

Philosophy of Human Sexuality: Kantian Sexual Ethics as a Panacea for Sexual Violence and an Authentic Pathway towards Development in Africa

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Abstract: History reiterates that philosophy is the life wire of civilization owing to the indisputable fact that philosophical ideas are both effects and causes that shape human history and transform the society for good as it enquires directly into the phenomena of life, while it concerns itself with the basic questions and problems confronting man and his existence and the environment in which he lives. It avails and promotes critical and creative thinking as well as moral reasoning that equip man with the appropriate character of right conduct in relation to himself and to others in building a healthy humane human society. To the existential question then, “what can philosophy do for Africa?”, this paper indicates sexual violence as a widespread cankerworm and a significant factor that dwindle development in African society. It then seeks to exhume the causes of sexual abuse and to underpin the functional role of philosophy with regard to redemptive healing and authentic development of the nations from the point of view of healthy human sexuality grounded in Kantian ethical doctrine of sexual morality as it proves its relevance in our contemporary society. The work highlights philosophy of sexuality as it generally studies the concepts, propositions, sexual variants and the place of sexuality in human nature but focuses specifically on Kant’s sexual ethics as it assumes a normative deontological position to scrutinize the morality of sexual practices within the dictates of freedom and rational will as the supreme practical grounds for valid moral conducts that promote the intrinsic worth of the moral agents. Interestingly, the deontologist’s concept of rightful sexual relations which is well enunciated in his central moral idea formulated in his Groundwork of the ‘Metaphysics of Morals’ that ties his whole moral theory together serves as an antidote that fosters critical and creative thinking that equip individuals with good moral values of right conduct in relation to oneself and to others and consequently promote authentic and sustainable development both in the individuals and the society at large.

Key Terms: Sexuality, Violence, Ethics, Human, Development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is a widespread problem that has gained global discussions and treatise as it dwindles development and its sustainability of both the individuals and the society at large. It can be directed against any sex; male and female alike at various age levels. Studies on Sexuality prove relevant in our contemporary society. Accessible statistics show that such notorious malady is more rampant in sub Saharan Africa. In some countries, about one out of four women experiences sexual violence by an intimate partner. Habitually, men who exploit their spouses sexually believe that their actions are legitimate because they are married to them. Many adolescent girls report their first sexual experience as being coerced. Some adolescent boys recount their ugly sexual experiences with sugar mummies who happen to be their boss. However, the most vulnerable groups are women, youths and children. The scope of this paper accommodates mainly the violence against the women folk who are most susceptible to the cankerworm because they mostly lack the economic, social and educational powers for resistance. Due to their poor accessibility to education, their being amply disposed and empowered with the acquisition of relevant skills to think clearly, appreciate their lives and that of others, develop better and contribute constructively to the growth of their nations and promote human dignity is impeded. Consequently, they fall prey to various abuses and violations that dehumanize them. The classical Greek philosopher, Aristotle observed that the educated differ from the uneducated as much as the living differs from the dead. The empowerment of women has both intrinsic and extrinsic values that at the same time are at the heart of the attainment of all the other goals. Educated and empowered women with integral formation approach of knowledge and good character can inflame stable constructive development that can efficiently break cycles of poverty; for self, family, nation and world at large.

As philosophy enquires into the phenomena of life, the basic questions and problems confronting man, his existence and the environment in which he lives, it harbours the principles for rational knowledge that could be practically translated into actions.

Ethical philosophy lays down precepts that conduct man to good life. Philosophy of sexuality exhumes the nature, causes and variants of sexual violence as well as their link to development. While this work analyses Kantian doctrine of sexuality, it endorses its redemptive healing for sexual violence through convincing ideas that shape the mind and consequently lead to good actions. His categorical imperatives seem to avail and promote critical and creative thinking as well as moral reasoning that equip man with the appropriate character of right conduct in relation to oneself and to others in transformation of the society for good.

II. SEXUALITY AND HUMAN NATURE

Human sexuality is not just man's conglomeration of genital organs but his entire sexual constitution that involves the whole human person. Being a constitutive part of human nature, it is an integral part of human life. It is God's gift and a great value to be treasured and exalted as a higher good. The desire for the opposite sex is imbedded in the very nature of man. It is not without reasons that sexual drives are termed passions. The male and female anatomical differences are not mere accidents. They are meant to complement each other but sometimes their complementary roles pose sexual tensions since the loss of original and primordial sexual integrity by our first parents. Hence, the carefree naturalness of sexual life was disturbed and is seen as vulnerable and needs protection.

