Application and Subjectivity of Divine Command Theory and the Possibility of Morality without Organized Religion.

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ABSTRACT

In the society, peace and tran quillity is pegged on members adherence to a code of conduct which they presume to contain ethical directives. As such, anyone who adheres to this code is considered moral and those who violate it are deemed immoral. In some societies, especially in the African continent, adherence to religious tenets is considered a necessary and sufficient condition for morality. In this respect, a moral person is one who adheres to what their religion teaches. This perspective can be associated with one of the prominent African Philosopher and theologian John Mbiti who is credited with the proclamation that Africans are notoriously religious, that they associate everything in their lives with religion. If good things happen to an African, it is assumed that it is a reward from a deity, and if evil befalls them, it must be a punishment for an evil committed. In this paper, an investigation to the nature of organized religion and its contribution to formation of moral principles is discussed. The study sought to examine whether the religious ethical principles and the divine command theory from which they emanate are absolute and can be objectively used in our societies. The divine command theorist would argue that an act is moral because God or Deity commands it to be morally good. The question arises whether there can be morality in the absence of organized religion. The study postulates that there is possibility of human knowledge of moral principles independent of external influence which inform human conduct if organized religion would cease to exist.

INTRODUCTION

In his address to Bishops of the Catholic Church of Eastern Africa, Jomo Kenyatta argued that the church is the conscience of the society (Coertzen, Green, Hansen & African Consortium for Law and Religious Studies, 2015), this implies that moral directives proclaimed by the Christian faith are a necessary guide to human conduct. This institution, Kenyatta's statement further implies, should use its moral principles to guard against any violations by the state or individuals presumed to be contrary to right human conduct.

The assumption that organized religion stipulates how the populace should act in any given society would appear fallacious in instances where members in that society belong in different religions whose moral tenets conflict. The belief that one's own ethical principles, born out of their religion, are absolute is a factor that has led to contradiction in ethical principles laid down in our societies. Therefore, the question arises, "does organized religion give objective ethical principles, and if so, does it mean that in its absence, humans cannot know and act morally?"

Nature of Organized Religion

Religion refers to a system of faith that is founded on the belief that there is a particular god or gods. It also denotes a belief in the existence of a god or gods and the activities that are connected with their worship and reverence (Bowker, 2016). This definition, however, does not capture the real essence of all organized religions because there are some that do not have a god or gods and their doctrines do not involve reverence

or worship to any being, whether supernatural or physical. For instance, Theravada Buddhism is considered one of the world's major religions but it cannot be considered theistic. This is because, according to Jerryson (2016), it does not recognise any gods and does not encourage worship of Buddha or any other higher or supernatural being. Religions are diverse; each having its own beliefs and traditions, and at times it would seem difficult to give a definition that clearly describes them all.

To this effect, then, one may describe religion a system of faith or set beliefs and practises that serve to foster the relationship between human beings and sacred beings or divinities. In most cases, the religions are founded on the basis of revelation while at times they arise as a result of man's need to achieve a blissful life without pain and suffering that come with normal human existence. Organized religion provides structure, dogmas, and rules and guidelines for conduct to the members that follow a particular religion. Religions have certain features like a feeling of faith or belief in a particular doctrine, established rituals and practises, a community of people that share and are guided by these beliefs.

The various definitions of religion have in common features such as beliefs (mainly in superhuman or supernatural entities), rituals, a sense of belonging in a certain community, and a sense of existential, self-expressive or social benefit. Examples of organised religions include: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and many others. Not all people that consider themselves spiritual can be said to belong to organised religion. There are those that recognize the existence of a deity or deities but do not affiliate themselves with any of the established religions. Instead, they choose to revere these deities in their own ways without necessarily having rituals.

Decline of Organised Religion

The fact that religion is of fundamental concern to human beings has been placed into doubt. It is central to politics, cultures, social life of man and ethics. In the 21st century, religion has been viewed as irrational, irrelevant and worthless in the life of this scientific age. Many different thinkers have speculated on the nature of religion, some seeing it as a meaningless endeavour while others think it is a human requirement (Inglehart, 2020). The fact that it is not empirical makes the science-oriented mind more sceptical of its objectivity in giving information and tenets on which man can build his life.

