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An African Communitarian View of Epistemic Responsibility

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I venture into a fairly underexplored area of African epistemic normativity. I seek to consider how the question of responsibility might be approached differently if values salient in African communitarian thinking are critically explored. I argue that while one may find almost a uniform framework for the determination of epistemic responsibility in different philosophical traditions based on the rational scheme, in the dominant African communitarian tradition, there is more to responsibility than just individualistic traits like rationality. My argument is based on the premise that, responsibility in African epistemological thinking is viewed from a communitarian perspective. According to this view, despite most of African communitarian knowledge conforming to the consciousness and control tests of the rational scheme, communitarian philosophy still remains cardinal in defining the aspect of responsibility on the part of both the individual and the community. I, therefore, partly make critical comparisons between a Western and African concept of responsibility as I seek to justify the plausibility of an African model of responsibility based on communitarian habits and culture.

Introduction

What does an African epistemological theory of normativity look like, and what does it say about the questions around epistemic responsibility? Should questions on epistemological theorising be considered from a *universalist*¹ view such that we can have uniform conceptions on epistemological ideas like responsibility? It is not very clear whether different philosophical traditions have, or ought to have, uniform conceptions of epistemic responsibility. At the same time, the philosophical issues on African epistemic normativity, particularly the ideas around the question of responsibility have not received much attention in much of African philosophical writings. In this article, I venture into a novel interpretation of African epistemic normativity, attempting to consider what an African communitarian view of responsibility² look like as well as how it fundamentally differs from the dominant view of epistemic responsibility in much of Western philosophy.

In this article, I draw the conclusion that African epistemic normativity is grounded in African communitarian thinking as I focus on the epistemic norm of responsibility. As I consider and defend an alternative view of responsibility in African communitarian thinking, I will argue that the conception and determination of moral responsibility and accountability ought to be understood differently in different philosophical traditions. For example, I

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establish how African philosophical thinking places much emphasis on the communitarian criterion of responsibility as opposed to the dominant notions in non-African traditions like the Western view. I, therefore, provide strong reasons why the African view ought to be taken as more plausible than the Western view, which takes the aspect of responsibility to be solely dependent on the rational schema as determined by individual will and reason on the part of the individual person.

Until recently, much of African epistemological theorising has focussed more on legitimising African epistemology. This is why Metz (2007, 321) argues that 'in the literature on African ethics, one finds little that consists of normative theorising with regard to right action' (See also, Molefe 2017a, 1). As a result, I argue that the issue of epistemic responsibility ought to be part of this mission of addressing African epistemological theorising. The aspect of African epistemic responsibility is also closely connected to moral responsibility and hence in need of further interrogation. Although 'a post-colonial view of ethics has emerged in Africa based mainly on traditional indigenous knowledge systems' (Murove 2009, xiv), my point of departure will be a close examination of the African epistemic view of responsibility from which the conception of ethical responsibility could be drawn within the African communitarian context.

While I am more focussed on the African communitarian model of epistemic responsibility, I juxtapose it with the dominant view in Western philosophy where epistemic responsibility has more to do with human reason. Although I contend that the African communitarian conception of responsibility also takes into consideration the centrality of will and reason (the rational scheme) in the determination of responsible actions, I argue that these are not enough. In addition to will and reason, the communitarian ethos or voice is also important in the determination of epistemic responsibility. As a result, it is my argument that following the African communitarian model, individuals cannot just be responsible as individuals, they also need the community (see also, Menkiti 1984, 171–180; Behrens 2010, 472 and Ikenobe 2015, 1005–1007) The community plays a very central epistemological and moral role in inculcating what responsibility is, and how it ought to be understood and evaluated in community. Accordingly, the community ought to be responsible for knowledge of what individuals do because the community makes what the individual is.

In espousing what I see as an African communitarian view of responsibility, I do not wish to pretend, or give the impression, that all the various and diverse communities in Africa have a similar conception of epistemic responsibility. However, I draw on those African communitarian societies that share fundamental opinions on fundamental issues. First, I attempt to define the aspect of epistemic responsibility as an important aspect of epistemological and moral thinking in general. I then examine what I see as the *universalist* fallacy in much of Western philosophical thinking. This is the thinking based on the assumption that only human reason ought to be accountable for human epistemic responsibility. In the last section, I examine the communitarian view of responsibility that I glean from African communitarian philosophy. Here, I provide strong reasons why not only reason is responsible for human epistemic responsibility. Ultimately, I draw the conclusion that an African view of responsibility is communitarian and not individualist, as I compare it with what is prevalent in Western philosophical thinking.

