

The Question of Leadership in Africa: A Kantian Contribution

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Abstract

The leadership question has become one of the recurrent issues in African politics. It is a truism that everything rises and falls on leadership. Among several factors that have been adduced for the failure of post-colonial African states and governmental apparatuses is the concept of weak, corrupt and incompetent leadership experiment on the continent. It has been argued that if Africa gets its leadership right, the socio-eco political ambiance of the continent and its citizenry would benefit from it. Therefore, this paper engages the necessary theoretical underpinnings of leadership, opting for the concept of ethical leadership using Kant's Categorical Imperative as a model for ethical values in the process of governance in the continent. This paper engages secondary sources of data in marshalling its point for ethical leadership based on the proposal of the German Philosopher. It argues that it would be a disservice to the continent if its intelligentsia underplay the central place of ethical values in its pursuit of an ideal form of leadership that is a prerequisite for national/continental development. From this paper, one can conclude that ethical leadership based on the Kantian paradigm is a necessity for development and true democracy in Africa.

Keywords: Leadership; Ethics; Development; Categorical Imperative; and Citizenship

Introduction

The importance of leadership is so central in all human organizations. The nature and effects of leadership remain one of the most researched topics in organizational behavior (Barling, Christie,

& Hoption, 2010; Kelloway, Weigand, McKee and Das, 2013: 1). Not just within organizational behaviour, even in the realm of political institutions. Also, Leadership is central to the growth and the development of any nation. This possibly explains the multifarious researches on leadership in our today's world. As noted by James Hunter, a search on Amazon.com reveals more than 280,000 titles on leadership and management! Tens of thousands of pages are written about leadership in magazines and journals each year. Three-quarters of American corporations send people off to leadership classes each year and spend an estimated \$15 billion on training and consulting for those on their leadership teams Hunter (2004: 14). While we could argue that one of the major crises in Africa is the crisis of leadership, Rosenthal, Pittinsky, Purvin, & Montoya, (2007) hold that more than 7 in 10 Americans agree or strongly agree that there is a leadership crisis in the United States too. Therefore, we cannot agree less with Woolley, Caza and Levy (2011), that there is a widespread perception of a profound crisis in modern leadership. They posit further that "this perception of crisis has prompted scholars and practitioners alike to call for more positive approaches to leadership and organizational studies" (Woolley, et. al, 2011: 438).

These several studies of leadership have produced one dynamic but positive problem, which is the absence of a univocal definition of leadership. It was the leadership guru, Bennis (1989) who holds that to an extent, leadership is like beauty; it's hard to define, but you know it when you see it. Owen (2011) holds that everyone recognizes a good leader when they see one, but no one agrees on a common definition.

Avolio and Gardner (2005: 316) hold that Leadership has always been more difficult in challenging times, and that the unique stressors facing organizations throughout the world today call for a renewed focus on what constitutes genuine leadership. Public, private and even volunteer organizations are addressing challenges that run the gamut from ethical meltdowns to terrorism and SARS.

On this note, it is important we turn to review literature on leadership with the ultimate goal of discussing the concept of leadership within the purview of the political world.

2.1. Review of Literature

It is important to note that no matter how difficult it seems for us to have a univocal definition of leadership, there are certain identified components of leadership.

- i. Authority: This is the right a leader has to make decisions and enforce obedience without necessarily appealing to force or coercion. However, it also includes the right to take action to compel the performance of duties and to punish default or negligence.
- ii. Power: This refers to the ability of a leader to influence the behaviour of others with the use of power. The following kind of powers can be distinguished (i) Legitimate power, (ii) power of reward (iii) referent power and (iv), expert power.