Secularization has been blamed for the increasing disinterest in religion. The secular world has become more appealing to the masses, especially those that seem to be knowledgeable. Some people live lives that we can consider stable, have a consistent access to food, shelter, and medicine (Thiessen & Wilkins-Laflamme, 2021). Those of them that live in urban places, places that are considered to be more advanced than in villages or conservative societies, are more prone to fall in this line of thought. They are more likely to become less religious. Science and the pursuit of personal occupational and recreational ends give them the motivation to be sceptical of religious groupings.

Countries in the Western world are the most secularised and they include states like Britain, The United States of America, Denmark, Ireland, Holland, and many others. When earlier data is compared with the present-day data on the number of people with religious inclinations, there is a clear indication that the place of religion had been taken over by science. It is worth noting that religious affiliation and belief can be complex and vary among individuals and religions. For this reason, any statistics would be subject to interpretation within a certain context. The decline or growth of religion can differ from country to country within the Western world. However, that does not justify scepticism on the phenomenon of religious decline. A Pew Research Center report from 2018 indicated that religious 'nones' (People who identify themselves as atheist, agnostic, or having no religious affiliation) were on the rise in the United States of America, as well as in the Western Europe where a trend of declining religiosity has been observed in Some countries (Peer Research Center, 2018). The same report indicated that religious 'nones' were on the rise in several African Countries including; South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana. However, it is important to note

that religious dynamics in Africa are complex and multifaceted. Religious beliefs and practices can be deeply ingrained in African societies and religious affiliation can be influenced by a variety of factors including cultural traditions, social dynamics, societal myths, as well as historical influences (Mbiti, 2015). Other reports indicating this decline have been reported by Research Institutions that specialize in religious demographics such as Gallup.

For instance, even though the figures show that there were a number of people that were not religious in Britain in the 19th century, the number of the same kind of people has grown by a great percentage in the twenty first century (Bullivant, 2019). This means that at the very least, the desire of publicly displaying one's own religious commitment and affiliation has gone down. This does not just paint the picture of Britain alone, as this same situation affects many Western and even non-Western countries that are literate, educated, scientifically advanced, and physically and existentially comfortable.

In the 21st century, the declining relevance of religion in many societies and the preference of secular ideologies have become more popular (Clayton, 2018). Traditionally, religious scepticism was treated like a sin, something people feared to be associated with, but it nevertheless existed. However, complete alienation of political structures, ethical considerations, and economic interests from religion is a relatively new trend. Autonomy has been adopted by the well-informed members of the society and as such, they can rationally investigate reality and come up with explanations devoid of religious connotation.

Sociologists such as Max Webber and Emile Durkheim argue that religion has given up its central position in most societies. This is because it has failed to provide an objective and rational world view. In their opinion, religion can no longer give tenets that are acceptable to majority of the inhabitants of the earth (Yimer, 2019). The argument that modernization has an impact on religion is based on the assumption that there are better explanations put forth by empirical science and these prove to be more objective and more acceptable that what religion offers us. In situations of social differentiation, religion does not exert pivotal influence on areas such as the economy, science, arts, politics, ethics and medicine.

It has been observed, in Britain, that there has been a religious decline in the past few decades. This has been partly attributed to generational differences such that the new generations are portraying less affiliation to matters religious and have interest in scientific and more pragmatic matters (Crockett &Voas, 2006).This means that in the Western world, religion's place is being overrun by science and technology.

In Africa and the rest of the world, the decline of organized religion can be attributed to scientific discoveries which make religious claims of divine intervention in solving most of human problems redundant. For instance, infant mortality rates, reproductive problems, health problems such as cancer and HIV and AIDS are being managed effectively through science (Inglehart, 2020). New generations learn that science, not divine intervention, is the solution to most human problems and slowly drift away from organized religion. When our societies attain a high level of security, economic, social and physical, traditional norms about the role of divinities are abandoned in favour of more pragmatic explanations for these achievements. Claims that abandonment of these traditional moral and religious beliefs will lead to the collapse of ethical conduct, however, there is insufficient proof to support these assertions.

