

The Debate about African Ethics and Paucity of Principle-Based Ethics before WWII

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Abstract

Introduction: This is an investigation into the development of Principle-Based Ethics in both the Western world and in Africa. It attempts to explain the historical links of atrocities in the Western world to the development of Principle-Based Ethics. The paper aims to answer the question of whether Africa has a layout of African ethics and morality in its traditional dimensions and whether African ethics and morality originated from Western influences or its own cultural evolution and politics. **Method and Methodology:** The author employs the case-study method, with qualitative literature review as its methodological approach, to conduct content analysis of relevant literature to tease out ethical principles and values for the evaluation. **Theoretical Approach:** The paper uses intersectionality theory for the analysis of morality and ethics, considering the variety of ethical and moral frameworks of the nations forming Africa with differential colonial, historical, and developmental approaches. **Results:** The outcome showed that prior to the 2nd World War and the Nuremberg Trial, there was a paucity of Principle-Based Ethics in the Western world; and that the Nazi atrocities caused a major revolution in the development of Principle-based ethics in the Western world. This assertion does not deny the existence of moral mechanisms and social etiquette in the promotion of acceptable social behavior. The perennial argument about whether Africa has ethics and a moral framework is not helpful when one does not differentiate between the type of ethics and morality one is describing from the mundane social moral compass that governs the intersectional relationships between people and communities. **Conclusion:** The competing schools of thought deviate from empirically assessing what each of the nations offers. The allegation that Africa lags behind in the development of moral values, resulting in the negative effects on modern-day African societies due to the paucity of universalized virtue ethics, is debatable. The flip side of the coin posits that Africa has well-developed principle-based ethics, which is also highly debatable. What this paper has revealed is that Africa's supportive role in causing world atrocities that led to the devel-

opment of principle-based ethics after the 2nd WW and the Nuremberg Trial universalized the etiology of principle-based ethics for all nations that participated either in defence or offence of the Nazi atrocities and resulting war.

Keywords

Origins of African Ethics, Theory, Tradition, Practices, Human Flourishing

1. Introduction

As an introduction, the author would like to make the declaration that this paper is not about virtue, normative ethics, moral discipline espoused by Aristotelian and Socratic ethics about human flourishing or “eudaimonia”, good life and virtues, character, honesty, trust, and community service. It is definitely not about Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarianism and hedonism; as an extension of Caesar Beccaria’s principles of justice as fairness and punishment as satisfying the greatest number of subjects for the greatest good. Emmanuel Kant’s ethical exposition equated moral law to truth with emphasis on rational beings. His advocacy of pure reason became the premises for Hans Kelsen’s articulation of pure law with reason as the guiding principles for legal interpretation and jurisprudence. John Stuart Mills’ utilitarian principles, ideas of economies of scale, and notions of opportunity cost, together with his belief in the freedom of speech and thought, are all important general behavioral morality and yardsticks for the evaluation and direction of human conduct (Mills, 1977). This work examines the African dimension to the development of normative ethics and attempts to differentiate between an individual’s moral landscape from the more restricted and shallower Principle-based ethics for professionalism in public health, developmental ethics, and in the practice of a myriad of common public duties. By Principle-based ethics in the Western world, it means investigations into ethical principles such as autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, due process, and informed consent to assess the validity and virtue of decisions or evaluate conduct (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001; Kamm, 1992). In the African context, it means good life, justice, respect, community solidarity, commonality, and reciprocity (Wiredu, 1992; Wiredu, 1996; Onunwa, 2008; Sarpong, 1972; Opoku, 1978). The work begins with a qualitative literature review to investigate the origins of African Ethics and the role of ethnicity, religion, and AU, as well as other actors in this process, through the case study method. The theoretical basis for this work is intersectionality theory, developed by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 for the social sciences. Intersectionality theory allows for the analysis of the interrelatedness of experiences, phenomena, and human activity. It helps to assemble varied narratives into units for analysis of systems, communities, and people in a given ecosystem or nation, vis-à-vis the effect of official policies and administrative decisions of government on everyone in that society. The theory helps to show how subjective experiences in economic opportunities,

power sharing, politics, security, and the environment overlap in objective public policies, interpretation, mainstreaming, and setting development and fiscal policies for national development. I will start with the discussion on the origins of African ethics.

2. The Origins of African Ethics: Disaggregated by Ethnicity

Africa is often said to have no ethical values, except what has been handed down by Western nations through colonialism and other modern collaborations (Wiredu, 1992; Wiredu, 1996). The Western world, too, seemed to have suffered from the paucity of principle-based ethics until their engagement in large-scale atrocities, sheer wickedness, and crimes against humanity during the two World Wars (Norman, 1963). Kigongo (2002) and Onunwa (2008) have argued the opposite, that Africa is inured with its own set of ethics, though it cannot be called Principle-based ethics. This statement is both right and wrong. Right in the sense that there is not a single compendium of ethical philosophy of the respective African nations that could be labeled as representing African collective ethics (Norman et al., 2010; Norman et al., 2011; Norman, 2014; Norman, 2015; Norman, 2016; Norman, 2022; Norman et al., 2015). This is because there has never been the need for the Whole of Africa to come together to develop generally accepted ethical principles, as the historical events culminating in the 2nd World War and the Nazi atrocities demanded of humanity. That statement is wrong because each of the ethnic groups in Africa has its own ethical and moral values that are not aggregated with the rest of African nations, although there may be occasional similarities and common themes (Gyekye, 1995; Sarpong, 1972; Sarpong, 1974; Opoku, 1978; Idowu, 1962). For the sake of brevity, ethics is defined as the science or study of customs or habits of men towards a greater moral goal and existence. It is the science of habitual conduct of men evaluated as right or wrong based on pre-set standards for assessment within a given society in order to achieve a greater degree of morality for that society (Tayung, 2019: p. 332; Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). Ethics is also defined as, “of or relating to moral action, conduct, motive or character as in ethical emotions, or the treatment of moral emotions” (Blacks’ Law Dictionary: pp. 496, 804). Ethics is therefore synonymous with the term morality (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). It is also the social, religious, or civil code of behavior considered, especially that of a particular group, profession, or individual. Professional ethics is the conduct that is professionally right or befitting. Professional code of conduct is often a list of administrative and convenient regulations or do’s and don’ts. They do not, often, meet the strict legal definition of ethics. Professional ethics amount to usage and customs among members of a profession, involving their moral and professional duties toward one another, toward clients, and toward the oversight and licensing organization of that profession (Kraushaar v. La Vin, 1818). Morality is concerned with human conduct or behavior. It is the distinction between good and bad, between what is right and wrong. For example, murder is a crime, but when soldiers kill in peacekeeping in self-defense or in the

