



A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE MORAL FOUNDATIONS IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

The study critically evaluated the moral foundations in African philosophy while its objectives were to show the various grounds for morality in Africa., to provide ethical blueprints through these foundations. and to expose the cracks in the foundations for morality in Africa. This study is vital because it not only negates the impression of western philosophers that Africans lack moral foundations, but it also exposes these foundations as well as subjecting them to constructive criticisms in order to create a viable platform that is open-ended for arguments and further discussions. This work employed the analytic method. Through the analytic method, we delved into the clarification of concepts within the purview of African ethics. Also, this method also enabled us to reduce ambiguities and eliminate vagueness in this work as much as possible. The culture of the African, too, is another aspect that provides moral grounds. Entrenched within the African cultural milieu are custodians of moral values in the form of ancestors and sages who act as high priests in determining what is right or wrong. The culture of the African in this sense is pivotal regarding its moral dispositions as ethnic affiliations are of paramount importance in dealing with ethical issues. In African vantage point the relationship between philosophy, religion and morality as lived by the people is one of unity .there is no distinction between these disciplines as they are not perceived as entities in themselves but as dynamic elements which cannot be separated from life processes Philosophy is life; religion is life; morality is life; community is life. There is no room for separation within the African worldview, but only complex interdependence. Moreover, from the African tradition, morality or ethics are merged with religion The study showed that, morality is a concept, understood and marked in Africans by various phenomena. These phenomena, as seen in the study, have ways of impacting the being of man as an ontological individual which by his very nature makes him a member of a normative community. Although through social interactions, colonialism, slave trade and the abrasive effect of this westernization and other artificial man made activities, Africans continue by their nature to be connected to their foregone moral status has been hampered. This connection to their understanding of morality by Africans is so deep that it regulates the activities of man, which place man as social force in the universe.. In conclusion, an African person is naturally moral. It was recommended that Societies should do more to promote moral values rather than focusing on amassing wealth Further study should compare the moral foundation of African philosophy with those of other continents or races

Keywords: Critical , Evaluation , Moral Foundations , African Philosophy, Societies



1.0

INTRODUCTION

The moral foundation in African philosophy, like any other aspect of the discipline, was constructed in spite of projected stereotypes against Africa in that Africans lack the rational capacity to grapple with ethical issues. Consequently, the popular belief from western philosophy is that Africans are bereft of moral tenets. This reductionist thought, projected by the likes of Levy-Bruhl and Hegel, is nevertheless erroneous, for without morality, it implies that Africans are not any different from animals that cannot differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. The disposition of the African, then, rested on hinging moral thoughts that are instituted within the ambience of her culture, religion, and being. Although this disposition was ethnically conceived, it is nevertheless credible on the basis that philosophy itself was birthed from religion by breaking away from the dogmatic reality that religion presents.

The metamorphosis of religion to philosophy in this sense creates a logical argument for moral concerns in African philosophy. This is because a number of moral values in Africa were derived from religion. This admission does not, in any way, refer to Christianity as it is a western religion. The reference point here is African traditional religion, which was already ingrained in the African before the advent of western missionaries. The assertion here is that there are moral values embedded within the scope of African traditional religion which is where the African draws his moral compass from in navigating through reality. In other words, African traditional religion provides a guide post regarding how the African makes moral judgments.

The culture of the African, too, is another aspect that provides moral grounds. Entrenched within the African cultural milieu are custodians of moral values in the form of ancestors and sages who act as high priests in determining what is right or wrong. The culture of the African in this sense is pivotal regarding his moral dispositions as ethnic affiliations are of paramount importance in dealing with ethical issues. Therefore, since Africans exist as a force, individualism is not promoted. Rather, the communal spirit enjoins each African to exist as a unit so that it is in this conjugal bond that morality is defined. The ancestors and elders in the community, therefore, are responsible for the construction of ethical standards in various ethnicities.

Then, there is also the nature of being in Africa which is not only deterministic as seen from her religion and culture but also on the basis of common sense. Since the rational disposition of a human person provides axioms for self-affirmation, the African is also able to draw moral distinctions from common sense. In order to know what is right from what is wrong, the moral



sense is crucial in the nature of one's being. This implies that mental state of the African provides a necessary backdrop for making ethical judgements. Simply put, every individual furnished with common sense should be able to define moral values in an agreeable fashion. Having pointed these factors, our task in this work is to show how these foundations for morality in Africa may be necessary but are not sufficient in the grand scheme of things. The outlook in this work is to provide critical perspectives into these foundations and expose their flaws in defining the moral values in Africa. The moral foundations in Africa, as we shall see in this work, are not without some structural weaknesses. It is on this basis that the background for this work is established. The moral foundations in African philosophy are steeped in shaky presentiments. Under the purview of this work, our task will be to highlight the problems in the moral foundation in African philosophy. The inspection of the grounds for cultural, religious, and common sense as the foundations for morality are problematic because while they may present necessary conditions, they do not possess sufficient basis for standing as moral foundation in African philosophy.