THE DIVINE-COMMAND THEORY OF ETHICS

Many people consider the divine sources of moral values to be one of the best and genuine of all other sources of moral codes of conduct. Moral values in this context are regarded as synonymous with religious values and religion becomes a guarantee of the truthfulness of our moral judgments. Religious texts such as the Bible and the Quran are viewed as providing objective and universal codes of conduct and therefore all human beings should abide by them (Hare, 2015). Violation of the moral rules demanded by these religious books is equivalent to disobedience to God, and therefore these actions are considered to be vicious or

immoral.

The divine command theory can be understood as the claim that if God or divine being(s) did not exist then we would not be having morality. In this case, we would not have such things as objective moral principles by which we would operate. We would not be bound by the same moral rules and obligations that bind other people of different races, cultures and continents. The absence of God's commands would be disastrous to the human race because each individual or society would only be bound by subjective obligations. This is to say that God's command is a necessary condition for objective morality.

Two basic claims are incorporated in the divine- command theory. To begin with, there is the claim that a god or gods approve of certain actions and disapprove of other actions. Secondly, the actions that are approved by the god or gods are necessarily morally right while those that the gods disapprove are immoral or vicious (Hare, 2009). People that affiliate themselves with this school of thought then have to find out what the god or gods that they believe in approve and disapprove.

In some instances, the divine command theory can be manipulated by religious extremists who commit actions claiming that it is what the divine commands of them. For example, Islamic terrorists use verses in the Quran to attack and kill people they consider infidels. People with different views from theirs are considered enemies and should be eliminated from the universe. Majority of those who agree with this theory are law abiding and peaceful people. They use religious texts and traditions to justify why we should do certain acts and avoid others and as such, we can consider them good people. This notwithstanding, important questions arise when we analyse the divine command theory. Firstly, how can this theory be defended or justified and secondly, if this theory can be justified or defended, is it possible to term the adherents of this ethical position as moral agents?

Considering the fact that the theory stipulates that an action is morally right if it agrees with the teaching of god or gods (depending on the religious affiliation), there would be a complication when different people hold conflicting beliefs basing on their respective religions. This theory does not specify which god or gods provide objective teachings which are binding to all human beings. For instance, the Islamic extremist has his own interpretation of the Quran which may differ from the understanding of the moderate Muslim and the Christian or even the Traditional African Religion adherent. Further, in some religions we have different attributes of god or gods which appear to conflict. For example, in the Old Testament, the God of the Jews appears to be vengeful and jealous and he punishes even the innocent offspring of the wrong doers. In the New Testament the Judeo-Christian God appears to be less vengeful, more forgiving and merciful. If one were to use the tenets that the God of Old Testament and that of the New Testament put across, there may be confusion or even conflict. This is one of the major concerns that are raised in objection to the divine command theory.

Many people usually see a great connection of morality with religion. People that have been brought up in religious setting thus associate morality with religion. They may claim that knowledge of morality requires revelation. Arguments presented in support of this theory of morality may tend to use theistic premises. For instance, Mortimer infers the truth of the divine command theory from the assumption that God is the creator of all things. This can be demonstrated in the following manner: if God is the creator of all, he must be the originative source of all morality and therefore this theory is true since if God was not the source of morality it would mean that moral standards are independent of God. If this is the case, if there are moral principles independent of God, then God would not be the creator of all things (Timmons, 2012).

Timmons (2012) further points out that many thinkers, both atheists and theists, have argued that the divine command theory should not be accepted owing to a dilemma from one of Plato's dialogues, 'Euthyphro'. Euthyphro claims to know what piety means when he is questioned by Socrates. He claims that piety is what the gods love and impiety is what they all hate. To this explanation, Socrates is provoked to ask, "Do the

gods love piety because it is pious or is it pious because they love it?" this question incites us to wonder if the actions that God commands are good because he orders us to do them or does he order them because they are good?

During the Nuremberg trials after the Second World War, war criminals tried excusing the atrocities they committed by arguing that they were just following orders but the judges were not sympathetic to them. This is because the perpetrators of these acts were following morally wrong or reprehensible actions and therefore their atrocities could not be forgiven. They acted blindly on orders without evaluating the moral permissibility of these actions.