defense of others, that is not a crime. That action probably qualifies as a righteous act in criminological philosophy and ethics. Morality also means the quality of being moral and the degree of conformity to conventional standards of moral conduct (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001; Tayung, 2019). In the following write-up, I will look at the several cases to move the discussion to its logical goal by looking at the definition of ethics within African conventions, which covers both parts two and three below.

3. Traditional Definition of Ethics

In traditional Ghanaian Akan communities, ethics descriptively means one who leads a good life, or one who is good. One who is humble, honest, and kind, and without acrimonious charges of theft, embezzlement, dishonesty, and misappropriation of community property or those of other citizens. To be able to lead a good life, one has to be industrious with a good work ethic; be courageous to take bold and decisive decisions; be devoted to one's craft, family, and community; and be accountable and transparent. However, Westerners do not import such ethical expectations of expressions about character and habit into Ghana and other nations similarly situated in African societies or ethnic groups. Such values have been part of the intrinsic standard of virtue and good conduct even in the most primitive and secluded societies of the world (Wiredu, 1996; Kambon, 2016).

4. Humanism Not Religion Is the Foundation of African Ethics and Morality

It is generally agreed among scholars that African ethics and morality are built on humanism but not on religion. African religion could probably not have provided the environmental impulses and intellectual stimulation to create logical reasoning as part of its religious observance due to the lack of organized liturgy, modalities such as prayer sessions, hymnal vis-à-vis the cacophony of drumming, dancing, gyrating, and shrills from the Chief Priest or Priestess. Some researchers argue that African religion is about the welfare of the people in a community and their interests, seen from the lenses of the Chief Priest and the Chief of the community. Considering the observed detachment of African politicians, community leaders, chiefs and elders of the villages and towns and bureaucracies from their constituencies and the people they are to serve, which has plunged the economies of the nations' south of the Sahara into a debt and mismanagement, such philosophical thinking about the origin of African ethics and morality, defeats the preposition that African ethics and morality originated from deliberate considerations of the welfare and interests of the population. Among the proponents of this line of argument is Wiredu. Addressing Akan morality, Wiredu observed that "the moral outlook is logically independent of religion". This presupposes that there is some logical matrix that was being used to assess human conduct, bringing the evaluation of what is good and bad closer to applied and meta-ethical evaluative tools used in the Western world to assess the ethical and moral fitness of one's conduct

or deed based on reason. This makes the individual the center of analysis, and the possibility of rejecting filial relationship and sanguinity as the basis of valid excuses for action or inaction is opaque. The position of Wiredu is supported by Odera-Oruka (1972: pp. 5-11) in papers on various African ethnic groups. Other researchers, however, have advanced the argument that religion or religiosity is the basis of African ethics, among which are Gyekye (1995), Sarpong (1972), Opoku (1978), and Idowu (1962). Placing ethical reasoning in the space of religion and not reason is to deny the African individual personhood and responsibility. Without the benefit of reason or rational thinking, one may not be able to accept responsibility for one's actions, since one may qualify as an idiot, imbecile, or mentally challenged.

The religious argument as the basis of African ethics assumes too much unproven and difficult to prove assertions imbedded in those assumptions, such as the African lacks the capacity for reasoning, and cannot process complex ethical dilemmas and finally, Africa has had organized religion, with organized scriptures, hymns, and liturgy that were easily transferrable to other convents and novices of that particular religious order. On this, Mbih Jerome Tosam (Tosam, 2014: pp. 36-37), writing about Kom ethics (Kom are people from the North West Region of Cameroon), recounted that, "One of the consequences of the African encounter with the West was the misrepresentation and suppression of African thought and culture. Backed by the racist's theories of some prominent modern thinkers like Hume, Kant, and Hegel, and amplified by agents of colonialism like explorers, missionaries and anthropologist, the colonials disrupted and distorted African Traditional cultures and imposed Western categories of thought". Despite the determination of evil people like King Leopold of Belgium, who master-minded the Scramble for African in 1884, European cultural and intellectual colonization [...] "did not completely erode the sense of Africanness that was, in fact, the fundamental motivating factor of independence struggle" (Kigongo, 2002; Tosam, 2014: p. 36). The following dwells on comparing African ethics with that of the West to assess the application of principle-based ethics in the mundane affairs of the two systems.

5. African Ethics vs. Principle-Based Ethics of the Western World

Although this work is strictly on African ethics and morality, the ethical framework becomes more vivid if it is amplified within the intersectional relationships of the various African nations, as extensions of municipal and international diplomacy, politics, and conflicts. The author endeavored to take the reader to the past history of collective Africa, and traveled along with the reader through the historical path to the modern and post-modern dynamics observed within the various African nations' ethical and moral progression on pertinent issues of race, ethnicity, gender rights, privacy and autonomy issues, and the capabilities and functioning of the African people. Some of these nations have experienced and

