

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY | APPLIED ETHICS



TOPIC

**UBUNTU AND CORRUPTION: ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON NEPOTISM IN THE
SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

BY

MZIKAYISE JOHN MSIBI (1767738)

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DECLARATION

I, Mzikayise John Msibi do hereby declare that this Research Report is the results of my investigation and research and that this has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree or for any other course to any other University.

All work from other writers has been properly acknowledged and cited – this was achieved by ‘in-text references’, and the ‘bibliographic details’ which is at the end of this work.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to reflect on the problem of corruption (nepotism) in the public sector using African moral thought. I will specifically be investigating the relationship between the moral theory of ubuntu and nepotism. This research will use Thaddeus Metz's interpretation of ubuntu as a moral theory that prizes certain social relationships as intrinsically valuable, to pursue the moral status of nepotism. In the dominant legal and moral discourse, nepotism is considered to be obviously immoral, and as an instance of corruption. In this research, I will be exploring the relationship between ubuntu and nepotism, I will be specifically considering whether nepotism is immoral, and counts as an instance of corruption in African moral thought. In the final analysis, I seek to extend the conversation about partiality in moral philosophy to consider whether nepotism is a plausible or acceptable form of partiality. I will conclude by noting that Ubuntu considers nepotism to be a wrong form of partiality, which can be characterized as an instance of corruption.

Keywords

African thought – Impartiality – Nepotism – Partiality – Relational ethics – Ubuntu

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CPI: Corruption Perception Index

PRASA: Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa

INTRODUCTION

The Corruption Perception Index (CPI: post 1994 yearly indexes) indicates that South Africa is among countries with concerning high levels of corruption¹. The perceived levels of public sector corruption in 180 countries/territories around the world in 2017 placed South Africa in position 64 with a CPI score of 43. Countries which have CPI scores from 0 to 49 are perceived to be highly corrupt by the Corruption Perception Index. The position, as indicated in the CPI, is supported by a number of reports especially by the former Public Protector, Advocate Thuli Madonsela regarding corruption in South Africa. One such report dealt with findings and recommendations in one government agency, the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA)². One of the interesting notes concerning corruption in the report by the former Public Protector on PRASA pertains to instances of nepotism in this organisation. The aim of this research is to ethically reflect on nepotism in the light of ubuntu as an embodiment of an African ethical worldview.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This research explores the relationship between ubuntu and nepotism. It is usually taken for granted both legally and morally that nepotism is illegal and immoral. Specifically, it is considered to be an instance of corruption. In this article, I revisit the moral status of nepotism in the light of ubuntu as a moral theory. The idea of ‘nepotism’ refers to the favoritism one shows to their family and friends in the recruitment or hiring process (Bellow, 2003). The prevalent moral belief or intuition is that nepotism is wrong because it is an instance of a wrong form of favoritism or partiality (Cottingham, 1986). Not all forms of partiality are morally justified or acceptable. Paradigm examples of wrong forms of partiality are racism and sexism. If there are acceptable kinds of partiality and unacceptable ones, it will be interesting to consider the status of nepotism in the light of African moral thought - ubuntu.

The idea of ubuntu is usually explained in terms of the maxim ‘a person is a person through other persons’. One influential interpretation of ubuntu, by Thaddeus Metz (2009), construes it to be

¹ Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/>.

² Available at: <http://politicsweb.co.za/documents/how-prasa-was-derailed--thuli-madonsela>

best understood, meta-ethically speaking, in terms of partiality rather than impartiality. As such, it appears that ubuntu would require us to prioritize or favor our special relationships in our day-to-day engagements. Where it is not entirely clear is whether ubuntu would recommend such kind of partiality in the context of business or in the public sector. More precisely, the challenge that is posed here seeks to ascertain whether ubuntu would regard nepotism as morally acceptable or unacceptable.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research is to determine whether nepotism can be justified in light of ubuntu.

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

One of the grossly under-explored questions in African moral thought pertains to the meta-ethical question whether ubuntu is best captured in terms of partiality and impartiality (see, Molefe, 2016; 2018). The aim of this research is to contribute to this debate, by way of considering its implications for public governance with regards to the moral status of nepotism. Further, this research aims determine whether nepotism will count as an acceptable form of partiality and in which instances. In that sense therefore, this study imagines itself as a contribution to African ethics, particularly in contexts of public governance on the basis of African moral thought. The research is important because the question of nepotism has been reflected on, drawing on legal and moral thinking prevalent in Western individualistic societies, which tend to draw a sharp distinction between the private and public sphere. The aim of this research is to think about nepotism in light of African moral thought and contribute to the scant literature on the discourse on partiality in African ethics, specifically in relation to the areas on governance and corruption.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is concerned with three moral themes: (1) ubuntu as a moral theory; the meta-ethical question of partiality and impartiality in relation to ubuntu and (3) the moral status of nepotism in African moral thought, whether it is acceptable or unacceptable. The literature review will follow this three-part distinction. I begin below, by giving the reader the sense of the literature with regards to ubuntu.

Ubuntu as a Moral Theory

Metz states that “[a] moral theory is a fundamental principle that accounts for what all right actions, as distinct from wrong ones have in common ... [it] is single principle that purports to entail and explain all permissible decisions, as contrasted with those that are not permissible” (2009a: 339). Metz then highlights that “prevalent moral thought is highly influenced by western thinking with little attention dedicated to African ethical thought and its implications for questions of governance” (Metz, 2009; Wareham, 2016). However, thinking about ethics only in terms of western thought and only according to dominant western moral theories would tend to wrongly assume that Africans do not have moral standpoint or moral theory that can contribute to local and global ethical discourses. African cultures have under-explored moral resources that can contribute to moral discourses such as the issue of nepotism. African moral thought, especially in sub-Saharan countries, is usually summed up by the concept of ubuntu. Most sub-Saharan cultures espouse ubuntu or some moral thought akin to it (Eze, 2005). It is worth noting that, though other sub-Saharan countries do not necessarily refer to their moral thought as ubuntu according to their different languages but if African thought is collected and analyzed, this moral thought would be summed up to ubuntu, or would be closely associated with it.

It is generally accepted that ubuntu as a moral theory is best captured in terms of the maxim - ‘A person is a person through other persons’. The assertion by John Mbiti – I am because we are – is also understood to amount to the same moral logic and consequences inherent in the discourse of ubuntu (Ramose, 1999). There are competing interpretations of ubuntu as a moral theory. Scholars like Ramose (1999), Mokgoro (1998) and Shutte (2001) reduce ubuntu to a *perfectionist* approach to morality, where the agent is required to realise the ideals associated with her humanity. Leonhard Praeg (2014) construes ubuntu as a ‘critical humanism’, where

ubuntu is understood as an open-ended discourse about conditions necessary for a good human life. Recently, Edwin Etieyibo (2017) construes ubuntu in terms of ‘strict cosmopolitanism’, where the interests of all count and should count equally. On my part, for the sake of focus, I will use Thaddeus Metz’s interpretation of ubuntu to pursue my investigation into the questions of partiality and nepotism.