To start with, there are many ethnic groups in Africa, which implies that they also have various moral tenets. So, how do we combat ethical relativism in the African cultural milieu? Is one's cultural ground for morality superior to another culture's? Can absolutism in ethical standards be achieved in African ethnic groups? And, then, about the ancestors and elders in the community: who made them high priests over what is right or wrong being that time and space can indeed allow for changes and moderation within the ambience of traditions that are not expected to be static by any means?

Rooted in religion, can moral values in Africa be given credence when a number of tenets involved may be antithetical to the laws of nature, especially those that involve the shedding of blood, for example? The framework of religion as a basis for moral grounds in Africa also lacks justification where there are dogmas that must not be questioned. Is that an efficient way of deciding what is right or wrong when our choices are infringed upon? Then, is common sense common to every one? If common sense is part of the foundation of African moral values, then why can't individuals freely decide for themselves in making ethical judgements? Since common sense is liable to divert over the metaphysical realities of time and space, should everyone be expected to decide for himself or herself based on what is deemed convenient? These form the problems that this work is set to tackle.



The aim of this work is to critique the moral foundations in African philosophy while its objectives are:

- i. To show the various grounds for morality in Africa.
- ii. To provide ethical blueprints through these foundations.
- iii. To expose the cracks in the foundations for morality in Africa.

This study is vital because it not only negates the impression of western philosophers that Africans lack moral foundations, but it also exposes these foundations as well as subjecting them to constructive criticisms in order to create a viable platform that is open-ended for arguments and further discussions.

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2.0

LITERATURE REVIEW

The moral foundations in every human society is embedded in the ideas and beliefs about their understanding of right or wrong, what ought to be called a good or bad character; it is also embedded in the conceptions of satisfactory social relations and attitudes held by the members of the society; it is embedded and this is never in any way missing in Africa, furthermore, Mbiti argues that “morality is the forms or patterns of behavior that are considered by the members of the society to bring about social harmony and cooperative living, justice, and fairness” (17).

Thus, in trying to understand the African position of morality is consists of two parts: first, morality in the strict sense; and second, morality as custom or mores. The defining principle of the first is the golden rule, that of the second, local utility, idiosyncrasy, or even accident. The first is known to be universal to all human cultures. This has to be so of a necessity, in view of what the rule entails. The golden rule, to follow Harry Gensler, in his *Logic: Analyzing and Appraising Arguments* enjoins that:

One ought not to endeavor to do something to somebody without conceding that it would be acceptable for that person to do the same thing to one in an imagined, exactly reversed situation. From this, specific imperatives of honesty, fairness, and respect are derivable without which human community is inconceivable (61).

To take an example reminiscent of Immanuel Kant, Harry Gensler; suppose a particular individual's project is to make a promise to someone that he or she has not the slightest intention of keeping. If that person pauses for a moment to consider whether he or she is prepared grant that



it would be all right for the other person, in an exactly reversed situation, to do the same, the person making the promise will see that this is not possible. Moreover, if one has basic intelligence, one will see that the general avowal among all people of the reverse of the injunction against false promises would bring human community to an end. In Africa, Kagame in his work titled *The Foundation of Morality in Africa*, is of the opinion that:

From an African point of view, the morality of a society is embedded in the ideas and beliefs about what is right or wrong, what is a good or bad character; it is also embedded in the conceptions of satisfactory social relations and attitudes held by the members of the society; it is embedded, furthermore, in the forms or patterns of behavior that are considered by the members of the society to bring about social harmony and cooperative living, justice, and fairness (17).

The ideas and beliefs about moral conduct are articulated, analyzed, and interpreted by the moral thinkers of the society.

Thus, the African societies, as organized and functioning human communities, have undoubtedly evolved moral systems, moral values, principles, rules intended to guide social and moral behavior. But, like African philosophy itself, the ideas and beliefs of the African society that bear on moral conduct have not been given elaborate investigation and clarification and, thus, stand in real need of profound and extensive analysis and interpretation. In the last three decades or so, attempts have been made by contemporary African philosophers to give sustained reflective attention to African moral ideas. This entry is intended to make some contribution to the understanding of African ethical and moral thinking.

On the same line, one will argue moreover that, from the African tradition, morality or ethics are merged with religion. This confirms John Mbiti's in his book titled *African Religion and Philosophy* view of religion as foundation of African morality. This clearly implies that the moral beliefs and principles of the African people are derived from their religion and that religion provides the necessary justification for moral values and beliefs. Moral concepts, such as good, bad right and wrong are defined in terms of religious prescriptions or commands (Kikongo 22). To Mbiti religion is surely a foundational theory of morals in African societies. Accordingly, as Heidi Verhoef and Claudine M. argues that:

Africans live and practice their religion, as one and the same and morality within Africa is that which evolves from the process of living and is grounded in the



context of communal life in which religion can be considered as the presupposition of the moral life (34).

