Morality as a Catalyst for Functional Society: Unveiling African Potentials in the New Millennium

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Abstract

The problematic of African potentials in this new millennium is that the logic of African morality has been abused by Africans themselves. It has also been observed that Africa's problems are based on the inability to harness her natural and human resources. This is as a result of mal-administration and socio-political and economic woes. The logic of African morality is built on the principles of reciprocity, cohabitation, solidarity, love, sense of belongingness, empathy, brotherhood and collective human existence. The problem of African morality is the major constraints of African development and the full realization of African potentials in this new millennium. African morality is the basis and the search for the radical transformation of African society and functional society. The objective of this paper is to analyze the role of African morality in a functional society. Employing the method of analysis, what is revealed is that any society without any moral fiber is at the blink of total collapse. And the conclusion is that a functional society is that society that is governed by practical moral end. African morality becomes the only solid bedrock for African development and the search for functional society. Morality has become the only viable alternative for African development. Morality is the turner for functional society. Morality and law are the only bases of African social order and that Ethics and morality are fundamental elements for unveiling African potentials in the new millennium.

Keywords: African morality; functional society; human agent; rationality; normative expectation

1 Introduction

African morality reflects on the need for the strict adherence of ethical and moral principles for the ultimate survival of the African person. African morality lies on the principle of complementary harmony of man's existence in his immediate society. Asouzu (2004:173) duly observes that breaches of ethical and moral rules will lead to:

> The breach of the harmony that unifies all existent realities in a transcendent complementary manner… Hence ethical rules touch on the comprehensive needs of man in society. This approach is sustained by the contractual idea joining the individual and the totality of reality and is borne out of the natural insight and common sense that man's personal survival and prosperity depends on the inherent complementary harmony between all existent realities.

African morality is based on moral goodness and the complementary balance between the African man and his immediate society. The African person and African morality is based on the solid bedrock of the unifying force or complementary balance between the individual and society. The understanding of ethical and moral conduct is in tandem with the ultimate foundation of any functional social system or social order. Asouzu (2004:174) believes that:

> The understanding of ethical and moral conduct finds good acceptance in the general worldview of most African communities. To keep the whole fingers clean, the average traditional Igbo strives to live in harmony with the world. From here arises the need to maintain a

complementary balance between the ego and the world in view of the joy of being and over all contentment of individuals and society.

The African person or African society is therefore governed by moral goodness. The African man abhors evil. Evils serve as an impediment to the fullness and the ultimate foundation of being. Heavy sanctions are always meted out to those who perpetuate evil in African societies. African morality and goodness entails what Asuozu (2004:175) adumbrates as:

> The symbol of fullness and foundation of being in history… Traditional society demonstrates its commitment to an absolute foundation for ethics and morality for the human being in the fragmented relative condition of his historicity. This absolute commitment creates a social moral bulwark against the forces of retrogression and decay within the framework of the immediate community and sows the seeds for progress and prosperity.

African morality is situated between the mind of the African person and his immediate society. The African person believes in the mutual experience of the mind and its role in regulatory human society. The African person believes in the existential experience of the fullness of goodness, deep complementary unity of consciousness and the ultimate integrative foundation of his African society.

Little wonder Asuozu (2004:175-176) argues that:

> In this mutual experience the mind intents the foundation of its legitimacy as the one unifying ultimate being and as the joy that in the co-affirmation of this experience…This intuition into the need to make this ultimate

foundation permanently accessible in action and as the experience of the fullness of goodness reinforces the deep complementary unity of consciousness between the ego and the world. In this way, all existential situations offer the human mind very good opportunities for the integration of all realities into a practical complementary unity of consciousness for the good and welfare of individuals and society.

The African person believes that African morality is only possible and it is deeply rooted in mutual harmony of beings. African morality is embedded in a deep insight of the nature of the operations of beings in their given society. The level of mutual harmony and integrative foundation of any functional human society reflect the need for the principle of authentic existence of beings and the unity of complementary consciousness. The African person believes in the principle of universal brotherhood. This led Asouzu to conclude that:

> The level of mutual harmony and integration obtainable in a given society gives us an insight into the nature of its operations. Furthermore, the level of efforts made to integrate all possible relations into the aim driving human action gives us an idea into the nature of such aims; (the aims of an authentic living between the individual and society, my emphasis).

African morality reflects the principles of reciprocity and it is at the heart of morality. For Herrick (2003:23): This principle of reciprocity is at the heart of morality. Africans are of the view that morality arises because humans are essentially social animals…The social nature of humans creates the need for morality, not from a god but from the nature of human self-responsibility and social-inter-relations".

