

IMMANUEL KANT'S NOTION OF SUICIDE: IMPLICATION FOR NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

Suicide, the intentional and voluntary taking of one's own life, is a key health concern for all age groups in many parts of the world and is viewed to be one of the leading causes of death. Consequently, it is worrisome that Nigerians who ordinarily would go to any length to preserve their life, now more readily engage in the act of suicide. Therefore, the reason for this new paradigm has become the question begging for answer. This essay employed the method of analysis to investigate Immanuel Kant's claim that suicide is irrational. Kant's moral framework condemns suicide because its maxim is not universalizable and also that the rational will as the very source of universal normative principles could not authorize its own destruction. The study discovered that there are generally three reasons for suicide among Nigerians viz; influence of unmediated global culture, faulty orientation and socialization and poor mental health management. Based on these findings, the researchers agreed with Kant that suicide is irrational. It thus recommended that an understanding of Kant's philosophy on suicide would engender quicker resolution of the life-threatening social and psychological problems bedevilling Nigerians, and consequently reduce the level of suicide in the country.

Key words: *Categorical Imperative, Global culture, Implication, Suicide, Socialization.*

Introduction

Since after the first time of reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, we could not stop wondering why a strongly built, materially blessed, socially popular and enviably respected personality like Okonkwo would not think it twice before taking his own life no matter his reason. That shock had recently turned to an existential worry for us, given the prevalence of suicide in our society today and across every race, tribe, economic group, age bracket, gender and every religion. Indeed, there is no exception, everybody seems a potential suicide victim. According to the World Health Organization, Nigeria is the 30th most suicide-prone country in the world and 10th in Africa. By the same report, suicide "is a major health concern for all age groups in many parts of the world and is considered to be the second leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds,

claiming the lives of about 800,000 people per year, worldwide.”¹This figure we believe, is only a fraction of the number of people who attempt suicide yearly.

As alarming as the world suicide report may seem, it is worrisome that Nigerians who ordinarily would go to any length to preserve their lives, recorded about “five reported cases of suicide only in May, 2019.”² The number could probably be much higher, “due to underreporting and the stigmatization of suicide”, and equally because, “research investigating the prevalence of suicide is quite limited in developing countries.”³ The World Health Organization estimates a suicide rate of 9.5 per 100,000 people in 2017 in Nigeria, a significant increase from the reported rate in 2012 which was 4.3 per 100,000.⁴ Statistics have also shown significant sex disparities in suicidal behaviours which may cut across cultures. While globally, almost twice as many men than women die by suicide, one unusual aspect of Nigeria’s rate, however, is the gender breakdown whereby the figures are very similar. The age-standardised male rate is 17.5 per 100,000 people, while the female rate is 17.1. Taken separately, Nigeria has the 56th highest suicide rate among men, but the 3rd highest among women.⁵

The preponderance of cases of suicide indicates that this once abominable act is now found among Nigerian youths, who probably see it as a way of escape. However, irrespective of the various reasons associated with suicidal behaviours ranging from economic hardship to mental illnesses, the common question on the lips of all stakeholders is; what has gone wrong with Nigeria’s millennials? However, whatever their reasons and whether these reasons or any other is enough for a person to take their life is what this work is set to discover.

Kant’s Notion of Suicide

We will commence with an exploration of the concept of person which sets the stage for presenting the fundamental Kantian arguments against suicide and terminating with conditions under which suicide may be preferable.