continue to experience heightened intensity for social transformation through democratic dispensation, de-democratization, and even military takeovers (Norman et al., 2024; Norman, 2024; Aboagye, 2025). Others have enjoyed a rather gradual progression of cultural adjustments, changes, and transformations, leading to greater national developmental dividends, while other economies have been stifled. Africa is not a continent that inspires itself. For example, while there were highly contested general elections in a nation like Ghana in December of 2024 for both Presidential and Parliamentary candidates that resulted in minor election related violence considering the stakes, in Kenya during the same time, there were continuous youth agitation against the ruling government for engaging in corrupt practices and identity politics, although both nations suffer from the same inimical political and anti-democratic forces perpetrated by official corruption, nepotism, discrimination, social exclusion, tribalism and realism. An event that would make a section of Kenyan society implode, for example, would certainly not make Ghanaian society manifest the same reaction. The lack of internal inspiration of African nations to each other, speaks loudly to the reality that, the core epigenetic make-up of the people of each of the nations are so diverse as the geographical spaces in which they live, and the cultural habits that define each tribe and ethnic groupings that, there is no chemistry between the various peoples and there is no sense of brotherhood among Black Africans in Africa. For example, in December 30th, 2024, protest by young Kenyans sent shock waves through the country's political scene, forcing the government to drop proposed taxes and the fire several ministers (Yusuf, 2024: para. 1). Similar tax related policy introduced by the Akuffo Addo government in May of 2022 on electronic internal money transfer which hit the poor the hardest, and against the protest of the public was more or less introduced without much challenge from the public. Thus, if Ghana's reaction to the national taxes had inspired the Kenyan youth, they would not have engaged in anti-tax and anti-corruption violence. This, however, resulted in low patronage of electronic money transfers internally, and did not achieve the revenue creation intentions of the proponents of the e-levy (Anyidoho et al., 2022).

It is interesting to take a look at a previous statement about whether or not Africans as a collective have a compendium of ethics or values called "African Ethics" or "African Values" made in the paper, *Exploring Work Ethic in Ghana* (Norman, 2023: pp. 23-32). The challenge thrown at African researchers who make those claims is for them to refute my assertion against their claims and correct the erroneous statements about so-called African ethics or values.

"African revisionist philosophers have alleged that there is, perhaps, a body of works, a compendium called 'African morality and ethics' (Kigongo, 2002; Onunwa, 2008). The author has previously proffered that many African researchers were extravagant in claiming that Africa was bequeathed with ethics, morality, or systematic religion before the advent of Western religious and philosophical thought in Africa (Norman, 2016). It would have been preferred if a restatement of their positions were thus: individual African na-

tions, indeed, individual ethnic groups in Africa, had their own moral codes and religious observances which may or may not be different from each other, but these separate codes and religious practices were not amalgamated on the Continent. This author still holds the preposition that there is no coordinated, no single unifying system of morality in Africa that can be labeled as 'African morality', 'African religion', or 'African philosophy'. For example, among the Shona of South Africa, the Ubutu concept of self is actually different from the concept of autonomy among the Ashanti of Ghana (Osei-Hwedie, 1997). Whereas elsewhere the individual defines his or her autonomy from the lens of his or her community, among the Ashanti of Ghana, it is the family and not the entire community that inures him or her with autonomy (Osei-Hwedie, 1997). No evidence was found to support the hypothesis that there exists a compendium of ethics or morality called "the African Traditional ethics". The development of western philosophical thought had been nurtured by its religious ethos. There does not appear to be an overriding common religious ethos in Sub-Saharan Africa, because it was found that African traditional religion was never organized with hymns and songs and sermons offered in a systematic manner, which could have potentially led to systematic thinking in African religion. The chief priests and priestesses danced, gyrated, conjured, jumped before a small group of drummers, did incantations, poured libation, threw fossils, threw cowry shells and other unidentifiable fossilized objects of supposedly animal and human bones, and muttered things to himself or herself. Such discordant liturgy could not have provided the inspiration to the observers to engage in intellectualism or a higher-level thinking about being or things. The villagers simply watched in awe or detachment as spectators and were not involved in the proceedings at the voodoo house. Each household had a stool, a wooden doll, a clay god, and a tin god to which blood and alcoholic libations were poured at certain days of the month by the head of the family in a secretive, supposedly spiritual manner. There was no organized worship, organized liturgy, or supplication or service, at least in the case of traditional religious situations in Ghana and among certain Akan groups. The author cannot describe what pertains in other ethnic groups in Ghana, let alone Africa, because it has not been seen how the people gathered as a congregation to worship together with the head priest or priestess anywhere. It was also found that in Africa, moral conduct is usually evaluated on a fairness scale calibrated to appease everyone. Among the various tribal groups in Ghana, there is a plethora of evidence of moral values which, in strict universal terms, would be nothing more than the rules of etiquette' (Ollenu, 1966; Norman, 2016). The morality of the motley collection of nations in Africa was not concerned with organized religion or organized morality because the weighing of moral dilemma was dependent on the status of the actors in the dilemma and their personal social value. The respective African nations had their respective moral codes, which differed from one tribal corporate entity to the other in many respects in terms of

meaning, ritual, and interpretation (Nkrumah-Boateng, 2007). It is therefore disingenuous for modern-day researchers to impose a collective value of morality on the people of Africa which cannot be sustained by the respective cultures and history of the collective in their individual parts” (Norman, 2023: p. 29).

An additional source of support for the challenge to revisionist researchers is the reliance on the intellectual dispositions of the African Union.

6. The Role of African Union in Amalgamating African Ethics and Morality

There is further support for the assertion that there is no basis for any scholar to use the terms “African Ethics” or “African Morality”. This is because Africa does not have any evidence, whether written or oral, about having a set of ethical or moral values or equivalence that is accepted by each of the 54 African nations as representative of their unique national culture, customs, or morality and ethics. Despite the aspirational motivations of the African Union towards African integration, the varied design of the physical space of the Continent of Africa works against integration. The cultural differences and preferences among the tribes and ethnic groups cement the decoupling of the various nations from the desire to create a uniform continent. In addition,

Embedded in the AU Charter are strong Identitarian incentives for the promotion of Afrocentricism. The Charter begins with homilies, which really are sentinel calls for the defence of the motley ethnicities of Africa against the harmful advances of other nationalities and jurisdictions against Africa’s ontology. The African Union takes its philosophical inspirations from the pre-independence Pan-Africanists proponents, such as Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, and other luminaries of African descent. The Pan-African Association was established around 1897 by Henry Sylvester-Williams, who is reported to have organized the first Pan-African Conference in London in 1900 (Norman, 2022: p. 39). Its purpose was, from the start, the promotion of Black Identity in exclusion to all other ethnic or racial interests. Its ideology was deepened and, perhaps, hijacked by post-independence leaders like Muammar Gaddafi of Libya for their own political agenda. From its soaring Charter, the African Union was dedicated to the ‘promotion, consolidation and development of African interests and its peoples, culture, languages, and autonomy’, values which are not different from those of Generation Identitaire (African Union Charter, 2005: p. 1). Afro-xenophobia is as rife and alive in Africa proper and among Diaspora blacks as other types of xenophobia are present among the other races represented in just about every nation. Every single human being on earth has, at one time or another, expressed xenophobic tendencies or hostilities, insults, abuse, and panned a person from another race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, or educational background. [...]

