

## PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS OF TEACHING MORAL INSTRUCTIONS IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

The rate at which our society is degenerating should worry both the ordinary citizens and the political class in Nigeria. Upon careful analysis, one may adduce that all social problems are moral problems. If serious efforts are not taken, not only by the government but also by individuals, moral values that make for peaceful co-existence, progress and development may be eroded from the society. It is on this premise that this paper takes a critical look in the values and relevance of morality and moral instructions in the society. As a result of the role morality plays in the society, it is recommended that moral instructions should be taught at both primary and secondary school levels in Nigeria. What are the issues involved in this recommendation? The paper looks into these.

**KEYWORDS:** Morality, Moral Philosophy, Ethics, Utilitarianism, Deontology.

### INTRODUCTION

Plato deals extensively on the roles of education in his *Republic*. According to him, the aim of a good education is not only for the mental or intellectual development of the citizens, but also and more importantly, for character building and moral development. In a similar vein, Awolowo (1968: 268) writes on education as follows:

The cardinal aim of education is not as is popularly but narrowly conceived, to teach a man to read and write, to acquire a profession, to master a vocation, or to be versed in the liberal art. All these are only means to the end of true education which is to help man to live a full, happy and triumphant life. In other words, any system of education which does not help man to have a healthy and sound body, an alert brain, and balanced and disciplined instinctive urge is both misconceived and dangerous.

Every society is faced with one problem or the other. However, the so-called societal problems, upon careful and final analysis, dissolve in moral problems. The social, economic, religious, political, cultural, technological and educational problems facing nations all over the world are essentially moral in nature and character. For instance, one of the major problems facing most of the developing countries in the world today is insecurity which some people (Fayemi, 2014) have linked with high rate of unemployment. When people are not productively engaged, they put morality aside, they want to survive first, and at that, there is

no amount of moral and religious preaching that can dissuade their minds from immoral acts. This is in line with the popular adage that states that an idle hand is the devil's workshop. This is not to say, however, that immorality can be justified on the ground of joblessness, but empirical evidence shows that crime rate is higher among the unemployed. For any nation to overcome these problems therefore there is the need for moral rejuvenation and revival of her citizens because morality is the foundation of the society. According to Wiredu (1998: 306):

Morality in the strictest sense is universal to human culture. Any society without modicum of morality must collapse. But, what is morality in this sense? It is, simply, the observance of rules for the harmonious adjustment of the interests of the individuals to those of others in the society.

As a result of the pivotal roles morality plays or can play in the society the National Universities Commission (NUC) has made the teaching of Logic and Philosophy mandatory for all undergraduates in Nigeria. The essence of the course is to create the sense of morality, rationality and criticism in the students. This is because; Philosophy encourages and promotes self-criticism- the ability to ask salient questions that are personal, communal, societal, national and global. This gesture can also be extended to primary and secondary school levels. Let us discuss this branch of philosophy called ethics. We shall examine the relevance of ethics to the individuals, and to the society, and why it needs to be taught and studied. In introducing the teaching of moral instructions to primary and secondary school levels, what are the likely challenges, and how can these challenges be overcome? These are the pre-occupations of this paper.

## **ETHICS AND MORALITY**

It is customary for some authors and scholars to draw a distinction between ethics and morality. For instance, Omoregbe, (1993, 5), likens ethics and morality with logic and thinking, and came to a conclusion that: "morality is the basis of ethics, the latter is the explicit reflection on, and the systematic study of, the former." While this distinction is legitimate, we do not see any harm in using the two concepts interchangeably. It is to our mind that the so-called line between morality and ethics is a distinction without a difference. According to Solomon and Greene (1998: 2):

That ethics and morality are often used interchangeably is not simply a matter of carelessness (although, this is sometimes the case.) Rather, the two disciplines are intimately related, and, at least ideally, constantly influence one another. We cannot ask what "right" conduct is in a vacuum- to inquire about the right thing to do is to necessarily take into account the sort of agents involved in making the choice and the value to which they are attached.

William, K. Frankena (1995: 5) defines ethics as: "a branch of philosophy; it is a moral philosophy or philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems and moral judgments." According to Ozumba (2001: 4), "Ethics therefore deals with judgments as to the rightness or wrongness, virtuous or vicious, desirability or undesirability, approval or disapproval of our actions." For Agulanna (2000:147): "ethics is that aspect of philosophy which investigates human conducts in so-far as such conducts can be said to be right or wrong." Omoregbe (1993: 3) submits thus:

Ethics is a branch of philosophy which deals with the morality of human actions; or as a branch of philosophy which studies the norms of human behaviour. It can also be defined as the systematic study of the fundamental principles of the moral law; or as the normative science of human conduct.

