

YOUTH MORAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: CAN MORAL PHILOSOPHY HELP?

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Abstract

Moral education in Nigerian school curricula exists in the form of religious instructions and civil education, where children learn the religious beliefs, practices and prohibitions of Christianity and Islam, and about other ethnicities in the country. In these engagements, children are merely told what to do, with little logical explanation for why moral principles are necessary, or why morality is important in general. The ultimate implication of this state of affairs is that the typical Nigerian child grows into an adult, following “the ways of the ancestors and religious principles,” without exposure to moral reasoning, or ever engaging in any kind of critical thinking concerning moral issues, or even knowing that such a thing exists, in the first place. With the recent explosion of moral decadence among Nigerian youths, facilitated by the decay of culture and the availability of social and other media, it seems evident that the existing system of moral education in Nigeria has been inefficient, partly because it is devoid of logic, critical thinking and capability for the development of independent mindset and initiative. Yet, no amount of technological development and scientific advancement would be worth anything without the concomitant adequate moral education and development of the individual to harness them appropriately. Inability to exercise coherent, independent reasoning inevitably takes its toll on human and national development, especially in the area of social cohesion and co-existence. Using the method of critical analysis, therefore, this paper advocates the revitalization of basic moral reasoning and critical thinking on moral issues in Nigerian basic education system, in order to fill this yawning gap in the national educational scheme. Data for the study have been acquired from library and archival resources.

Keywords: education, ethics, moral argument, naturalistic, Nigeria, youth

Introduction

This paper argues that lack of emphasis or the near absence of critical thinking and debate on moral issues in our social, political, religious and cultural education in Nigeria constitutes a fundamental lapse and, hence, a critical element in the problem of moral decadence among contemporary Nigerian

youths. To address this deficit, the paper draws attention to the reason, logic and critical thinking inherent to moral philosophy, to inject natural reason and logic into our existing moral institutions, beginning from basic school curricular. In so doing, the paper seeks to boost the prevailing religious and cultural conceptions of morality, and to ultimately catalyze young people to appreciate the need to make intellectual moral discussion an integral part of life in essentially concrete terms.

Religious moral instructions in Nigerian schools are good and commendable because they are generally aimed at instilling the fear of God and love of neighbour in the consciousness of school children. So, these instructions have their place in the social and cultural development of people in society. However, they have inherent limitations: in large part, these instructions tend to emphasize the rewards of heaven and hell, and have rather little to impart about the social and pragmatic importance of morality itself. In other words, religious moral instructions heavily rely on generating and awakening scrupulosity in children, with little argumentation process and critical thinking. When children inevitably grow up and are ready to think for themselves, the unscrupulous ones quite easily put aside the religious moral instructions they received in early childhood since these instructions have not originated from their own independent thinking and conviction, but have been forced on them from without. So, they find it hard to relate to the threat of hell or the promise of heavenly bliss, which sound distant and exoteric. They then begin to interrogate these religious teachings against the backdrop of secular reason and commonsense, sometimes even treating them with hostility or sarcasm, and ditching them entirely. They reckon that no dead people have ever returned to earth to tell if the claims about heaven and hell are factual indeed, and that no one has seen God. Only the living are capable of enjoying life. Since this physical life is the only reality humans can lay claim to here and now, it should be enjoyed to the fullest, so that when death comes—if it comes—it would take care of itself as the ultimate destiny of all the living. Meanwhile, those who retain these teachings do so mostly out of conformism and the bandwagon effect, rather than out of rational conviction.

The search for empirical knowledge in 7th and 6th century BCE Greece saw the rise of scholars (philosophers) whose works focused on the natural, external world of human experience. Within the next century, however, intellectual attention was riveted on the human person, their nature and their conduct, as a being existing in a larger social space shared with other human beings having equal stake in that space. In these engagements, what