I do not do so because I take his approach and account of ubuntu to be complete discussion on ubuntu, nor do I take it as a complete interpretation of ubuntu. I am aware of some of the scathing criticisms of Metz’s work (Ramose, 2007; Wood, 2007; Futter, 2016; Etieyibo, 2016; Molefe, 2017). However, Metz’s work provides an invaluable academic discussion and interpretation of ubuntu. First Metz defends an interpretation of ubuntu that takes partiality as a point of departure (Metz, 2009a: 52). Secondly, he has discussed the relationship between partiality and nepotism in his own analysis (Metz, 2009b). Metz defends a relational interpretation of ubuntu grounded on the basic value of harmony, which takes its inspiration from Desmond Tutu (1999).

All these discussions by Metz seem to me as coming very close to what I was being told from a young age, as a Zulu person; this because “Black traditional societies below the Sahara are well known for tending to share certain ways of life. They characteristically are small scale in number so that everyone knows everyone else; are oral cultures...” (Bell and Metz, 2012: 79). I must indicate that by stating that Metz’s discussion on ubuntu seem to me as coming very close to what I was being told from a young age, as a Zulu person, I do not mean that Metz’s work is less than what I was told while growing up in the Zulu culture in which the maxim “a person is a person through other people” is lived or should be learned through experience more than through academia. What I mean is that Metz’s work figures well with my lived experience and adds an important academic discourse on the issue of ubuntu so that the two (oral pre-philosophical African renditions ubuntu (learnt through my upbringing in Zulu culture) and Metz’s academic discourse on ubuntu comes close and will hopefully meet at some point. Therefore I am naturally drawn to Metz’s work on the issue of ubuntu for that reason.

Ubuntu and the meta-ethical question of partiality and impartiality

One of the under-explored questions in African ethics is the question whether morality is best construed in terms of partiality and impartiality. Wiredu (1992) advocates sympathetic impartiality, which takes impartiality as the defining feature of ethics. Gyekye (2004) also advocates impartiality as a defining feature of morality. Both these scholars do not talk of ubuntu, but can be understood to advocate a moral system similar to it. Appiah (1992, 1998) takes partiality as a defining feature of African ethical thought. Molefe (2016) also defends partiality. In this analysis, I will adumbrate on Metz's interpretation of African ethics to elucidate on partiality as a feature of a robust moral system. The aim is not so much to adjudicate between the two positions, partiality or impartiality, but to pursue the consequences of partiality regarding the moral status of nepotism in the light of ubuntu.

The moral status of nepotism in African thought

Should helping members of one's society or relatives be regarded as nepotism in all circumstances? Dominant western moral theories like utilitarianism and Kantian ethics would suggest that whenever an agent takes into account special relations with the person or persons being helped, then the particular moral agent would have practiced a morally unacceptable act which they refer to as nepotism. However, not every act of favouritism amounts to nepotism, or at least not all forms of favouritism are unacceptable: helping my child or my member of my family using private goods is not nepotism and is not morally unacceptable. The important question is at what stage and under which circumstances does favouritism amount to nepotism (or uncreatable favouritism)? African writers would mostly answer this question by saying no; helping members of your society or your family does not render itself as always morally wrong. Interestingly, there are other western scholars that are not opposed to partialism (Wolf, 1992; Cottingham, 1986). There are African scholars that are opposed to partiality like Kwame Gyekye, as mentioned above. The term nepotism is a word which is "[b]orrowed from French *népotisme*, from Italian *nepotismo*, from Latin *nepōs* ("nephew"), a reference to the practice of popes appointing relatives (most often nephews) as cardinals during the Middle Ages and Renaissance"³. Karakose (2014: 245) provides a similar definition of nepotism.

³ Available from Paul W. Sherman, "The Meaning of Nepotism," *The American Naturalist* 116, no. 4 (Oct., 1980): 604-606. (taken from <https://doi.org/10.1086/283652>)

There are writers who straightforwardly suggest that taking relations as an important determinant of affording help as morally wrong. Writers in legal fraternity call favouritism nepotism or cronyism when especially public goods are used, that is, when an agent takes relations as important determinants of assisting another to advance in positions or in business, including the awarding of tenders. According to these writers, nepotism is a form of corruption, and corruption is morally and legally wrong in all instances. But is nepotism morally wrong in all instances? The former Public Protector Adv. Madonsela is one such writer from legal fraternity who would seem to regard nepotism as acceptable in all instances. Madonsela included nepotism in her report on PRASA (see introduction of this work). Alatas (1990:Chap. 3) is a philosopher who also include nepotism as form of corruption exactly like legal practitioners. By including nepotism on the form corruption, Alatas and Madonsela do not seem to think that nepotism can, in any way be justified.

There are also writers are those who, by implication (obviously not explicitly), argue that nepotism may be justified in certain circumstances such as Metz, Molefe, Appiah and others who advocate partiality. In the following paragraphs I briefly interrogate arguments of these writers.

Marcia Baron asserts that “[w]hile no one claims that impartiality is invariably a bad thing. A number of philosophers argue that its importance for ethics is exaggerated and that the emphasis on impartiality in ethics is detrimental” (Baron, 1991: 836). In this statement, Baron (by implication) acknowledges that totally regarding partialism or nepotism as morally evil is detrimental. It is realized that thinkers of ubuntu and those who argue for partiality tend to support certain forms of partiality but also tend to reject those that are morally questionable like sexism and racism. It is therefore crucial to reflect on whether nepotism will be regarded a kind of partiality that may be moral relevant in certain circumstances. This research, then will attempt to discover those circumstance in which nepotism can be acceptable, if at all.

John Cottingham also argues for partialism is his assertion that “[d]espite its widespread support from various versions of utilitarianism, socialism, Christianity and other creeds, impartialism is untenable (Cottingham, 1986: 357). Cottingham (1991: 801) further indicates that “[t]he Christian injunction to love your neighbour as yourself seems to presuppose something

impossible: That the sense of special concern which is the hallmark of genuine personal relationships could somehow retain its strength when indefinitely diluted to extend to all humans”. Cottingham also offers an equally philosophically compelling thought for impartiality in his article titled “Ethics and Impartiality”. Cottingham thinks that:

This conception of morality as impartiality can be found in eighteenth century appeals to the notion of an 'impartial spectator'; but it is by no means confined to ethical theoreticians. Millions of people pay at any rate lip service to the Christian maxim that one should love one's neighbour as oneself - an ethical idea which is (as will appear) closely linked to the impartiality thesis (Cottingham, 1988: 83).

The question that should be asked is what influence does impartiality (or partiality) have on morality? Drawing from the passage above, it would seem plausible to argue that the issue of moral outlook (ubuntu vs. dominant western philosophy) and how nepotism (moral problem) can be viewed differently by impartialists and partialists. The definition of partiality by Cottingham (1986, 358) “as the thesis that it is (not merely psychologically understandable but) morally acceptable to favour one’s own” seem to suggest that there can be instances in which nepotism can be justified. It must be indicated even though, Cottingham actually believes that nepotism is a moral defect, however, his strong support for partialism needs further exploration because partialism, by definition according to Cottingham, supports favouritism of some sort.

