

A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES WITH THE MEANING AND NATURE OF ETHICS

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Abstract

The concept of ethics is often an object of misconception, misinterpretation and mismatching with other terms like morality, value and aesthetics in philosophy especially among undergraduate students of Arts and Humanities. It is evident that a good number of them are sometimes confused when it comes to the definition and meaning of ethics, its differences from the notion of morality and the relationship between the two in moral philosophy. There are those that do not know why there are various ethical theories and justification for them in the society that cherished such ethical theories. Again, there are young learners who desire to know the similarities, differences and relationship between normative and meta-ethics. Therefore, this paper is concerned with the definition and meaning of ethics, the differences between meta-ethics and normative ethics, the differences between ethics and morality, the significance each plays in the understanding of ethics and implications inherent in their relationship with one another. Besides, the paper also gives a general survey of special ethics to young and curious minds with reference to various professions that are growing up in leap and bound of our contemporary society.

Keywords: ethics, morality, normative, meta-ethics, custom and value

Definition and Meaning of Ethics

The common understanding of ethics is simply considered as the written and unwritten principles about what the society has defined, determined, justified, promoted and preserved for years as what is right and wrong in human relationship with others, transcendental realities like God, ancestral world, the land, societal authorities and concern for the ecosystem. In other words, ethics goes beyond what people ought to do or ought not to do to regular investigation and evaluation of what is morally good or bad, right or wrong

and true or false. Hence, the moral and cultural values of every ethnic group in the world are practically sourced from ethical principles that have relationship with the world view of the people and existential realities that are abound in their environment. The word ethics is etymologically a derivative of a Greek word, *ethica* that has its root in *ethos*. Thus, the primary meaning of *ethos* is the ultimate socio-cultural orientation and inner disposition inherent in every member of a society.¹ It is evident that *ethos* is the *energia* that determines, defines, justifies and motivates the manner every member of a cultural group lives in a given society. This implies that cultural and ethical life of every man is a practical representation and demonstration of the *ethos* that his society cherished and ever ready to preserve from corruption. Human history has shown that the onus is on every cultural group to define, determine, justify, sustain, promote and defend her ethical norms and customs from decadence and extinction. As a matter of fact, the ancient Egyptian like Merikare and Ptahotep; and Greek philosophers like Socrates and Plato made effort to demonstrate the *ethos* of the people of their time. The Romans were the people that later translated *ethos* to *mos* or *moris* meaning customs, manners and practices of a particular land by which the citizens are characterized. The ancient Egyptians and Greeks were popularly known to be more theoretical on guiding principles on how to live so as to be successful in life while the Romans emphasized a practical demonstration of the basic principles to attain a fulfilled life.²

In the perspective of the above, ethics can be philosophically defined as the culturally generated principles impacted in every member of a society for the appreciation of what is morally good, right, just, true, practicable and condemnation of what is morally bad, wrong, unjust, false and impracticable in human society. Human history is dotted with many philosophers that have propounded variants of ethical theory for the society of their times as evident in the ethical theory of Merikare, Ptahotep, Socrates, Protagoras, Plato and Aristotle of ancient time; Marcus Aurelius, Thomas Aquinas and Augustine of medieval period; Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, Francis Hutcheson and David Hume of modern time; Fredrick Nietzsche, Soren Kierkegaard, Immanuel Kant, John Mill, Alasdair McIntyre and Jürgen Habermas of our contemporary time.³ Any attempt to study the ethical theory of any of these notable moral

¹Asante, Molefi Kete, *The Egyptian Philosophers: Ancient African Voices from Imhotep to Akhenaten* (Chicago: African American Images, 2000), 81; George M. James, *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*. Reprinted by Molefi Kete Asante, (Philadelphia: African American images, 1954), 4.

²Aso, Williams Olorunfemi. *Rudiments of Philosophy for Undergraduates* (Lagos: Fropiel International Limited, 2018A), 108.