Understanding epistemic responsibility

In general, responsibility is taken to be a very central normative status among all conscious human beings having control over their actions. In most cases, the aspect of responsibility is taken as both an epistemological and a moral aspect referring to the knowledge and kind of obligations which the individual or community ought to have as a result of either individual or communitarian acts on others. As he looks at responsibility as accountability, Thomas Bivins sees responsibility 'as a bundle of obligations associated with a job or function' (2006, 20). However, this common view and understanding of responsibility as accountability is also informed by the epistemic view of responsibility that considers responsible actions or moral responsibility to be a result of an epistemic disposition.

Accordingly, knowledge, responsibility and morality could be taken to be closely connected to each other because they all have something to do with obligations and interests of others as well as the knowledge and duties which human beings ought to have in order to consider various moral acts as responsible and accountable. In much of ethical thinking, the aspect of responsibility is considered as closely connected to the conception and determination of moral responsibility and accountability. These aspects of responsibility and morality are considered as closely connected to each other because they are all understood within the context of the creation of responsible moral acts, accountability, good relations, consideration of the interests of others, and cooperation and creating harmonious living among human communities.

However, despite the above loose view and blanket approach to epistemic responsibility and moral responsibility, there is a distinction that ought to be made between epistemological responsibility and moral responsibility. As Kornblith sees it, 'an epistemologically responsible agent desires to have true beliefs, and thus desires to have beliefs produced by processes which lead to true beliefs; his [or her]³ actions are judged by these desires' (1983, 1). As a result, there must be a thin line but a fundamental difference between epistemic responsibility and moral responsibility. However, when I loosely use the term 'responsibility' throughout this work, I mean more of the former than the latter although these are closely connected. I, therefore, do not wish to examine ethical responsibility, but epistemic responsibility from which the former could be drawn.

While the notion of epistemic responsibility has been fairly addressed in much of Western philosophical discussions on ethical conduct, not much about it has been said in African epistemological and ethical thinking. This is why Gyekye argues that 'like African philosophy itself, the ideas and beliefs of the African society that bear on ethical conduct have not been given elaborate investigation and clarification and, thus, stand in real need of profound and extensive analysis and investigation' (2013, 205). I, therefore, venture into this important aspect in the African conception of responsibility. My endeavour is supported by Murove's argument that, 'many scholars in sub-Saharan Africa have finally realised that the Western ethical tradition, which has for so long dominated sub-Saharan African society, is merely a particular way of understanding ethics relative to Western elites' (2009, xiv).

The *Universalist* fallacy of epistemic responsibility

There are various criteria used for assessing epistemic accountability or responsibility. Some of these include the assessment of human reason, the moral agent's mental

disposition, the influence of society and other factors. However, a dominant view in much of Western philosophy has been the one following what I see as the rationalist scheme or approach to epistemic responsibility. This kind of scheme is mainly informed by the anthropocentric⁴ view of reality where human reason is seen as being central in determining what ought to be. Following the anthropocentric view of epistemic normativity, only individual human beings are considered as responsible for the determination of knowledge of responsible actions because of their reason and autonomy as individuals. Yet following Bellah's argument, the individual does not exist as an island unto him/herself if the human community is properly understood (2009, 175–178).

Ultimately, this anthropocentric approach to the aspect of epistemic responsibility that is characteristic of the dominant view in much of Western philosophical thinking can also be accused for propagating the view that only human reason is the sole determinant in terms of assessing the knowledge of responsible actions. As I have argued elsewhere,

A dominant feature of Western philosophical thinking has been the emphasis on the importance of human reason as informed by the classical Socratic-Platonic and neo-Platonic philosophies, philosophical realism and the Cartesian philosophical traditions. These central philosophical traditions characterising and heavily influencing contemporary [Western] philosophical thinking are based on the basic Western traditional assumption that human reason alone is the fundamental source of our knowledge about the world. (Chemhuru 2014, 75)

As I also argue here, this view is mainly responsible for shaping the reason-centred view of responsibility that characterises much of Western philosophical thinking. On the same grounds, this philosophical tradition can be interpreted to be grounding the epistemological view that human reason alone is central in the determination of responsible actions.

