



## Research Article

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# Western Ethics: Drawing Lessons for Zimbabwe's Contemporary Education

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**Abstract:** The 'narratives of return', which have gained currency over the years, serve to foster a bigoted conception of ethics in the realm of education within Sub-Saharan Africa where the current moral discourse seems to over glorify African ethics. While it is worthy to value ethics from the home perspective, overdoing it may turn out to be a self-injurious predisposition especially within the new world order suffused with globalisation sensibilities. This article, therefore, seeks to reflect upon the development of Western ethics, highlighting its relevance to Zimbabwe's education system. The author, thus, addresses the contribution of Western ethics to the development of the Afro-Zimbabwean ethical code as embedded in the philosophy of Unhu/Ubuntu. In terms of methodology, the current reflection is textual analysis within which the author scrutinises available written sources on the evolution of Western ethics from Protagoras to Hegel. As noted herein, the Western conceptualisation of ethics continues to shape Zimbabwe's moral component of education. The foregoing, therefore, warrants the conclusion that the hybridisation of Western and African ethics is capable of bequeathing to Zimbabwe's system of education a vibrant moral grounding thereby capacitating education in the country to continue raising good citizens.

**Keywords:** Education, Western ethics, African ethics, postcolonial and globalising Zimbabwe.

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## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The ethical grounding of education in Zimbabwe is located in the philosophy of *Unhu/Ubuntu*, Africanisation agenda, African renaissance, Sankofa and decolonisation movement. According to Makuvaza (2017), all these ideals repose within Gade's theory of 'narratives of return'. Therefore, the subject of contemplation herein is the over-emphasis placed on African ethics which may serve to dismiss the utility of Western ethics in Zimbabwe's education system. Thus, the problem under reflection is Zimbabwe's Updated Curriculum's affirmation of African ethics to egoistically undergird the nation's education system. This is solipsism which might turn out to be counter-productive within the postcolonial dispensation in a globalising Zimbabwe. This article, therefore, reflects on moral philosophy (ethics) from a Western perspective with a view to drawing insights that may complement the Afro-Zimbabwean ethical grounding of education as embedded in *Unhu/Ubuntu*.

### Problem Statement

It is observable that the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015-2022 (herein called the Updated Curriculum or Government of Zimbabwe or simply GoZ, 2015) over-emphasises morality from the home perspective of *Unhu/Ubuntu* as if there is nothing worthy of adoption from Occidental ethics. Such bigotry could be a suicidal

predisposition especially in the context of life and education in a postcolonial and globalising Zimbabwe.

### Aim

This reflection seeks to trace the Western development of moral philosophy (ethics) from as far back as the Sophist era, thereby drawing moral lessons for Zimbabwe's education system. Such an undertaking is with a view to bequeathing to a postcolonial but globalising Zimbabwe a non-bigoted, more vibrant and progressive moral philosophy of education which is informed from both the African and Western perspectives.

### Conceptual Framework

The current reflection is conceived within the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015-2022 - a principal document which currently enshrines Zimbabwe's education system from Infant to A-Level. Notably, the reflection in question is informed by the eclectic approach, which, according to Rivers (1981), allows for the absorption of the best but diverse viewpoints and using them for the purposes for which they are most appropriate. Thus, eclecticism is nothing but the fusion of knowledge from all sources, a peculiar type of educational philosophy which combines all good ideas and principles from various philosophies (Ruth, 2008). Hence, the eclectic approach is a conceptual framework that does not hold rigidly to a single paradigm or set of assumptions, but instead draws upon multiple theories, styles or ideas to gain complementary insights into a subject, or applies different theories in particular cases. In this context,

eclecticism concurs with the complementarity thesis which accentuates the hybridisation of African and Western philosophies. Thus, guided by the eclectic approach, this inquiry explores the possibility of complementarity between African and Western ethics within a postcolonial but globalising Zimbabwe.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Research conducted so far and literature currently available demonstrate that the authorities involved address the subject of ethics of education in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular from a bigoted perspective, *id est*, either from a predominantly African or Western standpoint. Stumpf (1975); & Stumpf & Fieser (2008), for instance, are copious authorities on Western ethics, that is, from Protagoras of Abdera to Hegel the German idealist. Thus, the aforesaid authorities elucidate ideas on ethics as expounded by philosophers of the Sophist era, Classical times, Medieval times, Renaissance era and Contemporary times. As Western writers, it is expected of them not to stray into African ethics. This, in itself, manifests a conceptual gap in literature which the current inquiry seeks to address by advancing the thesis of complementarity in the context of Zimbabwe's system of education.