³Aso, *Rudiments of Philosophy for Undergraduates*, 110.

philosophers and their contemporaries exposes one to the nitty gritty of their moral philosophy and relationship to the meaning and definition of ethics either normative or meta-ethics.

The fundamental differences between normative ethics and meta-ethics

Generally speaking, normative ethics is described as the formulation of stipulated norms, values, disposition, practice and character necessary for human beings to reasonably recognize the characteristics of what is morally good or bad, commendable or condemnable in human society. In philosophical parlance, normative ethics is defined as the formal structure of the basic principles that serve as the moral standard by which an individual in a given society is able to recognize the norms, values and practices that are acceptable and distinguish them from those that are detestable so as to live with others without any discord. In other words, "it attempts to make inquiries concerning the way and manner human beings ought to behave in particular circumstances. It is the content of the character that befits what set man apart from animals. The common morality in a given society is sourced from the normative beliefs and worldview of the people living in a given society."⁴ It is pertinent to note that normative ethics actually serves as the foundation on which the ethical structure of any society is established, justified, promoted and preserved from any depravity.

The concern of meta-ethics is usually about how human beings are to behave and demonstrate the rational capacities that set them apart from other animals in their genus like Gorillas and chimpanzees. In other words, meta-ethics primarily deals with the rationality behind how human beings behave among their kinds and not actually what they ought to do morally or avoid in the society. In the context of this chapter, "meta--ethics fundamentally deals with the definition, nature, analysis, justification and implications of the concepts and language of expressing what a moral agent ought to do and avoid for the moral nobility inherent in his nature perceptible."⁵ Judging from this quotation, meta-ethics is concerned with the moral terms, concepts, ideas and language use in defining, determining, justifying, promoting and protecting ethical values, dispositions and characters. Hence, "it is closely related to analytic philosophy where use of concepts, terms and language are properly

⁴Asante, *The Egyptian Philosophers: Ancient African Voices from Imhotep to Akhenaten*, 80-82; Omoregbe Joseph, *Ethics: A Systematic and historical study* (Lagos: Joja Educational Publishers Limited, 1993), 176-180.

⁵Aso, *Rudiments of Philosophy for Undergraduates*, 110.

determined and justified to avoid ambiguity and equivocation.”⁶ For instance, the concerns of meta-ethics consist of issues like, justice, injustice, happiness, virtuous and vicious characters, good, evil, deliberative choice and similar terms.

The differences between normative and meta-ethics lies on the fact that the former is basically concern with what a society actually judged to be morally good, commendable and practicable or what is morally bad, condemnable and impropriety; while the latter is strongly based on how human beings are expected to behave in accordance with the ontological reality inherent in human nature. The relationship of the duo is centred on the fact that meta-ethics defines, justifies and preserves that foundation on which normative ethics proposes how human beings are expected to live with others without any contradiction to the ontological reality that human beings are both rational and emotional; and none should be subservient to the other. In other words, normative and meta-ethics are complementary when one is talking about moral standard and disposition required of human beings to naturally demonstrate the moral nobility inherent in human nature.

Why everyone is required to live a moral life in human society

Anthropological studies about man clearly show that human beings are naturally composed of body and soul with complimentary relationship between them as the basis of human deliberative choice of moral action. The body is material and end of emotional desires for pleasure while the soul or the mind is the epic Centre of intellectual activities that often culminate in rational and deliberative choice of moral judgment. It is obvious in the second part of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* that the rational that characterized human beings is fundamentally sourced from *synderesis*, practical wisdom by which he recognizes the inner moral principles of ‘do good and avoid evil’. The metaphysical organ of *synderesis* is conscience where the nitty-gritty of the knowledge and implications of moral issues are adequately defined, determined, evaluated and justified to derive motivation for moral judgment.⁷ Hence, by the virtue of human rationality, every man that has deliberative choice of action is expected to live a moral life in human society as evident in the moral theories of Socrates, Plato Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. In this context, little children and victims of mental incapacitation are exonerated from

⁶Aso, *Rudiments of Philosophy for Undergraduates*, 110-111.