Metz illustrates cross-cultural differences when he argues that “[i]t is natural, of course, to point out that the cross-cultural moral differences we face are not between different planets, but rather different societies on the same planet” (Metz, 2007: 371). Metz further clarifies the point by pointing “concern” “that, particularly in light of the apparent existence of different planets when it comes to the referents of the term “morality.” This influence of culture on morality, as I understand it, implies that ubuntu as a moral theory, would endorse certain actions that Western cultures would reject. However, the question is whether ubuntu would endorse nepotism under certain circumstances? This further illuminates the perceived moral tension between ubuntu and the dominant Western philosophies regarding nepotism as dealt with in the problem statement of this work.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research method that will be used in this work is philosophical analysis. This method is characterized by two features, namely: (1) linguistic analysis and argumentation (Dower, 1998). The first facet of philosophical analysis, linguistic analysis, involves the correct use of language for the sake of gaining correct understanding of terms and for the sake of correct interpretation of concepts and issues. The second facet involves the question of evidence. Philosophical analysis conceives of evidence in terms of proffering reasons to defend or justify particular conclusions. In other words, a philosophical position is acceptable or justified if it is backed by a weight of evidence in its favour, which is understood in terms of rational considerations supporting the view under scrutiny. The aim of philosophical analysis as a research method is to ensure that we use concepts correctly, so that our meaning is free of ambiguities and confusion; and, it also aims to secure our conclusions on the basis of solid rational evidence.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

This research is constituted by two chapters as follows:

Chapter 1: Ubuntu, Morality and Partialism

This chapter will reflect on ubuntu as a moral theory. There are many competing conceptions of ubuntu as a moral theory. For sake of focus, I will rely on Metz's interpretation of ubuntu, which is influenced by Desmond Tutu's pre-philosophical rendition of it. I will tease out the following facets of Metz's interpretation of ubuntu. Firstly, I consider the distinction between relationalism and individualism in African moral thought. Secondly, I elaborate on his relational ethics. In the third section, I will consider its implications regarding the meta-ethical debate between partiality and impartiality. I will indicate that Metz's interpretation of ubuntu is partialist.

Chapter 2: Ubuntu and Nepotism

This will be the decisive chapter of this research. In this chapter, I will pose the question of how to distinguish between justified and unjustified forms of partiality. I will use the cases of racism and sexism as best instances of the wrong forms of partiality. From there, I will be in position to determine whether nepotism is a right or wrong form of partiality in light of ubuntu.

CHAPTER 1

UBUNTU, MORALITY AND PARTIALISM

Introduction

In this chapter, I consider Metz's interpretation of ubuntu as a moral philosophy. I will be elucidating on four facets of his moral theorisation regarding the moral discourse on ubuntu. To do this kind of exposition of Metz's view of ubuntu, I will draw largely from his essay 'Toward an African Moral Theory' and I will also consider subsequent 'renovations' of the views expressed in the initial essay. These are the four points that will constitute the focus of this chapter: (1) to account for what is 'African ethics' on Metz's view; (2) to consider the distinction between relationalism and individualism in the discourse of ubuntu; (3) to elaborate on Metz's relational interpretation of ubuntu with the purpose to capture how it accounts for rightness of actions; and, (4) lastly, to reflect on the meta-ethical question of whether ubuntu, at least according to Metz, admits of partialism or impartialism. In the final analysis of Metz's moral philosophy, this chapter will demonstrate that ubuntu endorses partiality as a feature of a plausible moral theory.

Metz's interpretation of ubuntu on the basis of African ethics

To make our entry to the discourse on ubuntu, it is useful to start by drawing our attention to the maxim that captures its essence - 'A person is a person through other persons'. This claim admits of both metaphysical and moral interpretations. With regards to the former, Gaie and Metz (2010: 274) inform us that to "most international readers this maxim may not bring to mind nothing prescriptive and, instead, will indicate merely some descriptive claims about the dependence of a human beings, particularly a child, on other human". Understood as a metaphysical claim, this view of ubuntu offers what we may term a relational view of personal identity (Mbiti, 1969; Menkiti, 1984; Mentiki, 2004; Molefe, 2019). I will not immediately turn to the moral implications of this maxim. For now, I will turn to considering how Metz construes the idea of African ethics.

In his philosophical writings, Metz employs the phrase 'African ethics' to refer to "values associated with the largely black and Bantu-speaking peoples residing in the sub-Saharan part of

the continent, thereby excluding Islamic Arabs in North Africa and white Afrikaners in South Africa, among others”⁴ (Metz, 2007: 321). This definition indicates four important factors about African ethics. The four factors in Metz’s view of African ethics are (1) “values associated with the largely black people”, (2) the Black people in question are “Bantu-speaking”, (3) they reside “in the sub-Saharan part of the [African] continent”, and (4) therefore exclude “Islamic Arabs in North Africa and white Afrikaners in South Africa, among others”. The four factors from the Metz’s definition provides a valuable tool to systematically separate African thought on ethics from other thoughts such as Oriental ethics and to be clear on what is meant by African ethics.

One important consideration regarding Metz’s interpretation of African ethics requires that we clarify the idea ‘African’ in the phrase ‘African ethics’. Metz’s uses the word ‘African’ to refer to a set of “... salient beliefs and practices of many sub-Saharan peoples” (Metz, 2010: 50) and adds that he does “not mean that either it or the intuitions on which it is grounded are unique to the African continent” (50). Central to Metz’s definition of what makes some value(s) and practice(s) is its *salience* in this region and across time. Metz captures the property of salience in this fashion - “to count as African, an idea or behaviour need not be present *everywhere* in Africa, and it need not be present *solely* in Africa” (50) and “only that they are prominent there in a way they are not everywhere else” (50). In other words, the values characteristic of African cultures are dominant in this region than in other parts of the world. Metz does give us a rough sense of the values dominant below the Sahara in this fashion:

For example, indigenous sub-Saharanans often think that society should be akin to family; they typically refer to people outside the nuclear family with titles such as ‘sisi’ and ‘mama’; they tend to believe in the moral importance of greetings, even to strangers; they normally think that there is some obligation to wed and procreate; they generally say that ‘charity begins at home’ or that ‘family comes first’; they frequently believe that ritual and tradition have a certain degree of moral significance; they usually do not believe that retribution is a proper aim of criminal justice, inclining toward reconciliation; they commonly think that there is a strong duty for the rich to aid the poor; and they often value consensus in decision making, seeking unanimous agreement and not resting

⁴ I must indicate that, though I do not support the use of the term “Bantu-speaking” as used by Metz because I construe it to carry apartheid connotations as in Bantu education, Bantustan and other such distasteful words in South African context; however I will continue to use the term because this project is not a political one.

content with majority rule (Metz, 2009: 52).