The Nziramasanga Commission Report (1999); Hapanyengwi (2011); & Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru & Makuvaza (2014), among others, also take a chauvinistic stance on ethics of education in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, as opposed to Stumpf and Fieser mentioned earlier, the aforesaid authorities tend to dwell much on moral philosophy from an African perspective. These authorities, thus, seem to extol education which is guided by ethics as embedded in *Unhu/Ubuntu* – the African philosophy of life and holistic pedagogy which accentuates the education of 'the head, the heart and the hand'. African moral philosophy (ethics) is, thus, located within 'the education of the heart' which dwells much on morality and character development. This African chauvinist view of ethics of education manifests a conceptual gap in literature which the current research endeavour seeks to address by establishing a zone of convergence between Western and African ethics.

The underpinning philosophy of education in Zimbabwe, as articulated in the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education for period 2015-2022, is anchored in *Unhu/Ubuntu*. Hence, the said Curriculum Framework decrees *Unhu/Ubuntu* to be the philosophy designed to solipsistically guide primary and secondary education in Zimbabwe. This also manifests a bigoted predisposition which sidelines ethical views from the Western world. This research endeavour, therefore, undertakes to bridge this gap by exploring the possibility of complementarity between

African and Western ethics in the context of education in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular.

Basically, the knowledge gap identified herein constitutes the driving concern of this research endeavour. Thus, it is this knowledge gap that motivates the proposed research work.

### Untangling Morality from Ethics

According to Horsthemke (2013:289), "a distinction is commonly made between morality and ethics. Morality is the idea that some behaviour is good or right and that other behaviour is bad or wrong. Ethics is generally taken to mean moral philosophy." Thus, ethics refers to moral thought whilst morality incorporates the practical manifestation of ethics.

### Evolution of Occidental Ethics

This section traces the Western roots of ethics to as far back as the Sophist era. Thus, it articulates the development of moral thought from classical times to the contemporary period.

## MORAL THOUGHT IN CLASSICAL TIMES

The Western roots of moral philosophy or ethics are traceable to as far back as the Sophists, three of whom are quite famous. According to Stumpf & Fieser (2008:27), these include Protagoras of Abdera (Thrace) [circa 490-420 B.C.], Gorgias of Leontini (Sicily) [circa 483-375 B.C.] and Thrasymachus of Chalcedon (Bithynia) [FL. 427 B.C.E], all of whom were visitors or ambassadors to Athens (Greece). Protagoras – the oldest and most famous – states that, "in the interests of a peaceful and orderly society, then, men should respect and uphold the customs, laws, and moral rules their tradition had carefully nurtured" (Stumpf, 1975:35; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:29). Protagoras, thus, conceives morality in conformist terms implying that he views morality as obedience to societal conventions.

Unlike Protagoras, Gorgias's extraordinary notions are (a) nothing exists, (b) if anything exists it is incomprehensible, and (c) even if it is comprehensible, it cannot be communicated (Stumpf, 1975; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008). Gorgias's nihilist pedagogy, thus, neither conceptualises nor apprehends the existence of ethics and morality. Lastly, Thrasymachus popularises the reduction of morality to power through his 'might is right' precept which states that 'right' is the interest of the party established in power (Stumpf, 1975). Therefore, Thrasymachus's conception of morality consists in the will of the 'rulers' as the power-wielding section of the society.