- iii. Influence: It is the ability of the leader to alter the behaviour of the followers or some set of people within the scope of leadership.
- iv. Delegation of Authority: This is the process of the leader's deferment of his power and authority to a person or a group of persons to act on his behalf.
- v. Responsibility and Accountability: It entails accepting responsibility for performing a task according to orders, and be accountable for every action and decision taken

Leadership is the exercise of power, and the quality and consequences of leadership depend on the ability to exercise power (Kets de Vries, 1993). The implication of this is that special attention has to be placed on the manner with which power is exercised by the leader given that there is a possibility of abusive use of power. The ultimate place of power is underscored by Harold Laski when he argued that every government must submit itself to the judgment of those who feel the consequences of its acts. The reason for such submission is the simple historical fact that unconditional power has always proved, at least ultimate, disastrous to those over whom it is exercise (Laski, 1967).

Therefore, the explanation and definition of leadership in relation to use of power and authority must include the manner of the exercise of such power and authority so as to ensure that it is not to the detriment of the lives of the people.

Katz & Kahn (1978) define leadership as the influential increment over and above mechanical compliance with the routine directives of the organization. With this definition, they meant that leadership elicits obedience from the followers without the application of force. This implies that a leader has a natural influence over the followers without forcefully compelling them to pursue a set goal.

In the same vein, Jacobs & Jacques (1990) define leadership as a process of giving purpose (meaningful direction) to collective effort, and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve purpose. With this definition, leadership creates vision, inspires its pursuit and ensures the fulfillment of organization goals.

Richards & Engle (1986) see leadership as all about articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished. From this definition too, the question is not just about the achievement or realization of organizational or national goal but also the environment created by the leader must be investigated to ensure that leadership power and influence were not used to elicit high performance from the people whether they (the people) were willingly or unwillingly. In other words, true leadership does not include the use of strategic bullying and managerial tyranny.

Ricketts (2009) defines leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. From this definition, leadership has four components:

- i. is a process
- ii. involves influence
- iii. occurs in a group context (you need to have at least one constituent)
- iv. Involves goal attainment.

Even though this definition of leadership is inclusive, the nature of the influence is not defined again. What is important here is that any definition of leadership must capture the nature of the process of governance whether it includes voluntary followership or not.

Ayodele (2006) defines a leader as an individual appointed to a job with authority, and accountability to accomplish the goals and objectives of the society. For him, a leader must be astute with both man and material. A leader must possess the ability to create in the followers the necessary enthusiasm/motivation to put in every necessary effort to deliver on set goals. Thus, the ability not only to conceive but also to communicate a vision or idea is of utmost importance as an attribute of leadership. Above all, a leader must first and foremost be a member of his own team, internalize their feelings and galvanize their potentials towards reaching the goal (Ayodele, 2006 cited Ebegbulem, 2012).

In the same vein, Eze (2002) holds that all over the world, leadership is the most important number one factor that determines whether a nation can develop. According to him, the leadership that is free, brave, patriotic, people-oriented, destination-bound; the leadership that understands the psychology of leading and applies it to the development of the people must be at the affairs of men (Eze, 2002).

3.1. Development and Leadership Crises in Africa

Underdevelopment has been the reality of Africa over the past 50 years (Gatune, 2010). Poverty has become an identity of Africa since independence. The most recent estimates indicate that approximately 47% of sub-Saharan Africans live on less than US\$1 per day and more than 50% of them are from East Africa and Nigeria (World Bank, 2001, 2008). Africa is rich in gold, diamonds, oil and many other coveted natural resources. Yet it has not managed to capitalize on its wealth: its infrastructure is underdeveloped, its economies are small and unsophisticated, and its people languish in poverty (Endres, 2012: 2). On average, poor Africans were estimated to earn US\$0.85 (85 cents) per day during the latter part of the 1990s (Bread for the World Institute, 1997; Hope, 2004:129). Since 1990, income poverty has fallen in all regions of the world except SSA, where there has been an increase both in the incidence and absolute number of people living in income poverty. This sees some 300 million people in SSA – almost half of the region’s population – living on less than US\$1 a day (UNDP, 2006: 269). Africa holds 60% of the world’s platinum deposits, more than 40% of the world’s gold and almost 90% of the world’s diamonds, not to mention substantial oil reserves that remain largely unexplored—yet it remains the world’s poorest continent, with 47% of the population living on less than \$1.25 per day. No wonder there is a constant refrain in Africa: “If we are so rich, why are we so poor?” (Lawson-Remer and Greenstein, 2012: 21)

The largest economy, the United States, with 4.6% of the global population, accounts for 24% of global GNP and exercises 17.17% voting power in the World Bank, compared to 3.71% voting rights for 50 African countries. In contrast, 50 African countries, home to 10.3% of the human population, account for 1% of global GNP and 3.71% of the voting rights in the World Bank...

