



## ETHICAL BEHAVIOR OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS: FROM THE CONCEPT OF HOMO ECONOMICUS TO HOMO SPIRITUS

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### Abstract

This research highlights accounting malpractice under the concept of Homo Economicus and how the Homo Spiritus concept guides professional accountants to develop a willingness to embark on a spiritual journey through everyday life and professional services to clients. The study of the Homo Spiritus concept refers to individuals with holistic awareness, characterized by complete obedience to God's will, based on the conscience (God Spot). Research on the spiritualist paradigm remains limited. The researcher aims to enrich the discourse and bring it to light as a contribution to expanding the scope of qualitative research from a spiritualist perspective.

This research uses the Rationalist Spiritualist method, meaning the researcher analyzes data with a directed and accurate mindset. However, this approach alone cannot uncover ultimate truth; it serves as foundational steps. The ultimate truth can be discovered through the control of the mind. A spiritualist mindset is one that is controlled, born from a heart that has been purified and made whole. This manifests in one's work and brings benefits to others.

The research found that the concept of Homo Economicus, characterized by its emphasis on rational thinking, has faced much criticism for its pursuit of prosperity limited to self-interest. Clearly, a new concept is needed to achieve the ideal nature of accountants, by treating the Homo Economicus concept as a step towards the Homo Spiritus concept. This more grounded concept aims to lead humanity towards a more just and prosperous life.

**Keywords:** Ethical behavior, public accountant, rationalist spiritualist, homo economicus, homo spiritus.

## INTRODUCTION

The problem of fraud has long occurred in companies (Darby and Karni 1973). The emergence of scandals in accounting such as Worldcom and Enron companies further exacerbated ethical violations within the organization. The company disclosed the substantial damage caused by the appalling behavior. Those companies were previously big. Enron was one of the largest companies globally, focused on energy trading. WorldCom is a giant in the telecommunications industry focused on telephone and Internet services (Petra and Spieler 2020). Global Crossing operates a global fiber-optic network that transmits telephone calls, and Internet data. The company's ambition is to build a 100,000-mile fiber optic network connecting 27 countries. This ambition became the company's downfall because the need for cash exceeded the available supply. As a result, the company tried to raise more money by incorrectly using capacity swaps to increase revenue (Petra and Spieler 2020).

The Enron scandal had two main concerns from public investors to get out of the scandal: (1) the emergence of managerial irregularities and (2) claims by top executives that they were unaware of what had happened. The executives were tasked with creating an accounting scheme to make Enron appear more profitable than (it was) to reap personal rewards. That "profit" raised the share price and put Enron's shareholders (unbeknownst to them) at enormous risk. Another concern comes from the executive's account that claimed the mistakes were made without their knowledge because the whole business was too complex to be aware of every detail (Neuman 2017).

The concept applied in the global development of the accounting profession is based on the concept of homo economicus. Burchell et al., 1985; Hopwood, 1999; targets to be achieved cannot be separated from goals that are closer to satisfying personal interests (self-interest). This is made aware of the content of the concept of homo economicus which is based on rational thinking. Rational thinking that relies on desire and reason is more about efforts to maximize utility to obtain wealth that benefits certain parties and harms other parties.

Homo Economicus concepts are moulded by secular and atheistic traditions. They are fully oriented to, and for the sake of, secular life. There is no indication that they have a connection between earthly life and hereafter. Secular is one of other characteristics such as materialistic, individualistic (James 2007; Gallhofer & Haslam, 2011) and atheistic, of

capitalism. These characteristics have a strong influence on shaping human's character. James (2007) argues that under selfish capitalism, which is driven excessively by neo-liberalism, one has changed his/her needs to wants; connected with others only based on secular appearance, wealth and charisma, rather than love; and felt emptiness and loneliness that may finally result in personality disorder. Capitalistic civilisation has made people live in materialistic and individualistic ends.

On the other hand, the condition has made an increased turning to a spiritual dimension (Gallhofer & Haslam, 2011). This is a human quest for happiness. But, is it a real solution? Turning to a spiritual dimension by ignoring a materialistic dimension cannot solve the problem, rather it may create another problem. Why? Because a human being has materialistic and spiritual dimensions. The dimensions should be balanced and in harmony. Thus, this study attempts to balance those dimensions.