The Sophists fundamentally denied the existence of the universal principles of truth and

morality (Barker, 2003), meaning that they basically had a nihilistic attitude towards truth and ethics. Stumpf & Fieser (2008:30) also allude to the “inevitable consequence of the Sophists’ skepticism, which led them to a relativistic attitude toward truth and ethics.” The Sophists, thus, looked upon truth and ethics as relative matters. Hence, “it was inevitable that they should be charged with teaching young men how to make a bad case look good or to make the unjust cause appear to be just” (Stumpf, 1975:33). The Sophists, therefore, turned out to be poisonous in terms of the relativity with which they conceptualised ethics and morality. Consequently, Barker (2003:18) proclaims that, “in place of moral absolutes, they (Sophists) taught the doctrine of ethical relativity, which is to say that right and wrong are not immutable and transcendent but, on the contrary, are ever-changing, and dependent upon man’s condition and conception of them.” The Sophists, therefore, maintain that the concepts of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are conventional – an epistemic predisposition which is dangerous for society because a wrong act today could unduly be conceived right someday thereby breeding chaos and turmoil.

Socrates [circa 470-399 B.C.], a Greek idealist philosopher and keenest critic of the Sophists, believed in the existence of the absolute universal principles of truth and of morality. Consequently, he “linked *knowing* and *doing* to each other in such a way as to argue that to know the good is to do the good, that ‘knowledge is virtue’,” (Stumpf, 1975:37; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:37). Socrates, therefore, implied that knowledge undergirds morality. “Socrates meant also to say that vice, or evil, is the absence of knowledge. Just as knowledge is virtue, so, too, vice is ignorance” (Stumpf, 1975:44; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:37). He, thus, blames wrongdoing (immorality/vice) on ignorance. To Socrates, “virtue meant fulfilling one’s function. As a rational being, a man’s function is to behave rationally” (ibid). He, therefore, believed that like knowledge, rationality also underpins virtue or morality. “Because man has a desire for happiness, he chooses his acts with the hope that they will bring him happiness” (Socrates, as cited in Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:37). Thus, Socrates believed man has to strive for virtue-morality, which, in turn, brings ultimate happiness as the supreme good – *summum bonum*. “Wrongdoing, then, is the product of ignorance simply because it is done with the hope that it will do what it cannot do. Ignorance consists in not knowing that certain behaviour cannot produce happiness” (Socrates, as quoted in Stumpf, 1975:45; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:38). Socrates, therefore, maintains that wrongdoing or vice emanates from the absence of knowledge.

Plato [circa 427-347 B.C.], another Greek idealist philosopher, fundamentally maintains the Socratic tradition. “In agreement with Socrates’s, Plato’s philosophy of ethics states that, moral evil is the result of ignorance” (Stumpf, 1975:44; & Stumpf &

Fieser, 2008:54). However, Augustine, in particular, did not agree with Plato that the cause of evil is simply ignorance. Nevertheless, Plato maintains that, “it is the body, in the last analysis that accounts for ignorance, rashness, and lust, for the body disturbs that clear working of the reason, spirit, and appetites by exposing the soul to a cascade of sensations” (Plato, as cited in Stumpf, 1975:69; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:56). To Plato, this happens when the soul gets buried into flesh at which point it forgets all the knowledge that it used to have when in the spiritual world - the world of perfection. Thus, the body activates the irrational part of the soul – especially the appetites – and deactivates the reason.

Plato also stresses that ignorance or “false knowledge occurs when the passions influence the reason to think that what appears to bring happiness will do so, although in reality it cannot” (Stumpf, 1975:67; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:54). Therefore, this disordered arrangement, whereby the irrational part of the soul rules the rational one, produces the Platonist ignorance. “When the appetites, thus, overcome the reason, the unity of the soul is adversely affected..., this new unity of the soul is inverted, since now the reason is subordinated to the appetites and has hereby lost its rightful place” (ibid). This is how Plato explains the genesis of immorality.

“For Plato, morality consists in the recovery of man’s lost inner harmony. It means reversing the process by which the reason has been overcome by the appetites and the stimuli of the body. The reason must regain its control over the irrational parts of the self” (Stumpf, 1975:69). Thus, man must restore his/her reason to its rightful place in order to overcome ignorance and achieve virtue. “To say, then, that ‘knowledge is virtue’ means that false knowledge must be replaced with an accurate appraisal of things or acts and their values” (ibid). Thus, morality demands knowledge of what truly leads to *summum bonum* and not what seems to.