⁷Aquinas, Thomas *The Summa Theologiae*, Trans. by the English Dominican Fathers (New York: 1947), First part, question 79, article 12.

moral responsibility because their actions are mostly devoid of rational evaluation of moral issues before they arrived at their choice of action.

It is indisputable that human beings are always conscious of the fact that social life is inherent in their nature. This consciousness started with the recognition of the presence of parents, siblings and extended members of the family of every man. It is obvious that the consciousness is nurtured in the family and blossomed in the larger society where social norms and customs are already in place for the young ones to appreciate, promote and preserve from decadence. The fundamental ethical principles that sustain the social norms and moral values that characterized the society are expected to be cherished, respected and practiced by every member of the society. In this perspective, moral revolutionists are often sanctioned as deterrent to whoever longs for obnoxious and irrational moral dispositions. Therefore, the need to live harmoniously with other members of the family imputes the responsibility of living a moral life on every moral agent of a given society as palpable in the moral philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, George Hegel, Karl Marx and a host of others.

There is no doubt that every traditional culture that ever existed and the present ones in our world of today strongly believe that the ethical principles and moral values they cherished are derived from a divine command to live a righteous life for rewards and punishment for disobedience to his injunction. In this context, the need to live a life in which the honourable characters that distinguished human beings from animals is fundamentally based on the justification of divine authority. It is the duty of the traditional ruler, his chiefs in council and the messengers of the gods or God among the people that often interpret the moral injunctions of the divine for members of the society. In other words, they define, determine, justify and preserve the moral values that the people need to live acceptable and moral life in the society and before the gods or God. The adverse effects of disobedience to the moral guidelines of the gods or God over the individual offender and its ripple effects on the land and other members of the society often make the head of the community and associates to supervise and apply sanctions against moral deviants that live among the people. The analysis and justification for the requirements of divine authority that everyone in the society ought to live a moral life are well articulated in the moral philosophy of William of Ockham, Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas.

It is observable that man has ontological order and principles at the basis of his nature and existence that he needs to keep intact and sustain before the

honorable characters inherent in his nature can be demonstrated for others to cherish in the society. Judging from this background, it is cumbersome for a moral agent to live a moral life in conformity with the law of nature the moment he allows bad habits to underline his habitual way of life. In other words, those that it is a serious moral aberration for any man to cultivate any fashionable and habitual way of life that is detestable in the society because it is incongruous to human nature. Therefore, the ardent desire of man to live a moral life is sourced from living in conformity with the natural law that confirms the appropriate characters inherent in human nature as obvious in the moral philosophy of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

Besides, there is a passionate desire in every man to attain authentic happiness and final fulfilment in which one will not long for anything again. This is the moment that Augustine and Aquinas normally refer to as the perfect union with God. It is apparent that ontological principles and rational ability of human beings are responsible for their capacity to make judgment about the knowledge and details of how they can attain appropriate happiness and final fulfilment of moral life in this world. Aristotle and Aquinas articulated arguments to demonstrate the importance of natural law, intellectual and cardinal moral virtues of courage, prudence, temperance and justice in the attainment of *eudaimonium*, authentic happiness or final end of man. The final end of man in Aristotelian understanding or authentic happiness of man is rooted in the supernatural union with God. It is evident in Platonic and Aristotelian-Aquinas moral traditions that the final end of man or authentic happiness is accomplished as soon as one can demonstrate honorable characters that are divine for the approval of others in the society. Therefore, the attainment and demonstration of divine characters in human society as children begotten by the gods or God is one of the reasons why everyone in the society is required to live a moral life.