It emphasises on a brief construction of a managerial performance concept that is based on a theistic-spiritualist perspective. Under the perspective, the existing concept is regarded as being incomplete. They never direct human behaviour to a divine consciousness that recognises the existence of God and never bring human's awareness to the real ultimate end of life. The perspective has a capacity to generate a new concept that is expected to be more holistic than the existing ones. Using a theistic-spiritualistic approach, the concept in essence broadens Homo economicus by balancing its secular elements, material and spiritual element. The combination will make the concept more holistic and better than Homo economicus because for a theistic spiritualist, there is no separation between the secular and the spiritual. They are in unity (tawhid) (Tinker, 2004, p. 452; Mustofa, 2005; Choudhury, 2008, pp. 239 & 245;).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study constructs human identity from the perspective of Homo Spiritus. Assumptions of homo economicus which is the foundation of modern accountancy should be changed. Moreover, this prioritises profit as the main purpose of economic activity, contradicting the Homo spiritus (Sitorus & Triuwono, 2015). In this study, homo spiritus, which contains the

principles of balance and love, is used to study accounting and to realise the value of human (Soekarno, 1945, 2001).

We know humans have a free will and are sovereign in making decisions. Humans do have the right to separate himself from the presence of God, others, and the universe. Nonetheless, the free will concept should not be directed to things that are oriented to lust, especially in the concept of matter. People should use the freedom to be oriented to God, others, and the universe. In other words, free will is based on human wisdom and discretion (Latif, 2012; Lehman, 2014; Waldron, 2010). Therefore, the principles of sincerity and love are aimed at taming the ego (Cahyanto & Parikesit, 2011).

Humans, from the spiritualist perspective, should not see freedom espoused by capitalism (Latif, 2014). Instead, they sacrifice for common interests and welfare (Cahyanto & Parikesit, 2011). His or her existence is not self-centred but God, others, and the universe are far more important (Sitorus, 2016). The nature of sacrifice such as this that does not exist in homo economicus. An overhaul of homo economicus must be done to achieve homo spiritualist. Self-interest is actually divisive to the nation (Hines, 1988; Mulawarman, 2013). In addition, social inequality exists due to private wealth accumulation (Latif, 2012).

We must realise the development of accounting concepts cannot be separated from human characteristics, vice versa. Accounting and human beings have a strong bond, even from the level of definition (Sitorus, 2015). Both are aspects of reality that are not separated from one another, both on the physical level and vice versa (Kamayanti, 2009). Awareness of this “nothingness” will encourage accounting that is conscious, and humble, and from ontology, to axiology (Molisa, 2011; Triyuwono, 2012).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The fundamental principles of the IFAC’s code of ethics for professional accountants can be regarded as a starting point to redesign the code. In essence, the principles require a professional accountant to be honest and objective, to maintain professional knowledge and skill, to act diligently in accordance with applicable technical and professional standards, to respect the confidentiality of information, and to comply with relevant laws and regulations and avoid any action that may discredit the profession (Anonymous, 2005). The principles are

full of positive meanings that may direct the behavior of a professional accountant to be in the right track.

However, they are not enough to guide and bring a professional accountant to a psycho-spiritual consciousness, because, the principles mostly reside on rational consciousness which are steered by human desire and intellect. Thus, there is a need for adding other principles that may bridge the rational sphere to psycho-spiritual one. The additional principles are sincerity and love (see Table 1). They are in the locus of heart which are never associated with human rationalisation, rather with feelings.

**Table 1. The relations of fundamental principle, metaphysical element, and consciousness**

Category	Metaphysical Element	Fundamental Principles	Consciousness
1	Desire and intellect	Integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care, confidentiality, professional behavior	Rational consciousness
2	Heart	Sincerity, love	Psycho-spiritual consciousness
3	Conscience	Divine will	Divine consciousness

Sincerity is an imperative internal virtue of an individual to deliver actions to all human kinds, to universe, and to God based on a very pure intention (Gardet, 1986: 1060). It is beyond the involvement of desire, intellect, and heart. An action is not delivered based on human desire, or based on rational analysis, or based on positive feeling, but based on the real self of human being.

In the perspective of a religion, a good action is the one that carried out sincerely. When an individual, say, gives an assistant to other individual without any expectation to get a reward from the individual, then the action can be labeled as a sincere action. According to religious teaching, a professional accountant renders his or her professional service to a client not for his or her own sake, rather for the sake of God. He or she never thinks of getting a reward from a client, even though in fact he or she gets it, but he or she does the service only

for the pleasure of God. The individual always enjoys what he or she is doing, because there is no other worldly matter that disturb him or her.

Under the sincere action, an actor is free from the boundary of time (i.e., past experiences and future expectations) and space (Tolle, 2001; 1999). The action spontaneously emanates from the inner self that of course is purer than human ego (i.e., desire, intellect, and heart). Human ego, through intellect and a relevant feeling, all the time attempts to fulfill the needs and the wants of human desire which are actually artificial in nature. But, the inner self, the pure consciousness, is free from the ego.