the Greeks did differently was to maintain a critical distance from the extant religious and mythological inclinations of the larger society. Using ordinary human intellect and natural reason, they raised logical questions concerning, not merely the nature of reality, but the place of the human person in the universe of experience. They jettisoned the old ways of thinking and the traditional methods of seeking knowledge, wherein ideas and opinions were accepted and endorsed merely on the basis of religion and culture, and opted for the critical method of inquiry, where ideas—any idea whatsoever—could be carefully scrutinized and radically evaluated by independent scholars with the tools of natural reason and logic. This is the basis of scholarship and rational inquiry that has evolved, and has led to the development of human knowledge and civilisation, science and technology, and the different areas of human endeavour subsisting today. Argumentation, logic and critical thinking are the smooth hands operating behind the scene to make all these things possible, even when no one appears to notice, or to pay close attention. Since these factors have been the bedrock of moral and social development of human societies the world over, and neglecting or ignoring them has been part of the underlying causes of the decline of human civilizations throughout history, it is the considered submission of this paper that Nigeria direly needs these elements to reclaim its pride of place in the scheme of things in the world, beginning from the early education.

Moral philosophy

How did philosophers understand and approach ethical inquiry? Historically, although there had been earlier moral persuasions, such as those of Confucius and Pericles, formal philosophical moral inquiry has probably been mostly influenced by Socrates' attitude, or belief, that "An unexamined life is not worth living."¹ Prior to Socrates, philosophical inquiry had focused on the natural physical order, until Protagoras turned attention to the human person by arguing that "man is the measure of all things."² In the wake of Plato's inauguration of social theory, the idea that the human person—an essentially social being—exists in a *polis* or a social arrangement, rather than a vacuum, was formally introduced into scholarship. Philosophy became "a form of life which is necessarily demanded of man ... [as] norms of behaviour ... under

¹ D. J. Sullivan, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1964), 5

² S. E. Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 32

the name of ‘ethics’.”³ Ever since, philosophers have aimed explain and to critically justify different forms of theory about how humans should conduct themselves in the *polis* to ascertain the continued existence of society.

When moral philosophers raise critical questions about social institutions and practices, as did Plato, for instance, in his famous critique of the Athenian democratic institution in the *Republic*, they do so through the skillful use of persuasive argumentation, with the aim of suggesting a better way forward for a more meaningful ordering of society and social life.⁴ For the one who claims that an existing model is inefficient must not only establish the truth of the claim and reconstruct the model; the critic must also provide plausible reasons for deeming the new model preferable and better the one to be replaced.

Against this backdrop, ethics, in philosophy, is understood to be the attempt to arrive at a systematic understanding of the nature of morality and what it requires of humans both as individuals and as a society.⁵ While morality itself involves the *practical* issue of how humans (*qua* social beings) ought to live and behave towards one another, ethics is a *theoretical* inquiry into the underlying principles of human moral beliefs and actions.⁶ Therefore, moral philosophy is concerned with human conduct that is, at least, potentially moral in nature; and human attitudinal disposition and conduct are said to be involved with morality if such attitude or conduct can potentially—even if remotely—“affect the wellbeing of anyone” in society, including the moral agent and others.⁷

For a typical moral philosopher, therefore, ethics is not an end in itself, but simply a means of inculcating in humans the necessary disposition that enhances social well-being. It is not merely an attempt to achieve some theoretical knowledge of the human natural capability for the expression of moral sentiments.⁸ Beyond that, it is a critical evaluation or assessment of

³ R. Schaeffler, ‘Philosophy,’ in Karl Rhaner, et al. (eds), *Sacramentum Mundi: an Encyclopedia of Theology*, vol 5 (New York: Herder, 1968), 5.

⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, in Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse, (eds), *Great Dialogues of Plato*, (New York: Signet Classic, 1999), 118-422.

⁵ J. Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 13.

⁶ T. L. Beauchamp and J. F. Childress, *The Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 5th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

⁷ E. Barcalow, *Moral Philosophy*, (California: Wordsworth, 1994), 4.

⁸ U. S. Odozor and Christopher O. Agulanna, ‘Biology and Ethics: A Case for Aristotle’s Theory of Moral Habituation,’ *Canadian Social Science Journal*, vol.8, no.5, (2012), 153-161.

those ways of acting which, even though human beings may feel less naturally inclined to follow, are nevertheless indispensable for their corporate survival. In all these, it is taken for granted that humans are rational creatures that are able to appreciate and elicit commendable behaviour through the training and development of the relevant natural faculties that they already possess.