Following on from the above epistemological assumption, a common view that is dominant in Western philosophy has been one that is centred on looking at responsibility from the rational scheme. Bivins traces this philosophical tradition to Aristotelian thinking and observes that

it is important to note that as early as Aristotle, moral responsibility was viewed as originating with the moral agent (decision maker), and grew out of an ability to reason (an awareness of actions and their consequences) and a willingness to act free from compulsion. (Bivins 2006, 20)

According to this scheme, epistemic responsibility is assessed in terms of whether knowledge of actions and their performances have been done in accordance with the knowledge condition of responsibility or the control condition of responsibility. According to the knowledge condition of responsibility, a moral agent is judged for the responsibility of the person's actions on the basis of being aware of the moral act. In terms of the control condition, responsibility lies with the moral agent being in charge of things that are up to him/her. Accordingly, the aspect of responsibility of the person's actions is generally examined in terms of whether moral agents satisfy the knowledge condition of responsibility and the control condition of responsibility. It is expected that actions can be viewed as responsible, if and only if they have satisfied both the knowledge condition and the control condition of responsibility.

Knowing what one is doing and being in control of what is being done are mainly accepted as the *universal* view in the consideration of responsible actions. This view could be traced to ancient philosophical thinking along both Platonic and Aristotelian

lines. Much of Western philosophical thinking seems to be influenced by the Platonic, Aristotelian as well as the Cartesian views of responsibility. According to these dominant views of responsibility, the individual person or moral agent is solely responsible for one's actions because the person is taken as a *res cogitans* (a thinking thing) by virtue of having memory, will and imagination in the Cartesian sense. Responsibility is given to the person (P) on the basis of the rationality scheme.

In this dominant view or tradition in Western philosophical thinking, one of the most influential approaches to epistemic responsibility is mainly centred on appeals to the rational scheme through the *knowledge (consciousness)* and *control conditions* of epistemic responsibility. This view has generally been taken and accepted as the *universalist* view of epistemic responsibility among all human beings. Aristotle is one of the philosophers who hold the view that all human beings are rational animals. Because of this view, all human beings, therefore, ought to be responsible for their individual human actions because they must be in possession of knowledge of their actions as well as being in control of whatever they do.

I consider this view as the person-centric view of responsibility. It is person-centric because the aspect of responsibility comes back to the individual person by virtue of having the individualistic quality of rationality. It is based on the assumption that reason gives the person (P) knowledge or consciousness of one's actions in addition to control of one's actions. As a result this view of responsibility can, therefore, be judged to be highly subjective and atomistic to the individual moral agent. Despite Kornblith's view of such 'accounts seeking to ground epistemic norms in our desires [as] most promising' (1993, 357), I argue to the contrary, and seek to establish that this dominant view in the Western philosophical tradition makes epistemic norms such as epistemic responsibility to be some sort of a hypothetical imperative.⁵ This is because the moral obligations and knowledge of what one is doing are mainly dependent on, and determined by reference to, the moral agent as an individual being.

The African communitarian perspective

The alternative African perspectives on epistemic responsibility must be essentially tied to the African communitarian view of existence. A number of thinkers have so far offered various theories and perspectives explaining the way that existence is conceptualised in African philosophy as well as how it has an import to various epistemic and ethical discourses (see for example, Tempels 1959; Mbiti 1969; Samkange and Samkange 1980; Menkiti 1984; Ramose 1999; Gyekye 1996, 2011, 2013; Matolino 2011; Molefe 2017a, 2017b). Yet the communitarian view of epistemic responsibility is not discernible in most of these important works. This is why I intend to make a novel interpretation of the African communitarian view of existence in terms of how it informs a plausible view of epistemic responsibility.

I argue that a conception of the African communitarian view of epistemic responsibility is mainly anchored in the understanding of the human person that permeates much of African philosophy and thought. Broadly understood, 'the African view of man denies that persons can be defined by focussing on this or that physical or psychological characteristic of the lone individual. Rather man is defined by reference to the enviroing community' (Menkiti 1984, 174). Similarly, I seek to argue that this communitarian view of the

person has a very strong bearing on the African conception of epistemic responsibility as I will establish in this section. My argument could perhaps address Metz's reservations with African traditional knowledge as he expresses his fear in the following: 'does taking testimony to be an independent source of knowledge entail that tradition and elders can provide a good epistemic reason to believe an ethical claim?' (Metz 2013, 8).