Plato also believes that ‘virtue’, as manifestation of morality, is ‘the fulfilling of function’ (Stumpf, 1975; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008). Hence, reason continues to see the true ideals, it rationally controls the appetites and rationally orders the spirit thereby manifesting the virtue of wisdom or prudence. The spirit provides the energy of will, thus, “becoming instead a trustworthy power in aggressive and defensive behaviour” (Stumpf, 1975:72; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:58). This manifests the virtue of courage or fortitude. Appetites or passions remain being simply drives toward the things that give pleasure but they should be under rational regulation by reason so as to manifest the virtue of temperance or obedience. Plato adds that:

Each part of the soul has its own function, and when each is in fact fulfilling its special

function, a fourth virtue, justice, is attained, for justice means giving each its own due. Justice, then, is the general virtue, which reflects a person's attainment of well-being and inner harmony, which, in turn, is achieved only when every part of the soul is fulfilling its proper function" (Stumpf, 1975:72; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:58).

This entrenches morality into the concept of justice, as postulated in the Platonist ideal state.

Aristotle [circa 384-322 B.C.], a Greek empiricist, maintains the ideal of 'virtue as fulfilment of function' as pioneered by Socrates and Plato. Thus, "Aristotle's theory of morality centres on the belief that man, as everything else in nature, has a distinctive 'end' to achieve or function to fulfil... Man aim at *the Good*" (Stumpf, 1975: 104; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008: 82). Thus, man inherently strives for the Socratic-Platonist *summum bonum*. Aristotle adopts Plato's view which 'ties the word *good* to the special function of a thing' and states that virtue is grounded in rationality. Therefore, to Aristotle, "the highest function of man is to be rational in thought and conduct" (Barker, 2003:23), hence the Aristotelian belief that 'a fish was created to swim, a bird to fly but man to think rationally'. Man has to be rational for them to be morally upright.

Aristotle fundamentally adopts the Socratic-Platonist concept of soul but he opposes the position that the soul exists prior the body. Hence, he describes the nature of the soul, thus:

The soul has two parts, the irrational and the rational. The irrational part in turn is composed of two subparts, the vegetative and the desiring or 'appetitive' parts. For the most part, these are 'something contrary to the rational principle, resisting and opposing it'. The conflict between the rational and irrational elements in man is what raises the problems and subject of morality (Stumpf, 1975:105; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:83-84).

Therefore, the Aristotelian discourse on morality is equally anchored in the interface between the rational and irrational components of the human soul. Hence, Aristotle holds that morality consists in the rational control and guidance of the irrational parts of the soul by reason whereas immorality sets in when reason fails to regulate the irrational vegetative and animal parts.

To achieve the Aristotelian 'golden mean', the rational part of the soul should control both the concupiscent and irascible passions when they 'go wild' as they are preponderantly inclined to do so (Stumpf, 1975; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008). "Vice, again, is either extreme, excess or defect, and virtue is the mean. It is

through the rational power of the soul that the passions are controlled and action is guided" (Stumpf, 1975:107). Thus, it is the duty of the rational part of the soul to achieve the Aristotelian golden mean. "What is important about the role of reason is that without this rational element, man would not have any moral capacity" (ibid). Thus, morality, which, in this context harmonises with the golden mean, is predicated on rationality.

For Aristotle, "morality has to do with developing habits – the habits of right thinking, right choice, and right behaviour" (Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:84). This, again, means rationality undergirds virtue. Thus, "Aristotle was a firm believer in the instilling of virtuous habits in the young, and, moreover, in instilling in them a knowledge of virtue itself. Intellectual insight is not enough, virtuous behaviour is chiefly a matter of habit" (Barker, 2003:23). Aristotle, therefore, recognises the exigency of practical moral training. Hence, he further argues that, "all the moral virtues have to be learned and practiced, and these become virtues only through action, for 'we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.'" (Stumpf, 1975:108; Akinpelu, 1981:34). This means that the states of character are formed by doing corresponding acts. This Aristotelian method of habituation significantly informs moral education because it is not enough to tell a child what he/she should know or do, but the teacher needs to make him/her do the good act repeatedly until he/she cultivates the habit of doing it naturally.

