

ETHICAL DIMENSION IN EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts an ethical explanation to the phenomenon of examination malpractice. It relates the moral situation in Nigerian society to the "Hobbesian State of Nature". The paper argues that attributes of "State of Nature" can be found in almost all facets of our national life be it political, economical or educational. The paper therefore states that the root of examination malpractice is in the moral decadence of the society hence measures taken so far to curb the menace have proved abortive. The paper further observes that a broad spectrum of the Nigerian society is a stakeholder in examination malpractice. The paper calls for a moral rebirth of the entire Nigerian citizenry championed by those in authority. By this measure the perpetrators of examination malpractice will no longer find it attractive since the factor that promotes it will be out of vogue.

INTRODUCTION

All over the world examinations are conducted daily to achieve various purposes amongst which are certifications and placement. The importance of examination in our educational system cannot be overemphasized as most activities of the system are geared toward preparation for examinations. From the late 1970's however, the notion of examination malpractice crept into the Nigerian educational system as a ploy by candidate to pass examination at all cost. The menace has today grown to a frightening height that one wonders at the quality of school graduates the educational system will be producing. Omoregbe (1993) insists that if education is to fulfill its purpose of catering for some aspects of human needs in the society, it must be imbued with morality in a very high degree; otherwise it would do more harm than good to the society. Measures have been taken by various levels and departments of government and even Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to arrest the situation. The Miscellaneous Offences Decree No. 20 of 1984 stipulates a 21 — year jail term for anyone convicted of examination fraud. In Delta State, a crusade against examination malpractice has been launched and executed since 2003. An NGO, the Examination Ethics Project (REP.) has for years been campaigning for ethics as the moral foundation of a better society. Despite these measures and many others, the end to examination malpractice remains a mirage. It is on this note that this paper wants to tackle examination malpractice from the ethical perspective. Hence the central question of this paper is: why has examination malpractice become part of our national life especially in the face of efforts by various bodies to put an end to it?

This paper tends to philosophically explore the problems and issues germane to examination malpractice. It is not enough to launch a crusade against it. Thus the paper will attempt to highlight those subtle points for a more comprehensive grasp or understanding of the problems and to help to make solutions more realistic. The paper does not provide instant solution to the problem of examination malpractice but more essentially to diagnose and understand the true nature of the problem before offering remedies. It is conceived as a step towards a description of the source of the problem with only an attempt at prescription. That prescription will be informed by what it considers a vital and overlooked missing link in the issue of examination malpractice.

MEANING AND CONCEPT OF EXAMINATION/EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

Examination in broad sense according to Liman (1997) can be defined as an instrument for testing, assessment, evaluation and accreditation. It is also used for the purpose of selection, placement, certification and promotion. Iredia (2002) sees examination as a tool for assessing candidates' level of assimilation of a series of educational instruction and/or the extent to which a given concept or skill has been mastered. Okoye (1986) on his part says that examination is an organized assessment which presents the individual with a series of questions or tasks geared towards ascertaining the individual's acquired skill

and knowledge-content and ability to utilize this knowledge and acquired skills effectively. Akpotu (1998) states that examination is an indispensable tool, an essential tool in the teaching-learning process. The above definitions show that examination is an important constituent of an educational system without which all objectives of the system cannot be measured. Examination is used for placement promotion and certification amongst others; all of which the individual who attains them attaches a lot of value. Examination is therefore a tool for achieving value-laden ends at least in our society where for instance the acquisition of a certificate is used for status symbol.

The behaviour expected in any examination is such that every examinee should work independently of others and without access to materials (as the case may be) which can assist him. Thus the conduct in any examination should be regulated by the rules and regulations guiding the examiners and examinee Examination malpractice implies a deviation from the guiding rules and regulations of an examination (Akpotu, 1998; Iredia 2002). Akinseye (2005) opines that examination malpractice is simply an attempt by candidates or their agents or their collaborators to influence the outcome of examinations unfairly. It involves a deliberate act of wrongdoing, contrary to official examination rules, and is designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage. An analysis of the above definitions indicates that examination malpractice is adjudged to be bad or evil because it lacks the ethics expected of examiners and examinees in the conduct of examination. On the evil of examination malpractice, Iredia (2002) writes that the education industry is bleeding profusely from the wounds inflicted on it by examination malpractice arguing that the educational products are intellectually hollow for they only went through examination orientation and find it difficult to fit into the economic system. Akpotu (1998) also asserts that other nations are becoming apprehensive of personnel and students trained in Nigeria due to examination malpractice and that our degrees and certificates are gradually losing recognition and acceptability around the world.