¹World Health Organization, *Depression and other Common Mental Disorder: Global Health Estimate*, (2017a): p, accessed 20 September, 2020,

http://www.who.int/mental_health/management/depression/prevalence_global_estimates/en/

²OnyedikaAgbede, “Real Reasons Nigerian Youths are Committing Suicide,” *Saturday Magazine*, 25 May, 2019, accessed on 20 September, 2020, <https://m.guardian.ng/saturday-magazine/cover/>

³S. K. Gill, R. F. Munoz & Y. Leykin, “The Influence of Perceived Stress and Depression,” *Research in Political Sociology* 3, (2018): 139

⁴World Health Organization, *World Health Statistics 2018*, (2018b): p, accessed 20 September, 2020, <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/>

⁵World Health Organization, *Depression and other Common Mental Disorder: Global Health Estimate*, 2017a

The Concept of Person

In Kantian terms, the word *person* is a moral term. It identifies the individuals who are accountable for what they do and who are thereby worthy of respect. In other words, to be a “person” and to deserve respect, a being must meet some criteria. As Kant explains:

Beings whose existence does not depend on our will but on nature, if they are not rational beings, have only a relative worth as means and are therefore called ‘things’; on the other hand, rational beings are designated as ‘persons’ because their nature indicates that they are ends in themselves. Such beings are thus objects of respect.⁶

This quote differentiates things from person, highlighting that things are different because their existence depends entirely on nature and that they are not rational, while persons are rational beings, who have will. This distinction, though it succeeded in drawing a line between things and persons, seems to create room for further clarification especially with regards to the status of the infants and the mentally ill/demented who may not meet the requirement of rational capacity. However, Kant went further to define a ‘person’ not as a member of the species *Homo sapiens*, but rather as a rational being whose “nature already marks [him] as an end in itself, i.e. as something that may not be used merely as a means and hence so far limits all choice (and is an object of respect).”⁷ In another illustration, Kant describes a person as “a subject whose actions can be *imputed* to him. *Moral* personality is therefore nothing other than the freedom of a rational being under moral laws.”⁸ From these lines alone, it seems that Kant considered the term ‘person’ to be applicable to beings with certain capacities (as we already alleged), rather than to beings who are members of a certain species. It is thus notable then, that a person should have capacity of rationality as well as ability to take responsibility.

Let us look closer at another assertion of Kant with respect to person and humanity:

Now I say that the human being and in general every rational being exists as an end in itself, not merely as a means to be used by this or that will at its discretion; instead he must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or also to other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end.... The practical imperative will therefore be the following: So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.⁹

⁶ Immanuel, Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Mary Gregor. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 46

⁷ Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 85

⁸ Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 123

⁹ Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 85-7

We quickly observe that Kant's use of the term 'humanity' also reveals that he did not use the term in a descriptive sense to pick out all and only *Homo sapiens*. Rather, the term humanity denotes a certain capacity or predisposition in persons. According to Kant, 'humanity' is also a predisposition or a capacity, rather than a species denotation, and it refers to the rational faculties of persons, the ability that persons possess to follow self-imposed ends. Unlike the capacity for personality, which contains as part of its definition respect for the moral law, the capacity for humanity is the capacity for reason proper, without any explicit reference to morality. Although the predisposition for personality is the source of the dignity of persons, the reason why it is humanity that must be treated as an end in itself is because Kant emphasizes that it is rational nature *simpliciter*, not rational nature being exercised in a certain manner, that must be respected. Thus Kant writes:

The capacity to set oneself an end – any end whatsoever – is what characterizes humanity (as distinguished from animality). Hence, there is also bound up with the end of humanity in our own person the rational will, and so the duty, to make ourselves worthy of humanity by culture in general, by procuring or promoting the capacity to realize all sorts of possible ends, so far as this is to be found in a human being himself.¹⁰ For example, Kant argues that all persons have an imperfect duty to cultivate one's talents. A human being has a duty to himself to cultivate (cultura) his natural powers (powers of spirit, mind, and body), as means to all sorts of possible ends. – He owes it to himself (as a rational being) not to leave idle and, as it were, rusting away the natural predispositions and capacities that his reason can someday use.¹¹

Once it is understood what Kant means by the terms 'person' and 'humanity,' the formula of humanity can be re-phrased as follows: 'act that you use the capacity or predisposition for reason, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.' The object of respect in the formula of humanity, therefore, is not a certain biological species, but rather a certain capacity. Kant reiterates this imperative several times throughout his writings. If Kant wanted to argue that we must treat every single member of the species *Homo sapiens* as an end in himself, surely the former method of wording the imperative would have sufficed. Yet Kant takes pains to always remind us that it is the humanity within human beings or within persons that must be respected. That is, what must be respected is the capacity for reason; the capacity to set ends, follow those ends, and be an autonomous individual.