A professional accountant has a capacity to liberate him or herself from the ego. Free from the ego means that he or she feels the present moment. In that state, referring to Tolle's (1999: 18) concept of the power of now, the accountant feels his or her-own presence that is beyond of all thinking, all emotions, physical body, and external world. The accountant draws away from mind activity and create a gap of no-mind (not thinking), but still alert and aware.

Another psycho-spiritual state of an ideal professional accountant is love. It is a mysterious and pleasant feeling that connects an individual to other individuals, to nature, and to God. The feeling makes the lover and the beloved are in a beautiful, happy, and closed relationship. Love is a powerful energy that has a potentiality to change the life and environment of human being Chopra (1997: 17-18).

Love, as noted by Chopra (1997: 17-18), seems to us as a human love that has a power to change an individual to be better and also is a way to meet God. Human love, in nature, is psychological, free from intellect, knowledge, and eloquence (Nurbakhsh, 2008: 8; Chopra, 1997: 17-18). For Chopra (1997: 92), (falling in) psychological love is temporary, illusory, excited, attached, hormone-based, imaginary unity, and childish regression.

But, in contrast, spiritual love is timeless, transcendent, peaceful, freeing, soul-based, real unity, and enhanced evolution (Chopra, 1997: 92). At the same position, Nurbakhsh (2008: 8) argues that under human instinctive love, the lover longs for the beloved for his or her own benefits. The love is stimulated by the beauty of outer and temporary forms. Even, it is a result of sublimation and refinement of sexual desire. Nurbakhsh (2008) agrees to say that human love is not the real love. There is another sort of love, that is, spiritual love. He points out that "in spiritual love, the lover longs for the beloved for his own sake, as well as for that of the beloved" (Nurbakhsh, 2008: 8).

Nurbakhsh (2008: 8) contends that the real love is not the psychological and spiritual ones, but Divine Love. It is “a profusion and a rapture from the Absolute Beloved which descends upon the heart of the sincere lover.”The lover longs for the Beloved and only for the sake of the Beloved. There is no more human love in the heart of the lover, but the Divine Love.The love transcends the feelings of loving other individuals, nature, and profane livings.The only feeling is to love God only. For an individual who has the feeling, the human love (that is based on human ego) has already been passed over.

A professional accountant has a potentiality to be in the state of the real love. Through religious and spiritual exercises, the accountant can have an experience to live in divine love.Doing the exercises does not mean to detach the actor from daily and professional lives, but indeed they are in union with the lives. Through the lives, the accountant undertakes a psychological and spiritual journey towards achieving a pure consciousness.Staying in a pure consciousness gives birth to a joyful personal, social, professional, and environmental live.Psycho-spiritual consciousness is a continuum line that demonstrates that the love of a professional accountant may be in the range of psychological love and spiritual love. It reflects a dynamic movement of an accountant to move towards a beloved, trusted, and ethical accountant.

Both love and sincerity are the fundamental principles of the code.They are two stepladders that guide a professional accountant to next step, that is, divine consciousness within which God’s will resides.

The locus of divine will is conscience.It is the Essence of God that is implanted in and united with human body.It is a part of the Essence which is commonly acknowledged as God-spot (cf. Seabold, 2005; Joseph, 2002). It functions as a spiritual antenna for an individual to connect to God. Through the conscience, an individual all the time can make communications and conversations with God (Aman, 2013: 50-60; Walsch, 2010). It can be attained only by an intimate relationship that creates a spiritual leap and transcends an individual ego beyond its nature.

Through the conscience, divine will may revealed as conversations as experienced by Walsch (2010). Walsch (2010: 2) has an amazing experience to have communication with God. When he writes a letter to God, surprisingly, He responds his letter through his hand writing by using a pen that moves on its own.

Walsch (1010) tells us that God replied his questions of life by dictating some answers. God dictates Walsch to write the answers down through a pen that moves by its own. It is the God's will that moves the pen to write the messages down. In this context, divine will is expressed in terms of a verbal communication. It is a revelation.

At the same position, Aman (2013: 51) also affirms that in a religious tradition, believers perceive that God communicates with human being through three ways, i.e., revelation, something behind the veil, and angels. Verbal information is descended by God to His prophet that is later on compiled into one book that finally we call it as The Holy Book. The Holy Book, in other words, is the collections of the written God's will that is delivered to prophet. A verbal communication is not the only way of God to communicate with human being. He also communicates with human being through feeling, thought, and experience (Walsch, 2010: 4-6).