Another important point to note with regards to Metz's interpretation of ubuntu is to consider whether it favours ethical naturalism or ethical supernaturalism. The major debate in this regard revolves around accounting for morality entirely in secular or religious terms. Metz stipulates an approach to African moral thought that is secular at heart. Regarding why he takes ethical naturalism, he makes the following comment - "...it is clear that at least many African societies are best interpreted as believing moral norms to be logically independent of supernaturalist theses" (Metz, 2007: 328). Metz clarifies his interpretation of ubuntu in secular terms by sharing his personal view that "I am not out to defend an anthropological representation of the nature of African belief systems here; I instead stipulate that I seek to develop a moral theory that is non-religious at its base" (Metz, 2007: 238). As such, Metz offers an interpretation of ubuntu that is secular at heart.

Now that I have indicated what Metz means by 'African ethics', I will now turn my attention to highlighting how he interprets the term ubuntu. In doing so, Metz starts by indicating that the word ubuntu "is a word used by the Zulu people of South Africa, and is difficult to translate into English because it has many different connotations associated with it" (Metz, 2007: 323). It is important that Metz starts his engagement and interpretation of ubuntu by indicating its origin and that it "is difficult to translate into English" (323) as already indicated. This gives us a sense of the complexity and depth of the idea of ubuntu. It is therefore not surprising that most non-Zulu or non-Nguni language speakers often misconstrue the idea of ubuntu because as matter of fact, the concept of ubuntu is difficult to translate into any other non-African language⁵.

According to Metz, the word of ubuntu could be explained to "roughly mean humanness" (Metz, 2007: 323). He also holds that ubuntu often figures into maxim "a person is a person through other persons." In what follows, we shall turn our attention to the moral facets of this idea, as promised above. The moral sense of the aphorism 'a person is a person through other persons' enjoins that "one ought to be a *mensch*, in other words, morally should support the community in

⁵ Here I am using the word non-African in the same sense as Metz (I believe) would regard ethics as [un]-African if it is largely about [non]-black and [non]-Bantu-speaking¹ people not residing in the sub-Saharan part of the continent, thereby [in]cluding Islamic Arabs in North Africa and white Afrikaners in South Africa, among others such as Westerners.

certain ways” (Metz, 2007: 323). The idea of a *Mensch* means “a person of integrity”⁶ (323). A *mensch* is someone who is responsible, has a sense of right and wrong, and is the sort of person other people admire. A *mensch* shows up for her friends. In the English language, the word has come to mean ‘a good-hearted, dependable, solid person’. In the excerpt below, Metz gives more clarity on what he means by a *mensch*. He does this as follows:

The phrases say that achieving the state of being a *mensch* is entirely constituted by relating to others in a certain manner. In the way that “an unjust law is no law at all” (as per St. Augustine), or just as we might say that a jalopy is “not a *real* car” (Gaie 2007: 33, emphasis original), so Africans would characterize an individual who does not relate positively to others as lacking *ubuntu*, lacking humanness. Indeed, those who fail to relate properly are sometimes described as animals. (Metz, 2010: 83)

Metz further clarifies that the relationship with others should be a positive one (Gaie 2007). Metz also adds another angle of proper relationships (Metz, 2010). These two (positive relationships and proper relationships) are important because they bring to the fore the fact that there can be negative relations and there can be an improper relations which, according to Metz, would not amount to ubuntu. Negative relationships in Metz’s view are those that cause people to divide and not unite as in hostile and hateful relationships. Improper relationships on the other hand, as Metz views them, would be those in which people relate with the purpose of causing harm to others (ill-will): in this sense a group of criminals can be said to have a proper relationship with other members of their gang but would not account not ubuntu because the intension of their relationship as criminals, is to harm others in some ways. Interestingly, it becomes evident, in the analogy of the group of criminals that they have positive relationship among themselves as criminals. In this analogy, their positive relationship towards members of their group as criminals is improper in relations to the rest of community that does not support acts of criminality. In this sense, for a relationship to account as ubuntu, it should be both positive and proper. That is how, at least as I construe Metz, interprets the relational aspect of ubuntu.

⁶ Available at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-yiddish-word-dictionary-2076346>

In the following section I will reflect on individualism and relationalism, specifically gazing at how these two phenomena differ in African moral thought. This will assist in determining whether African ethics in Metz's view, is individualistic or relational.

Ubuntu: Individualism or Relationalism?

To get a clear sense of Metz's interpretation of ubuntu as a moral theory, it is important that we introduce a crucial distinction between moral individualism and relationalism. The key question to consider here is – does Metz take ubuntu to be individualistic or relational? Before I answer this question, we should first define these two concepts.

Supporters of individualism indicate that "...our moral obligations to animals, both human and non-human, are grounded in the morally salient capacities of those animals" (May, 2014: 155). This means that individualism is concerned with particular characteristics of an individual itself to place our moral obligation to such an individual. The phrase "salient capacities of those animals" as used by May above clearly indicate that individualism places morality internal to the individual. This view is supported by Metz's indication that individualism in Western moral thought, that is, "the dominant or salient normative theories found in books and journals from the West devoted to global ethical matters appeal, at bottom, to the ideas that moral status is grounded upon something intrinsic to an individual and that right action is a matter of honouring or promoting it" (Metz, 2014: 147). In this sense, though Metz and May use different phrases such as "something intrinsic to an individual" (Metz) and "salient capacities of those animals" (May) to locate morality in individualism but they are both quintessentially placing morality inside an individual. However, African moral thought, on the other hand, views individualism in a different manner to dominant moral theories such as "Hobbesian egoism or Kantian respect for persons" (Metz, 2007: 321). While individualism is required in African moral thought but unlike 'Kantian liberalism' in which it "is morally acceptable for an individual to lead a lifestyle without substantial human interaction, so long as one respects other people's rights" (Bell and Metz, 2011: 82). In African moral thought, however, individualism is viewed in relation to how the individual relates to others. This means positive and proper relationships with others. Therefore, in African moral thought there is a "moral difference, so to speak, between somebody who has rich social ties and somebody who seeks the good in, say, technology" (ibid,

82). Gaie and Metz hold that in African moral thought, “although the goal is personal fulfilment, selfishness is excluded’ (Shutte, 2001 in Gaie and Metz, 2010: 275).