Historical survey of the relationship between ethics and morality

In the view of common people, ethics and morality simply means the same thing as the concern to differentiate between what is morally good from what is morally bad in human society. As of today, moral philosophers have come to identify the fact that morality is about the cultural norms and customs that characterized a particular socio-cultural group from others in the society. Whereas, ethics is purported to be the instituted standard on which a particular morality can thrive, sustain and preserve from corruption in a given society. Hence, an ethical standard in one community can go berserk in another community as evident in human history. An attempt to survey the history of a particular subject like ethics always helps young learners to have a better

understanding of the subject and its boundaries from other disciplines. This historical account will give a leverage to discover how the issues relating to ethics and morality were defined, determined, justified and preserved in the past. This attempt will expose undergraduates to various moral philosophers of different cultures, times and ethical theories associated with them. Besides, history of ethics affords us the opportunity of knowing how some ethical concepts and terms were constructed, deconstructed, reconstructed and still relevant till date like justice, human right, good governance and ultimate goal of human life, pleasure and happiness.

In actual fact, we observe in human history that what constitute moral good and bad, right and wrong is quite different in various cultures and at different times. As a matter of fact, the Egyptian moral concern was different from Greek contents of morality, the two are different from Roman approach to morality, Christian moral concerns are different from the ones existed before it, morality took a new dimension in the Europe of the middle ages, the end of first and second world wars marked the beginning of a distinct morality from the previous centuries. Therefore, the fundamental questions that distinguish one historical theory from another one are three: (i) what particular question was the ethical theory tried to resolve? (ii) what answer does the ethical theory provided for the question? (iii) how does the answer provided related to the ethical problems and concerns of the time? This historical survey of ethics is not intended to give details about the history of ethics in various cultures and time but a general overview of the characteristics that distinguish the ethical concerns of notable cultures in human history.

Egyptian *Maa't* or Ethical theory

In the Egypt of old, the basis of ethical theory squarely rests on the knowledge of *ma'at*, a term ontologically known as truth, order and cosmic balance on which the universe is firmly established by the gods. The contents of the ancient Egyptian ethical theory is both anthropomorphic and anthropocentric as evident in their religion, liturgy and relationship to moral disposition. The Egyptian mysteries' teachers (priests in the temples) in cities like Memphis, Heliopolis, Thebes and Alexandria took it as part of their responsibility to teach the neophytes how to live a disciplined life so as to be in harmony with the kings, with the gods and the ancestral world, with the land, the universe, with self and other in the society.⁸ Any human act that causes disharmony in any of the above will invariably affects any other relationships in the society. For instance, any abomination committed by an individual often attracts not only

⁸George, *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*, 171-185.

personal but also communal cleansing so as to avoid the wrath of the gods. What was obtainable in the Egypt of that time generally became the source of the moral characteristics evident in the various cultures available in Africa that predated European civilization.⁹ However, there may be variations in some African cultures as a result of migration from the Nile to other parts of Africa where environmental realities became a major determinants for their moral worldview.

In ancient Egypt, the temple priests tried to teach the younger ones how to have a clear knowledge of themselves so as to attain the highest good (*Summum Bonum*) in the society.¹⁰ This is done by training the soul to achieve the followings: (i) control of thought (ii) control of action (iii) steadfastness of purpose (iv) identity with spiritual life or the higher ideals (an attribute attained when one had conquered his passions) (v) evidence of having a mission in life (vi) evidence of a deep insight and graveness that befitted the faculty of seership or priesthood and spiritual orders (vii) freedom from resentment when one is under the influence of persecution (viii) confidence in one's own ability to learn (ix) readiness or disposition for initiation.¹¹ For individual to know himself and have the ability to live a good life, he must strive to achieve the nine goals identified in Egyptian ethical theory popularly known as *Maat*. After Socrates visited and came in contact with some Egyptian priests, he learnt about the Egyptian idea of 'man know thy self' and carried the impression to Athens as the basis of his ethical theory. Plato, a student of Socrates, later summarized the nine goals of Egyptian moral theory he learnt from his teacher into four cardinal virtues namely: justice, temperament, courage and prudence.¹²

