

**MORALITY WITHOUT RELIGION ANY TRUTH: RE-THINKING TAI
SOLARINISM***

***P.O.O. Ottuh*, Ph.D.**

Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy

Delta State University

Abraka, Nigeria

E-Mail: pottuh@delsu.edu.ng; ottuhpeterGmail.com

***John A. Ottuh*, Ph.D**

Nehemiah Bible College Okwokoko,

Warri, Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The task which this paper wishes to accomplish is, to enable readers to re-think clearly and critically about the various human phenomena that we call “religious” and “morality” and analyzing them from the perspective of Tai Solarinism. Arising from its findings, it is therefore the position of this paper that, morality is both an *a priori* and *a posteriori* experience, knowing fully well that both realms of experience do not rule out theism. For the latter re-enforces societal morality.

Key Words: Morality, Religion, Re-Thinking, Truth, Tai Solarinism

Introduction

The academic study of religion and morality take a global and pluralistic approach, looking at religion and morality critically and analytically, with as much objectivity as possible, while also attempting to develop and maintain sensitivity to subtle and sometimes inexpressible levels of human meaning.

Religion and morality have been closely intertwined; however, the latter can exist without the former, while the former cannot. This is true whether we go back within Greek

philosophy or within Christianity and Judaism. This paper will not try to step beyond these confines. The paper further attempts to explain the main options as they have occurred historically. The purpose of proceeding historically is to substantiate the claim that morality and religion have been inseparable until very recently, and that our moral vocabulary is still deeply infused with this history. Tai Solarin is an advocate of morality that is devoid of religion. However, morality without religion, any truth?

Morality and Religion: A Conceptual Approach

Etymologically, the term 'moral' comes from the Latin *mos*, which means custom or habit, and it is a translation of the Greek *ethos*, which means roughly the same thing, and is the origin of the term 'ethics' (Adams, 1999). In contemporary non-technical use, the two terms are more or less interchangeable, though 'ethics' has slightly more flavour of theory, and has been associated with the prescribed practice of various professions (e.g., medical ethics, etc.).

On the other hand, "morality" is from the Latin word, *moralitas* meaning "manner, character, and proper behavior". It has three principal meanings. In its first, descriptive usage, morality means a code of conduct or belief concerning matters of what is moral or immoral. In its descriptive usage, morals are arbitrarily and subjectively created by society, philosophy, religion, and/or individual conscience (Smith, 1987). An example of the descriptive usage could be "common conceptions of morality have changed significantly over time." The arbitrariness of morality stems from the observation that actions that may be deemed moral in one culture in time may not be classified as such in others or in a different time.

The subjectivity of morality is shown by the observation that actions or beliefs which by themselves do not seem to cause overt harm may be considered immoral, e.g. marrying someone of the same or opposite gender, being an atheist or a theist, etc. Descriptive morality does not explain why anything should be considered immoral, only that it may be classified so. While for the most part immoral acts are classified as such because they cause clear harm, this is not by any means an all-encompassing criterion; it's possible that many moral beliefs are due to prejudice, ignorance or even hatred.

In its second, normative and universal sense, morality refers to an ideal code of belief and conduct which would be preferred by the sane "moral" person, under specified conditions. In this "definitive" sense, claims are made such as "Killing is immoral." While descriptive morality would not necessarily disagree that killing is immoral, it would prefer to say, "Many believe that killing is immoral." A refined adherence to this latter position is known as moral skepticism, in which the unchanging existence of a rigid, universal, objective moral "truth" is rejected (Gimbutas, 1989).

In its third usage, 'morality' is synonymous with ethics. Ethics is the systematic philosophical study of the moral domain. Ethics seeks to address questions such as how a moral outcome can be achieved in a specific situation (this is applied ethics), how moral values

should be determined (this is normative ethics), what morals people actually abide by (this is descriptive ethics), what the fundamental nature of ethics or morality is, including whether it has any objective justification (this is meta-ethics), and how moral capacity or moral agency develops and what its nature is (this is moral psychology).

Some evolutionary biologists, particularly socio-biologists, believe that morality is a product of evolutionary forces acting at an individual level and also at the group level through group selection (though what degree this actually occurs is a controversial topic in evolutionary theory). Some socio-biologists contend that the set of behaviors that constitute morality evolved largely because they provided possible survival and/or reproductive benefits (i.e. increased evolutionary success). Humans consequently evolved "pro-social" emotions, such as feelings of empathy or guilt, in response to these moral behaviors. In this respect, morality is not absolute, but relative and constitutes any set of behaviors that encourage human cooperation based on their ideology. Biologists contend that all social animals, from ants to elephants, have modified their behaviors, by restraining selfishness in order to make group living worthwhile. Human morality though sophisticated and complex relative to other animals, is essentially a natural phenomenon that evolved to restrict excessive individualism and foster human cooperation. On this view, moral codes are ultimately founded on emotional instincts and intuitions that were selected for in the past because they aided survival and reproduction (Smith, 1987).