If the divine command theory is wrong, it would also imply that our application of it would lead to disastrous consequences of which we would not be held accountable for. This can be demonstrated by the following analogy; a robot would not be held responsible for any of its actions, in fact, if it commits an action we would consider wrong (like killing), we would not hold it responsible for it. Instead, we would lay the blame on the creator of the robot. If the creator of the robot intended ill when making it, we can rightly blame him for the action. What is clear here is the fact that the robot is not to praise or blame for any of its actions (Geirsson, 2018).

In a similar manner, some thinkers would argue that a person who follows the divine command theory blindly should not be blamed for actions that may end up resulting in unpleasant consequences. If this person acts in a manner that kills or harms innocent people, then that person is not to blame for that action. We would then fault the author of the commands for any morally wrong actions that are committed by the person. However, this analogy does not quite capture all the circumstances of committing an action. The agent of the actions should be conscious enough to analyse the nature of the action, and make a choice they have chosen without coercion. Additionally, if the divine command theory holds, actions in line with what God ordered would not be wrong in any way.

An argument that has been sometimes put across to support the Divine Command theory is that even if human beings are aware of their moral obligations, they cannot act in line with these obligations out of their own free will. For them, only religion can assist them to overcome this obstacle that exists in their nature. It is only through religion that they can fulfil the moral obligations and make them to act in a moral manner. In this sense, human nature is diametrically opposed to morality. This means that the former is corrupt and as such, incapable of making morally correct judgments.

However, there are those who think that the truth concerning the matter of morality and human nature is not really that opposed. These thinkers propose that the nature of man is such that it is not impossible for him to act morally without religion, nut it is difficult for him to do so. The presence of religion makes it easier for him to choose the morally acceptable and right actions and avoid those actions that are immoral and unacceptable to the society. This means that religion improves the chances for a person to behave in a moral manner (Sagi, Statman & Stein, 1995).

The fact that proponents of the Divine Command Theory think that all good actions are commanded by God puts them in a position of subservience. Humans become inferior and as such, they cannot commit an action that is considered good without being under the order of God. Their obedience is not due to the fact that they understand or agree with the actions but because God commands it. The contents of the command are not put to the test or critically examined because doing so would be an act of undermining the authority of the divine. There is an emphasis on God's sovereign power and human obligation to devotion and unconditional submission.

The proposition that Divine command theory offers a good explanation for the basis on which we can claim to have knowledge of objective good and evil. The assumption that we have goodness presupposes the

existence of a superior being from whom all morality must emanate. This means that every judgment we make is usually on a basis that some actions are objectively good while others are outright evil. This demarcation is determined by the source of the former. The claim that there is morality leads us to make the assumption that there must be a source of this morality. This source is said to be the author of moral tenets and code of conduct and what he puts across constitutes morality and should be followed.

MORALITY WITHOUT RELIGION

Introduction

With the advancement of science and globalisation, religion has taken a back seat in matters of morality. In a world in which empirical matters have become more important, religion has lost the meaning it had during the medieval times. As such, people have become more rational and pragmatic and any solution that cannot be practically applied to solve problems is not considered to be a good solution. Given the fact that religion is declining and reason becoming more and more appealing to the masses, especially those that have undergone formal education, there is a chance that the ethical principles held by people may be questioned since a number of them rely only on religion for moral direction. Does it mean that the Christian, Muslim, Jewish or any other kind of ethics are redundant? What does it all mean for morality in this case? This section investigates the possibility of ethics without the basis of religion. The findings of the following investigation will justify or prove wrong Kenyatta's implication that the church offers objective moral truths which should guide the society.

The Possibility of Moral Agency in the Absence of Religion

Most of our beliefs today inform the nature of our judgments concerning human actions. For instance, we believe that killing is wrong because we have been taught by our parents, guardians, religious leaders, and other sources. These beliefs are primarily taught to most of us through religious contexts; for example, it is common for parents to warn their children against committing certain acts by invoking the wrath of God on the child. Some parents threaten their children that if they do morally wrong actions then the consequences will be eternal damnation in hell fire. One of the reasons for this kind of reason is that the care givers have not critically looked at the actual nature of the action but are heavily reliant on the religious authority for direction. They do not ask themselves why doing an action would be considered morally wrong or right and under what circumstances they would reason out and make different choices.