¹⁰ Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 13

¹¹ Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 117

It is equally true that Kant does call the offspring a person, and he argues that we should regard the “act of procreation as one by which we have brought a person into the world without his consent and on our own initiative, for which deed the parents incur an obligation to make the child content with his condition so far as they can.”¹² Kant also argues that parents possess this duty ‘from procreation’ and that “children, as persons, have by their procreation an original innate (not acquired) right to the care of their parents.”¹³

Kant’s Categorical Imperative

According to Kant, “the conception of an objective principle, in so far as it is necessitating for a will, is called a command (of reason) and the formula of the command is called an imperative.”¹⁴ Imperatives are expressed by an “ought” and exhibit thereby the relation of an objective law of reason to a will. By speaking of the objective principle as being “necessitating” for a will it does not mean, that the human will is condemned to obey the law, the point is rather that the will does not necessarily follow the dictate of reason.

Kant proceeds further by explaining some numbers of principles which when summarized will lead to categorical imperative. However, the very principle of our concern for the purpose of this research is on the concept of duty. This to him means acting out of reverence for law, and that law is essentially universal. Kant makes a distinction between action which are in accordance with duty and acts which are done for the sake of duty. To Kant, only those actions which are performed for the sake of duty have moral worth. He says about preserving one’s life, “to preserve one’s life is a duty,”¹⁵ and further, everyone has an immediate inclination to do so. There are two presuppositions here; now if I preserve my life simply because I have an inclination to do so, my action does not in Kant’s view, possess moral worth. To possess such worth my action must be performed because it is my duty to preserve my life; that is, out of a sense of *moral obligation*. We further note that Kant does not explicitly say that it is morally wrong to preserve my life because I desire to do so, after all my action would be at least in accordance with duty and not incompatible with it. Kant’s impression in his concept of duty is that duty must prevail over our inclination. He maintains that, “the less inclination we have to do our duty, the greater is the moral value of our action if we actually perform our duty for its sake.”¹⁶ Thus when we take an action, Kant’s concept of duty for duty sake would first analyze such an action, either from duty sake or from ones inclination, if it is from inclination the action is morally less worthy.

¹² Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 151

¹³ Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 140

¹⁴ F, Copleston. *A History of Philosophy: The Enlightenment* vol. 6 (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2010), 321

¹⁵ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: The Enlightenment* vol. 6, 321

¹⁶ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: The Enlightenment* vol. 6, 321

His rule is that goodwill, the only good without qualification, is manifested in acting for the sake of duty, that duty means action out of reverence for law; and that law is essentially universal.¹⁷ This is now to say that, there remains nothing but the universal conformity of actions to law in general, which should serve the will as a principal. There is, therefore for Kant, only one categorical imperative, and it is: "act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will universal law of nature."¹⁸ To Kant all imperatives must derive from this one, this is a means of testing whether the maxim of our action is morally right or not.

The Universal Law Argument against Suicide

In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant stated the first formulation of the categorical imperative, namely, "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law."¹⁹ He uses suicide to illustrate this test, which condemns any maxim that, universalized, generates a contradiction.

Someone feels sick of life because of a series of troubles that has grown to the point of despair, but is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. Now he inquires whether the maxim of his action could indeed become a universal law of nature. His maxim, however, is: from self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life when its longer duration threatens more troubles than it promises agreeableness. The only further question is whether this principle of self-love could become a universal law of nature. It is then seen at once that a nature whose law it would be to destroy life itself by means of the same feeling whose destination is to impel toward the furtherance of life would contradict itself and would therefore not subsist as nature; thus that maxim could not possibly be a law of nature and, accordingly, altogether opposes the supreme principle of all duty.²⁰

It is quickly seen that suicide maxim, universalized, could not possibly be a law of nature because a nature with such a law contradicts itself and would therefore not subsist. Consequently, suicide is ruled out.