Afroxenophobia like Identitarianism emerged out of Pan-Africanist ideology with local variations such as the Uhuru movement in Kenya, Ujamaa (a socialist Co-operative) economic movement of Tanzania with former President Julius Nyerere as its chief proponent, circa 1950-1960 (Eigas, 1980: pp. 387-393). Although hate was not the overriding impulse of these movements, the movements arose out of the desire for African Identity or Nationalism as a counterpoint to colonial control and power. Pan-Africanism's underlying philosophy is the political and social union of the indigenous inhabitants of Africa with those in the Diaspora in the Caribbean, Latin America, the United States, and Canada (Norman, 2022: pp. 38-40).

Secondly, people with shared ethical and moral ethos would not treat each other as if the others are mere fodder, second-class citizens, or despicable humans. Ethical value of respect, for example, demands concern for human rights, no matter the challenge. Ethics requires reciprocity of responsibility, duty, and care. If Africa had a shared ethical heritage, there would have been no Afro-xenophobia, vigilantism, and mass expulsion of other Africans found in some African nations, as the history papers tell us. Ethics demands unity, communitarianism, and communalism.

Afro-xenophobia (the fear of other ethnic black or foreign persons and their way of life) can be expressed intra-country, starting with the ethnic Biafra war in Nigeria (1966-1970) (Goetz, 2001). It can also be outwardly displayed as in the case of Ghana's expulsion of Nigerians (1968-1969) and Nigeria's retaliatory expulsion of Ghanaians (1984-1985). It can be expressed covertly as in tribal Identity Politics in African democracies, or violently as it was in Eastern Africa in Rwanda and Burundi. The Rwanda Genocide of 1994 was an intra-country Identity war, while the Ugandan expulsion of Asians under Idi Amin, 1972, or Kenya Asian attacks of 1982 were outward expressions of the hate of foreigners (Aremu & Ajayi, 2014). Tanzanian's Sungu-Sungu or vigilantism against Nomadic herdsman, or Libyan enslavements of migrants from other African nations (2013-2018), and the South African hate attacks of Nigerians in Johannesburg and Durban, (2014-2019) or the socio-political vigilantism directed at foreigners and migrants in other nations in Continental Africa are all well documented incidence of African nationalism or Identity crises (Norman, 2024; Hanekom & Webster, 2010). Vigilantism is the vehicle or the means of execution of the philosophy of exclusion, in order to realize Identitarian goals of a group or a community. At first glance, it may appear as if there cannot be a connection between the anti-immigrant politics of Europe, New Zealand or the United States of America and the people of color, such as those from the African nations, yet xenophobia is a common feature of human societies (Miller & Rensmann, 2010; Norman, 2022: pp. 38-39).

This paper does not make any effort to consolidate the various ethical and moral frameworks operating in the various African nations in any way, since such

a strategic move would lead to intellectual distortion and dishonesty, the denigration and stereotypical representation of the competing and differential moral ethos and ethics among the peoples of Africa. Those searching or trying to crystallize the various domains of cultures in Africa into a unified sum, or destroyed the cultural differences argument, are probably forgetting that Africa stands for ‘*intrinsic diversity*’ in everything, starting from race, tribe, clan, language, morality, ethics, cultural practices concerning ordinary activities such as burial, marriages, child naming ceremonies and so many other parts of the various tribes, races, ethnicities and cultural sub-types that have conveniently combined rather loosely into a merely geographical entity called “Africa”. The attributes of intrinsic diversity are cultural differences, different languages, different religious ethos, different marital protocols, different political and other disunifying qualities such as cuisine, greetings ritual, and others that place social cleavages between different groups of people.

7. What Is in the Name Africa?

Africa instills intrinsic difference in its inhabitants by the very nature of the design of its geographical space. Interestingly, Africans have not seen it as their business or responsibility to give unto themselves a fitting name for the continent in which they live, that captures the totality and the generalities of their individual national essences into a collective unit. The origin of the name “Africa” is greatly disputed by scholars. Most believe it stems from words used by the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans. Important words include the Egyptian word “*Afru-ika*,” meaning Motherland. The Greek word *aphrika*, meaning “without cold”, and the Latin word, *aprica*, meaning “sunny” (National Geography, 2024: para. 2-3; African American Registry, 2024). Africa could do well to assess colonial legacies and names to determine whether such names serve their best interests. In this paper, I have attempted to answer the question of whether Africa operates under either a general ethical framework or a principle-based ethical framework inspired by its own cultural or moral evolution or by the Western ethical framework.