Following African communitarian thinking, the dominant view of epistemic responsibility in African epistemology seems to espouse a communitarian view of epistemic responsibility as opposed to the subjectivist and atomist view that I have considered in the previous section as being characteristic of much of traditional Western philosophy. The African communitarian view of responsibility can be understood to be a collectivist approach to epistemic responsibility. This is because 'knowledge of what one is doing' or 'knowledge of what one ought to do' does not entirely and actively come from the individual moral agent alone. Rather, epistemic knowledge can sometimes be passively received from the community in the form of traditional or cultural knowledge.⁶ Although Dzobo (2010) is not specific with epistemic knowledge, he offers a view of African traditional knowledge that is similar to my conception of African communitarian epistemic knowledge. According to Dzobo, 'in indigenous society, then, knowing is the result of two different types of experience, one active and the other passive' (2010, 74). In light of this kind of approach to traditional knowledge, one can reasonably argue that in the African communitarian view, traditional or cultural knowledge of responsibility ought to be taken as some sort of a categorical imperative, implying that the duty to responsible actions is not determined by the moral agent alone. The idea of epistemic responsibility within the African communitarian communities must, therefore, be understood as rather socialistic, in so far as it promotes a social or cultural morality of the common good of the community rather than looking at epistemic and moral responsibility from an individualist perspective. As he looks at issues in *African Ethics*, Gyekye (2011) takes this view as he argues that 'African humanitarian ethics spawns social morality, the morality of the common good, and the morality of duty that is so comprehensive as to bring within its compass what are referred to as moral ideals' (2011, 237). From this view, therefore, it is clear that culture plays a central role in the cultivation of knowledge and epistemic responsibility in African social epistemology. Accordingly, Jimoh observes that,

culture plays an important role in the mental understanding of reality and unless one is intimately familiar with the ontological commitments of a culture, it is often difficult to appreciate or otherwise understand those commitments. Therefore it is important that we understand the African cultural and ontological conceptions of reality to enable us to understand the African approach to knowledge. (2017, 122)

As a result, following the African traditional model through which individuals passively acquire the kind of traditional knowledge alluded to by Dzobo (2010, 71–82), one can say that the African communitarian approach to epistemic responsibility must be collectivist in outlook. Although Menkiti is not more focussed on the idea of epistemic responsibility, he suggests a view that helps us to understand a collectivist approach to epistemic responsibility when he argues: 'group solidarity is most often cited as a key, perhaps the defining, feature of African traditional societies' (2004, 324). Although this kind of radical communitarian thinking could be accused of 'depart[ing] from the global sway of rights' (Molefe 2017b, 1), this collectivist view in African epistemology, as informed by

communitarian existence, epistemic responsibility does not entirely lie on the individual person alone. According to this communitarian view, rather, epistemic responsibility ought to be understood within the context in which the individual person forms an inter-twined with the family and community at large, who also form sources of such traditional knowledge of responsibility. As a result, following this communitarian view of epistemic responsibility, the content, scope and agency of knowledge of moral actions and obligations are mainly derived and determined by the community, and not necessarily by the dictates of the lone individual. Although Matolino (2011, 32) differs with Menkiti's radical communitarianism, he also settles for this kind of 'epistemological growth' that 'involves the moral aspect of both the individual and society'. This view is mostly applicable to a communitarian conception where adults are responsible for inculcating certain epistemic norms to children as they grow from one stage to the other.

In African communitarian existence, the ontological view and understanding of the person as communitarian has a very strong influence on the view of epistemic responsibility. This is why certain aspects of African communitarian dictates, behaviours, and attitudes may actually be determined by the one in control of the conditions for responsibility, in which case it is the community. In other words, it is possible for an individual moral agent or the individual human person to actually act without necessarily satisfying the knowledge condition of responsibility as well as the control condition of responsibility (in the traditional Western philosophical sense) without any problems. This view is not surprising when one considers Mbiti's argument that, 'whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: *I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am*' (1969, 106, emphasis in the original). From this view, one can reasonably glean a deterministic understanding of epistemic responsibility as well. Accordingly, it is apparent that collective epistemic responsibility is more important than that of the individual in an African communitarian set-up. Unlike in the dominant view in the Western philosophical tradition, African communitarian knowledge of epistemic responsibility does not necessarily need the knowledge condition and the control condition in order for the individual to be assessed in terms of responsibility.