In confirmation of Mbiti's position, Godwin Sogolo in his book titled *Foundation of African Philosophy* goes beyond this and lays out a foundation for an emerging indigenous African way of life; Based on his belief that a modern African philosophical tradition can be nourished within the context of African culture, history and experience, as he conducts a philosophical analysis of the conceptual implications of major issues, morality, beliefs and thought systems that are particular to Africa. This for him is because the entry makes the African moral language its point of departure, for the language of morality gives insight into the moral thinking or ideas of the society. The centrality of the notions of character and moral personhood, which are inspired by the African moral language, is given a prominent place. The entry points up the social character of African ethics and highlights its affiliated notions of the ethics of duty not of rights and of the common good.

Thus, in confirmation to the above argument put in place, Okolo is of the view that morality consists of two parts; first, morality in the strict sense and second, morality as custom or mores. As he argues that "the defining principle of the first is the golden rule, that of the second, local utility, idiosyncrasy, or even accident" (13). The first is known to be universal to all human cultures. This has to be so of a necessity, in view of what the rule entails. The golden rule, to follow Harry Gensler, enjoins that "one ought not to endeavor to do something to somebody without conceding that it would be acceptable for that person to do the same thing to one in an imagined, exactly reversed situation" (3). From this, specific imperatives of honesty, fairness, and respect are derivable without which human community is inconceivable. On that same account, Egbunu position, in his book titled *Chieftaincy Titles Among Igala: Problems and Prospects*, one will understand that:

The working of the golden rule in the shape of specific rules, such as this last, is manifest in moral conduct and discourse all over the world, irrespective of differences of culture or even of individual thought habits (11).

Thus, for example, if Christians or Islam are at least theoretically dedicated to the counsels of the golden rule, so also have Chinese Confucians have also been so since pre-Christian antiquity. Nor, similarly, is it difficult to find formulations of the golden rule in the repertoire of didactic epigrams in the oral traditions of Africa. As the Igala's will say, "Whenever a man kills an animal in a games



deep in the forest, it is a thing of celebration, but first let him consider what it would feel like if it was him or his relations that was killed" (Negedu 8). And defining the quintessence of moral insensitivity by way of the inverse of the golden rule, the Igala's remonstrance, "he who bow down his head to look at the underwear's of the next person should please be reminded that another person will be looking at their own in return" (Ujah8). For African, to be moral accordingly, is to evince empathetic impartiality in one's actions on the model of the golden rule. Notwithstanding in Africa, the universality in the living of the moral life, the theorizing of their philosophy, gives rise to great diversities of persuasion not only among cultures in Africa but also within there person. As Gyekye in his work titled *African Philosophy in Search of Identity* argued that:

As famously, Western philosophers, sharing basically the same moral values, have been in earnest conflict about the nature of moral ideas and the ultimate principles of moral judgment. So among other "isms," there are subjectivism and objectivism, on the first front, and consequentialism and de-ontology, on the second (113).

In contemporary African philosophy, too, unanimity does not reign. But the bone of contention lies in the interpretation of the traditional communal philosophy of morals in Africa.

The ideas and beliefs about moral conduct are articulated, analyzed, and interpreted by the moral thinkers of the society. Gyekye in his work titled *African Philosophy in Search of Identity* published in 1995 will say:

African societies, as organized and functioning human communities, have undoubtedly evolved ethical systems ethical values, principles, rules intended to guide social and moral behavior. But, 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 interpretation. In the last three decades or so, attempts have been made by contemporary African philosophers to give sustained reflective attention to African moral ideas (23).

This entry is intended to make some contribution to the understanding of African ethical thinking. The entry makes the African moral language its point of departure, for the language of morality gives insight into the moral thinking or ideas of the society. The centrality of the notions of character and moral personhood, which are inspired by the African moral language, is given a

prominent place. The entry points up the social character of African ethics and highlights its affiliated notions of the ethics of duty not of rights and of the common good.

P. Houtondji, in his work titled *Myth and Reality* published in 1970 believes that There are two dichotomous views among African concerning the African traditional concept of the basis of foundation of morality. As he argues that:

The first, and which seems to be most predominant and shared by majority of the critics, is that African morality is founded on African concept of the spiritual reality religion. The second is that African morality is fundamentally determined by the conception of human well fare (78).

In addition Africans devotions to their ancestor and taboo have taken as the characteristics of African moral awareness. Reverence for their ancestors regarded as so typical of the indigenous African culture that some African morality as ancestor worship by the western. Following Quarcoopome, T. N. O. in his 1989 work titled *West African Traditional Religion*, argues that:

By one account, African life and thought is religious through and through, and there morality is only a special case of this orientation because everything in morality for them is as regards both meaning and principle comes from the Supreme Being (6).

In confirmation to this thought, one of the most eloquent articulation of this view is found in Bolaji Idowu's work titled *Odumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. After rejecting any suggestion that morality derives from society's need for self-preservation or that morality is the product of commonsense (144), Idowu asserts that:

Our own view is that morality is basically the fruit of religion and that, to begin with, it was dependent upon it. Man's concept of deity has everything to do with what is taken to be the norm of morality (145).