At the zenith of classical ethics stands Plotinus [Circa 204-270 A.D.], whose philosophy is called Neoplatonism since he was an ardent follower of Plato's ideas. Plotinus's 'hierarchy of being' encapsulates the 'doctrine of emanation' – the principle by which Plotinus argued that "God necessarily overflows in order to share His perfection as much as possible" (Stumpf, 1975:134). Thus, God shares his perfection with the created world which includes human beings. Plotinus, however, argues that "still, there is moral evil, sin, pain, and the continued warfare of passions, and, finally, death and sorrow", and then questions: "How could the Perfect One (God), from whom everything ultimately emanates, permit this kind of imperfection to exist among human beings?" (ibid). Plotinus consequently rationalises that the blame for this faultiness reposes, not in God, but within the "imperfection in the body-soul arrangement, and much of the cause for this imperfection is ascribed to the final irrational movement of the material body" (Stumpf, 1975:134-135). Evil, thus, comes as a result of the soul's failure to regulate the bodily appetites. Hence:

Evil, for Plotinus, is simply the absence of something, the lack of perfection, the lack of form for the material body, which is not itself essentially evil. Man's moral struggle is therefore a struggle not against some outside

force but against the tendency to be undone within - to become disordered or to lose control of the passions (ibid).

This means evil comes when man becomes disordered or becomes undone. Therefore, Plotinus's conception of morality incorporates man's resistance against being disordered, meaning that man's soul should strive to maintain its control over the passions. For salvation, Plotinus believes that real morality is found in the soul's difficult and painful ascent to unity with God since it is God – the Perfect One and root of all emanation - who helps man's soul maintain control of the passions (Stumpf, 1975; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008). Plotinus, thus, places the moral discourse into the theological realm.

## MORAL THOUGHT IN MEDIEVAL TIMES

The medieval moral thought manifests the confluence of theology and philosophy comprising “the marriage between religion and philosophy” (Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:175). Plotinus, who featured towards the end of the classical era, is credited for pioneering this medieval theosophy. “Indeed, it was his moral and spiritual force combined with his intellectual rigor that influenced not only his contemporaries but especially St Augustine” (Stumpf, 1975:130). Plotinus's ideas, thus, foregrounded the development of moral thought in the middle Ages.

St Augustine [354-430 A.D.] contributed immensely to the development of moral philosophy. “What differentiated Augustine from, say, Aristotle, was that whereas Aristotle said that happiness is achieved when a person fulfils his natural functions through a well-balanced life, Augustine held that happiness required that man go beyond the natural to the supernatural” (Stumpf, 1975:150-151), meaning that man should find happiness in God. Therefore, whilst developing Plotinus's Neo-Platonist tradition, Augustine Christianised Plato's ideas.

According to Augustine, cited in Stumpf (1975:151),

Man's moral problem consists in the manner in which he attaches himself to his objects of love and in his expectations regarding the outcome of his love. Everyone expects to achieve happiness and fulfilment from love, yet men are miserable, unhappy and restless. Why? Augustine lays the blame upon man's 'disordered' love”

Disordered love is whereby man places too much love on material things and other finite and mortal persons – thereby occasioning heinous acts such as greed, envy, jealous and trickery among others. Thus, disordered love breeds disordered individuals who, in

turn, produce a disordered society. Hence, Augustine (as cited in Stumpf, 1975:152) argues:

What constitutes the chief fact about man is that the range of his needs includes not only (1) objects, (2) other persons, and (3) himself, but also, and most of all, (4) God...Man was made to love God...In some way, then, man's nature was made so that only God, the infinite, can give him ultimate satisfaction or happiness...To love God is, then, the indispensable requirement of happiness, because only God, who is infinite, can satisfy that peculiar need in man that is precisely the need for the infinite.

Thus, before loving the finite material things and other mortal persons, man needs to love God - the fashioner and custodian of *summum bonum*.

To Augustine, the rigorous and persistent fact is that personal reconstruction and salvation are possible only by re-ordering love, by loving the proper things properly. Thus, Augustine's argument is that an individual human can love another person properly only if he/she loves God first, because he/she will not expect to derive from human love what can be derived from God's love (Stumpf, 1975). Augustine (as cited in Stumpf, 1975) further argues that man can love themselves properly only as they subordinate themselves to God.

