

THE IMPORTANCE OF MORALITY IN HUMAN ACTION IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This work focused on the importance of morality in human action in the Nigerian Society. Morality is predicated on religion. In any society where religion is not strong, morality cannot do well there. The researcher made use of secondary sources of data as the methodology as well as participant observation. The main objective of this work is to highlight the importance of morality on human actions as well as discuss the relationship morality and religion. The work discovered among other things that morality and religion are inseparable. Morality also determined human actions to a large extent. The work recommended among other things that morality and morality must co-exist in a society where there is peace.

Keywords: Importance, Human acts, Morality, Religion, Nigerian Society.

INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to look into man's moral behavior, it would be relevant to look at it from the children's perspective. Since it is believed that man's behavior at any level of his life is determined by the societal value in which he was brought up. During this period, it is hoped that as children grow up, they will develop a clear understanding of the difference between 'right' and 'wrong'. But what factors are involved in children's development of a sense of morality and what changes do children go through in their behavior and thinking when faced with moral dilemma?

It is intuitively appealing to see parents as the main influence on children's moral development. But are children's beliefs about what is right and what is 'wrong' really dependent on how they are brought up? The idea that children learn moral values simply through being punished for misbehavior is certainly problematic. Of course, children's misbehavior sometimes does have to be disciplined through immediate negative consequences, especially when the safety of others or of the children themselves is threatened.

However, relying on frequent punishment (e.g. shouting, smacking) to encourage the long term development of positive moral behavior is unlikely to be effective. In fact, research evidence shows that parents' use of physical punishment may be related to greater levels of aggression by young children towards their peers. Children are more likely to learn positive

moral values from their parents if they are helped to understand those values through explanations.

Many researchers have focused on how children's behavior is shaped by their observation of role-model in the world around them, including peers, figures in the media, and other people besides their parents.

In a similar way, seeing others behave in antisocial ways could potentially encourage negative behaviours. This link between what you see around you and what you do yourself underpins many of the concerns people have about violence on television.

If children do learn patterns of moral behavior from others, it is reasonable to assume that the way they think about moral situations is also influenced by social factors? Some evidence for this is found in cross-cultural studies of children's reasoning about moral dilemma.

For example, imagine that a man is about to catch a train to get to his best friend's wedding; where he is due to serve as the best man. But in the train station, his wallet and train ticket are stolen. He then sees the opportunity to steal a ticket from another person. Should he steal the ticket to get to his friend's wedding?

Building on this theory, another psychologist named Lawrence Kohlberg conducted detailed interviews about situations involving complex moral choices. For example, children, adolescents, and adults were asked to decide if a man who cannot afford to pay for some overpriced medicine to save his dying wife should break into the pharmacy to steal the drug. Kohlberg's interest was not so much in the actual choices selected by a person, but rather in the ways in which the person reasoned about the dilemma.

Kohlberg argued that at early stages of moral development, there is a focus on punishment and rewards (e.g. 'you shouldn't steal because you'll be caught and sent to jail', or 'if you let your wife die, you'll get in trouble'). But as children grow older, they enter stages where they emphasize social harmony and law and order (e.g. 'no one will think you're bad if you steal the drug', or 'even if his wife is dying, you still have to obey the law'). Some individuals according to Kohlberg, reach the highest levels of moral reasoning and consider universal, ethical principles that transcend law.

Also, feelings such as guilt, sympathy, shame and pity can all play a role in everyday situations involving moral choices, and research shows that children's experience and understanding of these complex emotions changes as they get older.

MORALITY OF HUMAN ACTIONS

Dependants of Morality of Human Actions

1. **Relation to the end of man:** Human actions are morally good when they lead man to his end; they are morally bad when they turn him from that end. For it belongs to every moral agent to act according to order, that is, with due subordination of means to its ultimate end.
2. **The good of order apprehended by reason:** Man's perfection consists in attaining his end, and his actions are the means by which he tends to that end. But, since God has given man

both his being and his end, and since there is an intimate connection between the end and the means to attain it, it follows that these means are also given to man, and do not, in their relation to his end, depend on his free choice. But this close dependence of the means on the end constitutes the good of order, which however, does not become the term of a voluntary action until apprehended by reason. Therefore a human action is morally good when it is conformed to the good of order apprehended by reason, and it is morally bad in the contrary case. What constitutes the morality of an action is, then, something independent of man, and there is an intrinsic and objective difference between good and evil.