We equally note here that a maxim of disposing freely of my life, cannot be universalized and an arrangement with such a law would not be an enduring natural order. Kant maintains his consistency that a maxim that cannot be made a universal law, either on the account of contradiction of itself or for the reason that it is in discordance

¹⁷Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: The Enlightenment* vol. 6, 321

¹⁸Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: The Enlightenment* vol. 6, 321

¹⁹ Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 71

²⁰ Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 71-3

with natural order should not be applied and as such, Kant declares that suicide is “inadmissible and abominable.”²¹ In sum, Kant shows that when a principle of action cannot be universalized, a person is categorically prohibited from performing the action.

Duty to Oneself and to Others

Kant went ahead to decree that man has a duty of preservation of the person in himself and that of the person in others. In line with this role he asserts,

A human being cannot renounce his personality as long as he is a subject of duty, hence as long as he lives; and it is a contradiction that he should be authorized to withdraw from all obligations, that is, freely to act as if no authorization were needed for this action. To annihilate the subject of morality in one's own person is to root out the existence of morality itself from the world, as far as one can, even though morality is an end in itself. Consequently, disposing of oneself as a mere means to some discretionary end is debasing humanity in one's own person (*homo noumenon*), to which the human being (*homo phaenomenon*) was nevertheless entrusted for preservation.²²

Thus, man is subject of law as well as a law giver himself and as such has the obligation to act according moral law. He does not freely act against or contrary to the universal laws, which emanated from his will and legislated by his practical reason. More so, the act of suicide roots out the existence of morality from the world, since man is the basis of morality. Simply put, the course of morality ceases with annihilation of man. Kant relates again that, disposing of oneself as a means to some ‘discretionary’ end is demeaning of the personality in oneself and very importantly violates the agent's duty of preservation towards himself. Therefore, ‘not to commit suicide’ is a perfect duty. Along the same line of argument Kant declared,

He who contemplates suicide should ask himself whether his action can be consistent with the idea of humanity as an end in itself. If he destroys himself in order to escape from painful circumstances, he uses a person merely as a means to maintain a tolerable condition up to the end of life. But a man is not a thing, that is to say, something which can be used merely as means, but must in all his actions be always considered as an end in himself. I cannot therefore, dispose in any way the man in my own person so as to mutilate him, to damage or kill him.”²³

²¹K, Immanuel. *Lectures on Ethics*. Edited by Peter Heath and J.B. Schneewind, trans. Peter Heath. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 154

²² K, Immanuel. *Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Mary Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 73-75

²³ Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 57

What is said here is akin to the prohibition of suicide because its maxim cannot be universalized. It follows that the person who chooses to take own life out of self-love, when its longer duration threatens more troubles than it promises agreeableness trades more value to satisfaction than the life itself. Such a person uses life as a means to an end, a means towards happiness. The same action Kant condemns here, and insists that the person in me cannot be disposed because I want to escape painful circumstance, and if I do then I treat this person as a thin

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Rational Autonomy Argument

According to Kant, we are autonomous beings precisely because the source of the laws that determine our exercise of freedom, or free choice (*Willkür*), ultimately resides within ourselves, i.e., within the will (*Wille*) as practical reason itself.²⁴ In clarifying the place of autonomy as a regulating faculty of our actions, he makes an aside on freedom. Kant posits,