8. Where Is the Principle-Based African Dynamism?

Some African-based researchers and those outside but writing about ethics in Africa have argued that Africa operates under both a general ethical spectrum and principle-based ethical standards. If this is so, what are the basic principles or values of ethics upon which Africa operates? What historical triggers led or have led to the development of principle-based ethics before the universal socialization of these principles into the mundane activities of societies, medical practice, and public health practice around the world? What are the main attributes of the general ethical standards? This work also exposes how many African writers, researchers, and revisionist researchers have inured African ethics with principles or values equivalent or similar to the principle-based ethics of the Western world without appreciating that, by doing so, they become apologists for the past white

cultural practices that existed before the evolution of principle-based ethics. With the Western world having principle-based ethics now, it is not a mark of maturity in morality, but a reminder of the lack of sympathy and concern displayed by the Nazi medical doctors and their supporters for conducting unethical and immoral research on other human beings without too much care or concern, whether the research participants lived or died. Such a position also creates a historical vacuum, which cannot be filled by unauthorized and unethical medical experiments by African orthodox medical doctors or traditional medicine practitioners, or cause atrocities, bestiality, evil deeds, and genocidal tendencies, in order to have the opportunity to develop African-specific dos and don'ts of ethical guidelines. Despite the intentional obfuscation of the truth about African legends, including the most vilified African warrior, Shaka Zulu of South Africa, collectively, Africa has not committed many instances of bestial and genocidal acts. Why do Europeans who boast of principle-based ethics as if that is supposed to give Europe or the Western world an advantage of integrity over Africa, hide their roles in the atrocities committed in WWII? According to Dr. Dan Wylie's account in his paper, *Myth of Iron: Shaka in History* (Wylie, 2006), he reported that some colonial writers intentionally distorted and exaggerated the meagre historical record of warriors like Shaka Zulu into a despotic monster. Apparently, Nathaniel Isaacs advised to his friend, Francis Fynn, to smear Shaka and his successors with the admonition to "make them out to be as bloodthirsty as you can and endeavor to give an estimation of the number of people they have murdered during their reigns" was the white man's way of creating parity of wicked deeds between black Africa and the whites (Carroll, 2006). Such an admonition came from a man who can easily be described as lacking moral integrity, a condition that appears to have afflicted many white people living among the Africans in the colonial past in South Africa with a long history of racial segregation and wicked economic programs.

While Western moral and ethical philosophy has noted personalities, with names like Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, Kant, Bentham, and the rest, African scholars wish to have had similar personalities from the African side, forming the core originators of African ethics and morality. Such an expectation would be poorly placed for several reasons, namely, there is nothing called African philosophy or morality, and also, there is nothing called African ethics. There is however, Ugandan ethics which breaks down into the ethics of the various tribal groups, Kenyan ethics with dimensions of Kikuyu, Lou, Lua and Kalenjin ethics, South African ethics consisting of Zulu Ubuntu morality, and others, Ghanaian ethics with sub-types of Ashanti ethics, Ga ethics and Gonja ethics, with hundreds more of such unique sub-types waiting to be enumerated (Murove, 2009). Due to the decentralization of ethical dogma in the respective African nations based on ethnic groupings, it is difficult to recognize any authority figure as the main proponent of Akan ethics, for example. Akan ethics is a collective effort by the elders of the various clans that may have agreed to sustain a given line of ethical reasoning as part and parcel part of Akan morality and ethical evaluation of conduct through reason, logic, case-

studies and comparative analysis, influenced by culture, traditional belief system and religious ethos per the submissions of Ackah, (1988), Sarpong (1972: p. 41); Danquah (1944: p. 3). The rest of the paper would be approached from a more systematic manner through case studies

Method and Methodology

The Case-Study method was used in this discussion. The methodology was qualitative literature review and content analysis, using an opportunistic search approach for the pertinent literature, through the snowball effect until saturation was reached. The trustworthiness of the selected papers was tested by evaluating how data for each paper was collected, sampling strategy, organizational approach involving categorization, interpretation and representation, how outcomes were reported and analysis conducted and citations by other researchers, whether the paper was quantitative, qualitative, analytical piece, or systematic review (Cresswell, 2014; Atkins et al., 2008; Guba, 1981). Intersectionality theory on African national subjective ethics, morality, and cultures was aggregated into a unit for analysis of African ethics and morality in order to lay the groundwork for comparative analysis between African ethics and that of the collective Western nations to determine which of these cultures or systems operates predominantly on principle-based ethics and which does not. The intention of the author was to trace the evolution of African ethics and the possible positive or negative effects of colonialism and coloniality on African value systems since the beginning of the inimical Western hegemony over Africa in 1884 to the present. The author searched databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, PubMed, Medline, and others for reports, editorials, and published papers on ethics in the English Language. The literature search approach was based on carefully crafted phrases in Western and African ethics to identify the appropriate literature on the topic by mapping the reference pages of papers after assessing trustworthiness, reliability, research approach, and generalizability of the conclusions or findings in those publications. The phrases consisted of “*What are the attributes of African principle-based ethics?*” “*List the values of principle-based ethics in the West.*” “*What is beneficence, non-maleficence and autonomy in the context of African ethics?*” “*What is autonomy, justice and due process in the context of Western ethical standards?*” “*Is the origin of African ethics driven by colonialism or coloniality?*” “*Is reciprocity a valid African ethical value?*” “*Is Ubuntu a universal moral value in Africa, let alone in the world?*” The author adopted strict inclusion criteria for the papers reviewed for this article. As many as 100 papers were briefed by the author and one research assistant out of the initial figure of 2000 articles, opinions, blogs, grey literature, and policy documents identified. Out of these, only 82 publications met the inclusion criteria and were marked for additional review, briefing, and re-analyzed for this paper, until saturation was reached. The findings were summarized into their respective units and interpreted based upon the author’s skills and knowledge in policy and politics, national development, and law. This exercise was purely a desktop review of published literature.

Literature Review and Content Analysis Outcomes

A. *Ethnic Group Ethics: Define Sociological, Political, Economic, and Military Basis of Life*

It is difficult to accept that there is even a country in Sub-Saharan Africa that subscribes to virtues like honesty, duty, and responsibility or truth-telling, when the continent is the epitome of both institutional and personal corruption, pre-tention, and religiosity. Africa, admittedly, is not the only continent confronted with dishonesty, but a reality which happens in all nations (CDD-Ghana, 2020). What is the point of talking about ethics and morality in relation to Africa, when corruption in its various forms of social life, (and without generalization but based on annual surveys in Ghana) has become the acceptable norm among significant portions of the citizens, including Presidents, Parliamentarians, Judges, Lawyers, Medical Doctors, Captains of Industries and Bureaucratic executives, Bankers including those at the Central Banks, if not many of the citizens of Africa (CDD-Ghana, 2020).