Augustine principally accepted the formula which reads, “Justice is a virtue distributing to everyone his due” (Stumpf, 1975:154). He, thus, adopts the Platonist conception of ethics and morality which is entrenched in justice. Overly, Augustine (as quoted in Stumpf, 1975:155) argues that “justice places moral limitations upon humankind, the state and individuals alike. All of ethics, then, is based upon man's love for God and his love for his fellow man. Love is the basis for justice.” Augustine, therefore, anchors ethics, morality and justice in man's love for God.

St Thomas Aquinas [1225-1274 A.D.] is another force to reckon. “Aquinas considered ethics or morality a quest for happiness” (Stumpf, 1975:197). Hence, Aquinas Christianised Aristotelian ideas (Barker, 2003:35). Aristotle thought a naturalistic ethics was possible, a viewpoint with which Aquinas fundamentally agreed “adding only that the Aristotelian ethics is incomplete. Aquinas, therefore, argued that there is a double level to morality corresponding to man's natural end and to his supernatural end” (Stumpf, 1975:197). The supernatural end added herein is man's eventual unity with God, hence Aquinas argues that perfect happiness is found not in created things but in God, who is the supreme good.

“Virtue or goodness consists in making the right choices, the mean between extremes” (Aquinas, as

cited in Stumpf, 1975:198). Aquinas, thus, adopts the Aristotelian golden mean. "Aquinas agreed with Aristotle that the virtues of the natural man are achieved when the appetites are duly controlled by the will and reason" (ibid). Thus, Aquinas maintains the Socratic-Platonic-Aristotelian rationalist tradition which apotheosises the rational control of the irrational elements of the soul by reason.

According to Aquinas, law is there to ensure an ordered society. "The moral law is founded upon the reason's ability to discern the right course of conduct" (Aquinas, as cited in Stumpf, 1975:199). Hence, the Moral law is grounded in the natural law. "The basic precepts of the natural law are the preservation of life, propagation and education of offspring, and pursuit of truth and peaceful society. Therefore, the natural law consists of broad general principles that reflect God's intentions for man in creation" (Aquinas, as cited in Stumpf, 1975:200). Thus, all human/Government law should be entrenched in the natural law which embodies the moral law and anything otherwise is a perversion of law – law of the tyrant. Hence, Aquinas concluded that, "laws of this kind must nowise be observed, because...we ought to obey God rather than men" (ibid).

"Since man is ordained to an end of eternal happiness, in addition to his temporal happiness, there must be a kind of law that can direct him to that supernatural end" (Aquinas, as cited in Stumpf, 1975:200). This is the divine law, which goes beyond the natural law as it comes directly from God through revelation (scriptures) as a gift of God's grace (Stumpf, 1975). Therefore, Aquinas maintains the theological stance on morality as he sets a premium on man's obedience of the divine law, which surpasses the human, natural and moral laws. Aquinas, thus, stresses that it is the divine law which elevates man from temporal happiness (naturalistic end) achieved through naturalistic ethics to eternal happiness (supernatural end) embedded in supernatural ethics. This supernatural end comprises the *summum bonum* which is consistent with man's love for and union with God.

### **Moral Thought during the Renaissance Era**

Thomas Hobbes [1588-1679 A.D.], a British empiricist philosopher during the renaissance, postulates the state of nature, "which is the condition of men before there is any state or civil society" (Stumpf, 1975:238; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:199), where prevails 'the right of all to all' and 'the war of all against all' - anarchy. To avoid anarchy, "men (following the dictates of natural law and seeking peace) renounce some of their rights or freedoms and enter into a social contract and thereby create an artificial man, the great leviathan, called a *commonwealth*, or state" (Stumpf, 1975:240; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:201). The state is, therefore, created to umpire the embodiment of and adherence to ethics.

Hobbes argues that, "law begins only when there is a sovereign" – the logical truism - "it appears that justice and morality begin with the sovereign," and also "that there are no principles of justice and morality that precede and limit the acts of the sovereign" (Stumpf, 1975:241; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:202). The Hobbesian justice, therefore, bequeaths too much power to the ruler(s) – a predisposition in line with Thrasymachus's 'might is power' precept which reduces morality to political power. Hobbes further argues that, "if law means the sovereign's command and if justice means obeying the law, there can be no unjust law. Even in a case where the sovereign has commanded a 'bad' law, the citizens are not the ones to judge it as such, nor does this justify their disobedience" (Stumpf, 1975:242; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:202-203). This means that even if the sovereign engages in iniquitous acts, this is a matter between the sovereign and God, not between the citizens and the sovereign. The Hobbesian conception of ethics, law and justice seems to have authoritarian proclivities, which conflict with Aquinas's conception of the law.