This is a different dimension of individualism. Now the question is whether there are different kinds of individualism? Kagitcibasi (1997) answers this question by distinguishing between “normative individualism, with its emphasis on individual rights and avoidance of the oppression of the in-group, from relational individualism, with its emphasis on the distance between self and in-group”. It seems evident that Kagitcibasi’s “normative individualism” is what Metz and May have in mind in their placing of morality inside the individual. On the other hand, it seems plausible to conclude that “relational individualism” is what African moral thinkers such as Gaie, Metz, and Shutte have in mind when they draw a line between personal fulfilment and selfishness. On one hand, personal fulfilment when viewed alone seem to suggest morality resides solely in certain characteristics such as “salient capacities of those animals” in May’s case or in “something intrinsic to an individual” in Metz’s case. On the other hand, by excluding selfishness, Shutte (2001) seems to suggest that, though individualism cannot be denied but there are kinds of individualism which would be morally objectionable. This is true, especially when we view individualism through the lens of African moral thought. This view has already been discussed above. If I am correct that there are kinds of individualism that are not acceptable as has been discussed, then I feel obliged to bravely conclude that there is a radical-individualism (as would mostly be seen in Western societies) and moderate-individualism (as is evident in African moral thought)⁷. The view of moderate-individualism, as construe it, is mostly evident in African moral thought, is also supported by Motsamai Molefe (2017: 50) in his submission that “[o]ther scholars have noted that there are strands of individualism in African moral thought”. If that is the case, then radical-individualism would be a salient feature of Western moral thought such as Hobbesian egoism, Kantian respect for persons or Kantian liberalism, to name just a few.

Now that individualism has been discussed, then the next concept to discuss is relationalism. This discussion will assist in identifying which of the two (individualism and relationalism) concepts Metz take seriously and as a result, subscribes to it. “Relationalism is the view that the moral status of a living being is determined not by solely its particular characteristics but more

⁷ I am attaching the pronouns radical and moderate to the stem word ‘individualism’ (as a philosophical concept) because I have noticed that philosophers tend to use pronouns such as these - strict, radical or moderate to distinguish between types of the same philosophical concept.

importantly by the relations it has with human beings” (May, 2014: 155). Two points are important is May’s definition of relationalism in relation to moral status of living things. The two that points are that moral status of a living thing is “determined not by solely its particular characteristics” (as May would imagine) in individualism or more specifically radical-individualism as I concluded, but that moral status is “more importantly” determined “by the relations it has with human beings”. Please notice that May is carefully using the phrases “not by solely” and “more importantly” but due to space, I will not discuss these here. On the other hand, Metz also clarifies what is meant by relationalism. He does this by pointing out that “A different understanding of the morality of ubuntu includes the idea that moral value fundamentally lies not in the individual, but rather in a relationship between individuals (Metz, 2007: 333). This research takes Metz’s definition of relationalism as indicated above. African moral theory holds that “to be a human be-ing is to affirm one’s humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them” (Ramose in Metz, 2007: 331). In this sense, for Africans, relationalism carries moral obligations in that it requires ‘humane relations’ and one’s morality is grounded in those relations. I have indicated elsewhere in this chapter that Metz’s relationships in African moral thought must both be ‘positive and proper relations’ thus this is the ‘humane relations’ that Metz is also alluding to. There are two values in Metz’s interpretation of ubuntu: he offers what he takes to be a more plausible conception of care, which is constituted by two values – solidarity and identity. Metz explains the two values to mean that “[i]dentity is a matter of belonging, being close, sharing a way of life or feeling integrated, while solidarity is instead promoting others’ well-being, being sympathetic, acting for the common good and showing concern for others” (Metz, 2013: 81).

Before leaving this section it is necessary to conclude that Metz’s moral theory on ubuntu takes relational rather than an individualistic approach. Below, I elaborate on Metz’s Relational theory.

Metz’s Relational View of Ubuntu

Now that we have established that Metz grounds the essence of morality in some interpersonal relationships, it is crucial that we make an inquiry regarding what sorts of social relationships account for the good or morality. Metz, regarding what sorts of social relationships account for the entire gamut of morality, takes a cue from Desmond Tutu’s, who is also famous for chairing

the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), adumbrations on ubuntu. Tutu makes the following comment:

Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the summum bonum—the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague (Tutu, 1999: 35).

In this quotation, Tutu is elaborating on the moral idea of ubuntu. It is crucial to notice that Tutu takes ubuntu to be a moral value that highly prizes social harmony. On this interpretation of ubuntu, certain social relationships are the highest moral good, that is, certain social relationships constitute the very essence of morality. Metz is particularly attracted to this pre-philosophical relational view of ubuntu as adumbrated by Tutu. Metz seeks to offer a more robust and philosophically precise understanding of the ideal of social harmony as the core of ubuntu. Before turning to the codified rendition of Metz's philosophical theory on ubuntu, let me first demonstrate how Metz accounts for social harmony. Metz introduces three concepts that deal with harmony in different ways – shared identity, goodwill and the combination of shared identity and goodwill. Metz then carefully goes on to separately dichotomize and analyze the three concepts introduced to determine which of the three concepts best represent social harmony in terms of ubuntu.

On the first concept ('Shared Identity'), let me endeavour to summarise Metz's account for shared identity as illustrated: (1) when a given individual considers herself part of a group, then the same group must consider such an individual part of it, (2) "people share identity when they have common ends, if not also the same motives or reasons that underlie them" and the "people in the group coordinating their activities in order to realize their ends". This can be simplified by using an analogy as follows (Metz, 2007: 335). It therefore follows that if individual A considers itself part of group B, then group B must also consider this individual A part of group B. Moreover, individual A and all members of group B must aim to achieve C (common end) and work together to achieve it, but not necessarily doing the same or equal things to achieve C. Another example of shared identity can be exemplified practically as follows: Let us say I come home to Kwa-Zulu Natal, obviously I consider myself part of the Msibi family (my family) but also the Msibi considers me part of them as a family. Now let us say as a family, we want to

build a house (common end) and we work together to build that house (coordinated activities). Interestingly, in building the house, as members of my family, we will not necessarily do the same things and we will not equally work or equally contribute towards building the house – others will buy bricks, others will buy sand or material while others will actually lay the bricks or pay the bricklayer. That is roughly the shared identity that Metz has in mind.

With regards to the second concept (Good-Will), Metz (2007: 336) has in mind what he calls “caring or supportive relationship[s]”. The essence of these relationships is that they involve securing the welfare of others for their own sakes. The idea of good-will is characteristically exemplified through sympathy and care towards others with whom we share special relationships and the goal is improving the quality of their lives. Metz (2007: 236) captures the idea of good-will [solidarity] in this fashion:

One has a relationship of good-will insofar as one: wishes another person well (conation); believes that another person is worthy of help (cognition); aims to help another person (intention); acts so as to help another person (volition); acts for the other’s sake (motivation); and, finally, feels good upon the knowledge that another person has benefited and feels bad upon learning she has been harmed (affection).

With regards to the first two concepts I must indicate that Metz cautions that there can be shared identity without ‘good-will’, and also there can be good will without shared identity, therefore, my explanations and simplified illustrations as indicated above are just that, ‘explanations and simplified illustrations’, to give a glimpse of how Metz imagines ‘Shared Identity’ and ‘Good-Will’.

It is important to understand that Metz believes that “the most attractive sort of harmonious relationship to promote is surely one that includes both”, that is, shared identity and good will (the combination of the two concepts). That combination of ‘Shared identity’ and ‘Good-will’ amounts to social harmony. This philosophical exposition of harmony is the most important moral value in ubuntu amounts to the following principle of right action:

An action is right just insofar as it promotes shared identity among people grounded on good-will; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to do so and tends to encourage the opposites of division and ill-will (338).