In Ghana, for example, and among the Akan, the overriding ethical values include *hard work, communalism, respect for the elderly, sacredness of life, and hospitality*. Other researchers list *honesty, reciprocity, duty, responsibility, and virtue* as important values of Akan morality and ethics (Sarpong, 1972; Sarpong, 1974). For example, whereas Ghanaians pride themselves as being duty-minded, hard-working, and honest, the general view about Ghanaian productivity in Ghana is that, “there is a disconnect between national rhetoric on productivity and the phenomenon of work in the nation and among the ethnic groups” (Norman, 2022: p. 23). The productivity outcomes in Ghana from various industries are so bad that on May Day celebration of labor in 2017, ex-president Akufo-Addo, during his Presidency, described the Ghanaian worker as “Clock Watchers” in a May Day Speech he delivered to the Ghanaian worker at the Independence Square, Osu, Accra (Akufo-Addo, 2017).

“During that period, the micro and macroeconomic indicators appeared sound with the economy growing by as much as 8%. The economic affairs of Ghana have deteriorated from the expected progressive 8% annual growth rate in the following years, and it appears the deterioration would continue for a considerable length of time ahead (all of which happened under the Presidency of Akufo-Addo, the man who described Ghanaians as Clock Watchers). Both national and international think-tanks on the economy provided myriads of reasons why; the key reason among these was central government mismanagement of the national purse and cash inflows from internally generated national revenues or from loans, and from external and internal bond markets (Gray & Malone, 2008). The last and first quarters of 2022 and 2023 saw Ghana negotiating Debt Restructuring with both national and external creditors. Debt restructuring has its advantages and disadvantages, including being locked out of access to external credit and the suspension of having to pay one’s debt during cash flow challenges (Buchheit et al., 2018). In addi-

tion, since November 2022, Ghana has been seeking a USD\$3 billion loan over three years from the IMF through the External Credit Facility (ECF), which is about 4% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The national public debt stock is now above 100% of GDP. Local and foreign interest payments alone takes 70% - 100% of all revenue and there is 50% national inflation, with the Ghana Central Bank raising the main interest rate to 27%, (raised to 28% on 30th January 2023 by the Central Bank) and a slow recovery from COVID-19, coupled with official mismanagement of the national purse (Economist, 2022).

In fact, the productivity of the Ghanaian is so low that it is difficult to reconcile the existence of an ethical value, which is hardly observed, and how it applies or does not apply to the conduct of the people who possess that ethical value. These are parts of the extensive discussions previously written about in the paper, “*Exploring Work Ethic in Ghana*” (Norman, 2023). I have reproduced excerpts here for the convenience of the reader.

The economy of Ghana grew “at a rate of 5 percent between 1990 and 2010”. “Industry in Ghana accounts for about 25.5% of total GDP” “while industrial production has also been rising at a 25% of total GDP at 7.8% rate” and “making Ghana the 38th fastest growing industrial production in the world” during that period (Addo, 2017: pp. 73-76; Global Employment Trend, 2014; Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). Addo’s assessment of the competitiveness of Ghana’s industries was based on manufacturing, construction, mining, quarrying, electricity, water, and sewerage (Addo, 2017: p. 75). These inputs do not fit into the conventional definition of industries and manufacturing. Ackah et al. (2016: p. 50) agree that “industry in Ghana is mainly dominated by micro and small firms, privately owned and mainly located within urban areas in the form of industrial clusters. They add that, “patterns of labor productivity and wages indicate the food processing sub-sector privately owned and older firms as the most productive”. Decardi-Nelson et al. (2019) in their study of the perception of Shop Operators on packaging of made in Ghana products, offered that the perception of the local retailers and sellers of locally packaged goods cannot be compared to the foreign packaging of the same goods. In 31% of the retailers who participated in that study of local products, these were described as being shabby, with almost 25% describing the local packages as lacking vital product information on the labels and another 25% described them as unattractive” (Decardi-Nelson et al., 2019: p. 31). Made-in-Ghana products are tagged as inferior because, perhaps, the broader majority of Ghanaians see themselves as inferior or their nation as inferior. In addition, made-in-Ghana goods are also considered poorly packaged, with poor supply chain management and pitiable promotional incentives for sales or shelf space. In 2019, a national news media outfit reported that “only 18% of the goods sold in supermarkets in Accra City are made in Ghana, after sampling 7462 brands in eight supermarkets by a team of national and international

researchers”. Out of the sample, 6108 brands were foreign brands, representing 82% with only 1354 brands, or 18% being made in Ghana (Konfidants, 2019: p. 6). The percentage representation of nationally made goods sold in Supermarkets in Ghana rose to 26% as of March 2021 (Konfidants, 2019). Respondents offered that price and packaging were the main determining factors in whether to buy made in Ghana or not, in addition to the quality of the product. All of such studies, such products, and such outcomes affect the branding of the nation. A nation’s branding could be due to the quality of its products (Nagashima, 1970; Fan, 2006; Fetscherin, 2010; Hakala et al., 2013). The perception that Ghanaian goods are of poor quality should therefore be a concern to central government and the productive members of the nation. When the Ghanaian rejects ‘made in Ghana’ goods, he seems to reject himself. Some of the reported claims that made in Ghana goods are not often good are true and of a national concern, but in many cases, the relative degree of quality between say, a pair of shoes which is made in Ghana and one from China may be simply a matter of perception rather than reality (Fan, 2006). The national work ethic is to be blamed for this outcome. Ghanaians do not attend to piecemeal work as a form of supplication or homage to a Supreme Being, while workers in, for example, Asiatic nations do the opposite. A good Japanese craftsman does not see his handiwork as a means to the Yen, but rather as a link between him and his maker. The product becomes an extension of his being. His being is only a minuscule part of his nation, Japan (Norman, 2022: p. 33).