John Locke [1632-1704 A.D.], another British empiricist during the renaissance, submits that, "certain kinds of behaviour will bring us pleasure, whereas other kinds will bring us pain. Morality, then, has to do with choosing or willing the good" (Stumpf, 1975:280; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:236). Locke, thus, recognises man's inherent will to do good. Locke also said, "Moral good and evil, then, is only the conformity or disagreement of our voluntary actions to some law" (ibid). Locke's conception of morality is, therefore, premised on obedience or disobedience of the law amidst free will. He speaks of the three kinds of laws, thus:

The law of opinion represents a community's judgment of what kind of behaviour will lead to happiness: conformity to this law is called virtue. The civil law is set by the commonwealth and enforced by the courts. This law tends to follow the first...The divine law which men can know either through their own reason or revelation, is the true rule for human behaviour...And 'this is the only true touchstone of moral rectitude'. In the long run, then, the law of opinion and also the civil law should be made to conform to the divine law, the 'touchstone of moral rectitude'." (Stumpf, 1975:281; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:236-237).

Thus, Locke's moral philosophy concurs with that of Aquinas which regards the divine law as the desideratum of supernatural ethics. Locke (as cited in Rusk & Scotland, 1985:91) argues that, "the foundations of virtue are to be laid in religion. There ought to be imprinted on his mind (neophyte) a true notion of God as of an independent supreme being, the maker and author of all things, from whom we receive all our good." Locke, thus, corroborates the religious

foundation of morality as projected by medieval Christian thinkers.

Barker (2003:44) principally argues that in education, “Locke’s major concern was with virtue – the formation of an upright character.” This is endorsed by Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru (2014:126) whose understanding is that, for Locke, virtue is one of the main aspects which neophytes should seek throughout the process of education, and by virtue, “Locke means man’s ability to control his desires and wants through subjecting them to reason.” Therefore, Locke’s conception of virtue is anchored in rationality, just like virtue as conceptualised by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas and Kant, *inter-alia*.

### **Moral Thought in Contemporary Times**

The talk of moral philosophy sounds incomplete without Immanuel Kant [1724-1804 A.D.]. “Morality, for Kant is, therefore, an aspect of rationality and has to do with our consciousness or the ‘rules’ or ‘laws’ of behaviour, which we consider both universal and necessary” (Stumpf, 1975:317). This foreshadows the Kantian categorical imperatives. “Moral philosophy is the quest for these principles that apply to all rational beings and that lead to behaviour that we call *good*” (Stumpf, 1975:318). These principles are the categorical imperatives that incorporate the moderation of passions - constitutive of ‘the good’ which is good to all rational beings.

“Not all imperatives are connected with morality, for they are not in every case directed to all men and therefore lack the quality of universality that a moral rule requires” (Stumpf, 1975:318). These include the technical imperatives (rules of skill) and prudential imperatives (e.g. what must be done to earn popularity) – commands which are not absolutely necessary / those that rational beings can do without. “The technical and prudential imperatives are, therefore, hypothetical imperatives because they command us only if we decide to enter their sphere of operation” (Stumpf, 1975:319). These are, therefore, antithetical to categorical imperatives.

On categorical imperatives, Kant says:

The truly moral imperative is categorical. This categorical imperative applies to all men and commands ‘an action as necessary of itself without reference to another end, that is, as objectively necessary. It commands certain conduct immediately, without having any other purpose as a condition. Actually, the categorical imperative commands a law that forms the basis of particular actions. It is categorical because it instantly applies to all rational beings, and it is imperative because it is the principle on which *we ought to act*...Categorical imperative enables us to discover our moral duties (Stumpf, 1975:319).