Ethical theory and Greek-Roman culture

The Greek approach to ethics was remarkably rational rather than emotional, philosophically based rather than religiously or divinely established; it underlined the moderate rather than extreme moral disposition. The primary moral concern of ancient Greeks was how to live a good life, a life of happiness and satisfaction. Some notable Greek moral philosophers of that time like

⁹Turner William, *History of Philosophy* (Boston: Ginn and company, 1903), 9; Aso, *Rudiments of Philosophy for Undergraduates*, 59; Price A. Joan, *Philosophy through the Ages* (California: Wordsworth/Thomson Learning, 2000), 1.

¹⁰Asante, *The Egyptian Philosophers: Ancient African Voices from Imhotep to Akhenaten*, 4 and 81; George, *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*, 4; Aso, *Rudiments of Philosophy for Undergraduates*, 56-57.

¹¹George, *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*, 172-184; Aso *Rudiments of Philosophy for Undergraduates*, 57.

¹²Asante, *The Egyptian Philosophers: Ancient African Voices from Imhotep to Akhenaten* 79-80; George, *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*, 1954, 3-4.

Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus and Lucretius attempted to provide ethical theory to guide human life for the attainment of good life and satisfaction.¹³ However, none was able to give incontestable ethical theory as standard for attaining moral nobility and fulfilment. The Sophists were the first group of scholars that identified a good life and satisfaction as evident in political influence, financial power and physical pleasure¹⁴ At this time in the history of Greek culture, the Sophists were moving from one place to the other to teach people how to be successful and charged money for their service. As a matter of fact, the actual philosophical concern for ethics began with Socrates who started in Greece the rational activity of definition, clarification and justification of issues pertaining to ethics and philosophy in general. He was the pioneer of scholars that raised questions about what actually constitute a good life and how one can accomplish this status in life. He objected to the moral view of the Sophists as crafty and inappropriate for attaining a good life.¹⁵ Socrates demonstrated that if success was actually characteristic of good and moral life, why are the successful people often become sad and unsatisfied and why were the successful tyrants in history not admired by many people? He opined that if one is knowledgeable about what a good life is all about, it will be easier to attain it. Thus, he argued that ignorance is the cause of moral evil; hence any man that has the knowledge of a good life will not hesitate to live accordingly.¹⁶ The summary of his ethical theory was that man needed to be knowledgeable about moral virtues of courage, temperance, prudence and justice and the relevance of their interrelationship for character inherent in human nature. He employed dialogical methodology of inquiry to establish the meaning of each virtue and role in his ethical theory.

Plato was a dedicated student of Socrates that made many of his philosophical thoughts appeared in print. He had his academy where he expressed his own answers concerning the problem of moral life. He acknowledged the fact that man is a combination of both material and immaterial entities: body and soul, reason and emotion, matter and spirit.¹⁷ He evaluated the soul, spirit and reason to be more superior to the body, matter and emotions. Hence, he strongly argued that the only way man can live a good life is to subject his emotions and bodily desires to the governance of his intellect. He underlined

¹³Composta Dario, *History of Ancient Philosophy* (Bangalore: Theological publications, 1988), 62-63, 90-91.

¹⁴Omogbe Joseph, *Knowing Philosophy* (Lagos: Joja Educational Publishers limited, 1990), 71-130.

¹⁵Ethel M. Albert, Theodore C. Denise and Peterfreund, Sheldon P., *Great Traditions in Ethics*. Sixth edition (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1988), 10-12; Composta, *History of Ancient Philosophy* 100-104.

¹⁶Omogbe, *Ethics: A Systematic and historical study*, 155-175.