The African person and his strict adherence to African morality reflect the consequences of human actions. Herrick (2003:24) believes that "a key aspect of morality is the consequence of

a person's actions. Morality, be it African morality or European morality is derived from the Latin word "mores". Ferrante (2003:542) defines mores as "that norm that people define as essential to the well-being of a group". The phrase "Functional society" is derived from two words "function" and "society". The phrase functional society has sociological and biological implication, when function is understood as the part to the order and stability within the larger system.

2 The Logic of African Morality

First and foremost, the logic of African morality is defined within the context and logic of social stability. The existential and social-political and economic conditions of African societies reflect a clear demonstration of a deep philosophical commitment of human development and functional society. The derailment of the African morality becomes apparent because the problem of development in African is succinctly bastardized and draconized by human insensitivity. The philosophical commitment of the African morality is indeed very crucial and consequential for the project of humanity and the search for functional society. The search for a normative social order and functional society reflect the need for the full development of the human potentials in this new millennium. African morality serves as the basis for the determination of moral responsibility. African development and social stability redefining the logic of African morality has become the most needed platform for achieving the goals of integral and sustainable development for African Societies. The conceptual analysis of the logic of African morality presents us with the proper socio-political and moral imperative on social functionality and the understanding of contemporary African societies. The guiding principle of the logic of African morality presupposes the achievement of the normative foundation for culture, philosophy, democratic liberalism and development. The logic of African morality serves as the actuating force or principles of complementation, solidarity and human sociality. African morality

presupposes the human personality. The human personality is a complex structure and is characterized by complementary composite of diverse interacting parts. Accordingly, Asuozu (2004:148) believes that "the human personality is a very complex structure whose operation can be understood in terms of powers both material and immaterial".

Our study on the logic of African morality is a philosophical investigation and it has to do with the unveiling of the African person and the integrative foundation of functional society. African morality reflects human rationality. The search for a functional society has becomes the most contemporary challenge and the need for the African person to get of his present human predicament. According to Wisnewski (2007:124-125):

> The human predicament is a hazy, troubled one. African morality has been bedeviled by African irrationality. We must constantly struggle to achieve clarity about the relation to the world, about our relation to each other, and even about our relation to ourselves. The way to achieve this is, of course, perspicuous representation – and this can be achieved by engaging in a type of phenomenological analysis. We must investigate the value orientation that constitutes our form of life and it is only in this way that we will see our lives clearly. African morality requires the need for individual to be a change/rational agent.

Dukor (2004:193-194) sees the individual as "an agent of ethical transformation and is precisely and legitimately an inquiry into the moral and ethical capacity of man in building an ideal organization and functional society at large. The logic of African morality is defined by a kind of a humanistic tradition, existential dimension and he is characterized by a form of pluralist society".

For Herick (2007:39) observes in no uncertain terms that:

> In a pluralist society where individuals and groups have widely differing views, it is necessary to work out towards common values, where there is respect and tolerance for all views, provided they don't threaten the security of society as a whole. Philosophy is seen as the fundamental normative science that addresses the ends of human action. African morality as a search for a functional society requires the need for the rational human agent to change his immediate society.

For Asouzu (2004:149), "the human agent is seen as a conflux of difference and a perfect representation of synthesis". Asouzu also contended that the human agent is a composite of mutually interacting immaterial and material units and has therefore a destiny beyond mere corporeal existence. African morality requires the need for corporeal existence. The human personality is seen as a fascination of fullness of synthesis, an anticipation of goodness and an interacting complex person. African morality is governed the fascination of goodness and the human agent operates as the seat of psycho-emotive life. As Senghor rightly observed that the African person is governed by emotion. It is a well known fact in ethics that the human agent can never be conceptualized in a fragmented mode but as a complementary units that form a whole and the human agent cannot be conceptualized accurately except in terms of complementary interacting units; African morality is therefore built on an ethical principle of complementary interacting units.

Asouzu (2004:151-152) pointedly articulates that:

> The human agent can be conceivable since all its components are aspects of the same transcendent complementary unity of consciousness that joins the ego to

the totality of reality. The human agent is characterized by an animated physical body governed by psycho-communicative emotion. The mind is projected as the very centre of the rational human agent. The rational human agent in a functional society is characterized by a flow of consciousness.