Two critical facts are evident from this principle. The first critical fact is that for an action to be right it must promote “shared identity” and “good-will”. This succinctly encapsulates right action on ubuntu. As such, rape is wrong precisely because there is no shared identity between the rapist and his victim and there is also no solidarity. Secondly, the initial expression of this principle of right action took a consequentialist interpretation, where the relationships of harmony have to be promoted. In his latter interpretation, Metz prefers a deontological interpretation, where such relationships are not promoted, but are rather honored. In other words, the aim of morality is to make sure that we respect our relationships. And to produce as many of them as possible. Finally, Metz points out that this principle of right action or the ideal of social harmony amounts to the value of friendship or love (2007: 337).

In the next section, I will be considering the question whether ubuntu is best captured in terms of partiality or impartiality.

Ubuntu and Partiality

A careful analysis of Metz’s interpretation of ubuntu seems to take partialism as a defining feature of African moral thought. This view is supported by the fact that Metz reduces the value of social harmony to that of friendship or familial relationships. These relationships in terms of the values they express and the practices they engender are typically characterised by favoritism, which is a hallmark of partiality. Metz talks of familial relationships in this fashion - “[f]amilial relationships of the right sort have good consequences for individuals, but the fascinating idea salient in sub-Saharan morality is the notion that they are to be morally valued in themselves, apart from their results” (Gaie and Metz, 2010: 276). The point being made here is that ubuntu is usually captured in terms of familial relationships, and these relationships are to be valued for their own sakes. It is not farfetched to recognise that part of what it means to value these relationships is to appreciate the partiality inherent in them.

Metz also proceeds to inform us that ubuntu is characterised by partialism as its dominant feature in this fashion:

While the present interpretation of African morality is impartial at one level, prescribing community wherever it is possible, it implies that one's own extant communal relationships have a principled priority, a philosophical rendition of the partiality often given to kin in traditional sub-Saharan practice (Metz, 2010: 52).

The above quotation indicates that partiality, a kind of partiality similar to *philophilic* partiality that Cottingham (1986, 386) alludes to in that "partiality is exercised towards the philos, the loved-one, precisely in virtue of the special relationship which the loved one has to the agent" (369). Philophilic partialism is form "partiality often given to kin" as in Metz (Metz: 52). However, Metz is careful with his kind of partiality in that he attached constraints so that such partialism should not be unjustified. These constraints assist in toning down partiality to an acceptable level and thereby avoid criticism or to be regarded as corruption. The work done by the constraints that Metz attached to his theory can be seen below where Metz is carefully trying to avoid criticism. Metz illuminates this work done on the constraint by posing questions as follows:

What, if any, constraints are there on the way one may promote harmony? Suppose one can create harmony in the long-term only by creating some lesser amount of discord in the short-term. What is the right thing to do? Are there intuitively objectionable means of promoting the end of harmony that would not involve any discord at all? (Metz, 2007: 341)

Though Tutu did not put forth constraints in his account of ubuntu but that does not mean that there are no constraints on ubuntu but then what are those constraints. To answer the question of constraints, Bell and Metz add another term, that is, 'hospitality' in partiality vs. impartiality with regard to ubuntu. They hold that "African hospitality is a matter of aiming to forge a relationship of (active) belonging and (compassionate) benefiting, neither of which a Kantian gives any intrinsic or inherent moral weight" (Bell and Metz, 2011: 89-90). This does not refer to any moral obligations.

Partiality on the other hand, carries moral weight in that Bell and Metz regards “Ubuntu: [as] the central value of community, the desirability of ethical partiality” (Bell and Metz, 2011: 80). On the issue of hospitality Bell and Metz maintain that “It could be argued that Ubuntu-style hospitality emerged from a context where communities were generally stable and exceptions could be made for short-term visitors” (Bell and Metz, 2011, 89). This is a direct answer to the first two of the last three questions, that is, that of creation harmony in the long-term in expense of short-term harmony as posed by Metz above. On the issue of short-term disharmony, Bell and Metz provide a compelling instance in which a short-term disharmony takes priority. They do this by indicating that ubuntu places on us “the need to assist refugees at some cost to citizens, or the duty to help strangers in car accidents even if we are late home for dinner—and the Ubuntu ideal of not merely maintaining, but also creating, community with others” (Bell and Metz, 2011, 89). Bell and Metz hold that “I owe more to family than to nonfamily—but it also emphasizes the obligations we owe to strangers, simply in virtue of their humanity” (89). In this sense, Bell and Metz makes a distinction between being under moral obligation (partialism) and respecting human dignity, being hospitable. It may seem that respecting human dignity and being hospitable account as partiality. However, Bell and Metz clarify that “a strict impartiality is most clearly not a salient theme in African ethics, with personal ties—traditionally, often those of blood relation—playing a major role in thought about which of the needy have priority and about how much to aid them” (Bell and Metz, 2011: 88-89).

This is where, as I have indicated herein, hospitality, respecting human dignity, generosity, and acceptance or creating short-term disharmony in view of long-term harmony play an important role on the basis of ubuntu. Therefore, respecting human dignity in general in Kant’s view or being hospitable are not forms of partiality since partiality requires strong relationships. I cannot be said to have strong relationship simply because I respect human dignity nor can I be said to have a strong relationship simply because I help someone who is in an accident. Helping someone who is an accident or being hospitable, say to strangers does not mean that I identify with them nor does it mean I am in solidarity with them. So indeed there are some constraints to ubuntu. The issue of ubuntu (ethical obligation) and hospitality (not so much as an ethical obligation) is further clarified in that “We do have an obligation to extend love beyond intimates, but that is not the expectation that the same degree of emotions and responsibilities will extend to

strangers” (Bell and Metz, 2011, 88). What is doing the work is the phrase “some degree”, which takes into account the constraints that Metz has built into his theory in principle number 6 (U6)

Therefore, though Metz interprets ubuntu as partial in principle number 6 (U6), however he places constraints on partiality in his interpretation ubuntu for it to be justifiable.

Despite Metz’s constraints built onto his theory of Africa moral theory, but his conforms to partialism requirements. Metz African moral theory that has constraints is the consequential approach to ubuntu. However his strongest view is the deontological approach captured in his 2009 article entitled “African and Western Moral theories in a Bioethical Context”. It is in this article, so far as I am aware, that Metz made a shift from a consequential approach to ubuntu to a deontological approach. However, both approaches to ubuntu should best be understood to be partialist, as is the focus of this section. The constraints on partialism is further amplified by Bell and Metz (2013) by stating that “our ethical obligations, at least with regard to beneficence, are strongest to those with whom we have personal relationships, and they diminish in intensity the farther we go from those relationships” (88). Interestingly, Metz further holds that “the *only* way to develop one’s humanness is to relate to others in a positive way. One becomes a person solely ‘through other persons’, which means that one cannot realise one’s true self in opposition to others or even in isolation from them” (Metz, 2010: 275). This view is also evident on Metz’s six principles (U1 to U6) of right action.