Switzerland, with less than 0.1% of the global population, accounts for about 1% of global GNP; same as 50 countries with 10.3% of the global population (Garba, 2003: vii-viii).

The challenge of Africa is indeed that of political will by the political leaders in transforming the state of this continent. A further reflection on the idea of leadership confirms the genuineness of the claim that everything rises and falls on leadership.

Chinua Achebe’s master-piece on leadership crisis in Nigeria continues to stare us in the face. Achebe claimed that there is nothing wrong with the Nigerian climate, water or

airspace. And that the problem with Nigeria is that of leadership. The same can be said of all African countries.

In his words:

The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership. I am saying that Nigeria can change today if she discovers leaders who have the will, the ability and the vision (Achebe, 1983:1).

Though Achebe's submission is over 30 years old, the crisis of leadership is still very fresh in our daily memory today in Nigeria and almost in all African countries.

Lee Kuan Yew, in his book, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965 – 2000*, holds that we need good people to have good government. That no matter how good the system of government, bad leaders will bring harm to their people. On the other hand, he said he had seen several societies well governed in spite of poor systems of government, because good, strong leaders were in charge.

At this juncture, it is important to state that one of the problems of leadership in Africa is the exploitative character of the leaders. In early independence of the African states, the new leaders who inherited the colonial state from their colonial masters retained the status of the state as an exploitative apparatus in the hands of the leaders. Some of these leaders held on to power tenaciously – arrested and jailed opposition parties. Most of them became life rulers.

In Nigeria, for instance, ethnic politics was introduced at independence; political parties were formed along ethnic cleavages. The people became tools in the hands of these political leaders as a means of ascending the political thrones (Agbude, 2011). Most times, promises made are not fulfilled because the intention was never to fulfill them in the first place.

Even in the Fourth Republic, political power is sought with reference to the peoples' votes. But as soon as these political leaders get into power, the people are almost neglected and policies are made that do not directly impact on their well-being but that of the leaders and their bureaucratic compatriots.

Many years ago, Dukor underscored the nature of the state in Nigeria as run by military leaders. Since then till date, such description is still very valid even in our democratic setting. According to him, "it is significant that the present Nigerian socio-economic formations are one of conflicts between the state and the society. The state, instead of being means of executing the will of the people, becomes a representative of selfish, ethnic, and narrow interests and, inevitably becomes coercive machinery. The coercive and violent nature of the state suggests that there is an inherent weakness in the concept as bequeathed to us by the colonial masters" (Dukor, 1991).

It has become a truism that the African continent is a victim of three principal forms of corruption. The first is Political Corruption which takes place at the highest levels of political authority. It occurs when the politicians and political decision-makers, who are entitled to formulate, establish and implement the laws in the name of the people, are themselves corrupt. It also takes place when policy formulation and legislation is tailored to benefit politicians and legislators (NORAD, ch.4, Jan. 2000; The Encyclopedia Americana, 1999). The second is Bureaucratic Corruption which occurs in the public administration or the implementation end of politics. This kind of corruption has been branded low level and street level. It is the kind of corruption the citizens encounter daily at places like the hospitals, schools, local licensing offices, police, taxing offices and on and on (see NORAD, ch.4, 2000). The third is Electoral

corruption which includes purchase of votes with money, promises of office or special favors, coercion, intimidation, and interference with freedom of election. Corruption in office involves sales of legislative votes, administrative, or judicial decision, or governmental appointment. Disguised payment in the form of gifts, legal fees, employment, favors to relatives, social influence, or any relationship that sacrifices the public interest and welfare, with or without the implied payment of money, is usually considered corrupt (The Encyclopedia Americana, 1999).