However, the rational human agent as a change agent in a functional society is characterized by the principle of collective consciousness and heterogeneity. Human existence is by necessity constituted of heterogeneous interacting forces. In this way a responsible and fulfilled existence subsists in the complementarity of these forces and a complementarity of human potentialities. The deep philosophical commitment of the idea of complementarity is a veritable basis for authentic human harmonious co-existence. Finally, the rational human agent in a functional society is defined within a collective actualization of units within a whole. The African morality is quite different from the European morality. The African morality is built on the need for collective human existence. The understanding of the full grasp of African morality is built of African metaphysics. Africans believe in the hierarchies of beings: God, spirits, ancestors, living beings and non-living beings. African morality and rational capacity is equal that of the European.

Odhiambo (1995:97) in a well argued thought intended to prove that "the African mental disposition and rational faculty was equal to that of the Europeans". But African development and African potentials are implicit and Africans must make the implicit becoming explicit. African morality if well nurtured can lead to the enhancement of African development. To develop means to de-encase or de-envelop. To develop the potentials of the African person means to develop his though process and to inculcate the African being-ness into him. One major negative influence on African morality is Western culture or Western civilization.

3 The Role of Morality in African Society

By its function, morality is that set of convictions whose normative function is to promote human flourishing and to enable us live together on terms of mutually beneficial cooperation. Morality is a distinct sphere within the domain of normative thinking about human action and feeling. The whole domain of human society is anchored in normative foundation of morality. Moral codes have social function for maintaining beneficial cooperation. It does not seem as an a priori truth alone. The sentiment at the core of praise and blame is sometimes known to be a species of anger and indignation. Morality plays the important role of guiding peoples' behavior. As medicine exists to cure the illnesses, likewise morality should have some normative function in curing the ills of contemporary African society. It is used as a guide to correct animalistic behavioral patterns or wrongs.

The ultimate goal of both medicine and morality must be some positive conscious state of affairs, either a utilitarian one (public happiness) or a complex one of such state as experience of beauty, transcendent rapture, love and compassion, knowledge of some sort. When we face moral choices, we tend to need guidance, and if we do not have a conscience to listen to, then we can use a moral code instead. Moral code can also be communicated to others, in order to assist or control them. The function of morality is the primary reason that morality exists in cultural norms whose violation commonly engenders the emotion of righteous indignation and the idea that the violator deserves punishment or at least correction to ensure social justice and to guarantee the public good of all in African society.

Most importantly, the primary role of moral standards (the primary reason they exist in cultures) is that they increase the synergistic benefits of public cooperation in groups by advocating unselfish behaviors that increase on average, and the benefits of social cooperation within groups. Moral behavior demands benefit

of cooperation and unselfish behavior because seeking a benefit of pleasure produced by killing other members of a group could not qualify as a logically consistent benefit of human cooperation. The social nature of human cooperation creates the need for morality. A key aspect of morality is the consequence of a person's actions or deliberate act or volitions. However, unselfish behavior refers in the normal sense to the behaviors that are concerned with the pleasure and well being of others and not excessively concerned with one's own selfish aggrandizement, narcissistic behavior, taking advantage over others, pleasure or well-being of others.

Morality is a developing framework of adaptive and adoptive norms, the function of which it is to cultivate and adoptive norms, the function of which it is to cultivate the well-being within sustainable contexts of shared human development and non-human interests, with sustainability constituting the sufficient existential condition for cultivating human well-beings. Well-being, in this existential and normative context, connotes or rather consists in collective will formation or habit-forming maximally generous and attention of humans' states of affairs. Morality, however, is invariably an abstract term. Morality has become abstracted into an inexplicable law of inscrutable origins that constrains our rational behavior without regard to its own practical applications (the eulogizing or phrasing of Homer's Greek gods, a set of "well-meaning rules that don't work out in real life". However, probably, self-interest so to speak can mar human conducts and African development.

The bane of African development has always been lack of effective leadership, poor economic system, ignorance and corruption. I guess my next question is, does rationalizing morality increases or decreases its effectiveness towards our psychological fulfillments or ends? I guess my hypothesis about morality's purpose is to fulfill psychological, emotive, instinctive needs, to enhance positive self-perception and the need to have concern for others and the overall development of African societies; the unprecedented concern for others, radicalizing

the idea of the public good of Africans in order to unveil African potentials and rationalizing morality perhaps brings about the idyllically framework for the purpose of the good?

The function of medicine is not just to treat illness, but also to help people live long and healthy. Morality has more than one function. Of course, it is against ideals of morality if it does not cure society's moral ills. Some people most especially those at the religious circle think that morality serves a single purpose or function of enforcement of the will of God and the absolute is unchanging. Morality goes beyond religion, and it has to do with African development and the collective happiness of all in contemporary human societies.