The above definitions of ethics/morality are diverse, yet, it can be seen that certain themes run through them. Ethics studies morality and morality is concerned with the evaluation and examination of human conducts, as to whether they are right or wrong, good or bad. It is also concerned with what is 'is' and what 'ought' to be. Also, and as Fasoro (2004: 86) rightly noted, ethic/morality is essentially human or a human affair. This implies that ethics does not concern itself with the evaluation of the conducts of God, gods, animals and other inanimate objects. According to the author under consideration: "Morality is human-dependent or conditioned. Human experience and interpersonal relationships call for some regulative

mechanisms so as to promote peaceful co-existence.” Morality is basically concerned with the examination and the evaluation of human behaviour and conducts not in isolation but in their relationship with one another in the society.

From our discussion of morality so far, it follows that morality is social in nature and character. Being a social affair, it follows also that there are some behaviour that the society sanctions and compliance with these rules brings about peaceful co-existence among the people and in the society, and commendations on the part of the individuals involved. A large scale disregard to these standards brings chaos to the society, and condemnation to the individuals involved. It does not however follow that morality is all about conformity with the standards of the society. Morality gives room for the individuals to judge what is right or wrong, good or bad, but at the same time holds individuals liable for the choice he has made. As a matter fact, individuals matter, and their interests are also important to the society but must not be at the detriment of others or the society. Individuals are products of the society. According to Wiredu (1998: 306)

Morality in this sense involves not just the *de facto* conformity to the requirements of the harmony of interests, but also that the conformity to those requirement which is inspired by an imaginative and sympathetic identification with the interests of others even at the cost of a possible curtailment of one’s own interests.

In the course of promoting one’s interests, ethics emphasizes the mode of conducts in such a way that the interests of others are put into consideration and valued. It is this consideration for others interests that makes the study of ethics a valuable discipline.

#### **WHY STUDYING MORALITY IN SCHOOLS?**

Another way of putting the above question is: what is the relevance of morality to the individuals, and the nation as a whole? Any discipline that is not capable of solving societal problems, directly or indirectly, does not deserve to be studied at any level of educational institutions. Ethics /morality has important roles to play in the course of nation-building.. As Wiredu rightly asserted in our earlier reference, a “society without a modicum of morality must collapse.” This is because in every society there are different individuals and groups with different and conflicting interests. And, as Hobbes (1652: 184) observes: “And therefore, if any two men desire the same thing which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies, and in the way to their own end...they endeavour to destroy or subdue one another.” The role of morality here is to regulate the affairs of these individuals and groups with opposing and conflicting interests in such a manner that there will be peace and harmony in the society. According to Agunlanna (2000: 153)

Morality is basically concerned with society, with relations between men, with how men ought to behave with their fellow men. It is concerned with general rules governing relations between men and rules of the society they ought to adopt...It deals with “how humans treats themselves in order to promote mutual welfare, growth, creativity and meaning in striving for what is good over what is bad, and what is right over what is wrong.

Another area where morality is both helpful and useful to the society is that, it helps to develop an attitude of fellow-feeling. In other words, morality makes one to be sympathetic to the course of others. One can easily feel the pain of others. Through morality, one comes to the knowledge of the fact that the misfortune that befell another person may also happen to him. Since one will always like to be helped when one is in difficulty, one may be propelled to help others in such a situation. This point can be explained in the popular expression that what goes around comes around. Ethics does not only promote sympathy but also, empathy among the people in their social relations. Through it, one is able to feel the pains of others by putting oneself in their positions. For instance, a man who will like to be rescued in an accident ought to be moved to help those involved in accident. In a similar vein, a man of high dignity ought to respect and treat others in a respectful manner. This is in line with the Kantian golden rule that we should treat others in the like manner we would like to be treated under the same circumstance. If this fellow-feeling is cultivated

and nurtured in many third-world countries including Nigeria, issues like corruption, under-development, unemployment, assassination, breakdown of infrastructures, robbery, kidnapping, human and drug trafficking, political persecution, religious extremism, Boko Haram, etc. might not have been as profound as they are today.

A major bane of development in most of the African countries today is poor attitude to work and public services as well as utilities. Ethics teaches us to do the right thing at the right time, not because of compensation or commendation but simply because it is the right thing to do. It refrains us to do what is wrong and bad not because of punishment or condemnation but simply because it is wrong. A virtuous man does not need the law enforcement agent to do the right thing. He is dedicated to his work and does it without fear or favour. The Nigerian civil and public servants are in dire need of morality and orientation that will make them alive to their responsibilities. People should just learn to do what they are expected to do. Politicians are morally-bound to keep their electoral promises to the people just as the people should discharge their civic responsibilities as at when due.