On the other hand, the term "religion" refers to both the personal practices related to communal faith and to group rituals and communication stemming from shared conviction. "Religion" is sometimes used interchangeably with "faith" or "belief system," but it is more socially defined than personal convictions, and it entails specific behaviors, respectively. Religion has been defined in a wide variety of ways. Most definitions attempt to find a balance somewhere between overly sharp definition and meaningless generalities. Some sources have tried to use formalistic, doctrinal definitions while others have emphasized experiential, emotive, intuitive, volitional and ethical factors. Most definitions usually include:

- a. a notion of the transcendent or numinous, often, but not always, in the form of theism;
- b. a cultural or behavioural aspect of ritual, liturgy and organized worship, often involving a priesthood, and societal norms of morality (*ethos*) and virtue (*arete*); and
- c. a set of myths or sacred truths held in reverence or believed by adherents (Onimhawo & Ottuh, 2009).

Some religious scholars have put forward a definition of religion that avoids the reductionism of the various sociological and psychological disciplines that reduce religion to its component factors. Religion may be defined as the presence of a belief in the sacred or the holy. For example Rudolf Otto's "The Idea of the Holy," formulated in 1917, defines the essence of religious awareness as awe, a unique blend of fear and fascination before the divine.

Friedrich Schleiermacher in the late 18th century defined religion as a “feeling of absolute dependence” (cited in Onimhawo & Ottuh, 2009).

Who is Tai Solarin?

Tai Solarin was a Nigerian, born in 1922. He had his first education in a Nigerian missionary school and undergraduate degree in history and geography at the University of Manchester, Great Britain, in 1952 (*New York Times*, 1994). While in Nigeria, he became the principal of Molusi College from 1952 to 1955. Because Molusi's governing board forced him to open each school day with hymns and prayers, and march his students to church every Sunday, he protested and eventually quitted the job (*New York Times*, 7 August, 1994). He started his own school in 1956, calling it the Mayflower School, followed by the Mayflower Junior School in 1959, both located in Ikenne, southwestern Nigeria, where Tai lived for the rest of his natural life.

He briefly returned to England to pursue graduate studies at the University of London (*New York Times*, 1994). Then, in 1976, he turned the original Mayflower school over to the government, though it was still run under Tai's direct guidance and innovative principles until his death. Solarin also became chairman of the People's Bank of Nigeria in 1989 (Allen, 1993/1994), a position he held until his death. Tai Solarin married Sheila Mary Tuer in 1951 and they had two children. His mother was a devout Christian, a member of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), but he always maintained a loving relationship with her and all of his family, loyally fulfilling his brother's wishes by personally overseeing his religious burial in 1965 in spite of Tai's personal atheism. Solarin died in his home on July 27, 1994. The most famous and controversial atheist and secular humanist in African history (if not the only one of any real renown) was the Nigerian nationalist. Tai Solarin sadly passed away at the age of 72 in 1994.

Concept of Tai Solarinism

Tai Solarinism was coined and invented by me in order to scholarly sum up his atheistic and humanist thoughts. Tai Solarinism therefore, from my own perspective means the religious and humanistic ideologies, beliefs and life of Tai Solarin. The central issues of Tai Solarinism are well articulated in Tai Solarin atheistic, humanistic and political worldviews. However, this present discourse is limited to his worldview on morality and religion.

In contrast to the free-will position advocated by most people, Tai Solarinism places strong emphasis, not only on the abiding goodness of the original humanity, but also on the total ruin of human accomplishments and the frustration of the whole humanity and society caused by, in most cases, religion and its likes. More broadly, Tai Solarinism is virtually synonymous with secular humanism and atheism. For Tai Solarin, religion is a social thing with the power to disintegrate and destroy any human society.