‘STATE OF NATURE’ AND EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

It is the intention of this paper to analyze an ethical view, which could be applicable to Nigeria that creates fertile grounds for the subsisting of examination malpractice. This analysis is geared towards taking a close look at the moral situation of the Nigeria society. This paper may not be interested in an in-depth analysis of the concept of ethics, but it will be pertinent to mention a few definitions especially as they related to the topic of discourse What is ethics? Ethics according to Omoregbe (1993) is the branch of philosophy that deals with the morality of human actions. Ome and Aman (2004) see ethics as the nonnative science of human conduct nonnative in the sense that it evaluates human actions Hornby (2002) says that ethics is the normative principles that control or influence a person’s behaviour Morality in turn concerns conduct as to whether it is good or bad, right or wrong. Talking about ethics, Nwanegbo-Ben (1999) states that ethics is not interested in what is but what ought to be. It is not interested in what a man does but what a man ought to do. It is in the context of the above definitions that this paper wishes to relate an ethical position to the moral state of the Nigerian society.

Central to this discourse is Thomas Hobbes’ society which he calls ‘State of Nature’. Hobbes’ ‘State of Nature’ was a society in which men lived before the formation of organized society — a society where there were no laws, no authority, no morality, no sense of justice or injustice, no notion of rights or wrongs. Everybody simply pursued the interest of his desires. Hobbes (1946) paints the picture of a society dominated by self interest; a society in which everybody is only concerned about his own interest with no sense of morality. He goes on to say that there was no development and progress in that society because there was no morality Hobbes in this theory argues that morality is indispensable for social development and that civilization and social development came only with enforcement of morality by the civil society. Thus any society that wishes to progress must be prepared to rigidly enforce morality. By his thesis, Hobbes may not necessarily be describing a society that exists today in its natural state but one where individual conducts and activities are not in conformity with laid down or socially approved rules or procedures and where the individual goes out of his way to satisfy his desires. Self-interest and its satisfaction were the only rules of action. The foregoing discussion prompts this writer to ask the following questions. Are there features of Hobbes’ ‘state of nature’ in present day Nigerian society? Can self-centeredness and for immorality breed corruption?. Let us examine some aspects of our national life in the effort to answer the two questions.

Even though Nigerian democracy is modelled after that of America, some aspects of its implementation suggest non-conformity with laid down rules and procedures for doing things. For instance, it is knowledge common to all Nigerians that elections into political offices are characterized by a wide range of electoral malpractice. Referring to the 2007 general elections in Nigeria, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM) concludes that:

the election fell short of basic international and regional standards for democratic elections.., it was marred by poor organization, essential transparency, widespread irregularities and significant evidence of fraud, particularly during the result collation process — (Vanguard newspaper, Tuesday April 24, 2007)

In the economic sphere, Nigerians engage in activities designed to satisfy' their self-interests at the expense of the generality or the state. Economic saboteurs such as advance fee fraudsters, drug peddlers and oil bunkerers reign supreme. Government officials, for self interest, defraud their fatherland billions of naira in collaboration with foreigners (Omogbe, 1993). It is the wealthy man (the man who robbed the government or company's treasury, the smuggler, the policeman or judicial officer who takes bribe to twist the law, heads of schools who take bribe to admit unqualified candidates, dubious men and women of all shades) that buy the front pew in the church, performs the yearly pilgrimage and bags the highest chieftaincy title (Oroka, 2005).

On the educational front, teachers, parents, examiners, law enforcement agents who are saddled with the task of dissuading candidates from examination malpractice are all neck-deep in the act due to their self interests. Stakeholders in examination fraud are not interested in the effect of their act on the society and the quality of grandaunts the schools produce. Akpotu (1998) remarks that ministry of education officials, examination body officials, supervisors and invigilators (teachers) by omission or commission connive, aid and abet while at the same time pretend to be against examination malpractice. Aicpotu (1998) further indicates that parents provide their children and wards with money to buy live question papers.

Even though there are indications in this paper that the roots of examination malpractice is traceable to the moral value of the Nigerian society, individuals who engage in the act do so on their own freewill hence they are the ones punished or castigated for their involvement. The moral value of the society could be the cause but does not necessarily determine the act A free action is an action that is caused but which is not determined by its cause (Omogbe, 1993). The individual has the freedom to abstain from examination malpractice in the face of obvious societal factors that compel him to do it. Students, teachers, parents, school management etc. who are involved in examination malpractice do so on their freewill and hence they are so held responsible. But is *individual morality* sharply different from *societal morality*? After all, is it not the average conduct of everyone that could be referred to as societal morality? Thus it could not have been expected that the individual human conduct could sharply differ from societal morality. It is in this vein that Akpotu (1998) concluded that examination malpractice is a reflection of the moral decadence of our society.

