologies presuppose that states have accumulated a lot of wealth for everyone to share. This explains why under communism there is no state, no law, no police and no army because the classes that led to conflict have been eliminated.

Therefore, what African states men and scholars called socialism or communism was probably a soft version of Leninism and Maoism (Keller 2017; Keller & Rothchild 2014). African socialism/communism failed miserably as an ideology that would steer African societies to social and economic progress because of failure to understand Karl Marx's dialectical analysis of social evolution. It must be noted that Africa's ideological stances in terms of communalism, Nkrumah's *Conciencism*, Nyerere's *Ujamma* (familyhood), Kaunda's *Humanism, Negritude and Pan-Africanism* have been erroneously anchored in socialism (Nwosimiri 2017). This therefore demonstrates the necessity of a Kantian Copernican Revolution in African social and political

philosophy. This revolution is essential in the light of the human rights and social justice challenges posed by neo-liberal capitalism elucidated below.

THE TRAJECTORY FROM ORGANISED TO DISORGANISED CAPITALISM IN AFRICA

The failure of African socialism/communism led to the embracement of an organised kind of capitalism where the state took center stage in the managing development which was defined as economic growth. A number of governments took charge of the management of the health sector, agriculture, water, banking and education in order to steer African states to social progress. States provided agricultural subsidies to farmers, free medical treatment in government health centers, free primary, secondary and tertiary education.

The publication of the World Bank Berg report in 1981 signaled an end to organised capitalism. The report argued that states are very inefficient in managing and governing development. The report 'ordered' the states to relinquish the role of economic development to the market. The market was envisaged as the new mechanism to stimulate economic growth and distribute opportunities for wellbeing. This created a paradigm shift from organised capitalism to disorganized capitalism which is also known as neo-liberalism.

NEO-LIBERALISM AND THE *TELEOLOGISATION* DEVELOPMENT ETHICS

Neo-liberal policies in Africa have led to the treatment of human persons as a means to economic development. The rights to education, health, food and water were turned into goods to be purchased. This is at total variance with Kant's Categorical imperative. Neo-liberalism has unleashed into the African milieu greed and individualism unknown before in the history of the continent. It has bred dictatorial and regimes that prioritised markets over people's wellbeing.

Kant's deontology is therefore very relevant in confronting the violations of human dignity posed by neo-liberal austerity measures enshrined in structural adjustment programmes. However in order to invent a Copernican revolution in African moral and political philosophy, there is a need to re-think the Ubuntu ethics which is believed to be the pivot of Africa's social and political philosophy. The proceeding two sections below embark on this task.

THE AFRICAN UBUNTU ETHICS PARADIGM AND THE NEED FOR A COPERNICAN REVOLUTION

Ubuntu ethics has been so fundamental to Africa's social and moral philosophy. It calls for treating the other person with humanness. According to Philip Ujomudike (2016),

ubuntu ethics is defined as a set of values central among which are reciprocity, common good, peaceful relations, emphasis on human dignity, and the value of human life as well as consensus, tolerance, and mutual respect.

However it is not absolutely clear whether the human person is treated as an end in him/herself (deontology) or as a means to an end (teleology). It must be emphasized that the sacrificing of a man, woman or child in order to appease the gods that are believed to be causing the death of hundreds of people in the community (situation ethics) is regarded as an exhibition of ubuntu. In addition, the sacrificing of oneself (ethical altruism) to the gods in order to save society from being decimated by a pestilence from the gods is also a demonstration of ubuntu. More still, the acceptance of cows and virgin women as a sign of restorative justice (ethical egoism) from a rival family that has killed your brother and uncle is also a manifestation of ubuntu. Lastly but not least, the treatment of rape and abortion as social abominations (deontology) is also a clear display of ubuntu. This is indicative of the fact that Ubuntu ethics can be situated on both consequentialist and non-consequentialist arguments.

Thaddeus Metz (2011: 532) argues that:

There are three major reasons why ideas associated with ubuntu are often deemed to be an inappropriate basis for a public morality One is that they are too vague; a second is that they fail to acknowledge the value of individual freedom; and a third is that they fit traditional, small-scale culture more than a modern, industrial society.