4 African Morality: Towards a Functional Society

Functional human society is that rational society that is built on the principle of complementation. Functional society is that rational society that is defined by the principles of collective happiness of all and sundry as individual members. A society is said to be dysfunctional if it is characterized by bad leadership/maladministration, ignorance, corruption, insincerity, dishonesty, insecurity, deception, ethno-religious crises, lawlessness, social disorderliness, bloodshed, kidnapping, killings, rituals and lack of respects for human lives. African morality serves as the solid bedrock for African development and Africa's quest for functional/rational societies. Dysfunctional societies are governed by lack of morality and human immaturity or irrationalities.

Furthermore, a functional society is an opposite of dysfunctional society. A functional society is any society that is characterized by the sacredness of our humanity, respects for human dignity, law and moral soundness, freedom and equality, social justice, mutual recognition, the recognition of the collective happiness for all, abiding by rules and regulations, the prevalence of normative and legitimate expectations of human behaviors. A proper understanding of

African morality precedes the proper understanding of functional societies.

5 Understanding Morality and Unveiling African Potentials in the New Millennium

The unveiling of our African potentials is anchored in morality. Morality is the principles concerning right and wrong or good and bad of human behavior in society. Standards of morality seem to be dropping. Morality is a subsystem of deliberation about what we ought to do. Morality is a functional term like tuner. Much in our life is governed by norms and values. The direction we face in the elevator, the way we walk, the way we talk, what we wear, the volume we speak in, the way we greet people, and pretty much everything else that we do in our waking lives are all geared towards morality. Not all of these norms count as morals. My concern here is with moral norms. I am not here to distinguish moral norms from other norms, neither am I here to distinguish individual morals from social morals, but my considered and settled opinion here, is that, morals sometimes are based on sentimental norms: they are underwritten by various sentiments.

In particular, moral norms are solely grounded in the moral emotions. The British moralists claimed that moral norms are based on disapprobation. It simply means what society approves or disapproves as good or evil, what is good or bad. An action is right if it is generally accepted by the society. We would feel approbations or unalloyed approval towards those who do it, and an action is wrong if, under idealized conditions, we feel disapprobation. Idealized conditions include things like full knowledge and freedom from being bias. The term "approbation" and disapprobation are a bit antiquated, although, they can be judiciously treated as umbrella terms for two classes of moral emotions: emotions of moral praise, and emotions of moral blame. Emotions of praise include gratitude, esteem, approval and righteousness. Emotions of blame include other-directed-

emotions such as disapproval, anger, contempt, disgust, resentment, and indignation as well as self-directed-emotions such as self- guilt and blame.

What counts as a moral norm, is that emotions must behave in a particular way approved by a particular society in inter-subjective community. First, a moral norm does not count as moral simply in virtue of eliciting one of the aforementioned emotions in isolation. What makes a particular norm moral is because it is approved by the society (generality of people) or what are the parameters in which particular norms can be term to be moral. At a minimum, moral rules involve both the self-directed-emotions. You might feel disgusted when you see your friend cut his finger open intentionally but would you say this connotes moral act?, or he feels a shame or guilty in doing it? Secondly, our emotions must be directed at the third parties if they are to be grounded as moral norms. Moral concern arises when we are not directly involved. Thirdly, moral judgments are enforced by meta-emotion. If you do something wrong and don't feel guilty, you may be refer to as a psychopaths and I will be angry at you for your unethical conduct or irrational behavior and for your lack of remorse. Meta-emotions are necessary for moralizing in contemporary human. To have a moral attitude towards something, one must have a moral sentiment that disposes one to feel a self-directed emotion of blame for something, and an emotion of other directed blame when someone else does something wrong.

Psychologists through out of the history of mankind have shown that moral judgments can be altered by eliciting emotions. That negative moral appraisals or emotional deficits result in moral blindness or moral quandary. Psychopaths suffer from a profound deficit in negative emotions, including moral emotions. Tony Blair (1995) has shown that psychopaths fail to draw a distinction between moral rules and conventional rules as if they were merely conventional. The prevailing interpretation of these data is that psychopaths cannot form moral judgments because they lack the emotion on which those judgments ordinarily depend.