3. **The ultimate criterion of morality is not education, as Montaigne held; nor the opinion of peoples, as Saint-Lambert pretended; nor human laws, as Hobbes asserted; nor the good pleasure of God, as Puffendorf taught:** The good of order which requires that each being should tend to an end conformable to its nature, is immutable like God himself, who being infinite wisdom cannot create a being destitute of an end, or with an end contrary to its nature. Therefore morality is immutable in its fundamental principles. But education, the opinion of peoples, and human laws are changing and variable; therefore they cannot be sources of morality.
4. **The judgment of the morality of actions belongs to intellect and reason alone:** Truth is the proper object of intellect and reason; but, whether truth is speculative or practical, its nature does not change, since the difference is only accidental. Since, then the judgment of the morality of actions is only a judgment about practical truth, it belongs to intellect and reason. Whatever skeptics may say, reason cannot be deceived as to first practical principles and their immediate consequences, any more than it can be deceived as to first speculative principles and the truths derived from them directly. The greater opposition manifested to first practical principles is explained by their end, which is to control the passions and subject them in all things to right reason.

Constituent Principles of the Morality of Human Actions

1. **The object of volition apprehended by reason:** The good of order is the foundation of morality. But the reason objected to the will be reason, and viewed not simply but as agreeing with right reason, is the term of the action and specified it. Therefore, according as this object is conformed to good order or not, the action will be good or bad, and the object will be the first constituent principle of the morality of the action, and by it the objective intrinsic difference between a good action and a bad one will be established. Therefore the object may be called the formal principle of a moral action, since it is, as it were its substantial form; the free act or election of the will may be called the matter of moral action.
2. **The circumstances of an action are the constituent principle of its accidental morality:** The object of the action and its unchangeable relation of the object to absolute order constitutes the substance of the morality of an action; the accompanying circumstances are as the accidents of that morality. The perfection of the nature of beings not only on their substance, but also on their accidents; so too, will the moral action be more or less perfect not only from its substance, but also from the accidents that accompany it, i.e., the circumstances.

The principal circumstances are: the person who acted, what he did, by what means, in what manner, in what place, and at what time.

3. **The end of the subject operating is causally the constituent principle of the subjective morality of the action:** Besides the natural end of the action, there is the end depending on the subject operating, which may be identical with the former or different from it. If the object of the action is conformed to order, but the end of the subject is opposed to order, the end vitiates the action by the evil that it contains; in the contrary case it perfects it. If the object of the action is opposed to order, the end of the subject operating, even if it be conformed to order, will never make good what is intrinsically bad. This end, depending only on the will of the subject operating and distinct from the natural end of the action, determines the subjective morality of the action; the object and the circumstances constitute its objective morality.
4. **That an action may be good, it must be without defect in its object, in its circumstances, and in its end:** The three constituent principles of the morality of an action are the object, end and circumstances; hence an action is good when each of these three principles is conformed to order. If even one of these principles is contrary to order, the action will be bad, at least in part.
5. **Although abstractly there may be indifferent actions, in the concrete there can be none:** It is the object that specifies the action. Now, as there are objects indifferent in themselves, i.e., presenting neither agreement nor disagreement with order, there are, therefore, actions indifferent in themselves. But in the concrete, every action is vested with morality because of its circumstances, or at least, of its end. For every action elicited with advertence of reason (6) is either ordained to an end or it is not. If it is so determined, it will necessarily be either good or bad. If it is not determined, it will in so far be bad, because every action ought to be in the order of reason, and reason demands that everything be conducted to its proper end. The external act that follows the action of the will, though in itself not free, and therefore not possessing a morality of its own, may yet accidentally affect the morality of the action of the will, since it gives to it a greater intensity, implies a greater affection for it, and a fuller advertence to it.
6. **Imputability is that quality in virtue of every free action is attributed to someone as its author, just as an effect is referred to its cause:** The man who acts freely is the true cause of the action; it is, therefore, with reason that every free action is attributed to him who does it. This attribution is called imputability, and although always joined to morality is yet distinct from it, since, it does not constitute the morality of an action, but is rather a consequence of it.
7. **From the imputability of human actions arises the reason of praise or blame:** When a moral action is imputed to a man, he is considered as the author of the resultant good or evil, and is therefore judged worthy of esteem or contempt, of praise or blame. To praise or blame anyone is nothing but to impute to him goodness or malice of his action.