While those values may be part of the ethical values of the Akan, it does not mean that those values are observed wholesomely and religiously. African ethnic group ethics are pervasive and ubiquitously mainstreamed into the very fabric of African societies irrespective of the nation’s historical and colonial antecedents. This is to say that although one would expect African societies to closely mimic their experiences under colonialism due to the lingering effect of coloniality, modern-day African societies are programmed to operate more on ethnic group ethics of the ruling government or party than a universal set of ethical values of morality and virtue. The effect of group dynamics in influencing and controlling the conduct of the subjects of that ethnic group, particularly if such a group happens to be the ruling ethnic group, is more probable than not. For example, from January 7th 2017 through January 6th 2024, the ruling national political party in Ghana was the New Patriotic Party, (NPP). The pervasive cultural value that the leadership of the NPP under Ex-President, Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo, appeared to be practicing when matters of morality of national importance arose was subterfuge and shading of lies into different perceptible realities. Truth-telling in the public space was not an essential quality promoted and demonstrated by the NPP’s central and other power limits of that administration. The administration could be described as marred in moral subterranean space, where in that political and social

labyrinthine, reality changed its form on the whim of Party leadership against the damage to be averted or avoided, especially if the Party knew that they could get away with heightened propaganda. Truth-telling became a mere speech act when the Presidency laid the basis of an act by one of his appointees as acceptable or not, regardless of whether the evidence that is publicly available against the appointee for being corrupt or having embezzled State funds. Once the President said the accused was not guilty and that funds found on her, in her house, or bank account should be assumed to be her own money and not State funds, society, the police, and the prosecutors had no choice but to accept the verdict from the Presidency on the matter as controlling. It is, therefore, reasonable to state that ethnic group ethics and moral values of the various leaderships of the respective African nations have collectively created the social structures and systems that the people in Sub-Saharan Africa operate and which define their mundane ethical activities in politics, governance, and power dynamics.

Another example is the generally observed hubris that is evidently and visibly displayed by the politicians and political appointees in ways that defy logic and the rules and regulations of a democratic government. A case in point is that, during the 2024 general elections, the people of Ghana were presumed to be so angry with the arrogance displayed by the NPP government that ruled Ghana from 2017 to 2024 that the incumbent government gained only 88 seats out of 275 seats. This is the same Party that had overwhelmingly gained power from the National Democratic Congress in December of 2016, led by ex-President John Dramani Mahama. The NDC under the same man defeated NPP under Akufo-Addo, this time around, and gained as many as 184 parliamentary seats. The main cause of this massive turnaround and disgraceful loss of power to the NDC was attributed to the arrogance of the rank and file of the NPP, followed by alleged presidential and ministerial as well as general corruption, unaccountability to the people of Ghana and outrageous financial shenanigans that may have probably revealed a lot more about the ethical underpinning of the NPP than any other value one expected to be exhibited by the NPP. Greed as a negative ethical value is one of the most prevalent moral goals of the people of Africa. While researchers in Africa do not often speak to greed as an ethical or moral value of Africa, it cannot be denied that, whether it is accepted as having a huge negative effect on human flourishing in Africa or not, it definitely does have overwhelming negative consequences on the cost of public infrastructure and national development.

B. *African Traditional Ethics and Morality: Overview of Ghana, Uganda, Kenyan, Nigerian Cultural and Moral Ethos*

“When it comes to indigenous culture and ethics, a nation like Ghana has not taken the time to design the parameters for finding solutions to the complex problem of traditional medicine, or developing ethical code for the conduct of research specific to the traditional members of the Ghanaian society and their engagement with outside research partners” (Castellano, 2004; Norman, 2014). In the context of modern ethical practices in Ghana, until 2012, Ghana did not have national

legislation on medical ethics delineating the responsibilities of researchers to their subjects. In 2012, Ghana passed the Public Health Act (Act 851) to regulate, among other things, healthcare delivery system, clinical trials, and medical research (Norman, 2014: p. 95). Such development has already led to the development of Ghana or African-specific standards for ethical evaluation of conduct: criminal and constitutional procedures for the assessment of conduct within the public space. By using the example of Ghana, it does not mean that, for some reason, Ghana, together with the rest of Africa, has now developed a “compendium” of African ethics or morality.

C. The Non-Existence of Compendium of African Ethics or Morality

The big reveal in this paper is that there does not appear to exist a compendium of ethics or morality as the standardized or codified approximation of African ethics or morality for good reasons. African ethics is not standardized. By standardization, it implies a principle-based list of African ethics and morality. Part of the reasons why Africa does not seem to have principle-based ethics is that, Africans have been benevolent in their historical treatment of others without designing specific programs for racial annihilation, extermination, wicked medical experiments and systematic exclusion of others based on race, national origin or religion as the Nazi Germans did in killing Jews and others, through gas chambers and other horrible means of exterminating over six million Jewish people in addition to other racial minorities such as Gypsies. It seems the Nazi Germans universalized hatred towards others that were different from the Nazi view of humanity in such a way that physical assault on people or racial minorities was considered benign. This is no different from the reported six to ten million Africans killed by King Leopold of Belgium, according to Adam Hochschild, in the lands along the Congo River, or the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo (Atrocities Watch Africa, 2024). Similar racist acts and killings were undertaken by the Southern Confederacy in the United States in the sanctimonious confines of Christianity and devotion to God. The Scramble for Africa in 1884 defies any claim that the Western world was even exposed to principle-based ethics with values such as “beneficence”. Beneficence means whatever you do should benefit the community, or “non-maleficence,” or do no harm. The Western world was as ignorant about principle-based ethics as any cohort of people, contrary to the seminal writings of Beauchamp & Childress, Holland, Emmanuel, Norman, Gostin, and so many other researchers. The word “principle” is simply a statement about a fundamental truth, a reality, or proposition that provides the foundation for a belief system or behavior modalities for reasoning. Considering the evil practices engaged in by the entire Western nations on Africa even in 1884 onwards, where slavery was allegedly prohibited, tells a different story of how improvident, wicked, shallow and myopic the ethical and philosophical foundations of ethics were among the Western nations, and therefore, could not have been exposed to principle-based ethics by any stretch of the imagination. If the Western wicked approach to human relations was only with Africans, one could probably say it was probably

an accident. But considering the repetitive nature of the racist conduct of the West, not only in Europe but also in Australia, South and Central America, and Asia, it has to be accepted that the Western world preached ethics and morality on one side of their lips and conducted inimical and bestial acts on the other side of the same lips. This evidences that, principle-based ethics was not part of the mundane thinking and behavior of the generalities of the people of the Western world.