Ubuntu promotes and protects communitarianism instead of individualism. However, the privileging of society over the individual has culminated into a violation of the individual human rights. Keevy (2009:37, 39) opines that:

rights in traditional societies are assigned on the basis of communal membership, family, status or achievement. Children in these societies have little or no life force and can, therefore, not become ancestors upon death. In other words, because a man's soul is worth much more when he qualifies as an ancestor, it follows that unless he grows up, he is worth less than an adult.

Ubuntu ethics also fosters sexism and gender injustice. Ubuntu oriented African societies are fundamentally patriarchal and therefore treat women as the less human others. This explicates the denial of women land rights, inheritance rights, marriage rights and food rights. African gender scholars contend that "ubuntu represents ... a deep-seated patriarchy that entrenches gender inequality and disregard for the dignity of African women" (Keevy 2009: 41). They define this patriarchy as an "institutionalised social hierarchy in African societies whereby the extended family grants males authority and power over women" (Keevy 2009:41).

The failure of the ubuntu ethics framework to harmonise both the communal and individual dimensions of the human person, calls for a new moral schema to harmonise the duo. This will reinforce a Kantian Copernican revolution in African ethics which is premised on social/individual intercourse as well as state/global citizenship and solidarity. This Copernican

revolution aims at promoting and protecting the sanctity and dignity of all human persons in Africa irrespective of sex, gender, sex expression, class, age, nationality, tribe, ethnicity, size, color, disability, opinion, religion and social status.

KANTIANISM AND ETHICS OF *OBUNTU-BULAMU*(DIGNIFIED HUMANNESS)

Ubuntu ethics needs to be given a better perspective in order to address new African identities that have been propagated by globalization and colonialism. It must be emphasized that Ubuntu ethics is tethered towards black Africans from the Bantu ethnic group. These include among others; the Zulu, Ndebere and Xhosa of South Africa, the Baganda and Basoga of Uganda, the Shona of Zimbabwe, the Kamba and Kikuyu of Kenya, the Chaga and Sukuma of Tanzania and the Hutu and Tusi of Rwanda and Burundi. This implies that it excludes Asian Africans, Latino Africans, White Africans in addition to Africans from Nilotic and Nilo-hamitic ethnicities. This therefore calls for a new ethics of *Obuntu-bulamu* (dignified humanness) that embraces all the different identities of Africans.

Unlike the ubuntu ethics which promotes humanness without clearly dignifying it across the sex, gender, class and social status divide. The ethics of *obuntu-bulamu* not only explicitly situates African moral and political philosophy on a Kantian deontological foundation but also harmonizes the communal and individual tenets of the human person. According to this ethic, all Africans are rational dignified individuals with a social obligation to promote and protect the freedoms and rights of all other Africans in society. The abuse of this dictum leads to a violation of moral law or conscience. The promotion and protection of the same also leads the fostering of human rights, social harmony, social cohesion and social sodality.

It must be noted that the adoption of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights at Banjul in 1981 is indicative of the realization within the African human rights system of the need to harmonize the social and individual tenets of human persons in Africa. The concept 'human' depicts the individuality of Africans whereas the nuance 'people' portrays the communality of human persons in Africa. The preamble of the Banjul Charter echoes the fusion of individuality and sociality of African persons as follows:

Considering the Charter of the Organization of African Unity, which stipulates that "freedom, equality, justice and dignity are essential objectives for the achievement of the legitimate aspirations of the African peoples". ... Taking into consideration the virtues of their historical tradition and the values of African civilization which should inspire and characterize their reflection on the concept of human and peoples' rights; Recognizing on the one hand, that fundamental human rights stem from the attributes of human beings which justifies their national and international protection and on the other hand that the reality and respect of people's rights should necessarily guarantee human rights; Considering that the enjoyment of rights and freedoms also implies the performance of duties on the part of everyone;

More so, the adoption of the African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in 1990 and the Maputo Protocol in 2003 are also indicative of the urgency of

a Kantian Copernican Revolution in African Moral and Political philosophy. The former recognizes children as dignified beings like adults and the latter recognizes women as persons with an inherent dignity that ought to be respected without regard to any teleological consideration. The ACRWC challenges Ubuntu ethics by guaranteeing children protection from harmful cultural practices (such as child marriage and female genital mutilation) (article 21), freedom of expression (article 7), freedom of thought, conscience and religion (article 9), right to education (article 11) and freedom from child labour (article 15) among other rights.