The Kantian categorical imperative, therefore, speaks to the universality of the moral law and affirms the supreme worth of each rational person. One of Kant’s moral postulates stresses the ‘supreme good’ (*summum bonum*) – a postulate, which, according to James (2009), is predicated on the immortality of the soul. The other one also says that the rational and moral beings should assume the existence of God, again placing moral discourse into the theological framework.

According to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel [1770-1831 A.D.], “the tension or conflict between right and wrong is what gives rise to morality” (Stumpf, 1975:334; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:304). Thus, moral thought revolves around right and wrong. “Morality is therefore an element in the dialectic process...” wherein Hegel seeks to explain the practical co-existence of the individual well-being and the universal well-being in the civil society. “The state”, said Hegel, “is the actuality of the ethical idea” (Stumpf, 1975:336). Hegel, therefore, perceives the state as the prime fashioner and guarantor of morality. “In this way, the laws of the state, rather than being arbitrary, are rational rules of behaviour that the individual himself would choose if he were acting rationally” (Stumpf, 1975:337; & Stumpf & Fieser, 2008:306). Thus, like Hobbes, Hegel believes that obedience to state laws is manifestation of rationality and morality.

### **Lessons for a Postcolonial but Globalising Zimbabwe**

Socrates’s moral philosophy accentuates an education which conditions neophytes to strive for *summum bonum*. The Platonist notion of justice exalts an education that enables reason to manifest the virtue of wisdom (prudence) by rationally controlling the appetites and fostering in them the virtue of temperance (obedience), an education that also enables the spirit to exercise the virtue of courage (fortitude), thereby manifesting the general virtue of justice. In other words, Plato accentuates the raising of a person whose diverse elements of the soul are ordered and harmonised. Aristotle reaffirms the Socratic-Platonist education for *summum bonum*. Plotinus, who believes that real morality is found in man’s unity with God, thus, stresses the theological grounding of moral education. All this is represented in education for *Unhu/Ubuntu*, which, according to Zimbabwe’s Updated Curriculum 2015-2022, seeks to raise good citizens.

The fact that Augustine predicates ethics, morality and justice on man’s love for God accentuates an education system that conditions the neophytes to love God, to love proper things properly. Moreover, Aquinas’s emphasis on the notion of ‘supernatural end’, which is consistent with man’s love for and union with God, calls for an education which draws the neophytes closer to God as the true touchstone of moral rectitude. This theological facet of morality is also evident in the

*Unhu/Ubuntu* philosophy, which, in itself, recognises the close propinquity between morality and religion.

Though with authoritarian proclivities, the Hobbesian argument that the state is created to umpire the embodiment of and adherence to ethics connotes that ideal education is that which fosters citizenship - that which conditions neophytes to obey the laws, be just and morally upright. In the same vein, Locke apotheosises an education which prepares neophytes to always seek God as the true touchstone of moral rectitude. Thus, the agenda for good citizenship and the quest for Godliness, as articulated in the foregoing, are also entrenched in *Unhu/Ubuntu* - an African philosophy of life which recognises the existence of God.

The Kantian postulates of categorical imperative, *summum bonum* and God's existence have the vast potential to shape the moral outlook of Zimbabwe's education system. Hegel also affirms an education which stresses the idea that obedience to state laws is manifestation of rationality and morality. However, this Hegelian position is debatable because certain Christian philosophers do not share the view that all state laws are rational and moral. Aquinas even insinuates that immoral state laws do exist and argues that they "must nowise be observed, because... *we ought to obey God rather than men*" (Stumpf, 1975:200). Nevertheless, education should seek God for it to foster authentic righteousness.

## CONCLUSION

As emerged in the foregoing, Zimbabwe's education system has vital lessons to draw from the Western view of ethics, which, in itself, is not as antithetical to the African view as some African scholars purport. The current article, thus, provides Zimbabwe's Updated Curriculum 2015-2022 with a sound and logical ethical grounding from a Western perspective, not to replace, but to complement the Afro-Zimbabwean moral thought which is fundamentally grounded in *Unhu/Ubuntu*. This manifests the eclectic approach to ethics in education. The outgoing reflection, thus, exhorts Zimbabwe to fine-tune her education system so that it is adequately equipped to foster sound moral and religious formation in the neophytes from both the Western and African perspectives - the principal motive being to raise good citizens.

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