In Africa, the study of earlier features of moral understanding is exceedingly important. Knowledge of morality, in addition to satisfying our curiosity regarding the past, gives us a clear understanding of the nature of morality. As Metuh, in his work titled *A Philosophical Investigation into African Values: Towards Ameliorating, the African Predicament*, stress that: "this is because people who have evolved a culture would be expected to have a distinguishable epistemological or conceptual knowledge of the basic components of their culture, including their ethics" (21). It is a matter of fact that morality is universal to humanity. This means that morality is essential to all human being no matter where they live or no matter what kind of life they lead. Morality is



what makes man a man. In this case, Wiredu *Moral Foundation of African Culture* published in 1998 said that “any society without medium of morality must collapse.” This being the case, however, many foreigners have erroneous understanding of African morality. Some even tend to regard Africans as devoid of morality and moral consciousness. For instance, Temple, his book *La philosophie bantoue* published in English translation to *Bantu Philosophy* published in 1959 asserted that “Africans do not distinguish between good and evil...they are devoid of moral content or of universally accepted ethical norms” (52).

There are two dichotomous views, says James Kikongo in his book titled *The Element of Moral Philosophy* published in 2002, argues that:

Among the scholars of African concerning the African traditional concept of the basis of foundation of morality; The first, and which seems to be most predominant and shared by majority of the critics, is that African morality is founded on African concept of the spiritual reality religion. The second is that African morality is fundamentally determined by the conception of human well fare (52).

In addition Africans devotions to their ancestor and taboo have taken as the characteristics of African moral awareness. Reverence for their ancestors regarded as so typical of the indigenous African culture that some African morality as “ancestor worship”. Relevantly, taboos are cultural and religious phenomena that maintain order, cohesion, and integration in traditional African society (Egbunu 22).

As he stresses above, many writers have made the observation that:

Despite the indisputable cultural diversity that arises from Africa's ethnic pluralism, there are underlying affinities in many areas of the African life; this is surely true in the African religious and moral outlook. There are some features of the moral life and thought of various African societies that, according to the cited sources, are common or shared features (34).

There are other features that can be seen as common on conceptual or logical grounds. For instance, the claim that the values and principles of African morality are not founded on religion simply derives from the characterization of traditional African religion as a non-revealed religion. In the history of the indigenous religion in African, it does not seem that anyone in any African community, has ever claimed to have received a revelation from the Supreme Being intended either for the people of the community or for all humanity. This characterization makes African ethics



independent of religion and, thus, underlines the notion of the autonomy of ethics in regard to African ethics. If a religion is a non-revealed religion, then it is independent of religious prescriptions and commands. As Obi in his work titled *Being As Duality and African Hermeneutics of Foundation*, argued that:

The characterization of traditional African religion would, thus, lead me to assert to generalize on logical grounds that the moral system of each African society in the traditional setting does not derive from religion: thus, it is an autonomous moral system. Similarly, the claim about the social non-individualistic morality of the African society is closely related to the community and shared life of the African people. And so on (42).

Thus, while Bantun, Igalas, Igbos, Yourubas and Akan ethics is not a microcosm of African ethics, there is nevertheless evidence, both empirical and conceptual, that indicates that the values, beliefs, and principles of their ethics reverberate mutatis mutandis on the moral terrains of other African societies. Based on the qualifying expression mutatis mutandis allowing for necessary variations and adjustments, it would be correct to say that the term African ethics is appropriate. With all this said, however, neither African ethics would be unique among the ethical systems evolved by the various non-African cultures of the world. The relation between religion and morality has attracted the attention of philosophers since the inception of philosophy and the act of philosophizing. Kwame Gyekye argued that “the link between morality and religion is indubitable; some scholars are arguing that religion is foundational with respect to African traditional morality and others denying it” (87). For many philosophers, African ethical system is based on religion since both the former and latter are concerned with the values of human life.

In the same way, Wiredu asserts that:

In traditional Africa what is morally good is conceived to be what is decent for man-what brings dignity, respect, contentment, prosperity and joy to man and his community. And what is morally bad is what brings misery and misfortune and disgrace(23).

Furthermore, as Udeani in his work titled *The Concept of Morality in Indigenous Africa* published 2008, figures out, within the traditional African societies there is no differentiation between life, religion and, morality rather, an intrinsic unity between them. In similar vein, Heidi Verhoef and Claudine M. *The Foundation of Morality in African Ethics* published in 1997, precisely state that:



In African vantage point the relationship between philosophy, religion and morality as lived by the people is one of unity .there is no distinction between these disciplines as they are not perceived as entities in themselves but as dynamic elements which cannot be separated from life processes (42).

Philosophy is life; religion is life; morality is life; community is life. There is no room for separation within the African worldview, but only complex interdependence. Moreover, from the African tradition, morality or ethics are merged with religion. This confirms Mbiti's and other scholars' view of religious foundation of African morality. This clearly implies that the moral beliefs and principles of the African people are derived from their religion and that religion provides the necessary justification for moral values and beliefs. Moral concepts, such as good, bad right and wrong, are defined in terms of religious prescriptions or commands James Kikongo (2).