¹⁷Mondin Battisa, *A History of Mediaeval Philosophy* (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 1991), 112.

the fact that human intellect has the ability to make human action conform to the perfection evident in the world of form. Plato's understanding of human nature serves as the foundation for his psychology of human behaviour. The different roles of cardinal virtues: courage, temperance, prudence and justice in his ethical theory were properly defined and articulated for holistic and deliberative action of man and became a replica for every citizen to live harmoniously with others in the society.¹⁸ As a matter of fact, Plato developed all the basic concepts and notions of ethics that he learnt from Socrates with the conclusion that ignorance is the cause of every moral agent that acts viciously in human society.¹⁹ This implies that "only (ethical) knowledge can lead to virtue; when people are ignorant, their personalities are disorganised, for the unruly desires and passions then control them. By contrast, when people truly know what is good...they will do what is good. Hence, it is the virtuous person...the rational individual, who is truly happy."²⁰ In other words, the consequences of ignoring the necessary efforts and sacrifices required to live a moral life will certainly make it impossible for a moral agent to attain authentic happiness in the society.

Aristotle was a student of Plato and in spite of their closeness, he objected to some of his arguments. For instance, he opposed to his idea of two separate worlds: the world of form and ideas. As a matter of fact, Aristotle demonstrated that universal principles always appeared in concrete cases as they exist in our mind. The defense of Aristotle about ethical theory based on human nature made him an outstanding representative of ancient Greek's position on moral naturalism.²¹ Aristotle's opinion about the quality of a good life is based on a life of activity that is directed by good principles. These are principles that facilitate the excellence performance of actions that characterized human nature. His explanation concerning good principles and moral justification of human action led him to develop his doctrine of Golden mean. He maintained that every good principle of human action is balance between two extremes. For instance, courage is a mean between the extremes of rashness and cowardice.²² This is because rashness pays less attention to danger while

¹⁸Annas Julia, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), bk. IX, 591e, bk. I, 353d; Composta, *History of Ancient Philosophy*, 181-182; Aso, Williams Olorunfemi, *David Hume's Moral Theory: A Justification For Its Ethical Reconstruction* (Lagos: Fropiel International Limited, 2018B), 206-208.

¹⁹Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, bk. IV, 441d-442a; Omoregbe, *Ethics: A Systematic and historical study*, 161.

²⁰Ethel, Theodore and Sheldon, *Great Traditions in Ethics*. Sixth edition, 10.

²¹Ethel, Theodore and Sheldon, *Great Traditions in Ethics*. Sixth edition, 36-39.

²²Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Terence Irwin, Trans. (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1990), 1107a, 1109a-1109b.

cowardice pays too much attention to danger. There are other students of Socrates like Protagoras, Georgias, and Thyrasmachus, that propounded different ethical theory but their theories are not as remarkable as the ethical theories of Aristotle and Plato.²³

There are two contemporary schools founded at the same time by Epicurus and the Stoics around 200 BC. Epicureans maintained that a good life is a life of mental pleasure of study and friendship that endures and attract less side-effects unlike sensual pleasure of eating, drinking and sexual intercourse.²⁴ They strongly believed that the characteristic of good and moral life is based on getting adequate pleasure and less displeasure from time to time. Apart from this, they recommended that everyone must live according to the values appreciated by the society of their choice. The Stoics generally believed that the best way to attain a life of moral fulfilment was to live a life govern by nature. This is the kind of life in which man is simply depended on the basic natural wants and desires like food, drinks, clothes and shelter rather than sophisticated and expensive life.²⁵ As a matter of fact, the Stoics appreciated the value of family life especially of parents and children as a natural institution. Moreover, they advocated for good citizenship, responsible parenthood and care for members of one's family. However, they opposed to slavery, oppression and the lordship of one group over the other as atypical because members of every culture are considered as fellow citizen of the universe.