Following the African communitarian view of epistemic responsibility, it is possible that an individual might be compelled to accept and absorb certain knowledge of actions and do certain actions with some kind of impunity, while the community bears responsibility. In other words, there are exceptions where the community at large can bear responsibility on behalf of the individual because such knowledge of responsibility does not belong to the individual alone but to the family and community at large. For example, in holding on to knowledge of various taboos that are aimed at safeguarding communalistic values, individuals are not held responsible for certain actions that they may do, but the community bears such epistemic responsibility. Similarly, an individual might, therefore, fail the control condition of epistemic responsibility as an atomistic individual, but society might be the one in control of epistemic responsibility in that context.

Also, closely knit with the communitarian understanding of existence as being more focussed on the communalistic view of epistemic responsibility is the notion of *ubuntu*. Although it is difficult to separate the notion of *ubuntu* from the communitarian view, they are different from each other. The notion of *ubuntu* is more focussed on the idea of existence and its epistemic and moral import mostly to communities in Southern

Africa, while the communitarian view is broader in so far as it denotes the idea of how the individual is communally understood, and informed by closely associating with the community. I will spare a detailed discussion of the similarities and differences between these two concepts to some other space and time. I will simply conclude here, that the notions of *ubuntu* and communitarian philosophy are closely knit such that it is difficult to discuss one concept without the other (see Behrens 2010, 467–468). However, for the sake of this discussion, I will focus on the way in which *ubuntu* feeds into the communitarian view of epistemic responsibility. According to this view, the understanding of the individual has far-reaching implications for the communitarian understanding of epistemic responsibility. This is because the notion of *ubuntu* does not place epistemic responsibility on the person as an individual being, but the whole community as informed by *ubuntu* (see also Behrens 2010, 468). According to Ramose,

the African concept of a person as wholeness does not deny human individuality as an ontological fact, as an analytic finitude, but ascribes ontological primacy to the community through which the human individual comes to know both themselves and the world around. (1999, 79)

This view confirms the communitarian view of epistemic responsibility characteristic of African epistemology.

Also, the African hierarchy of *being* or existence is another important determinant of the communitarian view of epistemic responsibility. According to this African ontological order of existence, existence is hierarchically understood in so far as the chain of beings stretches from the Supreme Being (God), the ancestors, human beings, other animate beings and nature in general (Teffo and Roux 1998, 138; Chemhuru 2014, 80–81). Understood correctly, this view of existence in African metaphysics cannot be compatible with an atomistic view of existence, and the rational scheme of epistemic responsibility like the one in Western philosophical thinking which emphasises individualistic traits like knowledge or consciousness of what one is doing and being in control of what is being done. Thus, contrary to such a Western perspective, following the African order of existence, it is impossible to leave epistemic responsibility to the person without also taking into consideration other metaphysical aspects or beings such as the ancestors and the Supreme Being. This is because without these vitalist forces, existence would be incomplete. Similarly, responsibility or knowledge of what one is doing or control over one's actions also rests on the same metaphysical premises in African communitarian philosophy. This explains why mostly, although it is important to know what one is doing, individuals may be spared from blame and responsibility from actions which they might have done consciously and under their control. According to the African metaphysical view of responsibility rather, other metaphysical forces like familial and ancestral spirits could be held accountable and responsible for such actions and not necessarily the individual person. This view of existence is captured in Placide Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* where he alluded to the idea of 'vital force' as an important metaphysical concept of *being* among the Bantu people in the following manner:

After [God] comes the first fathers of men, founders of the different clans. These arch-patriarchs were the first to whom God communicated his vital force, with the power of exercising their influences on all posterity. They constitute the most important chain binding men to God. They occupy so exalted a rank in Bantu thought that they are not regarded merely as ordinary dead. (1959, 61–62)

Although he was writing from a missionary and colonialist stand-point, this vitalist view accounting for epistemic responsibility remains true and useful among most African communitarian societies. Imafidon also captures this vitalist view of existence as he argues that 'in a typical African ontology, there exists of two realms of existence, the visible and invisible; independently real but intrinsically linked to form a whole' (2014, 38). Consequently, if existence is construed in this way, it is impossible to look at epistemic responsibility from an individualist perspective but rather from a collectivist view where both the living and the departed bear epistemic responsibility for human intentions and actions. This is why in *An African Theory of Epistemology*, Jimoh (2017, 122) comes to the conclusion that 'for the African there is more to reality than what is within the realm of empirical inquiry'.