To these scholars religion is surely a foundational theory of morals in African societies. Accordingly, as Verhoef and Claudine will put it:

Africans lives and practice their religion, as one and the same and morality within Africa is that which evolves from the process of living and is grounded in the context of communal life in which religion can be considered as the presupposition of the moral life (7).

Following the above line, Mbiti argues that "there is no separation between concerns of a religious and philosophical nature, but complex interdependence" (34). Everything within the universe is interconnected, existing within a unified whole experiencing certain supernatural force from which life and moral character emerges. Accordingly, African traditional ethics entails a supernatural dimension. According to Ekwenife, he argues that:

African traditional religion refers to: those institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous religion of Africa which are rooted in the past African religious culture, transmitted to the present rotaries by successive African forbears mainly through oral traditions... sacred specialists and persons, sacred places and objects and religious work of art, a religion which is slowly but constantly updates by each generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectical process of continuities and discontinuities (21-22).



It is on this background that the study will determine and research on the true foundation of morality in African ethics.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This work employed the analytic method. Through the analytic method, we delved into the clarification of concepts within the purview of African ethics. Also, this method also enabled us to reduce ambiguities and eliminate vagueness in this work as much as possible.

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Rationality as Moral Foundations in African

If one is to argue from the position of rationality in African philosophy, one will be confronted with a critical reflection on the underlying philosophical discourse attached to morality at the long end. In the same line Azenabor that in all sincerity, the place of rationality cannot be underestimated in dealing with the issues on African morality. It is of this view; we shall set up our foundation in looking into the place of rationality in an African.

Before understanding the direction of rationality in African morality, one ought to first appreciate the origin on the world rationality. In looking into this concept, it will not be out of place for us to fall back to the use of the common literary meaning of the concept. In doing so, the theoretical term, according to Obi:

Rationality has qualities in common with the concept “reasonability.” Also, “rationality” is from the adjectival word, “rational” which has to do with ‘behaviour or ideas base on reason rather than emotion.’ Then, how can we explain or relate our definition to our academic task? The applicable sense of it is that, what is the place role or importance of non-emotional behaviour or idea in African Ethics? In other words, what is the place role, or importance of reasonable principles or ideas/behaviour behind in African Ethics? Simply put, does reason rationale any place in African morality? (32).

The only way we could start appreciating the use of “rationality” as it relate to our discussion *cum* what we may term ‘philosophical African morality,’ is going by the words of James K. Feibleman who listed four possible definitions of philosophy. Then, among the four definitions of philosophy, the very first one, in which he defined as, “philosophy is the rational explanation of reality and human experience.” Hence, since African morality deal with the reality and human experience(s)



which has to do with the study of African moral principles; it has to have rational basis or explanation, rather than being emotional.

Nevertheless, Some Philosophers like Owomoyela, “opt for a non-deontological evaluative conception of rationality that concerns what is good but not necessarily obligatory from certain evaluative stand point” (14). And it is on that evaluative capacity of reality that we would best understand the role or place of rationality to African morality. Moreover, “rationality according to some of these philosophers is in virtue of doing your best, or at least achieves your goals.” Similarly, it is on this ground also, we could best understand the writings of Azenabor; who says that, “to be rational, therefore, is to be able to identify your situation and problem, then being able to find a solution that will be benefiting within the system. Well, for it not to look as if we are tracking our discussion towards conclusion, let us for now reserve our position(s) in response to the issue at hand; yet until we exhaust our conceptual clarification.

Thus, in trying to relate the nature of rationality and African ethics, one will understand that; at this point the researcher would be looking into the basic qualities of reason or rationale in African morality. As Negedu will argue:

Let us understand quickly at this point that another most critical or big question which preoccupies most African Ethical Academia is: which is African Ethics? Or how should we study and apply African Ethics? It is the reflection of rationality on African Ethics that makes it not to be dogmatic, unlike Religion or issues related to the gods-“you do not question the gods”. (45)

Moreover, rationality should be dealing with the nature of in African morality itself in relation to the study of African moral values or principles. However, it is rational in the sense that reason has continue to remain a major tool of the philosopher. The essence of rationality in African morality is to continue to make use of the major tool of reason to explore. The nature of using the major tool of reason to explore in African philosophy of morality or African morality is to raise critical questions on African morality, for proper examination, cross-examination, and re-examination of values. In other words, it can bring about African historical methodology of the four co-ordinates of reduction, deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction.

Moreover, as Egbunu will put it:

It is through the nature of rationality implore into African morality which could make the typical African man to always have a rethink into any action that he or she would like to carry out; even, if it will please the Supreme Being (32).

Because, they highly believe that the super-natural has a role to play as the custodian of moral in Ethical conduct on morality.