The need for morality in the society would not have been very urgent and important as it is if religion, especially, in the African continent, has lived up to expectation. The contribution of religion has made the sermons in the churches and mosques watery and empty. The encouragement the imported religions give to the corrupt and other dubious but rich people in the society has contributed significantly to the desperation and moral degeneration of the youths in many African countries. Some have associated immorality in Nigeria to religion. Sam Mbah (2012) writes thus:

Religion has become an instrument of manipulation, exploitation, deceit, and large scale blindfolding of ordinary people in Nigeria. It is one of the factors militating against social consciousness and the developing of the working class, as a class in Nigeria. The development of the class of the dispossessed, the oppressed, the marginalized, who feel and share common interest, and are keen to fight for common interests...Every little thing is covered, is given a religious colouration, which is actually not. It is a tremendous setback to the development of social consciousness in Nigeria and the rest of Africa as a whole.

Religion in Nigeria loses contact with morality, and if the message of Prophet Isaiah is anything to go by, there can be no true religion without morality. In this aspect, Christianity and Islam have recorded a great failure for their inability to raise the moral consciousness of the members. Little wonder these days that it is becoming more difficult for the so-called evangelists to win more souls for the Lord. This is primarily so because those who profess to be religious are not morally upright than the so-called pagans. Morality and moral education is therefore urgently needed in our primary and secondary schools. This is however not a call to replace religion with morality, because, in spite of the violent attacks on religion by the like of Karl Marx, it still plays prominent in the society; such as bind people different cultures and tribes and also limiting the rate of crimes in the society. As a matter of fact, there are still people in the society who would have taken to crimes but for the religious and the other-worldness considerations. The message however is that, every religion ought to be ethical; hence, it is recommended that both should be complimentary to each other.

The roles of morality in the society have made it crucial to be taught at all the levels of our educational institutions. The time is now more than ever. Teaching moral instructions both at the primary and secondary school levels is more important than ever before because the society is fast degenerating. Moral and cultural values such as: hard work, honesty, brotherliness, fellow-feeling, love, kindness, etc., are fast losing their places in the society. If efforts are not made to re-cultivate these values, as Wiredu predicted, the society may collapse. Before these children become old therefore, their feet must be set on the right path of moral behaviour. This is also very important because the youths are often regarded as the leaders of tomorrow. If they are, then, they must be properly and well-grounded in good conducts, right away from their elementary schools.

The teaching of moral instruction in the lower schools has also become very important in view of the fact that most parents today do not seem to have time for their children. The home was at a time the custodian of morality, but in the recent time, the crucial roles it has to play on the children have been

eroded. Home is indeed the first church, and even the school of a child. It is the first institution of moral education, but this role seems not to be taken for granted According to William Abraham (1987, 21):

To wives is entrusted the initial training of a child and the transmission of the traditions, religion, morals, manners, tastes of the society. A wife enshrines the moral force of the society; a being more mysterious than a man, she is more sacral, and is the object of many taboos and rites, and is often revealed as the innermost secret of male religious societies.

For Wiredu (1998: 308): "The theatre of moral upbringing is the home, at parents' feet and within range of kinsmen's inputs." Unfortunately, our world has changed for the worse. Parents do not seem to have time for these because of their desire to 'belong'. They want the latest cars, dresses and houses everywhere. They want to play politics and they want to be celebrities. Some parents now realize their inability to serve this crucial role, and so, they send their wards to private school schools, not only for academic excellence but more importantly, for moral upbringing, thereby paying for the services they are unable to render. These materialistic tendencies prevent these parents from discharging their parental and moral responsibilities at home. Hence, the school is the only avenue left for teaching moral instructions.