Sexuality is an existential factor. Existential experiences show that past traditions have always relegated sexuality to the realm of irrationality. In fact, sexual ethics of the past were full of prohibitions and warnings with little edifying guidance because sexual love was viewed as a taboo. Little wonder that a lot of mistakes have been made which call for acute urgency and newness of evaluation and orientation to address the malady. Consequently, sexuality has gained global attention with positive approach in recent times. As such, it is one of the most discussed themes of our contemporary times. However Studies reveal that never has the act of sex so abused and bastardized as in our time due to steep moral decadence that paves way to carnal licence where even sex is deified. Often it is regarded as a market commodity and bartered in returned for services rendered. This affects its character of lasting value.

III. SEXUAL VIOLENCE: MEANING

Sexual violence is any effort to obtain a sexual act directed to any person in any setting by coercion irrespective of the person's affiliation to the targeted. The World Health Organization (2007) defined sexual violence as "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim in any setting including but not limited to home and work."¹Coercion can cover a whole spectrum of degrees of force such as threat, exploitation, terrorization, intimidation, duress, oppression, blackmail and all sorts of inhuman feats that debase human dignity. Apart from physical violence, it can take the forms of emotional, social and psychological abuses. It may also occur when the person who is compelled, is unable to give consent – for example, while drunk, drugged, asleep or mentally incapable of understanding the situation.

IV. VARIANTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

A wide range of sexually violent acts can take place in different circumstances and settings. These include various forms of sexual harassments, unwanted sexual advances including demanding sex in return for favours, rape of all forms, sexual assaults, forced kissing, domestic violence, sexual exploitations, spousal battering, sexual torture, abuse children, traditional practices that violet the sexual integrity of women such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and obligatory inspections for virginity, sexual abuse of mentally deranged or physically challenged people, sexual abuse of children, coerced abortion, forced prostitution, trafficking and any form of forceful sexual contact and unwanted sexual behaviour.

V. CAUSES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence depends on variety of factors. Educational imbalance and lack of intellectual power lead to serious societal problems. In Africa, the deficient literacy level has been tagged to be strongly responsible for all kinds of difficulties including sexual violence that confront the people in their daily dainty life activities. The great African patriot, Nelson Mandela hinted that “education is a powerful tool to conquer the world.” Through education, relevant skills are acquired to face life’s challenges which include socio-economic and health problems as well as sexual violence against children and women. The 2008 MDGs Report² reveals that the adult literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa is sixty seven percent (except in Zimbabwe, ninety percent and Burkina Faso, 12.8percent) with women having generally a higher illiteracy compared to men. On the other hand, the 2010 Unicef study³ reports that the enrolment rate of children of educated mothers is somewhat seventy one percent, while that of uneducated mothers lag behind with 22percent (51percent enrolment) with more children in primary rather than secondary school. Such substantial literate differences contribute significantly to the vulnerability of women to social ills and violence. Other contributive factors include lack or limited access to gainful employment, economic and social dependence on another due to poverty and associated factors, financial insecurity that reduces women’s power to negotiate safe sexual practices in their sexual relationships, insufficient sex education, socio-cultural beliefs, practices and rigid gender norms in disfavour of women, cultural barrier to self-fulfilment and marginalization of women and gender inequality, early marriage and even marriage with domineering, abusive and possessive men, weak system of criminal justice that indirectly encourages violence, reported abused cases not amply protected, polygamous family relationships and marital conflicts, etc.

Effects of Sexual Violence

As mentioned earlier, sexuality involves the whole human person. Sexual violence has a profound impact on physical and mental health of the victims. Studies reveal that sexual violence can have a long term psychological, emotional, social and even physical effects ,increased risk of a range of sexual and reproductive health problems with both immediate and long-term consequences, stigmatization HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). Even death may be resultant effect of sexual violence.

VI. THE SACRED ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY OF SEXUALITY

Education is the key to freedom from all forms of subjugations and enslavements. The former President of Tanzania and educationist, Nyerere (Nyerere, 1978) captured it better when he said, “education is the liberation of man from the restraints and limitations of ignorance and dependency...increase man’s physical and mental freedom... to increase their control over themselves, their own lives and the environment in which they live. The ideas released in the mind through education therefore should be liberating ideas, the skills acquired by education should be liberating skills.”⁴

Philosophical education is an unending adventure that has the central concern of both human and national development. Philosophy of sexuality studies sexual concepts, propositions, practices, beliefs, ontological and epistemological matters surrounding sexual activities. It also discusses the place of sexuality in human nature as well as the relationship among sexuality, emotion, cognition, etc. It is a conceptual and normative study that questions and clarifies the ethics of sexual life such as:

- The fundamental notions of sexual desires and activities
- The value of sexual activities and sex pleasure
- The legal, social, political and other issues regarding sex
- In what circumstances is it morally permissible to engage in sexual activity
- The good life through sexuality
- What types of sex are permissible

- With whom is the pleasure of sex allowed

The philosophy of sexual morality also investigates into the vast domain of sex variants, the attainment of sexual pleasures and fulfilment, the role of family as the vanguard for healthy sexual relationship that leads to happy and authentic existence as well the variety of sexual violations that degrade human persons.