The Maputo protocol or Protocol to the African Charter on the rights of Women in Africa on the other hand challenges the abuse of women in Ubuntu African societies by guaranteeing women, rights which were not accorded to females in African patriarchal societies. These rights include: right to equal dignity with men (article 3), protection from harmful cultural practices such as widow inheritance, forced marriage, rape, defilement, and female genital mutilation (article 5). Other rights include: equality in marriage (article 6), right to divorce (article 7), right to health and reproductive rights such as birth control, right to food (article 15), right to participate in determining cultural policies (article 17) and the right to inheritance (article 20). Therefore, within the African human rights system is an explicit acceptance of a Kantian Copernican revolution in ethics in addition to an overt replacement of Ubuntu ethics with the ethics of *obuntu-bulamu*.

A KANTIAN CRITIQUE OF THE SCIENTIFIC BASES OF NEO-LIBERALISM

Neo-liberal policies have been able to exert their hegemony in African due to a belief in their being founded on objective science (positivism). The evils propagated by austere neo-liberal programmes such as land grabbing and development induced displacements are believed to be inevitable due to the deterministic nature of objective science. The invisible hand of the market is believed to be a social scientific law that steers states from backwardness to development or economic growth.

Neo-liberalism has therefore insulate itself from criticism by hiding under the facades of epistemic authoritarianism (EA). EA refers to the thinking that the beliefs of others have no epistemic value and should therefore be relegated to the periphery. Within the neo-liberal discourse, this belief manifests in economists who vehemently believe in the objectivity of economic development. These social scientists regard human development perspectives such as the fundamentality of ethics, human rights and social justice in development as unscientific, naive and lacking epistemic privilege. This is unethical because the objectivity of science has been disputed and refuted. According to Immanuel Kant:

all the rational judgments can be applied only to the phenomenal world, that is, to the objects of experience: outside it, notions have no meaning at all. Only in this sense, science can pretend to be true. Our notions cannot have any transcendental application included in the sphere of some other objectness – the noumenal world. A noumenon as a “thing in itself” cannot be an object of a scientific investigation, as we have no ability to intellectually contemplate a “thing in itself”. In Kant’s opinion, reason certainly can generate its own concepts of objects. Due to the fact that a noumenon as a “thing

in itself" is not an object of scientific research, such concepts may result in mistaken or illusory notions which have nothing to do with reality (Motorina 2014:41).

Other philosophers of Science who lived after Kant have defended the subjectivity of Science. Karl Popper for instance has argued that science is based on conjectures (intelligent guesses) and refutations and hence there is no objectivity and certainty in science. Similarly, Thomas Kuhn in his book, *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1962) categorically argues that science progresses by crises and revolutions and is thus based on paradigms which are not static (Chalmers, 2013: 101-112). At one time scientists worked under the Newtonian paradigm which was discarded due to its failure to solve numerous scientific anomalies. This led to its replacement with the Einsteinian paradigm which is now used to solve various scientific puzzles. Therefore neither the Newtonian nor the Einsteinian paradigm can be categorised as objective scientific schemas because they are premised on phenomena instead of noumena.

Kant therefore inspires African moral philosophers to boldly challenge the scientific pretexts of neo-liberalism on the African continent. Africans urgently need to articulate and defend the ethics of *obuntu-bulamu* as an endogenous moral philosophy that ought to jealously prioritise the inherent dignity of African people in the face of instrumental development interventions and policies. African philosophers need to reject the imperialism espoused by neo-liberalism. It must be noted although Africans were able to avert overt colonialism by becoming independent states, colonialism was re-invented through the imposition of neo-liberal development policies from International Financial Institutions. Kant's deontology cannot be reconciled with moral evils associated with colonialism and this explains his condemnation of European conduct in the colonies in his *magna opera*, *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795) and *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797).