Tai Solarinism on Morality without Religion

As atheist and vehement critic of irrationality and hypocrisy, Tai Solarin has few kind words for religion in his country. Tai proclaims that Nigeria is dying today because of religion and due to her outrageous religious beliefs (Solarin, 1971). According to Tai Solarin, Africans are taught by religion and superstition to fear too many things including witches, angels, the devil or satan, thunder, lightning, nocturnal and birds. For him, all these objects generate fears. He told the tale of a magistrate in Lagos who refused to decide a case because he believed "juju" men were casting spells on him (Solarin, 1959). His successor, Kofi Mensah, recounts tales of taboos and superstitions that have thwarted attempts at halting the spread of disease, the feeding of starving regions, or the controlling of population growth, as well as prevented progress in industry, education, and human rights (especially for women). The worst bane of African under development according to Tai is the chronic dependence on some unknown deities to solve all earthly problems (cited in Mensah, 1991).

Solarin says that blacks hold onto their God just as the drunken man holds on to the street lamp-post for physical support only. He paints an interesting analogy from a childhood memory. He made a long journey with his mother once, who gave him a bicycle to help him finish the journey which was really just a wheel he had to hit with a stick to keep it going. He says that without the bicycle he would never have made the forty mile walk, but upon reflection he realized that he had really carried himself *and* the bicycle all along. For him, religion is like that bicycle. We only need it when we lack the confidence and determination to face the world alone (Solarin, 1959). Solarin believed that in order to get the young Africans weaned from their almost congenital reliance on fate they must be educated to stand on their feet. And the best way to accomplish that is for the government to copy the Mayflower School throughout Nigeria.

When Tai writes about his own moral and philosophical ideals, his true humanism is well revealed. "I believe in man," Tai declares, "by 'man' I mean man, woman and child. I believe that my duty to man is total service...outside man I owe none else any duties" (Solarin, 1965 also see Adenubi, 1985 p.65). He further asserts that "anything that man wants to do must be done by man *himself*. Anywhere he wants to go, he must, himself, aggressively propel himself in that direction." These are true humanistic ideals, echoed by secular humanists the world over. Tai taught that prayer is useless, and that it is better to teach people how to solve their problems, and to give them the power and freedom to act. Hence he said, "I do not want to be seen giving alms to the poor". Tai once wrote, "I want to be seen teaching the poor how to live creatively by making use of his hands and feet" (Solarin, 1965, in Adenubi, 1985 p.75).

His humanism had led him to express a fondness for the governments of China and the U.S.S.R., because of their socialist guarantees of free medicine and education for all. But he still upholds the ideals of freedom and democracy. One of Tai's favorite freethinkers is Robert G. Ingersoll, whose writings gave him the courage to accept his doubts and speak out against

what he believed was harmful or untrue. Tai said of Ingersoll: "He tore off the dingy curtains across my mind's eye, and let me stand, unafraid, to wend my way through life" (Allen, 1993/1994).

Many have tried to criticize secular humanism and atheism in particular, for leaving people unhappy and lost without a moral compass to guide them. Tai Solarin said that all are rubbish. He maintained great comfort and infinite happiness living as a humanist. Although he had always taught open defiance of conservatism and deadly orthodoxy, he has also taught that people can become, and should become, whatever they choose to be.

Morality, says Tai "is a question of leadership. He cited great atheist humanitarians who reformed their countries, whom he admired, including Jawaharlal Nehru (first Prime Minister of independent India) and Kemal Ataturk (who led the formation of the secular republic in Turkey) (Solarin, 1972). Tai believed wholeheartedly in the Golden Rule, and ensures that it is the basis of his students' moral education. He taught morals to his students by telling the stories of famous people who have done well through virtues such as determination or honesty. Most of all, Tai stressed that the purpose of morality should never be forgotten, and that its purpose is not to gain salvation in another life, but to attain a good life here and now, within a peaceful, cooperative society and all these could be achieved without religion. "A man is morally good," Tai instructed his students, "when he lives a happy and symbiotic existence with other men." As a message to all humanity, Tai Solarin declared that "morality has to do with life and only in its mundane and down to earth consideration" (Solarin, 1968). Some have asserted that dogmatic religions are in effect morally deficient, elevating to moral status ancient, arbitrary, and ill-informed rules - taboos on eating pork, for example, as well as dress codes and sexual practices - possibly designed for reasons of hygiene or even mere politics in a bygone era.

Morality without Religion: Any Truth?

Many people believe that morality and religion are fundamentally linked. They may see this as an argument for God's existence (if atheism's true, there can be no moral facts; moral facts exist; therefore God does too), but in this essay we shall evaluate it simply as a factual claim. One reason why some theists think that morality presupposes God's existence is that their beliefs seems to give their lives clear purpose, making them wonder what purpose atheists can supply for themselves.