No doubt the individual sees good in the possession of an educational certificate and therefore compelled to acquire it at all cost The theory of ethical determinism holds that once a person sees something as good and knows it is good he is internally compelled to do it (Omogbe, 1990). No man can deliberately choose what he knows to be evil and choose it precisely because it is evil. Socrates and Plato who are strong advocates of this theory argue that it is ignorance that makes people to do evil. The people who do evil are attracted by what they hope to gain from such acts, ignorant of the fact that the harm they do to themselves by the acts outweighs the gain they hope to derive from it. The acquisition of a certificate via examination malpractice is the evil in the certificate which the individual has failed to realize because at the end of the day, he has a possession which he can neither readily defend nor he is capable of developing himself and society. Omogbe (1993) contends that any education that is devoid of morality is incomplete and useless; such education is even harmful both to the individual who acquires it and the society in which he lives.

One may want to wrap up this discourse by observing that examination malpractice as it were, evidently falls short of Kant's Categorical Imperative. In the Categorical Imperative, Kant (1964) insists that

one should engage in an action which he can readily recommend to be embraced by all. Those who indulge in examination malpractice do so not based on principle and even though they may want to count the benefits derivable from the act, they will not as a matter of policy openly recommend it to be embraced by the entire society. The very fact that examination fraudsters try to escape when caught or about to be caught exposes the deficient morality inherent in the act and thus a far cry from Kant's categorical imperative.

THE WAY FORWARD

Examination malpractice is an ill associated with the education industry hence it would have been proper to proffer solution to it within the sector. But it has been noted in this paper that the roots of the problem are in the decadent morality of the society hence solutions advanced so far fail to yield expected results. For instance to say that teachers should be given adequate education and remuneration, adequate infrastructure and learning materials should be provided, the moral message of every lesson should be stressed, examination marshals should monitor examination, supervisors should be swarped and so on will not reduce the scourge to the expected level because in the larger society and even within the education industry there are still very many who due to their low level of moral appreciation will fail to acknowledge the evil inherent in examination malpractice. Thus the need to eliminate features of "state of nature" such as selfishness and immorality arises. In other words, Nigeria needs an ethical re-orientation. From where does this begin — the leadership or fellowship? Moral decadence as it were in Nigeria is not confined to any stratum of the society; hence the entire society needs the rebirth. But it must start from somewhere. This paper wants to posit that moral laxity in Nigeria has its roots in governance and bureaucracy, hence that should be the starting point. This is so because government controls the machineries of all institutions in the society be it economic, political. Judicial, educational, etc. This is more so as government officials are expected to enforce sanctions, as provided for in the constitution, against anyone whose moral disposition is not in accordance with the law or expectations of the society. Persons in authority both at the political and bureaucratic levels should have a rethink and shun immorality. They should honour their oath of office and ethics of their various professions and thus live above board. They should place the interest of society that is the generality of the people and the international image of the nation, above their personal interests. Once everyone in authority abhors immoral conducts, the rest of the society will be bound to follow suit. Once this works out, self-centered tendencies such as electoral malpractice will stop, embezzlement of public funds will stop, collection of bribe at check points and other levels of government business will stop, advance fee fraud will stop, drug peddling will stop, oil bunkering will stop, victimization and oppression will stop among others. Hard work and efficiency will be rewarded, electoral will of the people will be respected and the society will be a better place to live in. Thus the adoption of moral conducts in our national life becomes a *sine qua non* for other remedies proffered to solve the problem of examination malpractice to be effective.

Adequate budget will be appropriated and implemented in the education sector and finally examination malpractice will be reduced to its barest minimum.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, effort was made to establish that there is more to the cause and subsisting of examination malpractice than the social dimension that is being accorded it now. A philosophical examination of Nigerian society reveals that examination malpractice is firmly rooted in the moral nature of the society. The paper also tends to argue that collective or societal morality and individual morality cannot be mutually separated and thus individuals involved in examination malpractice are merely reflecting what obtains in other aspects of our national life. The paper finally states that a plausible solution to the menace can only be found in an ethical re-orientation of the citizenry, championed by persons in authority.

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