According to Kleingeld (2014: 53, 54):

In the Doctrine of Right, Kant defines a 'colony' in a way that makes the colonial relation necessarily unjust. He describes a colony as a people under the imperial rule of a so-called 'mother' state and condemns the resulting relationship as a violation of right. ... In the light of the rest of the doctrine of right of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, it is easy to understand why Kant would regard colonial status as objectionable. Only a republican state—that is, a political system of collective self-legislation by the citizens through their representatives, with the executive being subject to this law—is fully in accord with the innate human right to freedom. Being subject to the rule of another state—the defining feature of colonial status—is incompatible with his ideal of political autonomy. As Kant put it in 'On the Common Saying', a paternalistic government is the 'greatest conceivable despotism'.

KANTIAN ETHICS AND THE AFROLISATION OF LIBERAL CAPITALISM

The injustices inflicted by Structural adjustment policies on Africa necessitate a condemnation and total rejection of neo-liberalism and its scientific pretexts. Neo-liberal policies foster colonialism and its de-humanisation of African peoples irrespective of race,

colour and social status. They are incompatible with the promotion and protection of the inherent dignity of all Africans embedded in the implementation of civil, political, economic and social rights.

The ambiguity of African socialism and Ubuntu ethics calls for a proposition of a new ideology to foster African development and governance. This novel ideology is called *Afro-Liberal Capitalism* (ALC). This ALC is premised on the Kantian ethics of *obuntu-bulamu* articulated above. ALC not only makes the state central in managing development but also makes markets subservient to the rights of Africans. In other words, the inherent dignity of all Africans takes precedence over markets and all interests related capital accumulation and investment.

Afro-Liberal Capitalism also prioritizes social justice, gender justice, climate justice and the protection of the commons such as forests, wetlands and the atmosphere. The ideology advocates for de-growth of economies and alternative human development indicators for assessing economic development and social progress. The ALC promotes the biocentric ethics instead of an anthropocentric ethic. It also promotes the reward of innovation based on integrity and the accumulation of private property based mutual consent and just transactions.

The ALC is also premised on the *Dignified Humanness Foot Print* (DHFP) which comprises the ethics, integrity and good governance index that promotes and protects:

Independent integrity institutions, independent electoral institutions, free and fair elections
Independence of the three arms of the state, transparent corruption litigation, freezing of assets of corrupt public/private sector officials, constitutionalism, age limits and term limits on the presidency, legislature and other political offices (Kizito 2021: 52).

CONCLUSION

Despite his racist and sexist pitfalls, Immanuel Kant is no doubt one of the most prolific 18th century philosophers whose ideas have continued to illuminate even 21st century moral challenges. Kant's vivid defence of inherent human dignity and freedom are very relevant in the wake of Africa's submersion into the austere neo-liberal structural adjustments. These neo-liberal policy prescriptions which were imposed on Africa through colonial coercion have bred fraud and banditry in addition to propagating the violation of economic and social rights with impunity. Kant's successful Copernican revolution in ethics challenges African philosophers to advocate for the same in light of the ambiguities posed by Ubuntu ethics and African socialism. This paper has defended the vitality of Afro liberal capitalism as a replacement of the diabolical neo-liberalism. This new African ideology is premised on the ethics of *obuntu-bulamu*. This ethic is centered on Kantian deontology and emphasizes centrality of the Categorical Imperative in Africa's moral and political philosophy.

Abstract: The communal characteristic of African Societies has frequently been juxtaposed with the individualistic tenets of Western polities. However, the evolution of African societies into liberal democracies with the obligation to promote and protect constitutionalism and individual liberties calls for a philosophical niche to bridge between communality and individuality. This paper argues that Africa's moral and political philosophy is in an urgent need of a Kantian Copernican revolution to ameliorate the conflictual interface between sociality and individualism. The paper opines that the revolution will help to harmonize the dilemmatic relationship between communitarianism and individual rights. The paper also contends that the Kantian categorical imperatives are necessary in eliminating the unclear deontological/teleological situatedness of African ideological philosophies.

Keywords: Africa, Kant, Ideology, Deontology, Ambiguity

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NOTES

1 Dr. Kizito Michael George is a Lecturer in Kyambogo University Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy. He teaches Introduction to ethics, social ethics, development ethics, philosophy of law, social and political philosophy and history of philosophy.

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