Other forms of corruption are bribery, fraud, embezzlement, extortion, favouritism and nepotism.

Almost all of these forms of corruption are present on the continent of Africa. Though, the argument is not that corruption is peculiar to the continent but that the underdevelopment nature of the continent is due to corruption as displayed in the corridor of power in Africa.

4.1. Kant's Categorical Imperative

Kant differentiates between hypothetical imperative and categorical imperative. The Kantian project in Section of Two of his work, under which the categorical imperative falls is to present the practical faculty of reason from universal rules of determination to the point where the concept of duty as the basis of all moral imperatives is seen to spring (Kant, 1878/1949: 5).

Kant began his moral proposals by opting for universality of morality. According to him, what determines the morality of an act is its universality. The word 'ought' is prior to experience telling us what actions reasons expect all rational being to perform.

Kant points out that moral struggle is an indication of man not being purely rational. Man's nature is thwarted with sentiments, passion, emotions, inclination and natural tendencies. Reason intervenes, telling man what he ought to do. Thus, the moral law is seated in practical reason. According to Kant, everything in nature works according to laws. Rational beings alone have the faculty of acting according to the conception of laws, that is according to principles i.e. have a will. Since the deduction of actions from principles requires reason, the will is nothing but practical reason. If reason infallibly determines the will, then the actions of such a being which are recognized as objectively necessary are subjectively necessary also, i.e. the will is a faculty to choose that only which reason independently of inclination recognizes as practically necessary, i.e. as good (Kant, 1878/1949: 17).

In other words, a rational being is always struggling to do what ought to be done as against just acting from inclinations and self-interest.

The conception of an objective principle, in so far as it is obligatory for a will, is called a common (of reason), and the formular of the command is called imperative. All imperative are expressed by the word ought (or shall), and thereby indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will, which from its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by it (an obligation) ((Kant, 1878/1949: 17).

The imperatives are meant to help man act morally. They are only formulae to express the relation of objective laws of all volition to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, e.g the human will (Kant, 1878/1949: 18).

According to him, all imperative command either hypothetically or categorically. A hypothetical imperative commands us to do that which is a means to an end: thus it is conditional. He further distinguished between problematic hypothetical imperative and

assertoric hypothetical imperative. The latter commands one to act in certain ways or do certain things in order to be happy while the former commands one to do certain thing in order to achieve an end. For example, if you want to become a lawyer, you must study law.

On categorical imperative, Kant writes:

...there is an imperative which commands a certain conduct immediately, without having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by it. this imperative is categorical. It concerns not the matter of the action, or its intended result, but its form and the principle of which it is itself a result; and what is essentially good it consists in the mental disposition, let the consequence be what I may. This imperative may be called that of morality ((Kant, 1878/1949: 19).

On the contrary, categorical imperative is based on what is expected of rational beings. This imperative is different from hypothetical that is characterized by rules of skill or counsels of prudence. It is categorical because it applies to all rational beings and it is imperative because it is a principle on which we ought to act. From the combination of this two (categorical imperative), Kant posits thus:

When I conceive a hypothetical imperative, in general I do not know beforehand what it will contain until I am given the condition. But when I conceive a categorical imperative, I know at once what it contains. For as the imperative contains besides the law only the necessity that the maxims shall conform to this law, while the law contains no conditions restricting it, there remains nothing but the general statement that the maxim of the action should conform to a universal law, and is the principle on which it ought to act that is an imperative (Kant, 1878/1949: 22).

The distinction between a maxim and a principle in Kantian ethics is that a maxim is a subjective principle on which a person is acting (whether consciously or unconsciously, while a principle is an objective law of morality on which man ought to act.

All rational beings must act with maxims that will be in consonant with the objective principle of morality – categorical imperative.