Overall, within the African social and political context, the aspect of epistemic responsibility ought to be understood as closely related to morality or ethical thinking especially as it relates to how human beings are socially connected to each other within the various African communities. According to this communitarian view of epistemic responsibility and morality, a person can, therefore, be considered as being responsible for actions that only have moral or ethical import to other social human beings to which the individual relates with. At the same time, it must also be understood that the same individual person being held for such responsibility is naturally a social animal (See Gyekye 1996, 55). Consequently, if we accept the natural sociality of the person and persons in African ontology, an individual person cannot be held to be responsible for one's actions because he/she is not understood as a moral island. The individual exists within, and is influenced by one's social context such that it is difficult to separate one's decisions and actions from those of the community. Accordingly, Gyekye argues that 'morality is intrinsically social, arising out of the relations between individuals; if there were no such thing as human society, there would be no such thing as morality' (1996, 55). As opposed to the Western conception of responsibility that puts a strong emphasis on human reason alone, within the African metaphysical view, there is more to the determination of responsibility than just reason. If African metaphysical conceptions of reality are closely examined, one can glean a reasonable view of responsibility that respects both human reason and existence, particularly communitarian existence. What is unique about this view of responsibility is the attempt to go further than the individual reason of the human person, as it also takes into consideration the role of the metaphysical status of the individual and the society at large. Although Chemhuru is more concerned with the import of African existence to environmental ethical thinking, he alluded to a communitarian view of responsibility in the following: 'As complement to reason for example, among the Shona and most African communities, various insights, which are part of their metaphysics constitute sources of Shona and most of sub-Saharan environmental epistemology and axiology' (Chemhuru 2014, 75).

Conclusion

What I attempt to do here is to examine the aspect of epistemic responsibility as an alternative view emanating from African communitarian philosophy. Although I do not wish to commit the fallacy of assuming that all African communities follow the kind of communitarian epistemic view of responsibility that I examine here, I seek to confine my argument to African communities that are communitarian in orientation. I conclude that these communities largely exhibit a different understanding of responsibility from much of non-African traditions such as Western philosophy. This would explain why I

argue and conclude that the aspect of responsibility ought to be conceptualised and understood differently by different people. Notwithstanding my argument for a communitarian conception of epistemic responsibility in African philosophy, I also caution against the temptation to imply that African communitarian philosophy totally dismisses the knowledge condition of epistemic responsibility and the control condition of responsibility on the part of the individual. While the individual human being remains an integral part of the communitarian arrangement, he/she still has some claim to individuality such that it is sometimes possible to evaluate the person individually.

Notes

1. I consider the *universalist* standpoint to be a view-point that considers philosophical issues from a common stand-point or view, such that any human being will ultimately have a similar conception of a fundamental issue.
2. By this, I mean a view of ethical responsibility that is mainly informed by the community to which the individual person is immersed. This Afro-communitarian view is in contrast to the Western conception of responsibility that mainly focuses on the autonomy of the person without considering the person's communitarian relationships.
3. Author's insertion.
4. The word *anthropocentric* here could be understood within the context in which human beings are thought to exist with other non-human beings around them, such as God, other gods, non-human nature and all reality around. However, the general anthropocentric view ignores all these in terms of approaching fundamental questions about reality. Only the human being is thought to be the central and most important being in the universe. This is why it is referred to as the anthropocentric view because its main focus is on the human being as opposed to other non-anthropocentric views like the eco-centric approach which takes on board, the entire ecosystem.
5. I use the phrase 'hypothetical imperative' with an extended meaning, to capture the way a common view of responsibility boils down to individuality traits like reason, and not necessarily the same way it is used by Immanuel Kant to denote the morality of an action on the basis of one's desires or the practical necessity of an action. A similarly extended interpretation is also necessary when I characterise the African communitarian view of responsibility as a categorical imperative in the next section. I deliberately overstate the way an African communitarian view of responsibility could be referred to as a 'categorical imperative', because of the significance and value of communitarian knowledge of the individual.
6. It is not my intention here to get into the debate of what traditional knowledge is within the African context. However, I use it here to denote the kind of knowledge that is passed from one generation to the other orally. In this regard see also, Dzobo 2010, 71–82.

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