[Freedom] has to be restricted, not, though, by other properties and faculties, but by itself. Its supreme rule is: In all self-regarding actions, so to behave that any use of powers is compatible with the greatest use of them. For example, if I have drunk too much today, I am incapable of making use of my freedom and my powers; or if I do away with myself, I likewise deprive myself of the ability to use them. So this conflicts with the greatest use of freedom, that it abolishes itself and all use of it, as the highest principium of life. Only under certain conditions can freedom be consistent with itself; otherwise it comes into collision with itself. [...] The conditions under which alone the greatest use of freedom is possible, and under which it can be self-consistent, are the essential ends of mankind. With these, freedom must agree. The principium of all duties is thus the conformity of the use of freedom with the essential ends of mankind.²⁵

Kant is not mincing words in asserting that unless man gives himself rules, 'it is uncertain whether man will not use his powers to destroy himself, and others, and the whole of nature'. The feasibility of our continued existence depends on our following freely adopted laws. Unlike the non-free nature, if we refuse to adopt and restrict ourselves according to 'objective' rules, that is, rules suitable to be held in common by rational wills, all kinds of lawlessness will result, which will certainly contradict the essential ends of mankind. Again in another section Kant continues:

²⁴ K, Immanuel. *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 213

²⁵ Immanuel, *Lectures on Ethics*, 346

Suicide evokes revulsion with horror, because everything in nature seeks to preserve itself: a damaged tree, a living body, an animal; and in man, then, is freedom, which is the highest degree of life, and constitutes the worth of it, to become now a principium for self-destruction? This is the most horrifying thing imaginable. For anyone who has already got so far as to be master, at any time, over his own life, is also master over the life of anyone else; for him, the door stands open to every crime, and before he can be seized he is ready to spirit himself away out of the world.²⁶

Why are these submissions on freedom important to us? It is easily discernible here that suicide is wrong because it goes against the natural drive to self-preserve. So, the thing that evokes revulsion with horror here is the use of freedom to pursue a self-destructive deviation from this typical impulse. The enormity of this immoral use of freedom comes out clearer when it is related to the task of our rational autonomy. Recall as noted already, that what makes us autonomous beings is the point that the source of the laws that determine our exercise of freedom, resides within ourselves, in the rational will, but death entails its annihilation (of the rational will); death negates an essential condition under which any exercise of autonomy is possible (at least in this life).

Simply put, the argument is that because we are endowed with autonomy, which constitutes our unconditional worth, it is equally contradictory for us to act in a manner that negates our own autonomy as that of others. Thus, suicide is inconceivable because, autonomy cannot be exercised to achieve some end that effectively cancels out autonomy itself.

Implication of Kant's Notion of Suicide for Nigeria

This section will be concerned with the application of Kantian doctrine of suicide in the hopeful stemming of the rising cases of suicide in Nigeria. But before we turn to that proper let us examine the possible causes of suicide and x-ray recent cases of incidents of suicide in Nigeria.

Various factors have been adduced to be associated with suicidal and self-destructive behaviours. These factors include depression, alcoholism, hopelessness, substance abuse, possession of lethal weapons, terminal illness, loss of loved ones, crashing of a booming business, among others. Other mental health disorders besides depression also put people at risk of suicide- especially people with schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders. People who have traumatic childhood experiences including sex abuse are more likely to attempt suicide, perhaps, because they are at higher risk of becoming depressed.²⁷

²⁶ Immanuel, *Lectures on Ethics*, 372

²⁷ Toluwani Eniola, *Tackling Nigeria's High Suicide Rate*, (2018): 2, accessed 20 August 2020, <https://africanarguments.org/2018/10/30/tackling-nigeria-suicide-high-rate/>

In another related research, Oluwamayomikun L. summarized the causes of suicide in Nigeria as:

Emotional distress (expressed sorrow or grief), stress (mental or emotional tension resulting from the disparity between situational demand and the individual's ability), perceived personal shortcomings/guilt, physical illness, mental illness, economic/professional hardship, perceived difficulty with career (including students), culture/societal demands (having difficulty conforming to society's shared values or beliefs), supernatural causes (force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature), rejection, family/friend's death, traumatic life experience (not already mentioned in other categories), or actions of significant other/family member²⁸.