Another reason for this kind of reasoning is that we usually think that children are incapable of reasoning in such a manner that they would be able to objectively point out moral actions from immoral ones. This results in the use of deterrent measures such as threatening them with dire consequences for committing wrong actions and promising them rewards for doing deeds that we would consider good.

One of the inevitable outcomes of the decline of religion is the rise of autonomous thought and disassociation from religiously imposed moral values. The development of personal autonomy values leads the thinkers away from traditions and heteronomous cultures. They become critical of moral tenets they had been fed by the authority, religion and any other source that may be logically untenable or inconsistent. In European countries, there has been an acceptance in individuals' autonomous views and judgments on matters such as sexuality, family values, governance and other controversial issues.

For example, there has been recognition of same sex unions in countries such as the USA and various countries in Europe and this has ceased from being considered an evil act (Abou-Chadi & Finnigan, 2019). The redefinition of gay and homosexual acts as moral does not go hand in hand with the Christian, Muslim or Jewish understanding of these acts. If the divine command theory would apply here, it would mean that these actions are inherently immoral and we cannot justify them. Indeed, according to some religious texts, such as the Bible, they are punishable by death.

According to 2 Corinthians 6:14, the believers should not be yoked together with the unbelievers. This is because wickedness and righteousness do not have anything in common and light and darkness do not have anything in common too. In a similar manner, many theists would not even consider the option of marrying someone who is an atheist. The basic assumption behind this thought is that people who do not believe in God are evil and are followers of Satan. This means that they cannot be considered moral people. The believers assume that the atheists' declaration that God does not exist (or even God is dead) means that there is no morality and so everything is permitted. No one would want to marry a person who believes that everything is permitted as long as they have their own subjective justifications for their actions. Such partners would be a source of trouble and would spread this vice to children and everyone they come into contact with in the society (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2009).

Analysis of this same Bible verse would lead to the inference that God gives a divine command through revelation that intermarriage with non-believers is wrong, according to the commands of God. Reason would question this assertion to find out the true nature of this action, if it is a morally wrong action and if so why do we categorize it as such. The Christian faith also allows divorce on certain conditions, one of which is if the spouse is a non-believer. A rational investigation of this condition would not justify divorce on such grounds.

Even with the decline of religion, it is possible to maintain morality. However, the moral principles we will hold will be inspired by reason. Christian, Muslim and Jewish ethics stand to fall with the inexistence or death of God. This is because every one of its principles is formulated on the assumption that there exists a god who is responsible for the moral order and obligations that human beings have. This kind of ethical theory has truth only if there is such a being in existence. However, in philosophy, morality depends upon itself as a capacity to critically think or reason. It does not rest or rely on the existence of anything external but as long as there is an engagement of reason and this stems from the nature of man. It means that reason will always be in existence as long as humans exist and therefore there will always be moral principles that guide people in the universe.

One of the arguments presented to demonstrate that there must be a divine being who authors objective morality is that in his absence, there would be disorder and chaos in the universe. This is partly due to the fact that every human reasons differently according to their culture, their beliefs and their upbringing. They also act according to their understanding of how the universe is and why it is so. The implication this brings is that every human has his or her own beliefs and convictions as to what a morally right action is and a morally wrong action is. If this is so, then there is no way we would agree on certain principles are morally binding to the human race. For instance, we would not agree that murder is wrong, or rape, stealing or denying people their basic rights are wrong actions. This would mean that there has to be a god who instils these objective moral principles in us.

However, one may argue that religious differences complicate the discussion on what really constitutes a moral act. Further, in religions where there is an acknowledgement that only one God exists, there are different moral standards in each religion. Some of these moral laws are contradictory. For instance, according to the Christian faith, any marriage that is good should only have one man and one wife. Polygamy is considered sinful and therefore morally wrong. On the contrary, it is not wrong to have multiple wives in the Islamic faith. Additionally, in some Anglican churches, it is allowed to ordain homosexual clergy while in others it is not permissible because gay and lesbian people are considered to moral delinquents by their faith.