However, in his later works such as the 2013 article as referred above, Metz interprets ubuntu in deontological terms. He does this by pointing out that “Reflection on the (non-consequentialist) normativity of friendship suggests that one’s primary obligation is to be friendly oneself, with a secondary obligation being to promote friendship among others” (Metz, 2010: 52). In this deontological approach to ubuntu, Metz is using terms such as ‘prize’, ‘respect’ or ‘honour’ in respect to identity and solidarity. Metz indicates that the present theory “prizes identifying with others and exhibiting solidarity with them is to say this: do not fail to honour relationships in which people share a way of life and care for others’ quality of life, and especially do not esteem discordant relationships of division and ill-will” (51).

In doing so, Metz moved from a consequentialist approach to ubuntu to a no-consequentialist (deontological) one which, as Metz clarifies that it in “while the present interpretation of African morality is impartial at one level, prescribing community wherever it is possible, it implies that one’s own extant communal relationships have a principled priority, a philosophical rendition of the partiality often given to kin in traditional sub-Saharan practice” (52). Importantly, Metz is already drawing us to that fact ubuntu is partialist.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I considered Metz’s moral philosophy with the aim to determine whether it is best construed in terms of partiality or impartiality. To pursue this task, I focused on the facets of his moral philosophy. In this chapter I reflected on how Metz interprets ubuntu in Africa ethics. This was done so as to form a foundation for further discourse on ubuntu. The next section I reflected on whether ubuntu, according to Metz, is best captured by individualism or relationalism. It became evident that Metz takes a relational approach to interpreting ubuntu – Metz takes relationalism seriously. Since Metz is the primary focus of this research, it became natural that I should reflect on the idea of relationalism so that this idea can be better developed and understood for further use in this work. The last section of this chapter deals with the issue of whether ubuntu, in Metz view, is in line with partialism or impartialism.

The four concepts, as reflected on in this chapter, form the basis for next chapter. The next explores the moral status of nepotism in the light of ubuntu.

CHAPTER 2

UBUNTU AND NEPOTISM

Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to extend the conversation about partiality in moral philosophy to consider whether nepotism could be a plausible or acceptable form of partiality like we typically take friendship to be. I make this inquiry regarding the possible plausible status of nepotism in African moral thought for two crucial reasons. The first involves the fact that we have discovered that Metz's interpretation of ubuntu endorses partiality as a defining feature of African moral thought, where morality is defined entirely in terms of interpersonal relationships that intrinsically favor certain special ties. Secondly, it is common in the literature on partiality or even common sense morality that we distinguish between "more controversial forms" and "less controversial" forms of partiality (Cottingham, 1986: 368). The paradigm cases of controversial or even immoral forms of partiality are racism and sexism. Many scholars of ubuntu, Metz included, would consider racism to be an instance of a wrong form of partiality. Remember that Metz's moral theory requires us to prize relations of shared identity and solidarity, which is tantamount to expecting the agent to be friendly or 'loving' towards others. Racism and sexism are clear instances of unfriendliness. What is not immediately obvious in the literature, in African philosophy, is whether nepotism will count as either acceptable or not. As such, the second reason requires that we resolve this problem regarding the moral status of nepotism.

One of the leading proponents of partiality as a defining feature of morality in the Western moral tradition, John Cottingham (1986), drawing particularly from Aristotelian ethics, observes that nepotism is a controversial or even an unacceptable form of partiality. To justify this view, he argues that in the dispensation of public goods, the state and/or civil servants have a duty to operate on the logic of impartiality. This way of thinking seems to be based on the mere fact that in the public sector, the state and/civil servants are dealing with goods that do not belong to them and that should be dispensed for the sake of advancing, not their own interests or their special relationships, but the interest of the society at large. On this way of construing matters, it is a gross violation of public goods and its interests to deploy its goods in ways that serve narrow and self-centred interests.

The argument by Cottingham is launched from a particular moral and cultural vintage point. It is important to emphasize the fact that Cottingham is also committed to partiality as a defining feature of morality, at least those forms of it that are plausible like friendship. Secondly, he grounds his moral theory on some understanding of Aristotelian virtue ethics that construes morality in autocentric terms (see, Cottingham, 1991; Van Niekerk, 2007). The goal of morality on this view is captured in the moral goal of self-realisation, which is usually captured in terms of moral excellence. Finally, this view is pervasively influenced by values salient in the Western tradition, where the public institution is understood in terms of neutrality and impersonal role the state must assume (Kylmicka, 1990). In what follows below, I seek to explore whether ubuntu as a moral theory, will hold the same view regarding the status of nepotism like the one defended by Cottingham. To pursue this task, I will consider Metz's (2009) article 'African Moral Theory and Public Governance: Nepotism, Preferential Hiring and Other Partiality'.

Ubuntu, Public Sector and Partiality

I appeal to this particular chapter for the very reason that it is an obvious extension of Metz's commitment to partiality in his elucidation on African moral philosophy. In this instance, however, Metz takes his view of ubuntu as entailing partiality and applies in the context of the state or public sector. Specifically, among other things, he seeks to explore the question whether nepotism, as form of partialism, can be acceptable on the basis of ubuntu. To explore the relevance of partialism in the public sector, Metz begins by observing that dominant theories of moral-political thought in the West like Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics tend to take morality to be essentially defined in terms of impartiality.

From the above, it dawns to Metz that an African view of of morality (ubuntu) that is characteristically partialistic will have different implications for the conduct of the state than the dominant Western moral views that are characteristically impartial. What is not clear, however, is whether such a view will accommodate nepotism as an acceptable instance of partiality. This question by Metz (2009: 335) is instructive regarding approximating a solution to our primary question –

Should such a person refrain from considering any particulars about potential recipients or might it be appropriate to consider, for example, family membership, party affiliation, race or revolutionary stature as reasons to benefit certain individuals at some cost to the

general public? Which of these factors should be considered unjust, or even corrupt, as a basis on which to allocate state goods and which should not?

In this particular passage, Metz is asking regarding the posture that the state should take when allocating resources to its citizens. For our part, we are interested in inquiring whether family membership is an appropriate property to consider when allocating opportunities and resources of the public. It is interesting to notice that Metz argues that it is acceptable under certain contexts to show partiality in the distribution of public goods towards race (affirmative action) and revolutionary stature (those individuals who were directly involved in pursuing the independence fight against colonial powers and apartheid). The reason that justifies this kind of partiality in the conduct of the state seems to be two-fold. On the one hand, it is rooted on the demands of rectification justice; and, on the other, it is based on the duty to honor those that were directly involved in the struggle to bring about the emancipation of the oppressed (Molefe, 2018).