Stoicism and Epicureanism quickly gained wider acceptance among the various classes in the Roman society of that time: Epicureanism appealed to the luxury-loving members of the society and Stoicism fascinated those who cherished civility and social responsibility. This was evident in the lives of voluptuous and reckless aristocrats that prided themselves as Epicureans whereas Stoicism was religiously promoted among resolute Roman rulers and administrators like Marcus Aurelius.²⁶ The social class between the rich and administrators in the Roman empire of that period were morally confused because the two ethical theories were too abstract and sophisticated for them to integrate with the Roman traditional values and customs. The moral vacuum this circumstance created in their socio-religious lives made them susceptible to accept Christian religion and moral values. Before ethical theories were characterized by Christian values and dogma, it is good to recall that ethical theory had no problem with relativism and egoism at the time of Egyptian civilization. It was apparent that the classical period

²³Composta, *History of Ancient Philosophy*, 173-181.

²⁴Composta, *History of Ancient Philosophy*, 318-319.

²⁵Omogbe, *Ethics: A Systematic and historical study*, 174; Composta, *History of Ancient Philosophy*, 333-336.

²⁶Omogbe, *Ethics: A Systematic and historical study*, 173.

witnessed ethical skeptics and relativists as evident in Platonic, Aristotelian, Sophist, Stoic and Epicurean moral theories, each of this moral theory defined and determined how to live a good life in a different perspective.

Ethics and Judeo-Christian culture

There is no gainsaying that Greek and Roman cultures were distinct from the Jewish culture where Christianity derived its origin. What made Jewish ethical theory fundamentally different from either Greek or Roman cultural based ethics is the fact that Jewish ethics was based on divine revelation and not philosophical speculation that generated Greek and Roman ethical theories. The fact that Jewish ethical views were strongly based on divine authority, objectivism and severe sanctions for dissidents made their morality punitive and unattractive to non-Jews.²⁷ The Christian ethics that later developed from Jewish ethics was basically dependent on God for code of conduct and not philosophical thought on the quality of good life. Hence, the watch words for Jews and Christians all over the world is how to be in good relationship with God and one's neighbours with the hope of getting a befitting reward from God either in this world or in the world to come.²⁸ Nevertheless, the primary goal of obedience to the commandments of God on how to live a good life by Jews and Christians goes beyond divine reward to absolute worship and honour to God. After a period of time, Christian ethics gained a distinct characteristics from Judaism. As Judaism underlined the minutest parts of Mosaic ethical, political, dietary and liturgical rules and regulations with intense study of the Torah and intricacies, Christianity accentuated the act of doing good works and cultivation of human will to divine submission.²⁹ In spite of the differences between Jewish and Christian ethics, the duo highlighted and promoted the brotherhood of man in every culture to the fatherhood of God. This was the basis of major socio-political and economic changes evident in European world, including appreciation of human dignity, mutual co-operation and solidarity that were not prominent in the Greek and Roman cultures known for wars and domination. The emphasis on brotherhood and solidarity by the Jewish and Christian ethics made Judeo-Christian culture outstanding and distinguished from other ethical theories that predated the culture.

The principles and promotion of moral relativism started after the age of enlightenment and the reformation in Christianity spear-headed by Martin Luther and the corresponding consequences on religious discrepancies that later weakened Christian influence and her promotion of universal and

²⁷Mondin, *A History of Mediaeval Philosophy*, 274.

²⁸Mondin, *A History of Mediaeval Philosophy*, 349-350; Omoregbe, *Ethics: A Systematic and historical study*, 181.