With the decline of organised religion, these subjective standards and contradictions will cease to be. One would argue that it would be a step forward in eliminating relative moral theories and towards a rational establishment of universal moral rules for our society. Religion, therefore, is not a necessary condition for

the establishment of objective morality in any society, but reason is.

The chances of there being moral agency in the absence of organised religion can be demonstrated by the fact that there is a difference between how morality works and the demands of religion. Religion requires total submission and unconditional obedience to the tenets that God gives us while morality requires that agents make autonomous decisions without looking at what God wants or the opinions of the masses. This demonstrates that whereas the religious person cannot give valid reasons for their actions, moral agents are completely capable of giving logical explanations for their choices of action and decisions. Religious believers, therefore, do not do things on the basis of their understanding of the phenomena but rather through deference to rules imposed by God, an external authority. On the contrary, morality requires knowledge of the intrinsic value of the actions that we are doing (Sagi, Statman & Stein, 1995).

There is need to critically examine the notion that human beings need of religion in order to be moral and what happens in its absence. Further the claim that without religion there is no objective foundation upon which we can decide on what is moral and what is immoral or amoral, and in turn, human morality becomes subjective and each individual or community can rightly claim to be holding the objective moral tenets.

One way of ensuring that morality remains objective even in the face of the decline of organised religion is by holding as moral all that which serves to preserve humanity and make people's lives easier and more peaceful. On the contrary, we should consider as evil all that which hinders or obstructs humanity's quest for survival. Common sense dictates that it is good to do things that help others, treat every person equally and without bias or discrimination. There is no need to be told things of such a manner. Our minds should be clear that we should do to others what we would like them to do to us.

A question that emerges on the debate about religious involvement in ethical matters is that if morality goes hand in hand with religion, does it mean that the irreligious is not capable of acting in a moral manner? If we strictly agree with the divine command theory then we can say that they cannot be moral agents but conventionally, this cannot be the case. Morality is said to be human phenomenon and a result of evolution. This means that it cannot be attributed to supernatural forces or anything beyond humanity. Atheists therefore make choices based on rational conviction and examination of the nature of the actions which they commit and their consequences.

One of the greatest roles that religion plays in the inculcation of morality in people is through formulation of common beliefs and practises that give people a common ground to work together in harmony and have a common understanding of reality. Humans in a particular religion will share moral tenets and goals. In its absence, we should be guided by rational thought. For instance, in the absence of religion we can justify not committing theft or murder on the premise that it is detrimental to human development and peace, it goes against the principle of justice and it is not something a person would want done to them, regardless of the circumstances in which it is done.

There would be the expectation that in societies where faith in God is minimal, and church attendance has lowered each passing week, that kind of society is ungodly, chaotic, deprived of morality and peace and in constant crisis. However, this is not the case in these societies. For instance, Denmark and Sweden fall in the category mentioned above and those who have lived there report that these countries are not characterised by depravity and a state of anarchy. On the contrary, they are peaceful and developed and impressive examples of societies that are healthy and thriving (Zuckerman, 2020).

FINDINGSOF THE STUDY AND GENERAL CONCLUSION

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The moral standards that most people have or hold in their adulthood are mostly as a result of teachings they

received while still young and learning. This is done according to particular cultures and societies in which these individuals belong. A Christian, for instance, will have different views concerning the moral nature of polygamous or polyandrous relationships from a Muslim, or a person abiding by the traditional African culture and belief system. The Christian will condemn this kind of lifestyle as immoral and unworthy of being practised by humanity while those that adhere to the traditional African way of life may admit this lifestyle as moral. The Muslim will give conditions in which a man may marry up to four women and still be considered to have acted in a morally justified manner.

In matters regarding morality, religion has been playing a great role. In the early years of a child, issues of right and wrong actions are usually explained in relation to religious beliefs. For instance, if a child steals, Christian parents will threaten them with dire consequences such as going to hell for doing so and going to heaven if they apologise for their mistake and not repeat it again. This way, a child develops a moral perspective based, not on rationality, but because of his or her knowledge of certain consequences in the afterlife.