Analyzing further the above causes, Oluwamayomikun shows that economic hardship (18 points) is perceived to be the chief cause of suicide in Nigeria, then comes mental illness (8 points) and actions of significant other/family member (6 points). Others are supernatural causes (5 points), death of friend/family member (4 points), emotional distress/physical illness (2 points) and perceived personal shortcomings or guilt (1 point). However, stress/difficulty with career/culture or societal demands and rejection are considered the least causes of suicide in the country.²⁹

After a very close examination of the above causes, one would discover that these various listed reasons for suicide in Nigeria could be broadly grouped into two; faulty orientation and socialization and poor mental health management. This follows the fact that suicides resulting from abuse of drugs, alcohol, economic hardship, loss of loved ones, physical illness and personal shortcomings are all related to faulty orientation and socialization. Again, where the millennials wrongly perceive that life can offer them whatever they desire with or without the requisite determination and hard work, and in the event that such wishful imaginations fail, they quickly lose grip of themselves and sometimes race towards suicide. While other cases related to depression, emotional distress and mental illness easily occur on account of inexistent or ineffective mental health management in the country.

Now let us x-ray incidents of suicide in the recent past as this will help us to appreciate the gravity of this problem. On June 18, 2019 Christabel Omoremimo Buoro, a 21- year- old 300-level student of the Department of Medical Laboratory Science, University of Benin (UNIBEN), reportedly killed herself after she was allegedly jilted by her boyfriend. Christabel was said to have drunk the mixture of sniper chemical with a bottle of soft drink. Another 300-level student of Medicine and Surgery at the Faculty

²⁸OluwamayomikunLawal, "Attitudes Towards Depression and Suicide: An Analysis of News Coverage and Online Comments on Nigerian News Sites" (Master's Degree Thesis, Georgia State University, 2018), 49

²⁹OluwamayomikunLawal, "Attitudes Towards Depression and Suicide: An Analysis of News Coverage and Online Comments on Nigerian News Sites, 50

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of Basic Medical Sciences of the Niger Delta University (NDU), Uzaka Ebiweni was reported to have drowned himself in Amassoma River after he was advised to withdraw from medical school for failing the qualifying exam. Amos Ibrahim, a 17-year-old boy equally took his own life in Jos, Plateau State, by drinking Sniper on May 14, 2019. According to reports, Ibrahim chose to toe the dangerous path after failing the 2019 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME). The 22-year-old Chukwuemeka Akachi, a final year student of the Department of English and Literary Studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) committed suicide by drinking sniper chemical on Monday, May 13, 2019. He was said to have had a long battle with mental illness. A 100-level student of the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), Olaitan Gbadamosi, 18, also joined her ancestors by drinking sniper chemical on April 30, 2019. The late Olaitan had committed suicide following alleged depression. There was also a report on 4 May 2019, of one Kenile Nwabuzor, Lagos state, who reportedly killed herself after her boyfriend of two years ditched her. On March 25, 2019, a physician, Dr. Allwell Orji terminated his life by jumping into Lagos lagoon³⁰.

The prevalence of this act in Nigeria was better captured by Daily Trust Newspaper thus:

No fewer than 264 suicide cases were recorded in the country within the last 4 years....The victims comprising males and females took their own lives between January 2017, and August this year (2020)....This figure excluded numerous suicide cases that have not been reported by the media.³¹

The fact that all the above cited cases were made known mainly through the victims WhatsApp or Face book postings or through their parting notes, is an indication that they were under the influence of the current unmediated global culture ravaging the entire world. Our traditional view of suicide and its attendant stigmatization had always made it an uncommon act in our society and the few that attempted it preferred anonymity, owing to the shame and rejection associated with it. Having enumerated the possible causes of suicide and the recent incidents of suicide in Nigerian, we are left with the implication of Kant's notion of suicide for Nigerian society proper.