Thus, God's will is communicated to human beings through words, feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Aman (2013: 50-60) also expresses the same way of communication, even though he pays more attention on the verbal communication. For Aman (2013: 50-60), in essence, God communicates with all creatures through His dynamic and life rules that may include words, feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Even, he articulates that the communication not only to some special human being such as prophets, but also to all human beings, animals, plants, angels, devils, and universe. In the past, now, and in the future, God always communicates with all creatures. Except for the last prophet, the revelation has stopped at the end of the prophet's life (Aman, 2013: 51).

Through a human conscience, an individual will have an experience to have a communication with God. In other words, inside of the communication, there is actually the will of God. But, unfortunately not all human beings can capture His will. Some are willing to consciously and sincerely listen to God's will, but others are not (Walsch, 2010: 8).

Ideally, a professional accountant has a pure capacity to gain God's will through his or her conscience. When an accountant empowers his or her conscience, he or she can spontaneously understands, obeys, and totally surrender to the will of God. In this condition, thinking and taking an action is only based on the will of God. Through conscience, the accountant is guided to salvation (Lewisohn, 1986: 785). When the accountant has reached pure conscience, he or she automatically enlightens his or her desire, intellect, and heart. At this point, the accountant is the perfect accountant. In sufi's tradition it is called as Insan-



Kamil, the perfect man, that is, an individual who totally obeys God's will and has praiseworthy qualities, celebrates knowledge, asceticism, and piety (Lewisohn, 1986: 784).

## CONCLUSION

The Understanding the real nature of human being is very important, because this understanding affects how an individual comprehends, behaves, and responds any symbols surroundings the individual. Homo economicus, for instance, is recognised as an individual who has economic rationality and self-interest. He or she, under the character, has a strong tendency to respond human life as being economised for his or her-own interest. For homo economicus, maximising utility is the self-interest to get his or her wealth (Xin & Liu, 2013; Sigmund, 2010; Thaler, 2000). Even, homo economicus is bounded in the box of calculation, materialist, not social, no morality, greed, and no heroism (Wight, 2005).

Beyond homo economicus we find homo spiritus. It is characterised by strong religious and spiritual convictions on intimate and transcendental relationships not only with God and other individuals (Boteach, 1996),

the normative and the positive, between the theoretical and the practical, and so forth (Tinker, 2004). Homo spiritus has four metaphysical elements, i.e., desire, intellect, heart, and conscience. Desire is an element that has an inclination to fulfill animal instinct. The element relates to earthly tendencies of an individual. An individual who has pure inclination (by marginalizing other elements) may be the same as Jensen & Meckling's (1994) economic model. This model is purely the model of homo economicus. But, for homo spiritus, desire is just one element that its position is in balance with other elements. Intellect is the second element that has a function to rationalise and analyse any object surrounding the individual. Intellect does not stand alone. It is in a dynamic, interdependent, and balanced relation with other elements. Then, the third element is heart which relates to emotional spheres, such as positive and negative emotions, of an individual. And the last is conscience. It is a spot of a divine spirit or a spot of the Essence of God that is implanted by God into human being (God-spot). Its function is to drive divinely the behavior and action of human being to be accordance with the will of God. In other words, when an individual consciously and totally follows any command of the divine spirit (the conscience), then we can say that he or she has

submitted himself or herself totally to the will of God. This is the ideal condition of homo spiritus to pose the spirit as a divine source and centre

for delivering a course of actions. Conscience is the centre of divine consciousness. Sensitivity of divine consciousness depends on how far an individual has purified his or her conscience from the dust of earthly and humanly inclinations. An individual can purify conscience through consciously engaging in everyday life and spiritual exercises. Daily life and religious practices may become a way for attaining pure conscience which, for homo spiritus, is a spiritual journey to unite with God. The journey may start with rational consciousness (in which desire and intellect reside) and psycho-spiritual consciousness (in which heart stays) as a ladder to ascend the highest level of consciousness, i.e., divine consciousness. Rational consciousness and psycho-spiritual consciousness are basically humane. In our daily modern life, they are the main forces that drive human's behavior and actions. These two sorts of consciousness steers the human models designed by Jensen & Meckling (1994). At these levels, an individual has not been yet a divine one. Rather, he or she should process himself or herself until reaching and experiencing how conscience works actively.

After experiencing the works of conscience, then the divine spirit enlightens the human's desire, intellect, and heart to be divined ones. By doing so, the rational consciousness and psycho-spiritual consciousness are enlightened and divined. Finally, all sorts of consciousness are divine in nature. Thus, an individual who is in this experience is homo spiritus. Ideally, a professional accountant is homo spiritus. But, how? The answer is: designing code of ethics that may direct professional accountant to have willingness to undertake a spiritual journey through doing daily life and professional services to clients.

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