### **TEACHING MORAL INSTRUCTIONS- THE CHALLENGES**

While it may not be an assiduous task to teach subjects like Mathematic or Economics in the primary and secondary schools, the same cannot be said about teaching moral instructions at these levels. One reason for this assertion is the nature of philosophy and morality. Morality and moral issues are open to debates and controversies even among philosophers. Among mathematicians, for instance, nobody doubts that  $2+2=4$ . But what is good life or what makes an act to be wrong and the other right is a major controversy between the consequentialists and the deontologists. For the consequentialists, it is the result or the intended result of an act that qualifies it to be right or wrong. Thus, if an act is able to make more people happy or better, it is good, but bad if it will make few people better at the expense of the majority. The deontologists argue that the outcome of an act has nothing to do with the goodness or badness of that act. For them therefore, a bad act remains bad and a good one remains so regardless of the result. What makes an act right is if it is done for the sake of duty. That is, it is done according to the dictate of reason. Primary and secondary school teachers are subject to transfer from time to time. The 'school' to which an individual teacher belongs cannot but influence his teaching of moral instruction. This challenge should not be taken lightly while designing moral instruction curriculum for the students

Another challenge likely to be faced in teaching moral instruction in primary and secondary school levels is the mode of teaching the subject. Teaching morality is one thing but moralizing is another thing entirely. To know how to teach moral instruction is never the same as moralizing the students. Example is always better than precepts. What this point boils down to is that, it is possible for a teacher to be able to teach moral concepts and theories very well but if he does not live what he teaches, the desired outcome may not be achieved. Teachers of moral instructions have to be more careful than other people, colleagues, students and neighbours because of the sensitive nature of their subject

Availability of teachers and teaching materials, especially, textbooks may also constitute another challenge to teaching moral instructions in both primary and secondary schools. Following the poor disposition of the federal government towards humanities some years past, students were encouraged and motivated to study science courses. Universities were to give 60% admission to those in sciences and 40% to those in humanities. The outcome of this policy is that, unlike what obtained before, the number of students in science related courses is higher than those in humanities. To teach moral instruction in the elementary schools will be hampered in the interim by shortage of teachers. Inadequate textbooks on moral instruction will also be a problem at the beginning.

Award of marks and scores may also constitute a great challenge to teaching moral instruction in both primary and secondary school levels. A student that writes the most correct points, discusses them in organized manner, usually gets the highest marks in subjects like Biology or Government. The aim of testing students in these subjects is to find out if they actually 'know', and one is said to know in this regard by what he writes. But the goal of moral education, as Fasoro observes, is not to be able to explain ethical

theories and concepts, and to be able to make ethical judgments, but is in one's ability to offer *reasons* for one's actions and decisions. The problem here is that, if there are two students, in their examination, one writes very well but behaves immorally and the other behaves morally well but writes poorly, who has the highest mark? The student that behaves immorally does so not because he is incontinent or because he does not understand the ethical terms and theories, but because he does not see the need to be moral when he can 'make it sharply' through immoral means.

Some of these challenges to teaching moral instructions at the elementary school levels can be re-addressed. For instance, the issue of different theories and the confusion therein is not as critical as it seems. The consequentialists claim that every policy and decision should be geared towards the welfare of the majority. The removal of fuel subsidy by the Nigerian government in 2012 was condemned, for instance because it put more burden on the majority. The deontologists are of the point that human being must never be treated as a means to an end but as an end in itself. It is clear then that both theories are human-centred. Therefore, we can say that there is no hard line between the positions of the consequentialists and those of the deontologists. Whichever 'school' one belongs to may not be very important.

Shortage of textbooks and the supply of teachers of moral instructions can be overcome within some years. One reason many are not studying Philosophy today is because, apart from the fact that they are not familiar with the course from their elementary schools, they also feel that graduates in the discipline do not easily get jobs. The introduction of teaching moral instructions in both primary and secondary schools will create job opportunities, and students will definitely study the course when they know that there are jobs waiting for them after graduation. With more students in Philosophy classes, writers will be encouraged to publish books since they know that there is market for them.

As to the teachers of moral instruction, well, this may be a serious challenge. It is true that very many people preach what they do not or cannot practice. There is this saying among people; 'do as I say, not as I do' It is equally true that there are people who practice what they preach. As time goes on, teachers of moral instruction may come to the understanding that they are being watched, and so try as much as possible to combine theory with practice. With little encouragement from their students, colleagues, institutions, communities and government, they will remain focused and alive to their responsibilities. For instance, National Award, and other awards can be given to virtuous people, especially, moral and dedicated teachers.

## CONCLUSION

We started this paper with discussion of the concepts of morality and the crucial roles it can play in the society. We also examine why moral instruction must be studied and taught at the elementary schools. We submit that teaching moral instruction NOW at these levels of education is critical to the survival of the society. The impacts of science and technology, the negative roles of civilization and modernization, the degeneration the society from community to atomism and the wide-spread of materialism and materialistic tendencies, and so on, make teaching of moral instructions very pertinent and urgent very if the society is not to finally collapse and degenerate into the Hobbesian state of nature. We noted some challenges to the teaching of moral instructions but we hold that they are surmountable, only if we are genuinely concerned with the degeneration of the society.

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