We recall that there are three basic tenets, based on which Kant is a non-supporter of suicide which include: *a maxim that cannot be made a universal law, either on the account of contradiction of itself or for the reason that it is in discordance with natural order should not be applied, man has a duty of preservation of the person in himself and that of the person in others and the proposition that the rational will as the very source of universally binding normative principles could not authorize its own destruction.*

³⁰Fidelis Mac-Leva et al, "264 Nigerians Commit Suicide in Four Years," *Daily Trust Newspaper*, September, 2020, accessed 20 October, 2020, <https://www.dailytrust.com>.

³¹Fidelis Mac-Leva et al, "264 Nigerians Commit Suicide in Four Years," *Daily Trust Newspaper*, September, 2020, accessed 20 October, 2020, <https://www.dailytrust.com>.

Considering the causes of suicide especially in Nigeria, as summarised by Oluwamayomikun Lawal, we discover that none of the reasons for suicide in Nigeria can be universalized. For the emotionally distressed/stressed person, or the person suffering from physical/mental illness, or economic/professional hardship, or loss of friend or relative or perceived personal shortcomings like failing exam and depression, the maxim that any person who is challenged by any of the above situations should take own life, out of self-love is contradictory and therefore not universalizable. This is so and worse still because, all the reasons for which Nigerians take their lives, especially as stated above are temporary and transient since they have the capacity of improvement with determined perseverance. The principle of self-love presupposes the desire to preserve oneself and promote the wellbeing of self and not to shorten its existence, which is a contradiction of the demands of love. Furthermore, this method of application of self-love does not agree with the universal law of nature, because a nature whose law it would be to destroy life itself by means of the same feeling that would rather drive the furtherance of life would not subsist as nature. This implies that any Nigerian who understands Kant's universal law argument against suicide will never attempt to take own life, because it is an act against love for oneself and also not in accordance with natural order.

A close examination of the cited recent cases of suicide in Nigeria showed that except for one victim (Chukwuemeka Akachi), who committed suicide on an alleged account of mental illness, others took their lives for perceived personal shortcomings, including emotional distress, failing exam and depression. However, a proper consideration of Kant's position on self-love and the duty of an individual towards the preservation of his life, would ordinarily dissuade any prospective victim. This further explains why some scholars view suicide as an irrational act, because mental illness, emotional distress, exam failure and depression are all cases reversible through proper management by a mental health expert, and to terminate one's life on account of any of them, brings the rationality of the victim to question. Therefore, the researchers posit that should the unfortunate victims of suicide engage in a little reflection on the possibility of making it a law that out of self-love, whoever feels the slightest pain – as little as that associated with failing an exam should commit suicide, the contradiction inherent in such thought would surely prevent such thinker from the action.

More so, Kant claims that man has a duty to treat the person in himself and in another as an end and not as a means to an end. By this, he condemns the act of suicide as a means of an escape from unsatisfactory or painful life situations. As a subject of duty, man is entrusted with the preservation of humanity in himself and in the other, but to dispose of oneself in escape from pains, violates this duty, just as it debases the humanity in one's own person by treating it as a thing. Suffice it to say that in this circumstance, life becomes a lesser value than happiness and that the former could be sacrificed in the absence of the latter, since the victims of suicide believe that at least, it

brings their material suffering to an end. These researchers are optimistic that if Nigerian suicide victims realized how much they owe their lives to themselves, they would rather go out of their way to preserve than take their lives. These people engage in such a demeaning act because they are unaware of their duty to themselves and that life is far larger than a transient painful situation. The height of such ignorance and flagrant abuse of humanity, relates to those who kill themselves in order to make a statement, either to punish someone or to evade societal condemnation.