The first formulation:

Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

Immanuel Kant cited this example under to illuminate his postulation of this formulation of the categorical imperative.

“Another man finds himself forced by need to borrow money. He well knows that he will not be able to repay it, but he also sees that nothing will be loaned him if he does not firmly promise to repay it at a certain time. He desires to make such a promise, but he has enough conscience to ask himself whether it is not improper and opposed to duty to relieve his distress in such a way. Now, assuming he does decide to do so, the maxim of his action would be as follows: When I believe myself to be in need of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know I shall never do so. Now this principle of self-love or of his own benefit may very well be compatible with his whole future welfare, but the question is whether it is right. He changes the pretension of self-love into a universal law and then puts the 2 question: How would it be if my maxim became a universal law? He immediately sees that it

could never hold as a universal law of nature and be consistent with itself; rather it must necessarily contradict itself. For the universality of a law which says that anyone who believes himself to be in need could promise what he pleased with the intention of not fulfilling it would make the promise itself and the end to be accomplished by it impossible; no one would believe what was promised to him but would only laugh at any such assertion as vain pretense”.

Followed from his argument that everything in nature works according to the laws of nature, he reframed the categorical imperative to show that it is the law of nature as it relates to human behaviour.

Since the universality of the law according to which effects are produced constitutes what is properly called nature in the most general sense (as to form), that is the existence of things so far as it is determined by general laws, the imperative of duty may be expressed thus: Act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a universal law of nature (Kant, 1878/1949: 23).

For Kant, the categorical imperative becomes the moral test of all human action. If a maxim passes the test of the C.I, then the action is morally permissible, but if otherwise, the action is morally forbidden. I opt for deception as a way of life, can I will deception as a universal rule of behaviour? Will I be happy if others use this same principle I endorse against me? If the answer is a no, then such principle of behaviour is fundamentally wrong.

The Second formulation:

So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only.

The second formulation is derived from Kant's conception of all rational beings as ends in themselves. Man should not treat another man as a means because in every man there exists the principle of 'end-in-themselves'.

If then there is a supreme practical principle or, in respect of the humans will, a categorical imperative, it must be one which, a being drawn from the conception of that which is necessarily an end for everyone because it is an end in itself, constitutes an objective principle of will, and can therefore, serve as a universal practical law (Kant, 1878/1949: 23).

The foundation of this principle is man's conception of himself as an end. This must then become a objective principle of all human actions. It is again the moral law to use man as means to an end only because men are ends in themselves. It is thus against man's nature to be used as mere means to an end no matter how desirable or good the end is. All human activities (or action) must not violate the humanity that is conceived as an end in itself.

Beyond this, Kant argues:

It is not enough that the action does not violate humanity in our own person as an end in itself, it must also harmonize with it. For the ends in himself ought as far as possible to be my ends also, if that conception is to have its full effect with me (Kant, 1878/1949: 28-29).

The implication of this is that one must not only preserve the humanity in others, one must also act such that one's actions will enhance the humanity of other rational beings. We must add value to the dignity of the other persons. For Kant, even if we cannot add value to the life of any man, we must not at anytime subtract from it.

In his words:

...although, no one should contribute anything to the happiness of others, provided he did not intentionally withdraw anything from it (Kant, 1878/1949: 29)..

Kant goes on to describe the third formulation thus:

The conception of the will of every rational being as one which must consider itself as giving in all the maxims of its actions from this point of view – this conception leads to another which depends on it and is very fruitful, namely that of a kingdom of ends. A rational being must always regard himself as giving laws either as member or as sovereign in a kingdom of ends which is rendered possible by the freedom of will (Kant, 1878/1949: 30-31).

The implication of this third formulation is that as human persons, we must recognize the interpersonal relation as members of the same human community. Therefore, at any point one has to take a decision or make a policy, it must be that that recognizes the humanity in others.

All rational beings are united in this kingdom of ends and are bound by common laws. The effect is that we as members of the kingdom of ends must always give universal laws to which we ourselves are subjected to. Acting from duty, for Kant, implies the obligation of every rational being towards the need to enhance their both individual and collective well being.