Still, in ancient Greece, philosophers understood that it did not make sense to expect that everyone in society had an adequate comprehension of the concepts used in passing moral judgments. Thus, methodologically, these scholars evolved a process of *dialectics*, in which ethical concepts (such as ‘goodness’, ‘happiness’, ‘virtue’, ‘piety’, and ‘courage’) were rigorously examined and critically interrogated by a skillful use of philosophical argumentation, in order to achieve some basic understanding, on the basis of which ethical judgments can rest logically. Socrates’ continual engagement of Athenian citizens on the ultimate questions of human existence, as well as his attack of the skepticism of the Sophists on the notions of truth and goodness, testify to the effectiveness, as well as serve as a good example, of this method of inquiry.

The question of what ethics is has been variously answered by philosophers.⁹ This need not be found as surprising, though, because the philosophical discipline strives against consensus-seeking by default.¹⁰ Usually, philosophers hardly work towards agreement and consensus on issues; rather, individual philosophers have an almost incurable tendency to break away from existing traditions of thought, in utter expression of independent mindset in the market place of ideas. Thus, it would be a mistake to suppose that moral philosophers have maintained the same point of view, or any single method or aim in their inquiry into human morality. This should not discourage those interested in the subject, because, in the midst of such seeming chaos and discontinuity lies the fundamental question of human well-being and how best to attain it out there in the social space, which is the focus of most ethical theories that have actually been advanced by philosophers and social theorists. Morality and ethics are of direct or immediate interest to practical life; it is, therefore, hardly surprising that, following the incursion of evolutionary biology into ethics in the second half of the nineteenth century, teeming scholars from diverse fields, including the social and natural sciences,

⁹ O. A. Johnson, *Ethics: Selections from Classical and Contemporary Writers*, 6th ed. (London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1989), 11.

¹⁰ E. A. Maziarz, ‘Philosophy,’ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol.11, (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1967), 275f.

have taken unprecedented interest in the subject.¹¹ Subsequent research has made remarkable contributions and widened the scope of the study, thereby furnishing philosophers with insight, more robust and comprehensive understanding, as well as deeper appreciation of their subject of interest, from the point of view of natural science.

In spite of the above inroads, ethical inquiry has been traditionally divided into two main branches, namely *normative ethics* and *meta-ethics*. Not until later in mid-twentieth century was the subdiscipline of Applied Ethics introduced to address the concrete moral controversies trailing the advancement of science and technology, through the application of knowledge gained from the first two branches of ethical inquiry. In what follows, an attempt is made to briefly explain these three approaches to Moral Philosophy.

a. Normative ethics

Humans constantly face situations in which they need to make important decisions about their conduct, particularly conduct that would affect others, remotely or otherwise.¹² Normative ethics is, from the theoretical perspective, an attempt to seek out and outline how such decisions might be intellectually guided. Here, the philosopher is in search of the morally right option open to the moral agent who faces a moral situation. As the name suggests, normative ethics is concerned with “norms” which determine behavioural patterns in a given human individual or community. Typical questions of normative ethics include the following: “What kind of person should I be?” “How ought we to behave?” and “What is the right thing to do?” Sometimes, normative ethical statements take the form of actual moral judgments: “You ought to be more

¹¹ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, (New York: D. Appleton, 1871); Thomas H. Huxley, ‘The Struggle for Existence in Human Society,’ *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays*. (New York: D. Appleton, 1896), 195-236; Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: A New Synthesis*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975); Robert J. Richards, A Defense of Evolutionary Ethics. *Biology and Philosophy*. 1: 265–293; Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976/2006); Frans de Waal, *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996); Michael Ruse Edward O. Wilson, ‘Moral Philosophy as Applied Science,’ in Elliot Sober (Ed.), *Conceptual Issues in Evolutionary Biology* (3rd ed.), (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 555-573.