As already analyzed, with respect to the cited cases, causes of suicide were summarized into three: influence of unmediated global culture, faulty orientation and socialization and poor mental health management. But is it not ludicrous that reasons as flimsy as failing an exam, failed premarital relationship or depression are capable of pushing Nigerians into the act of suicide? Hence, a clear indication that these victims of suicide have not the slightest idea of the value of life, otherwise how could a sane human being think of equating a lofty life to merely passing an exam or overcoming depression; so bad that one can substitute for the other. However, this is the most reckless and thoughtless way to treat the humanity in us and that in others, as a thing- a means to an end. Suicide is thus, a desecration of the sanctity of human life. Therefore, the researchers are strongly asserting that, suicide will surely be brought to a control in Nigeria, if there is full Kantian consciousness that life is not a thing, a means to an end, but an end in itself. By this, persons showing tendencies of suicide ideation, if well counseled towards full realization of their duty of preservation of humanity in themselves and the others, and also well managed through their painful situations would surely not end in the act of suicide.

Moreover, Kant holds that it is contradictory for man to use his rational autonomy (freedom), to authorize its own destruction and to abolish all further uses of it (freedom). This is because suicide deprives man the ability for further use of his autonomy; it cancels out autonomy itself. This point should reduce suicide ideation among Nigerians if it is well assimilated. Kant supposedly means that man is a self-legislating being and no legislator would ordinarily propose a law that will permanently end his possibility to remain a legislator or to ever legislate again. That is what suicide does to its victims. And it is the belief of the researchers that should Nigerians realize the enormity of this act, the fact that suicide is a flawed permanent solution to a mere temporary (painful) situation, they would desist from it.

We must note as critics point out that most suicides, (like the above cited cases) by the level of their education and awareness may never have heard of Immanuel Kant or his universalization principle, and therefore are totally uncovered among those expected to wilfully apply Kant's doctrine. Furthermore, they claim that most suicide victims, prior to the eventual act of taking their lives, may have already degenerated into depression or other related mental health challenges capable of impairing their sound rationality and thereby dismissing the disposition of subjecting the impending action

into questioning, about whether it is universalizable or not. This lends support to the argument of some scholars that suicide is an irrational act. We acknowledge the fact that some victims of suicide in Nigeria may not have had a fair knowledge of Immanuel Kant's doctrine of suicide, and which is one of the objectives of this study, to create such awareness. However, the researchers contests the idea that *the victims may have already degenerated into depression or other related mental health challenges capable of impairing their sound rationality and thereby dismissing the disposition of subjecting the impending action into questioning, about whether it is universalizable*, owing to the fact that, since they are capable of composing their intention and posting same on the social media before consciously executing their plan, is a clear proof that their rational power is not impaired in any way. Thus, it is our firm belief that plunging into Kant's antidote on suicide can reverse the recent rising trend of the plague in Nigeria. However, the researchers disagree with the position that just the awareness of the non universalizability of the suicide maxim or the contradiction inherent in the abuse of human autonomy is effectual in reversing the rising rate of suicide in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The discussions so far present Kant's doctrine of suicide as a remedy for the escalating cases of self-killing in Nigeria, which could as well be an incentive towards the control of the nationwide political, ethnic and religious crisis, often resulting in a harvest of deaths. So, he worked strenuously to posit that suicide could surely be avoided if the suicidal candidate would pause to ask oneself whether it is universalizable for one to kill oneself out of self-love, without contradiction. Kant also reveals to us that human life could be preserved if man recognised his duty to oneself and to others by insisting that humanity is never treated as a thing, a means to an end, but always as an end in itself. He further averred that man being a lawgiver unto self, would engage in a contradiction if he uses the rational will, which is the very source of universally binding normative principles to authorize its own destruction that is, destroying what makes it possible for the will to be a source of legislation for itself in the first place. Thus, suicide involves the destruction of the self-legislating, free subject whose presence in the world is the very source of morality.

Kant's doctrine of suicide could serve as an antidote to the surging cases of suicide and political cum ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. If we choose to neglect his injunctions, then the effects of these social anomalies will continue to plague not only in the lives of people, but also on the country's reputation at international level, which certainly will culminate into raping the nation of her peace and stability.

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