²⁹Exodus, 20:1-17; Deuteronomy, 5:4-21.

objective morality.³⁰ As a matter of fact, Christian ethical principles suffered more lost after the two world wars as evident in Europe especially in Belgium, Netherlands, France, Britain, Poland, Austria and every part of former USSR. These were the areas that many soldiers of Christian background turned into the theatres of war against their fellow Christians apart from the six million Jews that Hitler and his cohorts callously eliminated. The dynamism and creativity in human nature makes human beings to remain unsatisfied with the various ethical theories that were propounded, defended and promoted by the previous generations. A good book on the history of ethics will illustrate how human beings of different times have constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed the theory of how man ought to live morally in human society. Moreover, the definition and promotion of fundamental human rights by the world organizations like: United Nation Organization, World Health Organization, International Court of Justice, World Trade Union, International Labour Organization, World Bank, Amnesty International and a host of others have made moral objectivism and universalism unpopular at the expense of minority groups, multicultural, religious, socio-political and economic differences that are abound in our world of today.³¹ In actual fact, moral relativism and self-styled moral justifications palpable in homo-sexualism, lesbianism, pedophilia and zoophilia derive support and promotion from the aforementioned world organizations.

The necessity for the origin and development of Special Ethics

In the course of human history, many moral philosophers have developed various ethical theories purported to be appropriate for human beings in the society but none has the conclusive or incontestable theory of morality. The critical minds of these notable moral philosophers on adequate ethical theory for a society have given rise to various areas of specialization in moral theory. For this reason, there are suitable ethical theories for different professions in our contemporary world as apparent in medical ethics, nursing ethics, bioethics, teaching ethics, business ethics, environmental ethics, ethics of journalism, judiciary ethics and so on. The objective of any of these ethical theories is to give a clear definition, purpose, justification and preservation of the fundamental values that can enhance the integrity of the profession and dignity of human person. It is obvious that each profession has moral principles like respect for individual autonomy, justice and fairness, honesty, benevolence, non-maleficent and other values to preserve and promote from time to time. In actual fact, the moral principles of each profession is embedded in what is identified as morally right and wrong, while moral values

³⁰Aso, *David Hume's Moral Theory: A Justification for its Ethical Reconstruction*, 5-7.

³¹Aso, Williams Olrunfemi, *Will Kymlica in Nigeria with the Scope and Morality of Liberal Multiculturalism* (Benin City: Floreat Systems Publications, 2019), 11-12.

become the contents of the character associated with a person or a group of individuals in a given profession. Therefore, the act of a moral agent becomes unethical when his character is contrary to the moral values and principles appreciated by his group or members of his profession.

It is observable that ethical character is gradually acquired at various stages of relationship with others in a group and working place. Hence, in every credible profession, ethical characters and mannerism are well-defined, indoctrinated, cultivated and encouraged like honorable level of integrity, accountability, honesty, dressing code, cordiality and similar ones.³² The members of any professional group that cherish, practice, sustain and promote the valued moral principles of the group are often classified as those that have attained moral nobility among their peers. The obligation is on the professional group that defined, determined and justified ethical characters and values to sturdily preserve them from fraudulence by applying sanctions against those that practice within the area of specialization with moral discrepancies. Otherwise, the professional group that generated the ethical values and principles will lose them to self-styled moral revolutionists as observable today in our global society.

Conclusion

The necessity of ethical theories to maintain law and order in human society can never be overemphasized because human beings are not angelic beings with the nature that is perfectly composed to remain the same like those in a mathematical world where $2+2$ always equals to 4. It is evidently clear that human beings are composed of matter and form, body and soul, reason and passion by which they are uniquely different from other creatures like Gorillas and Chimpanzees that shared at least 97% of human characteristics. The fact that the material and emotional aspects of human beings make them susceptible to immoral actions capable of causing disorderliness in the society necessitates the need to have practicable moral principles needed to tame the excesses emanating from their passions. This is possible through the cultivation of necessary virtues for human beings to behave in such a way that the nobility inherent in their nature can be excellently made evident both in character and in the good of the society. Therefore, human history will continue to have moral philosophers that will criticize, deconstruct, interpret and reconstruct available ethical theories before them to establish the ones that is justified for their culture and existing professions of the time.

³²Aso, *Rudiments of Philosophy for Undergraduates*, 114.