¹² P. Singer, *How Are We to Live? Ethics in an Age of Self-interest*, (Australia: Random House, 1993), 1ff.

considerate because your partner is disabled”; and “Child abuse is morally wrong”.¹³

Of course, not all moral evaluations are reasonable. For a moral evaluation to be reasonable, it must be based on good—justifiable—reasons.¹⁴ Thus, the philosophical element of ethics lies in the justification of moral evaluations. It is not enough to condemn or approve human actions and institutions (as is the case in the other areas of philosophical inquiry, such as social and political philosophy); the moral philosopher must say why the action or institution is morally bad, and why his preferred position is right or better. In other words, he must demonstrate the reasonableness of the judgment, and his belief about the facts must be within the ambits of sound reason and logic. This is because normative judgments are based on more fundamental, general moral principles, which have been observed, over time, to have a bearing on the human situation and well-being. For example, my singular and more specific moral judgment that “Professor Smith’s sexual abuse of his female student is wrong,” is based on the more fundamental principle that “All sexual abuse is morally wrong.”¹⁵ At this point, philosophers adduce different theories to justify a given ethical standard or moral evaluation.

Normative ethics is often regarded as the hub of moral philosophy due to the fact that it provides the raw materials for the other two subdisciplines. For instance, the meta-ethicist would not have concepts to analyze if normative and descriptive ethicists did not first use them in carrying out normative judgments and describing actual social moral institutions. In other words, meta-ethical questions are based on normative judgments and value-neutral scientific descriptions of real human societies, like the following: What do ‘virtue’ and ‘justice’ or ‘honesty’ and ‘premium’ mean as used in the normative statement, “Justice is the greatest of the virtues” and in “Honesty is regarded as a premium among the Akan people of Ghana”? Similarly, Applied Ethics is based on the assumption that normative ethics is a possibility, because it is basically an attempt to extend normative ethics to concrete human situations, such as abortion, euthanasia, sex without marriage, prostitution, and racism. More specifically, a judgment given in Applied Ethics, for example, that environmental protection is morally obligatory, seems to be based on the

¹³ K. Nielsen, ‘Ethics, Problems of,’ in Paul Edwards, (ed), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol.3, (London: Macmillan, 1967), 118.

¹⁴ Barcalow, *Moral Philosophy*, 4-5.

¹⁵ Barcalow, *Moral Philosophy*, 5.

more fundamental *normative* assumption and principle that unrestrained environmental degradation is morally wrong.

In normative ethics, therefore, there is a tacit assumption that humans are both capable of measuring up to and falling short of the acceptable standards of proper moral behaviour in a given social group. For this reason, philosophers' aim in normative ethics is to criticise human actions and institutions against the backdrop of the *ideal* conduct which ought to have been adopted for the common or greater good. It is along these lines that they developed a cluster of theories, all of which have elicited a great deal of interest and been widely discussed in all intellectual discussions of human morality.

b. Meta-ethics

Socrates has been famous over the past two and a half millenniums for going about trying to determine the extent to which people actually understood the terms they employed in daily discussions and for passing moral judgment.¹⁶ Following him, subsequent moral philosophers have also attempted to achieve, through a sustained, rigorous and exhaustive linguistic analysis, a systematic understanding of the meaning of the concepts used in normative moral discourse, or in normative moral judgments, some of which include 'happiness', 'virtue', 'goodness', 'justice', and 'evil'. The analysis involves reexamining the ordinary, pedestrian definitions of ethically interesting terms, exposing their inadequacies, and redefining them in ways that are consistent with reason and actual experience. It is only when the question of definition is settled that moral claims and evaluations may proceed. This approach is readily found in many of Plato's dialogues; for instance, Socrates' undermining of Euthyphro's initial confidence that *piety* meant 'what is pleasing to the gods,' and of Thrasymachus' definition of *justice* as the interest of the strong.¹⁷

'Meta' is Greek for 'above' or 'beyond'. Just as *metaphysics* is concerned both with the ontological status of things and other philosophical issues that presumably transcend the physical order, such as human origin, destiny and essence, death and the soul, so meta-ethics stands beyond normative ethics and raises salient questions about the ontological status of moral claims and judgments and the basic ethical concepts – happiness, virtue, goodness,

¹⁶ Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 34-45.