During the Middle Ages, organised religion was instrumental in many things such as civilization and spread of education. Our convictions regarding the rightness or wrongness of actions to a large extend are informed by our religious beliefs since this is how we got to know of the good and evil things and consequences of our choices. The present day is testimony to the influence of religion and therefore with the 21st century decline in the power and influence of religion, we are left with a dilemma on whether the status of our moral convictions will remain the same or there is a chance of us not being as moral as we were before. It also raises a pertinent question on how then we can pass on the tenets of right and wrong actions to young children whose faculty for reason is not yet developed to an extend of analysing information and making rational decisions.

This demonstrates that the question of whether certain actions are morally right or wrong is not as easy as some people might think they are. This makes human judgment subjective and as such it would be difficult for humanity to hold common principles in certain matters. This study investigates the various theories that different thinkers have come up with in an attempt to find a solution to the question of what constitutes a morally justified action. Some of the theories put across include teleological theories (utilitarianism and ethical egoism), virtue-based theories (proposed by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle), Deontological theories (Immanuel Kant's ethical theory) and the Divine-command theory.

With the continual decline of organised religion in the twenty first century, the question of the status of our moral convictions becomes a concern to us and the society at large. In most cases, we acquire our moral principles through organised religion. At a young age we cannot rationally look at actions and determine their goodness or badness and therefore we rely on authority like our parents, teachers, and religious leaders for provision of moral directions. Most of these moral directions are based on religion. For instance, we are taught that cheating or stealing is wrong because they are actions that will lead us to a life of eternity in hell where we will burn.

Most people would argue that this is one of the most effective ways of making children abstain from actions that are not sanctioned by the society since it deters them with the threat of punishment later on. But with the decline of organized religion there is a lot of difficulty finding appropriate ways of passing across ethical principles to young ones. The question of how in the absence of religion morality can be imparted to young people who have not been trained to effectively critique phenomena in a rational manner needs to be addressed in another study. This study focuses on the possibility of there being morality among humans in the absence of religion.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The attainment of absolute or objective morality is not an easy feat. No one can conclusively claim to have

found it and the theories, for instance, the Divine Command theory, what are put across are only subjective explanations for what constitutes a good action and what an evil action entail. This theory does notcapturethe totality of what morality is all about. Additionally, it contains general principles and at times they can be ineffective in the demarcation of particular actions that need judgment of whether they are moral or immoral. Due to the fact that morality requires a rational perspective and autonomy in decision making, this paper makes the conclusion that in as much as there is a lot of subjectivity in moral judgments, individuals can be guided by the power of reason to arrive at tenets that will ensure that they act in a morally justified manner.

Additionally, in as much as religion is becoming less and less popular among people of the world, especially those that are educated, there is a possibility that organised religion may lose its meaning to many people in many places in the future. However, this does not mean that morality will decline. This is because morality does not exclusively depend on organised religion for its objectivity. Even when there is no religious involvement in ethical matters, there can be other ways in which morality can be upheld. On the question whether morality in the African societies is influenced by religious factors, one can reason deductively that since they influence religious beliefs and religion influences morality, it is true to say that they do so indirectly through the Divine Command theory. However, while religious beliefs and teachings often provide a moral framework for many individuals and societies, morality can be grounded on secular or non-religious perspectives such as; Ethical systems based on reason, humanistic ethics, sympathy and social instinct, societal norms, and laws emanating from people's culture. This points to a conceptual link between culture of a society and its ethical norms, that is, what a certain culture or society holds as morally right or morally wrong. It is in this context that morality becomes a complex, multifaceted concept as individuals and cultures end up holding different moral viewpoints, beliefs and values. Therefore, it can be argued that, while from a historical perspective religion which is the foundation of Divine command theory has played significant role in shaping moral concepts, it cannot be an exclusive source or foundation of morality, individuals and societies can have moral values and act ethically regardless of their religious beliefs or being 'nones'.

Ultimately, reason will remain indispensable in such ethical processes and only when reason is missing can we definitively argue that morality is impossible to achieve. This study therefore categorically states that religion only gives a subjective perception of what constitutes a moral act and it is not a necessary condition for morality to be. Humans, therefore, should adopt a critical assessment of their moral principles and adopt them if and only if they adhere to the rules of right reason stipulated by logical principles such as non-contradiction, excluded middle, individuality and sufficient understanding.

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