ASSESSMENT OF MAN'S BEHAVIOUR

The Essence of Morality

Human acts are those of which a man is master, which he has the power of doing or not doing as he pleases. (No.2. See also *Ment. Phil*, Nos. 194 – 199). True, we are physically free to perform certain acts or to omit them – to do one thing or its contrary, to choose this act rather than some other; but are we also morally free in regard to all such acts? Is it right for me on all occasions to do whatever my inclination prompts me to do? My reason plainly answers, No: it is evident to a child that some actions are good in themselves, morally good and others bad in themselves, morally bad. The good acts our reason commends and approves; these we

call right. Evil acts, on the contrary, our reason disapproves and blames; these we call wrong. The ideas of right and wrong, like those of truth and falsity, substance and accident, cause and effect are “primary ideas” which are common to all men; hence, they are trustworthy ideas – that is, the distinction existing in the mind between right and wrong corresponds to a distinction existing objectively in human acts (Logic, Nos. 119, 120).

The reason why our intellect approves certain acts, calls them morally good and pronounces them worthy of praise, precisely as free acts, is because it perceives that they are rightly directed to their true end, suitable to and worthy of a rational agent, conformable to the exigencies of things, and therefore that they ought to be done by man: man ought to do what is conformable to his rational nature and conducive to his perfection.

Our intellect disapproves of other acts, calls them morally bad or evil and pronounces them to be, inasmuch as they are free acts, deserving of blame, because it perceives they are directed away from their true end, are unbecoming and unsuitable to a rational agent, at variance with the exigencies of things, and not to be done by man: man ought not to do that which is unworthy of a rational being and which, instead of perfecting debases him.

The Determinants of Morality

To know whether an individual human act is morally good, we must consider it with reference to the three things which, because they determine the moral character of acts, are called the determinants of morality:

1. The object of the act;
2. The end, or purpose;
3. Its circumstances.

The Object: The object of an act is the thing done. In reality, it is not distinct from the act itself, for we cannot act without doing something and the something done is the object of the act, say of going, eating, praising, etc. the act or object may be viewed as containing a further specification– e.g. going to church, praising God, eating meat.

Now, an act thus specified may, when considered in itself, be good, bad, or indifferent, thus, to praise God is good in itself, to blaspheme is bad in itself, and to eat meat is in itself an indifferent act. But that an individual act may be good, its object, whether considered in itself or as further specified, must be free from all defect; it must be good, or at least indifferent.

The End: The end, or purpose, intended by the agent is the second determinant of an act’s morality. The end here spoken of is not the end of the work, for that pertains to the object, but the end of the workman or agent. No matter how good the object of an act may be, if the end intended is bad, the act is thereby vitiated. Thus, to praise God is good in itself, but if in so acting the intention be to play the hypocrite, the act is morally bad. And this holds true whether the vicious end be nearest, remote or last end; whether it be actually or only virtually intended. On the other hand, a good end, though ever so elevated, cannot justify a bad act; in other words, we are never allowed to do evil that good may result therefrom.

The circumstances: The circumstances of time, place and persons have their part in determining the morality of an individual act. The moral character of an act may be so affected

by attendant circumstances, which an act good in itself may be evil when accompanied with certain circumstances; for instance, it is good to give drink to the thirsty, but if the thirsty man is morally weak, and the drink is intoxicating, the act may be evil.

Accountability for Moral Acts

When someone performs a free act, one which he is able to do or not to do, as he chooses, the act is evidently imputable to him. If the thing is blameworthy, the blame belongs to him; if it is praiseworthy, he is entitled to the praise. Every human act, therefore, since it is a free act, is imputable to him who performs it. But he is accountable for his free acts. To this end, it would be relevant pose and as a question that; is there anyone who has the right and the power to hold someone answerable for his moral conduct? It is believed that God's right to bind us is clear from the fact that He is our creator and we are His creatures. Now that which is made out of nothing or created, belongs entirely to its creator; therefore we, His creatures, belong entirely to God, and consequently He has a perfect right to the homage and service of our whole being.

Hindrances to Accountability

Since the accountability for an act is based on someone's power to control the act, whatever hinders or lessens this power must, to the same extent, hinder or lessen our accountability. There are mainly four such hindrances: ignorance, concupiscence, fear and violence.