¹⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, 118-122.

justice, evil, and piety. In analyzing ethical terms, meta-ethics tries to determine the extent to which a given normative or moral judgment can be legitimately sustained within the limits of reason. Thus, meta-ethics is not so much concerned with passing moral judgments as with their analysis for clearer understanding and eventual deployment in the course of formal reasoning, discussion and debate.

c. *Applied ethics*

Traditional moral philosophy has, on several occasions, been wrongfully and, perhaps, even misleadingly depicted as a futile enterprise with no bearing on actual human situation. In this passage, Walker expresses such sentiment as follows:

Many moral philosophers will say that in their philosophical reflection they are not “merely” reflecting on their own moral experience (much less mirroring it), but are tapping into moral reality, or the moral realm, or the structure of practical reason, or the nature of the right or the good. But this assumes ... that the moral reality, realm, nature, or structure is something accessible and determinate *quite apart from anyone’s acquired experience of them*, and that the moral philosopher can tell when she or he has grasped these things as they really are *apart from his or her thoroughly tutored and cultured experience of them*.¹⁸

She further urges that moral philosophy take cognizance of actual human experience since morality is a phenomenon that fundamentally “arises and goes on between people.”¹⁹ Walker is, however, merely pontificating on the obvious. All through the history of philosophy, moral discourse has both essentially and substantively rested on the interplay between individual human interests and general wellbeing; moral thought in philosophical circles has tended to focus almost exclusively on the attempt to strike a balance between the two. There is no known single theory in traditional ethics that does not, at least, acknowledge this much.

One sense in which moral philosophy may be said to stand outside of particular human societies and their moral peculiarities is, as has been demonstrated above, basically in metaethics, which focuses on analyzing

¹⁸ M. U. Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5; added emphasis.

¹⁹ M. U. Walker, *Moral Understandings*, 5.

ethical concepts. When a moral philosopher shines light on the idea of good, evil, justice or human rights, for example, he or she normally does not typically need to do so from the point of view of any specific human society considered in isolation from the rest of the world. The reason is simple: philosophy deals with ideas and concepts as they are abstracted from real human societies; not with anthropological data collection. Since the philosopher analyzes concepts based on diverse schools of thought, the philosopher would quite naturally approach such concepts in abstraction from a particular society's (as opposed to every society's) ideation of the concept in question. Making progress in his or her inquiry demands that he or she stand outside of particular societies and search for what these societies have in common as human societies, since his interest is not merely in the accumulation of data, but in reaching conclusions that are logically applicable across board, using natural, practical reason. This hardly entails that the philosopher views morality as something removed from human beings.

Be these considerations as they may, discussions and debates on moral issues among philosophy scholars inevitably culminated in the development of an entire field of moral inquiry in philosophy whose sole aim is applying conclusions obtained from normative moral philosophy and meta-ethics to concrete human situations and experience. This mid-twentieth century entrant is known as Applied Ethics. Interest in this area extends to the topical issues of abortion, prostitution, racism, pornography, euthanasia, and all the issues that have trailed the advancement of medical science and technology, such as stem cell research, the human genome project, artificial birth control, environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources, as well as assisted suicide and transgenderism. These issues are closely tied to human experience and situation. More recently, philosophers have debated the ethical implications of replacing humans with robots and cyborgs in health care and the hospitality and manufacturing industries. It is, to this extent, a false notion that moral philosophy has not taken adequate cognizance of concrete moral issues of the human condition.

Moral reasoning

Some moral judgments are readily appreciated and accepted by most people in society. For example, under normal circumstances, almost everyone would agree that it is wrong to kill an innocent human being, particularly if such a person poses no obvious threat to anyone. In like manner, most normal people would both believe and accept that taking someone else's property without

their knowledge and consent is definitely a morally wrong thing to do. This understanding is so pervasive that even those who appropriate other people's property usually have to do so shielding their identities from the public, sometimes under the cover of darkness. This is because there is tacit acknowledgement of the fact that such act is morally wrong, or at least socially reprehensible. In the few exceptions, such as when a starving individual decides to steal some food to survive, it is still thought that the very act of stealing somewhat constitutes an aberration or a moral breach. However, not all moral problems can be resolved as easily without some critical thinking and reasoning. As in law, some moral issues require close, critical examination of the facts of the matter.²⁰ For this reason, some moral issues have tended to elicit strong and long-running debates. Such moral issues include abortion, use of information and communication technology, euthanasia, the nature and extent of human rights, the exploration of nature and use of environmental resources, human cloning, stem cell research, and capital punishment.²¹