4.1.2 Religion as Foundational in African Morality

For several hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of years, religion has been part of nearly all cultures across the universe. Starting as a rather barbaric force, religion swiftly diffused into nearly every culture across the globe. Almost every culture has adopted, forcefully at times, some form of religion. It is asserted that before religion, we were nothing short of barbaric savages with no sense of right or wrong; it is said that religion saved us from an imminent self-destruction from our unethical ideas. Some will even assert that we need religion as a foundation of morality to guide us to divine tranquility and peace. I humbly object to this by saying we certainly do not, nor did, need religion to develop our morality in society. This is supported by evidence found in the human-like characteristics observed in primates, such as being able to understand the concept of fairness, or plan for the future something that humans know and do quite often. Plenty of people find solace in the idea that religion was the founder and creator of basic human decency, and without religion there would be chaos and anarchy in human societies. So the question arises, where would our morality be without religion? At first it may seem sensible.

Accordingly, Africans lives and practice their religion, as one and the same and morality within Africa is that which evolves from the process of living and is grounded in the context of communal life in which religion can be considered as the presupposition of the moral life. As previously argued, one can now underrated that, African tradition, morality emerged within their religion. Thus, Kikongo argues that:

This implies that the moral beliefs and principles of an African people are derived from their religion and that religion provides the necessary justification for moral values and beliefs. Moral concepts, such as good, bad right and wrong, are defined in terms of religious prescriptions or commands (20).

To these scholars religion is surely a foundational theory of morals in African societies.

In supporting the African position of religion as the foundation for morality, Dennis Prager argues in his *National Review* that:



Religion is a necessary foundation for morality. I appreciate the effort he has put into challenging the antireligious polemic of writers such as Richard Dawkins. I agree with him that religion helps us to be good. On one important point, however, I believe that he is mistaken (42).

Because that point seems to be a view widespread among some West (though not, I think, one solidly grounded in traditional Christianity), If one takes a closer look at Prager's views, one will understand that he first makes his point abstractly by nature as he ask the following question "If there is no God, the labels "good" and "evil" are merely opinions, they are substitutes for "I like it" and "I don't like it." They are not going to be any objective realities (48). To justify this argument, Let us begin with the abstract version of his question; and let's begin not with good character but with a moral life. On what basis do we judge killing, say, to be bad act? We don't need to bring the Supreme Being into the picture. Human reason can stress to the point that killing is bad. We don't need to bring our own subjective preferences into the picture to see this.

In the same way that reason is sufficient to distinguish good from bad act, it is sufficient to distinguish good from bad character. Justice, generosity, honesty, temperance, and courage constitute good character. So the virtues named above are necessary to living a full human life a life lived in community with others and guided by reasoned judgments not blown about by the winds of passion such as Paolo and Francesca in Dante's work titled *Inferno*. Some people may not like the demands that rational judgments about character place on us. But the fact that *Bayo Ojochenemi* likes to commit adultery is no more relevant to whether the action is good than is someone's fondness for chocolate relevant to whether chocolate is nutritious. It is enough, in distinguishing good from bad actions, that we have a conception of what constitutes a genuinely human life. We get that in the same way we acquire our conception of human action by our familiarity with human beings and with the human mode of being. Those are objective realities, however hard it might be for the anorectic in the case of our action or the habitual liar in the case of character to recognize them.

4.1.3 Culture

African culture is embedded in strong moral considerations. It has a system of various beliefs and customs which every individual ought to keep in order to live long and to avoid bringing curses on them and others. Adultery, stealing and other forms of immoral behaviour are strongly



discouraged and whenever a suspected offender denies a charge brought against him, he would be taken to a soothsayer or made to take an oath for proof of innocence. As Egbunu will argue:

In the Igala land for instance, *Ofor* ordeal is very popular as a method of crime detection. The soothsayer who specialises in it sets a pot of boiling oil, drops a stone into it and asks the suspects to attempt to retrieve the stone. The guiltless can reach to the bottom of the pot and retrieve the stone without the hair on his arms getting burnt (32).

But when the culprit approaches the pot, it rages and boils over in a manner that even the most daring criminal would hesitate to make an attempt at retrieving the stone. The fear of being made to go through such ordeal or to be stripped naked and taken round the community as in the case of stealing, adequately checks crimes of some sort. African proverbs and wise sayings have a rich repository of wisdom. The proverbs warn the African against evil conduct and, according to Mbiti they are “therefore a major source of African wisdom and a valuable part of African heritage” (8). African culture has a moral code that forbids doing harm to a relative, a kinsman, an in-law, a foreigner and a stranger, except when such a person is involved in an immoral act; and if that is the case, it is advisable to stay away from such an individual and even at death, their corpses would not be dignified with a noble burial in a coffin and grave. Mothers of twins were not welcome and were regarded as the harbinger of evil, hence unacceptable.