According to Christianity, we have been created by God in His image, so as to fulfill the purpose He intended us for. The Catholic Church developed this basic idea into the concept of natural law: we can see how we should behave by working out what our purpose is; often, it will be manifest in the way we have been designed. The Pope's condemnation of homosexuality is an example of this theory at work: the natural result of sex is conception, and any sexual acts not open to this possibility involve an immoral rejection of the purpose for

which God intended them. Needless to say, this approach to ethics is controversial; it might be felt to be a poor imitation of morality. Regardless, few now think it will do as a foundation for it: it begs too many questions, and fails to provide a justification for many of our most basic moral principles.

A different explanation of the purported link between God and morality is the idea that we have an obligation to obey His commands because He is our omnipotent creator, to whom we owe our existence. The obvious question is: Why do we have this obligation?. Might doesn't make right, and though people once believed that children owed obedience to their parents simply because they depended on them, this view has not stood up to reflection. It is rather like the justification given for feudalism: masters protected their serfs, and it was only fair that they receive a share of the crops in return for this. The flaw is of course that the serfs never agreed to this arrangement.

Any notion of a 'social contract' was a fiction: feudalism bore a closer resemblance to a protection racket. If, by contrast, you answer the question raised above by saying "Because obedience is the morally right thing!" you will already have assumed that morality exists independently of God, or else committed yourself to circularity, since the 'divine command theory' you are trying to justify is supposed to explain why things are right in the first place. Many people have swallowed the idea that morality started with religion to such an extent that they cannot separate the two. I myself was under the impression that religion had a significant causative link to morality until quite recently when I came to see the truth.

Man is a primate. All primates have innate morality. A moral sense is vitally important to the efficient running of any society or group. There are no amoral primate groups anywhere. The Mafia has morals, baboons have codes. There are differences between the various groups and their codes of morality but all primate groups have some morals and standards of behaviour. Religion is also very common but it is not universal and it did not cause the codes or the instinct to observe them. These are facts that need to be clearly stated. Morality does not require religion.

In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union millions of people were brought up during the middle decades of the twentieth century in a state that was thoroughly atheist and many of the households and communities within those states were also atheist. There was no collapse of morality (Young & Freitas, 2005). Religion is not the bulwark of morality any more than the cockerel crowing if the cause of the dawn or the virgin sacrifices is the cause of the volcano keeping quiet. This trick has been perpetrated on people for centuries and people continue to fall for it. Morality in our species does not rest upon fear of God. Humans act morally because to do so makes us feel good about ourselves and make us better friends and allies. Being good and moral is the right thing to do for your own selfish self-interest. The best thing one can do as a society to make morality more widespread and more potent is to strip away all aspects of religion from it. Being good is the right thing to do because it simply is the right thing. Humans

as species have an innate sense of morality just as we have an innate ability to learn language. We need it. We are political animals. We have an innate sense of what is or is not fair. We need respect and the esteem of our neighbours, friends and colleagues. This makes us behave morally without religion.

The way to keep morality and lose the encumbrances of religion is to promote morality in and of it. We as a species know what morality is and we recognize moral behaviour when we see it. We are naturally moral because we have developed complex instincts to help us in social situations. These instincts work as long as we allow them instead of burying them in external threats and admonishments. For instance, the Ten Commandments do not help us discover ultimate morality. We all know it when we see it. The way to get people to behave in a moral way is to trust them, to integrate them and to allow them to develop fully as individuals in a caring society. People will only act as amoral criminals if they fall into a criminal sub-culture, are mentally deficient in morality (rare conditions do exist that cause these problems) or are in a situation in which crime really does pay in a way that can become a life choice. However we can create a moral society without religion. The truth is that, there can be morality without religion, but there cannot be religion without morality.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to show that there is something wrong with every single way of linking morality to religion from the perspective of Tai Solarinism. We are not, of course, claiming that religion cannot have anything to do about morality. However, we might indeed owe a debt of obedience to God, if he existed as the grand moral order. The point is that, this must not be based on some logically prior morality, nor that it cannot help people do what is right. But we do claim that ethics is better served by a purely secular foundation. This means that morality is religiously neutral, rather than explicitly atheistic/materialist. Only then will we do justice to its primary concern: our duties to other humans. Piety is all very well, if God exists (for which we know He exists). But it is not everything, and to claim that it diminishes morality rather than elevating it. We therefore conclude that, morality is both an *a priori* and *a posteriori* experience. Both realms of experience do not rule out theism. For the latter reinforces societal morality.

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