Most importantly, for the psychologists there seems to be a conceptual link between emotions and moral judgments. Someone who is fully convinced that an action would maximize public happiness can still believe that such deliberate human action isn't morally good. There is an open question whether the things we are emotionally concerned with are really wrong, but it is not an open question whether the things we are emotionally concerned with are really wrong, but it is not an open question whether emotionally condemnatory attitudes are moral-attitudes.

6 African Morality and Human Nature in a Contemporary Perspective

Hobbes's moral thought or ethics is difficult to disentangle from his politics. African development is difficult to disentangle from African morality. On his view, what we ought to do depends greatly on the situation in which we find ourselves. Where political power and political authority are lacking (as in his famous natural condition of humankind), our fundamental rights needs to be guided by our rational thinking. Our natural rights must be guided by whatever means we think fit.

Where political power and political authority exist and are geared towards the public good, our duty seem to be quite straight forward, that is, to obey those in power. But we can carefully separate his ethics (his moral thought) from his politics (his political thought). If we follow Hobbes properly, we can see that his ethics or moral thought is concerned with human nature. His political philosophy and ethical philosophy deals with what happens when human beings interact socially. In this connection, we as human beings, we are all needy and vulnerable. No one can live in complete or total isolation. What defines our being is the ethic of oneness, the spirit of identity and fraternity or sense of belonging to a particular inter-subjective community. We are easily led astray in our attempts to know the world round us, our cognitive capacity to reason is as fragile as our

capacity to know, it relies upon language and it is prone to human error and undue influence when we act. We may do so selfishly or impulsively or in ignorance, on the basis of faulty fate of this rather pathetic-sounding-creature that is of us? Unsurprisingly Hobbes thinks total happiness can be expected of our living together; hence the need for African development and social order.

The best we can hope for is peaceful life under an authoritarian African government. The worst, on Hobbes's account, is what he calls the "natural condition of mankind," a state of violence, insecurity, and constant threat-the natural condition of mankind where life becomes brutish, poor, short, nasty and solitary. Broadly and logically speaking, Hobbes argument is that the alternative to government is a situation no one could reasonably wish for and that any attempt to make government accountable to the people must be underscored, and so threatening is the situation of non-government that we must all wish to avoid. Our only reasonable option, therefore, is a sovereign authority that is totally accountable to its subjects. Hobbes' moral philosophy has an avowed affinity with African societies, development, and normative ideal social order. A political philosophy periscope from the Hobbesian tradition is invariably morally oriented. Let me make it clear that this conception of social contract is not going to be treated here.

7 Recommendations

African potentials are achievable in an atmosphere of freedom, trust, equality, law, order, opportunities, justice, socio-political stability and economic stability. Leadership in Africa should be transformative, dynamic, people oriented. Nevertheless, African governments, in their quest for leadership transformation should avoid the evils of corruption because corruption is unethical and it is the subversion of the collective ideality of social order should. The African person is a change agent and should be governed by

rationality and freedom. Accordingly, Ruch and Anyanwu (1984:181) contend that:

> Man is rational and free, but these typically human characteristics combine with other psychological aspects which man shares with other animals: instincts, habits, emotions, sensitivity, appetites…etc. These animal traits of man's psychology find themselves profoundly modified and affected by their competition with man's rationality. Essentially, every normal, mature human being, whatever his racial or geographical origin shares these specifically human characteristics. They make of each human being a unique, unrepeatable rational and free person, who precisely because of his rationality and free will has an infinite potential and therefore an infinite respectability and dignity. While human nature and its dignity is universal and common to all men, each human person is also a particular mix of all the elements which go into his making to the main philosophical trends in contemporary Africa.

8 Conclusions

African morality serves as the solid bedrock of African development and the unveiling of African potentials in the new millennium. African morality as a search for functional society is anchored in African human rationality because rationality is common to all men. Accordingly, Ike Odimegwu (2008:18) taking a clue from the Augustinian and Aquinas traditions believes that rationality is common to all men and all men are children of God. Therefore sovereignty, which comes from God, lies with the people. Society is natural to man and exists for the satisfaction of human material nature. Functional society is built on a viable moral alternative, soundness and acuteness. Morality is the basis of normative ideal social order and the turner for functional society. African society must be built on the solid

bedrock of morality, law and order; it must be anchored in the sacredness of our humanity. African leaders in their quest for effective leadership and good governance must be governed by a viable alternative of moral imperative, acuteness and soundness. Any society that is not governed by morality is ready for doom and such a society is at brink of collapse. African morality is simply based on practical moral end. Odimegwu (2008:3) believes that "philosophy should have a practical moral end. The proof of success in any functional society lies in a whole social structures being changed from the bottom up".

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