VII. KANTIAN ETHICS OF CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Considerable controversies abound over which system of ethics that best promotes and sustains human worth and happiness. Kant speculates that “two things move the mind with ever increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens and the moral law within.”⁵ His monumental *Fundamental Principles of Metaphysics of Morals*, FMM (*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*), GMS serves as a leading deontological ethical approach. It offers relevant insights into the existential issues that our contemporary society faces today in various spheres of existence including sexual life. It established an ultimate principle of morality that is inherent in and binding to all rational beings. This fundamental principle is the autonomy of human will commanded by the law of practical reason having a rational authority by which it guides the passions. The Kantian FMM delineates that all human actions spring from subjective principles (maxims)⁶. The moral worth of all moral agents lies then in causing their maxims to the respect law. The respect of law is a categorical imperative that commands actions from law for the sake of duty⁷; a duty that correlates with the rights of others.

Although, it seems a kind of abstract but it harbours a fundamental teaching that good motives and respect for persons promote healthy living and serves as an antidote for sexual violence. It emphasizes that acting morally means acting rationally and making the rule of passion slavery to reason, while acting immorally means acting irrationally and making the rule of reason slavery to passion. Kant’s basic principle of morality is one; a golden rule of non-maleficence (“do to other what you would want them do to you”) but having three dimensional formulations. Each formulation is comparable to another but captures and accentuates one aspect of morality. The first formulation - “act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (FMM 39)⁸ highlights conformity to universal law⁹. The second formulation- “act so that you can will that everybody shall follow the principle of your action” (FMM 49)¹⁰ underscores the autonomy of human persons as moral legislators. This is what the German deontologist termed ‘kingdom of ends’ (autonomous but subjected to the same universal moral laws). While the third prescription- “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”¹¹ (FMM 47) has its focal point on the persons as ends in themselves. It is an imperative that is categorical, that is, it refers to no other end except to itself. “If now action is good only as a means to *something else*, then the imperative is *hypothetical*, if it is conceived as good *in itself* and consequently as being necessarily the principle of a will which of itself conforms to reason, then it is *categorical*.”¹² It admonishes and promotes respect for persons. Respect is the concept of a worth that impedes self-love. The object of respect is law. Respect for law is respect for persons. All the three maxims express that moral law is imbedded in man’s rational nature and not an external imposition. Freedom is central to the autonomous exercise of the will.

VIII. THE AUTONOMY OF WILL AS THE SUPREME PRINCIPLE OF MORALITY

Human beings are rational agents who act according to certain principles. The deduction of actions from such principles requires the exercise of reason. According to Kant, the will is a practical reason. It necessarily chooses that which the reason independent of any inclination considers as good. This relationship of an objective law of reason to the will is understood as the command of the reason; it is imperative in nature and it is valid for all rational beings.¹³ In the very first section of his *Foundations of Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant asserts that “nothing in the world...can possibly be conceived which could be called good without

qualification except a *good will*¹⁴(FMM 9). He further clarifies that “a good will is good simply by virtue of the volition, that is, it is good in itself, and considered by itself it is to be esteemed much higher than all that can be brought about by it in favour of any inclination.”¹⁵ So understood, “autonomy of the will is that property of it by which it is a law to itself (independently on any property of the objects of volition). The principle of autonomy then is: Always so to choose that the same volition shall comprehend the maxims of our choice as a universal law.”¹⁶ Consequently, “moderation in the affections and passions, self-control and calm deliberation are not only good in many respects, but even seem to constitute part of the intrinsic worth of the person; but they are far from deserving to be called good without qualification...”¹⁷The command of the reason is valid for all rational beings and it dictates a categorical imperative for all moral actions exercised in good will. Freedom is a property of the will which plays a central and practical role in the exercise of the will without which the reason cannot think itself as free for the realization of the intrinsic worth of moral agents.