On the first reason, it seems the state would be characteristically unfriendly should it fail to respond appropriately to its unjust conduct of oppressing others. Part of what it means to respond appropriately involves paying special attention to victims of its unjust and oppressive practices. Hence, the state can and ought to show partiality towards those it harmed in the past as a way of demonstrating friendliness. The second reason specifically applies to outstanding individuals in the fight against the oppressive state. Here, we have in mind revolutionaries like Nelson Mandela, Stephen Bantu Biko and many more. With regards to these individuals, the state has a duty to manifest due other-regarding partiality to these individuals and many others precisely because of the role they played. Regarding these kinds of individuals, Metz comments:

In both cases, individuals risked life and limb to aid the state or the general public. Friendly relationships include a desire to show gratitude to those who have worked for the benefit of others. A person who is able but not willing to thank someone who has provided above average service is not properly identifying with that person or exhibiting goodwill.

With regards to those who gave their lives in the struggle fighting against the cruel regime of

apartheid, Metz endorses favoritism. This favoritism is grounded on the special relationships of shared identity between the state and the veterans. There is a sense of ‘we’ that exists between the state and veterans that it does not share with every member of society. It is not every member of society that fought for a just state in the way some of these individuals did, hence they are special. An essential part of sharing relationships of identity and solidarity just is to be grateful for those efforts that advance one’s status as an institution, just like the veterans and revolutionaries did. This comment by Metz (2009: 349) is appropriate – “An ethic that values friendly relationships therefore requires the state to recognize those who have made great sacrifices for it or the general public”. Part of this recognition might require that the state offers these individuals reasonable partiality that might involve giving them leadership positions, financial remuneration or even symbolic remuneration like offering them a state funded funeral and the like. Regarding this recognition that is owed to those that made great sacrifices Metz makes the following observation –

Similarly, the state may show some preference to individuals from whom it demanded unjust sacrifices in the past. Here the relevant moral category is not gratitude but repentance. In a choice between making amends to a wronged friend or making two new friends, an ethic that values friendship would demand the wrong to be set right first, presuming this were feasible (ibid).

In this passage, Metz reveals another important facet of accounting for morality (ubuntu) entirely in terms of certain interpersonal relationships of friendship or ‘love’: the idea of repentance. The idea here is that when we have violated our interpersonal relationships by being characteristically unfriendly, we have a duty to correct such injustices towards our victims (those who sacrificed a great deal). Part of showing friendliness involves repenting. The repentance imagined here is a robust kind since it goes beyond merely feeling bad and showing remorse. It requires that we identify the victims of our unfriendliness and we show them repentance, which might involve extending special corrective benefits or privileges to these individuals to repair relationships. The application here is that in the case of these outstanding individuals, for example, who were excluded in the economy, ubuntu could require that we build them homes, make efforts to connect them with their ancestors and families and even connect them with economic opportunities, all this on the part of the state as a way to express friendship, at least the

repentance part of it to amend the broken relationship.

Well, this discussion does go some way to indicating that the idea of ubuntu does accommodate some forms of partiality to be acceptable in the dispensation of the public goods, but we are still not clear regarding the status of nepotism in the light of ubuntu. Metz is unequivocal that ubuntu forbids dispensing public goods for the sake of our relatives at least if they were not ill-treated by the state or they are not veterans of the struggle. The logic for this seems to be self-evident that these possess no relational features with the state that may prompt or justify partiality. Or, as captured by Metz (2009: 345) –

A state which routinely distributed resources to benefit its officials' relatives, knowing that this would cost the public, would do a poor job of developing identity and goodwill. It would produce instead division and ill will.

To prize friendly relations with others requires that we avoid sowing discord and division in society. If state officials would hire their relatives without considering merit this would be violating public trust, which is crucial for enhancing social harmony. The fact that they may do it secretly makes it even more objectionable because to prize friendly relations, remember, requires sharing and working together to achieve goals, to operate on secrecy just is to be unfriendly towards the citizens. Remember, the aim is not to maximize friendliness; rather it is prizing it. The upshot of Metz's construal of ubuntu amounts to the view that though it is open to other forms of partiality, it does regard hiring one's family at the expense of the public good is an instance of corruption because it is characteristically unfriendly.

In light of this analysis of Metz's interpretation of ubuntu we can rightly conclude that it does endorse partiality. With regards to our specific question, we can observe that it forbids the state or civil servants to conduct themselves in ways that are motivated by nepotism since that is characteristically unfriendly. Only forms of special favors that state owes have to do specifically with members of society that were excluded by oppression and outstanding individuals who fought against an unjust state. Beyond these categories of individuals, the state has a duty to be impartial in the dispensation of public goods, which is a crucial feature of sustaining public trust. Without this public trust the state cannot claim to have ubuntu *qua* being friendly. Public trust

requires openness, transparency, collaboration and so on.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I was engaged in an exploration of the question whether ubuntu will consider nepotism as an instance of corruption, or an acceptable form of partiality. I relied on Metz's interpretation of ubuntu, which reduces morality to the relationships of friendship or friendliness. These relationships that constitute ubuntu are openly endorsing partiality, and not impartiality. I continued to apply this view of ubuntu to the public sector, specifically whether state resources could be dispensed in ways that benefit relatives or family members in terms of hiring and allocation of contracts. In the final analysis, I observed that an ubuntu-based account considers such acts to be immoral insofar as they are friendly, or they could lead to societal discord.

I am the first to admit that this research has several major weaknesses. The first is that this research selected one interpretation of ubuntu, and neglected others. This selection was not justified in terms of plausibility or the strength of the reasons that count in its favor. The second reason is that this argument took an exploratory or expository posture without being critical of Metz's view of ubuntu. This weakness should not be taken to suggest that this research should not be taken seriously; rather it should be taken to be a starting point for more promising future research. For starters, it will be important to survey the literature on ubuntu and determine which view of it is plausible. It will be crucial to consider the debate between partiality and impartiality at this large scale of the literature. This will put us in a better position to make moral views about a plausible view of ubuntu, its implications regarding partiality and impartiality and then we can proceed to consider its applications to the public sector trying to determine what counts as morally acceptable and what counts as corrupt.

This research focused on exploring whether nepotism can be acceptable on the bases of ubuntu. There is still a lot more research that can be conducted to determine ethical circumstances in which nepotism can possibly be accepted in African sense. This means, as I have indicated herein, that to only view nepotism as a morally questionable act that amounts to corruption as writers in legal fraternity always view it, may actually be and a quick, erroneous and vacuous conclusion to nepotism that excludes African thinking on the matter. African ethical thinkers,

still need to dig deeper (morally speaking) on the issue of this phenomenon called nepotism and not to blindly reject it as evil, based on the Western and the legally adopted notions of it, without having philosophically engaged it themselves in accordance with African thought. This research was therefore, merely the beginning of wide and deep research opportunities on moral wrongness or moral rightness of nepotism in certain circumstances in African sense because so far, the moral verdict of nepotism's wrongness is probably largely based on Western moral thought. As indicated in chapter two, this research discussed only one interpretation of ubuntu, therefore, other interpretations of concepts, still need to interrogate to arrive at a better and complete understanding of ubuntu as a moral theory. The expository nature of this research also warrants further researches that will not only be explorative if we are to: (1) better understand ubuntu as moral theory and (2) conclude with more certainty on the instances in which nepotism would be acceptable or not acceptable forms of partialism

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