According to Kant, the three modes of presenting the principle of morality are as follows:

1. A form, consisting in universality: and in this view the formula of the moral imperative is expressed thus, that the maxims must be so chosen as if they were to serve as universal laws of nature.
2. A matter, namely, an end, and here the formula says that the rational being, as it is an end by its own nature and therefore an end in itself, much in every maxim serve as the condition limiting all merely relative and arbitrary ends.
3. A complete characterization of all maxims by means of that formula, namely that all maxims ought by their legislation to harmonize with a possible Kingdom of ends as with a kingdom of nature (Kant, 1878/1949: 30).

For Kant, in all our actions, our maxim – the underlying principle could be view as a legislation for all human beings without contradiction.

5.1. Application of the Categorical Imperative to Leadership Studies

For Kant, at any point a leader or policy maker is to make a decision or formulate a policy, he/she should opt for a decision or policy he/she will wish should be universalized. In other words, such a leader or policy maker should put him/her self in a situation whereby he/she is at the receiving end of such policy or decision and see whether he/she can still wish the policy. If he can wish such a policy to be made a universal policy – also having an effect on

him/her – then such policy may be good. The principle of our behaviour should be tested against the categorical imperative – the universability of our principle.

In the same vein, the second formulation holds that men should not be treated as means only, but as ends in themselves. In the realm of political leadership and bureaucratic practice, it could be argued on the basis of this second formulation that the masses should not just exist as an ideological appendage in our political lexicon – only needed to gain political power and then discarded as soon as the purpose is achieved.

In contemporary politics in Nigeria, this seems to be the case. The president, governors, senators and some members of elected offices only remember the people as necessary imperative when they are at the tail end of their tenure as public office holders and they need to vie for second tenure in office. It is at this point they begin to initiate and formulate policies that have human-face just to appease and get the vote of the people. This is an example of leadership treatment of the people as means to an end and not ends in themselves. This also takes place in corporate bodies and the private sectors.

Again, Kant argues that *“although, no one should contribute anything to the happiness of others, provided he did not intentionally withdraw anything from it...”*. The implication of this position is that if political leaders, for instance, cannot add any value to the lives of the citizens, they should not devalue them also. In other words, if the policies cannot make the lives of the people better, it should not make them worse. It is better that the people remain stagnated due to unfavourable policies by their political leaders than for them to become retrogressive by their policies. To put it simply: ‘if you cannot help me, do not hurt me’; ‘if you cannot build me, don’t break me’; ‘if you cannot raise me, don’t ruin me’.

The third paradigm in the Kant’s categorical imperative is: *“A rational being must always regard himself as giving laws either as member or as sovereign in a kingdom of ends which is rendered possible by the freedom of will”*. We are to treat all human beings as belonging to the same class of people or what is known in leadership studies as social or group identity. As noted by some scholars that evidence shows that the greater the similarity between leaders’ and followers’ values, the more satisfied followers are with their leaders (Meglino, Ravlin & Adkins, 1991; Woolley, Caza & Levy, 2011). One of the problems in Africa today is a total disconnection between the leaders and the led. As soon as power gets into their hands, most political leaders in Africa disconnect themselves from the people who elected them into power. In major issues that bother on their well-being, the people are not consulted because the so-called representatives believe they have an epistemic access into what the preferences of the people are in terms of policies and programmes to be initiated and implemented for them. Thus, the gap between the leaders and the led gets wider daily both physically and materially.

Conclusion

With the three formulations of Kant’s categorical imperative, leadership can take a new turn in Africa. We have to begin to have respect for citizenship not just as an idea or a concept in our politics but as having objective reality. We should ensure that we do not henceforth treat the people as instruments needed for the achievement of leaders’ goals. Our leaders must begin to treat us as ends in ourselves and not as a means to an end only. And importantly, the process of group or social identification is extremely important to our polity – the leaders identifying with the masses.

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