IX. KANT’S SEXUAL DOCTRINE: A DEONTOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF RIGHTFUL SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP

Kantian ethical doctrine of sexuality concerns itself with mutual sexual relationship, fidelity and the risk of pre-marital sex. He relates three major purposes of sex experience, namely; for reproduction, expression of love and interpersonal relationship. As such, any sex activity that does not serve the above intent is distorted, immoral and ethically wrong. He also argues that lack of sexual consent is wrong in the ethical sense. Kant’s notion of rightful sex relationship is grounded in his deontological ethical duty. His perception of good sexual behaviour emanates from the categorical imperative of “*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*”¹⁸ In effect, persons should not be used as objects of sexual gratifications which is a clear violation of moral law. As a matter of fact, he opines that sexual activity is permissible under the condition of marriage where true human affection is guaranteed, arguing that non-marital sexual relationship is degrading.¹⁹For him, marriage is the “union of two persons of different sexes for the lifelong possession of each other’s sexual attributes”²⁰ (MS 6: 277).Against this background, Varden explains that “natural sexual union refers to sexual deeds involving two persons of opposite sex who make reciprocal use of each other’s sexual organs and capacities in a way that is consistent with procreation. To engage in any other sex practices Kant appears to argue conflicts with our innate right to freedom...”²¹

Kant identified three fundamental moral problems regarding sexual activities:

- The problem of moral and physical risks involved in sex
- The problem of exploitation (the use of another person as a thing)
- The risk of surrendering oneself to another for sexual act

The moral risk with regard to sexual act expresses the egoism of lovers who are more interested in their own pleasure and happiness. According to him, “they plunge them into the greatest unhappiness in order to enjoy their own bodies. Once a lover has gotten what he wanted, he is likely to discard his partner as one throws away a lemon after sucking the juice from it”²² (MS 6: 387-8). This violates the duty of making other’s happiness an end. The physical risk on its side is that it may consume one’s body especially in the case of females such as the occurrence of pregnancy²³ (MS 6: 359-60).The problem of exploitation is a threat to others’ personhood. The problem of the risk of surrendering oneself to another for sexual act is solved in marriage. As he stated, “marriage is the sole condition under which the partners have the freedom to make use of each other’s sexual impulse.”²⁴

X. KANTIAN SEXUAL ETHICS: A PANACEA FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND AN AUTHENTIC PATHWAY TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Kant's sexual ethics is built on his *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals* where the principle of the autonomy of will, freedom and practical reason are emphasized as supreme practical foundations for moral agents. It is a laudable and eloquent treatise that advocates the treatment of man as an absolute value with intrinsic worth; treat with respect and not merely as a means to an end in combating the sexual violence against women for a meaningful development. It is a normative philosophy of respect for law and in effect of the dignity of individual persons as commanded by practical reason for duty sake and not dependent on any ulterior motives. The respect for law vis-à-vis respect for persons is acting from sense of duty which is a moral ground for practical love.

Kant purports that "this respect-inspiring idea of personality which sets before our eyes the sublimity of our nature (in its higher aspect), while at the same time it shows us the want of accord of our conduct with it, and thereby strikes down self-conceit, is even natural to the commonest reason, and easily observed."²⁵ It x-rays that the principle of private happiness is in striking contrast with the principle of morality. His sexual ethics which emphasises intrinsic worth of human persons as rational agents who freely act from the sense of duty as commanded by practical reason of a categorical nature makes men 'kingdoms of ends' subject to universalizable maxims that respect the dignity of human persons for the enhancement of both personal and collective developments. It creates a rational outlook that interrogates the basic assumptions and realities of life and grapples with the issues of human conduct and values of the people. As such, it seeks to proffer humane solutions to the core issues that militate against the intra and interpersonal relationships. The grandeur of the sex differentiation demands therefore, that each of the gender be accorded the respect due to him or her.²⁶

XI. CONCLUSION

Man is an integral being. Philosophy is man-oriented discipline. Ethical philosophy guides life for a just pursuit of good for ethical and material well-being as well as upliftment of man. Development is multi-dimensional. It goes beyond mere accumulation of wealth to the enhancement of the life of the people. At the centre of development is man situated. Therefore, development must touch the lives of the people and the agents of development should be sound in mind and body. As such, the annihilation of many obstacles is necessary to enable the individuals choose and grow freely and live in a humane human environment. Considerable and qualitative studies reiterate that sexual violence is widespread in Africa; the situation that constantly hinders development at all spheres. Conscious of the link between development and human sexuality, and considering the fact that women and young teenagers who are also significant agents of development are mostly affected, Kantian sexual ethics which upholds the moral worth and the dignity of human persons in the treatment of oneself and others as ends and not as objects is recommendable as a panacea for sexual violence. As an antidote for sexual abuse and many other teething problems that militate against human and infrastructural developments and their sustainability, Kant's sexual ethics will help to speed up the snail pace development of the African Nations.

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⁶ Maxims are subjective principles of actions.

⁷ Kantian notion of duty is the necessity of acting from respect for law.

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⁹ Law as conceived by Kant is an objective principle that also serves the subjective principles and it is valid for all rational beings in so far as the reason exercises full power over desire. The principle of objective law is imperative.

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