In this regard the culture as the foundation of morality in Africa and its commonality for instance, which fortunately exists and is practiced in all African societies can serve a cogent foundation for the development of science and knowledge in and on Africa to promote informed-solutions to societal challenges. One of the perennial debates in African philosophy pertains to the relationship between culture and the individual person. As Gyekye writes:

This debate can be framed in different ways. One can frame it in hierarchical terms where they consider the question of which between the two takes priority, the culture and the individual person. In the literature, this debate plays itself out between the so called radical and moderate communitarians (23).

Whereas it appears to be placing priority on the community, Gyekye places it on neither; he considers them to be equally fundamental. But commentators in the literature converge on the idea that Gyekye’s moderate communitarianism also ends up prioritizing the community over the individual.



4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 The Problem of African Philosophy

These ugly episodes of slavery, colonialism and racialism not only shaped the world's perception of Africa; they also instigated a form of intellectual revolt from the African intelligentsias. The frustration with the colonial order eventually led to angry questions and reactions out of which African philosophy emerged, first in the form of nationalisms and then in the form ideological theorizations. But the frustration was borne out of colonial caricature of Africa as culturally naïve, intellectually docile and rationally inept. As Quarcoopome will put it:

This caricature was created by European scholars such as Kant, Hegel and, much later, Levy-Bruhl to name just a few. It was the reaction to this caricature that led some African scholars returning from the West into the type of philosophizing one may describe as systematic beginning with the identity of the African people, their place in history, and their contributions to civilization (41).

To dethrone the colonially-built episteme became a ready attraction for African scholars' vexed frustrations. Thus began the history of systematic African philosophy with the likes of AimeCisaire, Leopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, William Abraham, John Mbiti and expatriates such as Placid Tempels, JanheinzJahn and George James, to name a few.

Thus, African philosophy as a systematic study has a very short history. This history is also a very dense one, since actors sought to do in a few decades what would have been better done in many centuries. As a result, they also did in later years what ought to have been done earlier and vice versa, thus making the early and the middle epochs overlap considerably. The reason for this overtime endeavor is not far-fetched. Soon after colonialism, actors realized that Africa had been sucked into the global matrix unprepared. As Aghaargues that:

During colonial times, the identity of the African was European, his thought system, standard and even his perception of reality were structured by the colonial shadow which stood towering behind him. It was easy for the African to position himself within these Western cultural appurtenances even though they had no real-time connection with his being (14).

The vanity of this presupposition and the emptiness of colonial assurances manifested soon after the towering colonial shadow vanished. Now, in the global matrix, it became shameful for the

African to continue to identify himself within the European colonialist milieu. As he still stress that:

For one, he had just rejected colonialism and for another, the deposed European colonialist made it clear that the identity of the African was no longer covered and insured by the European medium. So, actors realized suddenly that they had been disillusioned and had suffered severe self-deceit under colonial temper (23).

The question which trailed every African was, “Who are you?” Of course, the answers from European perspective were savage, primitive, less than human, etc. It was the urgent, sudden need to contradict these European positions that led some post-colonial Africans in search of African identity. So, to discover or rediscover African identity in order to initiate a non-colonial or original history for Africa in the global matrix and start a course of viable economic, political and social progress that is entirely African became one of the focal points of African philosophy.

Thus, Tempels an European missionary, elected to help and in his controversial book, titled *Bantu Philosophy*, sought to create Africa’s own philosophy as proof that Africa has its own peculiar identity and thought system. However, it was George James, another concerned European who attempted a much more ambitious project in his work, work titled *Stolen Legacy*. In this work, he stress that “there were strong suggestions not only that Africa has philosophy but that the so-called Western philosophy, the very bastion of European identity, was stolen from Africa” (122). This claim was intended to make the proud European colonialists feel indebted to the humiliated Africans, but it was unsuccessful. That Greek philosophy had roots in Egypt does not imply, as some Europeans claim, that Egyptians were dark nor that dark complexioned Africans had philosophy. The use of the term “Africans” in this work is in keeping with George James’ demarcation which precludes the light complexioned people of North Africa and refers to the dark complexioned people of southern Sahara.

4.2.2 Criticism against Rationality

The discourse on problem of rationality in African Philosophy has been associated historically with two related happenings: Western discourse in Africa and the African response to it. The Western discourse had come in form of such notorious proclamations and claims as “reason is Greek”, “emotion is African”, which meant to them that Africans are not rational. Yet to some, it further meant that African beliefs are neither rational nor irrational because the categories of rationality just do not apply to them. For another set like the postmodernists, the concept of

rationality does not apply to Africa, since the concept is a contested one that presupposes a language game with its complete rules that do not apply across languages and cultures; African was supposedly one of such languages and cultures. This according to AkinwandeOluwole;“Soyinka can be described as hyperbolic weapons that were figured in the heat of contestation” (14).

Thus, Akinwande stresses that:

The African response has come in different forms and dimensions, with the African nationalists, postcolonial African leaders, pan-Africanists, scholars, writers and traditionalist in the fore front. The response has sought to reaffricanize the ‘natives’, to strip them of the alienations of Western modernity that had as it were, made them a people with no identity and hope, and to force them to return to the ‘authentic’ and pristine values of a pre-colonial past (24).