Human beings are said to be rational by nature in the sense that they are endowed with the capability to exercise reason and intelligence. That is, under normal circumstances, humans behave in certain ways for certain reasons. Psychologists, brain scientists and crime investigators are able to predict human behaviour because there is a tacit assumption that, given certain situations, human beings would most likely think in certain ways and respond to these circumstances by acting in certain ways. People in society know that they should conduct themselves in certain ways for reasons bordering on factors like self-respect, mutual interest, survival, and general wellbeing of their proximate and remote community. At first most people simply comply

²⁰ Uche S. Odozor, 'How Biology Guides Ethics,' in Martin Asiegbu and J. Chidozie Chukwuokolo, (eds), *Frontiers of Knowledge in Philosophy: Cutting Edge Issues. Proceedings of the Biennial Conference and General Meeting of the Nigerian Philosophical Association*; (2014), 211-230; Uche S. Odozor, et al. 'Human Morality as an Evolutionary Illusion: Philosophical Exploration and Critique,' *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, vol.20, no.1, 89-112.

²¹ James D. Watson, 'Moving toward the Clonal Man: Is This What We Want?' *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol.227, no.5, (May 1971), 50-53; Barcalow, *Moral Philosophy*, 4; Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 59-62, 93-96; Jason S. Robert, 'Model Systems in Stem Cell Biology,' *BioEssays*, vol.26, no.9, (2004), 1005-1012; Andrew I. Cohen and Christopher H. Wellman (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); Philip J. Nickel, 'Ethical Issues in Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research,' in Kristen R. Monroe, Ronald Miller, and Jerome Tobis (eds.), *Fundamentals of the Stem Cell Debate: The Scientific, Religious, Ethical and Political Issues*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008); George W. Reynolds, *Ethics in Information Technology*, 5th edition, (Australia: Cengage, 2005).

by following the rules of conduct in the community. As they grow up and get more education and exposure, however, they begin to think for themselves and to interrogate the existing social norms and practices in the light of more recent, recalcitrant experience, either in private life or in the public sphere.²² In all these, reason and logic are the primary instruments with which progress is made in moral development; such is the central, indispensable role which reason plays in moral thinking, conduct, and development. To this end, Maziarz states that:

In traditional thought, the intellect has always been viewed as directive of human action. As in art, so in moral science, reason serves as a counselor and guide affording practical principles for all of man's activity. Two main areas have consistently been recognized: ethics, relating to the sphere of individual man and his responsibility, and politics, concerned with man's social and political nature.²³

According to Fagothey, "the function of Reason is to promote the art of life."²⁴ This means conclusively that reason cannot be divorced from human daily living; and Socrates' dictum becomes all the more relevant, given that the importance of moral goodness in the human being can hardly be overemphasized.

Contrary to Kant's thinking, moral reasoning is not a matter of following hard and fast rules and obligations; rather, the specific features of a given moral situation play some important role. Thus, for MacMurray, "Reason is the capacity to behave, not in terms of our own nature, but in terms of our knowledge of the nature of the world outside."²⁵ An example is when an older person refrains from shouting to a child that is running across traffic to avoid distracting the child and eventually causing the accident in the process. In this interpretation, reason involves the ability to adapt to the prevailing circumstances outside the person, in such a way as to remain absolutely relevant to that situation. Thus, reason and the exercise of it entail going outside of oneself to ensure that others are equally worthy of our consideration in some obvious ways. It stands somewhat in contrast to our

²² Johnson, *Ethics: Selections from Classical and Contemporary Writers*, 3.

²³ Maziarz, 'Philosophy,' 280.

²⁴ A. Fagothey, *Right and Reason: Ethics in Theory and Practice*, (St Louis: Mosby, 1953), 25.

²⁵ Cited in Alfred N. Whitehead, *The Function of Reason*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 4.

natural impulse to impose our own subjective way of life and attitudes on others.