D. Australia: Racist, Segregation, and Ostracization of the Aborigines

Australian whites embarked on a similar wicked racial doctrine to remove and exterminate the aborigines, their children, and children of aboriginal ancestry with Caucasians. European hegemony led the world into bestiality and genocidal existence. Slavery, which was the practical devaluation of human beings within the Western ethical framework, delineated black people as second-class citizens and caucasians as first-class humans. This classification or stratification of human beings was accompanied by wickedness, racial discrimination, and the provision of social assets on a segregated spectrum, with black people receiving less of the share of societal assets than every other racial group. It also led to intentional and deliberate annihilation, extermination of racial groups and minorities by white men and women, and two world wars with disastrous consequences for Africans and others. Africa has never hated a set of people anywhere to cause a world war as a means of defending their pride and their rights. The often neglected reality or key point is that, but for the deliberate bestial medical experiments of the Nazi regime's doctors, the Western world would not have developed principle-based biomedical or socio-ethical standards other than the universally based moral and ethical principles of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, Aristotle and others. The development of principle-based ethics was the Western world's way of coming to terms with its own excesses in wicked treatment of others. They needed to set a yardstick to check themselves from ignoring their own humanity and treating others like animals.

Early Sources and History of Ethics Were Populated by Non-Monopolistic Values

It is important to notice that the initial sources of the principles of Western philosophical ethical thoughts were populated with principles such as honesty, integrity, loyalty, and respect for others. None of these values is monopolistically Western, although each of these values has cultural limitations and approximations, despite the danger of the cultural relativism effect on the conduct of different persons. The early history of ethics includes Egyptian ethical training, Indian Vedic scriptures, and even Chinese philosophers such as Confucius and Mozi. Those ethical articulations were more about morality and virtue ethics influenced largely by theological moral precepts and aspirations, and not about Western social etiquette and morality. Most Western histories of ethics exclude this framework as not being fully systematized and thus not philosophical; however, the intellectual influence of Egypt on Ancient Greece is widely acknowledged by schol-

ars. The origin of ethics is hard to pin down, though most scholars agree that ethics evolve out of religious worship and scriptures (Rarick, 2008). It has been reported that Confucius “Kongzi” (551-479 BCE) developed, perhaps, the first robust virtue theory of ethics, focusing on piety. Mozi (5th Century BCE) also developed a form of impartial ethics comparable to utilitarianism. There also emerged schools of ethics such as “Daoism” with proponents such as Laozi (6th Century BCE) and Zhuangzi (369-286 BCE). Daoism rejected knowledge claims of absolute moral principles; they were about principle-based ethics, meta-ethics, applied ethics, and morality (Rarick, 2008; Savage, 2013; Martin & Damien, 2019). With the exception of Chaka Zulu’s alleged murderous rampage in South Africa, Africa does not have a pre-20th-Century narrative of genocide perpetrated by Africans against Africans except the Rwanda and Burundi cases. It seems wherever white people were found among the indigenous tribes’ men and women, the white people practiced genocide. In Australia, there was the near extermination of the Aboriginal Tasmanians, mass killing during the frontier wars, forced removal of indigenous children from their families, the so-called “Stolen Generation,” and pursued policies of forced assimilation (Savage, 2013; Martin & Damien, 2019; Perry, 1997).

Source of African Ethical and Moral Values

What Africa has by way of ethics and morality is based on convenient, ad hoc rationalization of moral conduct based on ethical cultural relativism emanating from each of the myriads of tribal groupings. That is to say, different societies have different customs and norms that underline the subjective interpretation of conduct within the remit of that society’s moral expectations or standard. This observation does not refute or deny the fact that Africa operates under the universal reality of ethical relativism within the comity of nations with respect to international politics and diplomacy within the controls of the international community, from the standpoint of official or national conduct. The international public conduct of African nations is not a stand-in for rationalizing ethical and moral domestic conduct of the various ethnicities in Africa within the limits of culture, justice, and fairness. At the national level, the practice of ethics in observing respect for rights, such as feminine and masculine gender rights in Africa, is viewed from each nation’s subjective lenses. For example, whereas South Africa permits alternative sexual orientation, Ghana describes such rights as impermissible and even criminal.

Africa is not a monolithic continent with one ethnic group, although superficially, Africans appear to share a common biological and genetic heritage. The moral framework of one ethnic group in Africa does not control the moral conduct and social expectations of the multi-cultural and hyper-ethnic group identities in Africa. For example, Ubuntu (Zulu) ethics in South Africa is not equivalent to Ugandan African ethics among the Acholi, Baganda, or the Soga people, but a minuscule tribal or ethnic moral set of rules unique to that tribe and no other. Ubuntu morality does not have a significant moral imperative among the various

ethnic groups in South Africa, such as the Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, Sepedi, or Xitsonga. Similarly, Akan or Ashanti moral ethos in Ghana is not equal to Nigerian Ibo or Yoruba, as well as the over 370 ethnic groups' moral metrics, although there are points of convergence and even assimilation among these ethnic groups in Nigeria.

9. Conclusion

Too many researchers in Africa or those researching African ethics and morality make expansive claims that are not supported by the history and culture of the respective African nations. There is, somehow, a compendium of moral ethos or standardized ethical basis in Africa. This behavior ought to stop. This conduct falls into the wider spectrum of nationalistic propaganda, because it perpetuates cultural and historical falsehood. The intention to write this paper is motivated by the need to be truthful and show the shortcomings captured in various research papers on the topic of African ethics and morality. To begin with, there is not a single compendium of African ethics stored in any library on earth. This is because there is nothing called "African Ethics". African ethics is used primarily as a pejorative term with no regard to the unique ethnic and tribal groupings that make up what is also erroneously termed or accepted as Africa. There are all forms of meanings and definitions attached to the word "Africa," which makes it a bit meaningless. Be as it may, this paper accepts the universal label of the continent of Africa as Africa and the various ethnic and tribal groups living in it as Africans for the time being.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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