In doing that, they have sought to disprove what Paul Tiyambe calls the Western excessive rationality that has portrayed their image as that of rational excellence, and to free Africans from its materialism, moral decadence and lifelessness; alienation from nature and propensity for destructiveness. This has formed the basis for the rationality debate.

The African’s philosophical responses and the concept of cultural relativism were attempts by prominent African scholars and nationalists to give answers to some of the questions raised in the problem of rationality in interpreting their worldview, and also to restore self-confidences, prestige and honor to Africa, bearing in mind that Africans through slavery and colonialism have suffered cultural discontinuity and dislocations and consequently made a people with no confidence in themselves.

4.2.3 Criticism against Religion

From an attempt of criticism, it is evident from an African point of view that our argument is an attempt to criticize the religion conception of morality in African thought and to ascertain whether there is any intrinsic connection between morality and religion. Apart from the confusion in scholarly debate regarding the exact meaning of the concepts “morality”, “ethics”, and “religion”, there is also a more far-reaching inadequacy of the terminology used. In common scholarly discourse, knowledge is embraced in conceptual treatises by way of representational modes of knowledge, which according to Idowu implies that “the concepts used represent knowledge of the world” (34). Therefore, such concepts form the constituents of that knowledge. It may easily be



assumed that the way in which all people know is similar and that they arrive at knowledge by means of correlating concepts or inferring in the same manner. It is therefore important to investigate how people may know differently how they acquire knowledge in terms of the way they know.

The way in which indigenous people know what is morally right may not correlate with the way in which Western religious people know what is right. In the latter traditions, the individual is informed or instructed by being introduced to concepts that explain moral codes and expected ethical behavior (14).

The acquisition of this knowledge is based on cognition and most probably complemented by societal threats of repulsion or societal morality and religion in African thought promises of reward. But this may not necessarily be the modes of acquisition of moral knowledge in indigenous societies with less emphasis on instruction in verbal (linguistic) modes. One should be aware that acquisition and construction of moral knowledge may be based on performance. The observation and experiencing of doing and performing may be the process for knowing what moral knowledge is. This knowledge is habituated and embedded in the action of community members and institutions of the group, and not necessarily taught (Marchand 46-47)

4.2.4 Criticism against Culture

Few if any will disagree with the conclusion of Mwikamba argument of the criticism of culture n African morality as he writes “The urgency of moral reforms both in theory and in practice are of paramount importance. The reforms must be radical at all levels: the churches, individuals and society” (104). But these few words pose a formidable challenge.

It seems to me that the essence of the problem we are dealing with is this: From where can we obtain reliable norms to guide moral life in contemporary Africa? I fully agree with Bujo when he says: “morality by definition has to formulate ... norms of human behaviour, without any concession to human weakness otherwise ethics would renounce its guiding function” (66). What people today need in Africa, more than anything else, is guidance, which direction to follow in the daily choices they have to make. Like the hyena in the folk tale they are confused because they have to choose between two different kinds of roads, indicated by two different norms. As was the case with the hyena they cannot simply combine the two. The one road is that of traditional African morality and norms and the other is that of modern Western morality and norms.



Thus, If one ought to challenge the western conception of African morality, the following should be kept in mind: That not everything black is beautiful. Traditional African morality contains many weak and even questionable aspects (Bujo102-111). To a great extent we have already missed the opportunity to save many of the good African moral traditions from disappearing. We are confronted today with many new problems, not considered by traditional morality. Therefore have to listen carefully to the still living traditions in Africa which have withstood the savaging deluge of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and Western Christianity and which are still pulsating in the hearts of Africans. At the same time we should be self-critical and not simply accept everything because it is “traditional”. Tradition cannot be accepted wholly without careful discrimination.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study has shown that, morality is a concept, understood and marked in Africans by various phenomena. These phenomena, as seen in the study, have ways of impacting the being of man as an ontological individual which by his very nature makes him a member of a normative community. Although through social interactions, colonialism, slave trade and the abrasive effect of this westernization and other artificial man made activities, Africans continue by their nature to be connected to their foregone moral status has been hampered. This connection to their understanding of morality by Africans is so deep that it regulates the activities of man, which place man as social force in the universe.

This is because there is a veritable consensus among students of African societies that traditional African culture is communitarian. Thus, for the sake of the study, a communitarian society is one in which individuality is regarded as a construct out of community and an individualistic society, one in which community is regarded as a construct out of individuality. The apparent sharpness of the contrast, however, is illusory. It is a matter of degree, for without individuals there is no community, and without a community there are no morality that govern the human individual's activities to one another. Still, in the case of this study; a lively concern in moral philosophy among contemporary African philosophers is to clarify and evaluate the claims of individuality in the context of African communitarianism. In conclusion, an African person is naturally moral.



5.2 Recommendations

1 Societies should do more to promote moral values rather than focusing on wealth acquisition

11 Further study should compare the moral foundation of African philosophy with those of other continents or races

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