Reason is used to draw inferences from a set of premises giving information about what the facts are, together with the fact that we have to know something about how the world goes, as Barcalow suggests.²⁶ To put it simply, reason plays practically the same role in ethics as it does in deductive logic. Knowing something about how the world goes as well as certain facts that have been established as being the case, one can legitimately proceed to draw the moral inference, but which must not fall outside the scope of the available information—even if tacitly—in the premises, exactly as in deductive argumentation. For instance, when one knows from experience or in principle that wickedness is an evil purposely done to harm others and then gets to learn actually that John has done something wicked to Tracy, one can legitimately draw the inference that John's action towards Tracy is immoral, evil, unjust or bad. This is a sound argument as long as the relevant facts about the act have been reliably gathered or established, and are really or truly the case. In all this, one is able to make this inference only because of the use of reason, without which it would be difficult, if not impossible. For this and related consideration, the logical justification proffered in the course of moral reasoning would naturally take the form of an empirical statement that is absolutely grounded experience; and it must answer the question, Why? Here are some examples of the structure of argumentation in moral philosophy:

A:

1. Anything that negatively affects someone's wellbeing is immoral.
2. Stealing negatively affects people's wellbeing by dispossessing them of their legitimate belongings.
3. Therefore, stealing is immoral.

B:

- 1: Any action that hinders good health of mind and body is wrong.
- 2: Selling and using of dangerous and illegal substances hinders good health of mind and body and potentially threatens social peace and stability.

Conclusion: Therefore, drug dealing is morally wrong.

C:

²⁶ Barcalow *Moral Philosophy*, 2-3.

- 1: It is morally wrong to kill the innocent and the defenseless.
- 2: Abortion involves the killing of innocent, unborn baby who is defenseless against its mothers, even where the mother's life and wellbeing is not threatened.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is morally wrong to have an abortion if there is no threat to the mother's life.

D:

- 1: Anything that demeans human beings or reduces their moral status is intrinsically evil.
- 2: Pornography and sexual abuse dehumanize women by treating them as objects of pleasure.

Conclusion: Therefore, pornography and sexual abuse of women are intrinsically evil.

E:

- 1: It is morally unacceptable to have no regard for the wellbeing of future generations.
- 2: Depletion of environmental resources through illegal mining, poaching of wild animals and greenhouse gas emission through the release of industrial waste destroys nature and constitutes mindless disregard for the wellbeing of future generations.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is morally unacceptable to engage in these practices.

F:

- 1: All self-destructive behaviour is morally condemnable.
- 2: Premarital sex is self-destructive: it encourages marital infidelity, destroys dignity and sense of self-worth, potentially leads to unprepared pregnancy and STDs, causing young people to drop out of school, thereby keeping them from realising their life ambitions.

Conclusion: To that extent, premarital sex is morally condemnable.

Some of the moral issues depicted in the above examples—for example, exploitation of nature, pornography, premarital sex, and abortion—have been hotly debated by scholars, with the dawn of postmodernism and its new conception of freedom.²⁷ However, these debates have boosted human intellectual development and expanded the frontiers of knowledge as well. In moral philosophy, reason and logic are equally used to evaluate the ideas of

²⁷ See an entire anthology by Cohen and Wellman, *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics*.

teeming philosophers, sociologists, evolutionary biologists, political ideologists and other social theorists, who have, in the past several centuries, put forward different ethical theories to address the prevailing moral issues in the social and political space they found themselves. Unfortunately, space would not permit the discussion of these theories.

Conclusion

Through the knowledge and reason that are inherent in it, therefore, there is neither argument or question whether moral philosophy has a lot of contributions to make in the moral formation of the teeming number of young people passing through Nigeria's education. When young people find good, plausible and experientially defensible reasons to desist from rape, drugs, and other kinds of crime; when they realize that watching pornographic films directly affects their productivity in academics and in business, such realization would naturally enhance their chances and ability to become more responsible citizens of society, because they would be much better able to relate to the logic behind such moral reasoning than to the threats of punishment in hell they have been received in religious instructions all their lives. For one thing, the critical thinking encountered in, and demanded by, moral philosophy would remind them of the natural and logical consequences of lifestyle preference here and now; whereas hell, which is only encountered in the hereafter, seems to be the product of phantasm and human imagination. Even more important, not only is moral philosophy a training in logical reasoning and rationality, it equally expands one's knowledge because knowledge is required to be able to put logic to a good use; and given that a well-educated person is an asset to society, it is hardly an exaggeration or wishful thinking to suppose that such exposure to moral reasoning early on would one day definitely culminate in the raising of generations of young people who are both emotionally and intellectually equipped to face the challenges that life necessarily brings and, in the long run, generations of mentally stable older folks in whose hands the fate of the entire human race can be confidently placed.

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