Ignorance: Ignorance is the absence of knowledge. In ethics it regards two classes of objects viz, laws and facts. If a man does not know that marriage between third cousins is forbidden, he is ignorant of the law. If he is not aware that his betrothed is his third cousin, he is ignorant of the fact. Ignorance, whether of the law or of the facts is either vincible or invincible. When it cannot be overcome by the due amount of diligence, it is invincible, otherwise, it is vincible. The latter is said to be gross or supine when scarcely an effort has been made to remove it; and if a person deliberately avoids enlightenment in order to sin more freely, his ignorance is affected.

Concupiscence: Concupiscence is a strong impulse of the sensible appetite inclining the will to seek sensible good and to fly from sensible evil. When it arises unbidden by will, it is termed antecedent; but when it arises at the command, or continues with the consent, of the will, it is called consequent. As soon as sensible good or evil is perceived, the appetite generally acts instinctively. This first impulse is not free, and consequently not imputable to us. In as far as concupiscence impels the will; it restrains our liberty, and thus lessens our accountability.

Violence: Violence is an impulse from without tending to force the agent to act against his choice. It cannot affect the will directly i.e., the elicited acts of the will, for we cannot will that which at the same time we do not will. But violence can sometimes affect our external acts. In so far as the violence is irresistible, we are not responsible for the external act. If, however, the will yields a reluctant yet real consent, we are blamable, though in a lower degree than if there had been no reluctance.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MORALITY AND RELIGION

Within the wide range of ethical traditions, religious traditions co-exist with secular value frameworks such as humanism, utilitarianism, and others. There are many types of religious

values. Modern monotheistic religions such as Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, define right and wrong by the laws and rules set forth by their respective gods and as interpreted by religious leaders within the respective faith. Polytheistic religious traditions tend to be less absolute. For example, within Buddhism, the intention of the individual and the circumstances should be accounted for to determine if an action is right or wrong. A further disparity between the morals of religious traditions is pointed out by Barbara Stoler Miller, who states that in Hinduism, “practically, right and wrong are decided according to the categories of social rank, kinship, and stages of life for modern Westerners, who have been raised on ideals of universality and egalitarianism, thus relativity of values and obligations is the aspect of Hinduism most difficult to understand”. According to Stephen Gaukroger, “it was generally assumed in the 17th century that religion provided the unique basis for morality, and that without religion, there could be no morality”.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MORALITY AND RELIGION

Religion differs from morality or a moral system in that it includes stories about events in the past, usually about supernatural beings, that are used to explain or justify the behavior that it prohibits or requires. Sometimes there is no distinction made between a moral code and a code of conduct put forward by a religion, and there is often a considerable overlap in the conduct prohibited or required by religion and that prohibited or required by morality. Sometimes morality is regarded as the code of conduct that is put forward by religion, but even when this is not the case, morality is thought by many to need some religious explanation and justification. However, just as with law, some religious practices and precepts are criticized on moral grounds, e.g. discrimination on the basis of race, gender, or sexual orientation. Morality is only a guide to conduct, whereas religion is always more than this.

IMPORTANCE OF MORALITY OF HUMAN ACTIONS

For a better understanding of the importance of morality of human actions, it would be relevant to compare and contrast the merit and demerit of human actions thereby arriving at the importance.

Merit is that by which an action deserves recompense; demerit is that by which it deserves punishment: conscience testifies to us that an action whether good or bad it deserves to be rewarded or punished. Merit and demerit are, therefore, qualities that flow from an action as a consequence of its morality. The good merited is called a reward if preceded by no compact, otherwise it is pay. The evil merited is punishment, which however, not all men may inflict upon those who injure them, for in most cases recourse should be had to the tribunals lawfully established for that purpose.

Man by his actions may merit or demerit from his fellow man: Man may do a good action that profits his fellow man, or an evil action that injures him. Order requires that in the former case he receive recompense in return; and, in the latter case, a punishment, that there may be a proportion between what he gives and what he receives.

Man by his actions may merit or demerit from society: Every man is a member of society therefore whoever does good or evil to his neighbor should receive a reward or a punishment not only from him, but from society, because to benefit or injure a member is to benefit or injure the whole body. If one does good or evil directly to society, he should first be rewarded

or punished by it, and afterward by its members. If one even does good or harm to himself, he should likewise receive recompense or incur penalty from society, because he is a member.

In conclusion, with the above, it would be of immense importance to note that man has every privilege at his disposal either act morally or to act immorally, but knowledge of the consequences of acting immorally which result is punishment thus motivate individual to behave morally in the society.

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