

# **RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR ORIGINS OF MORALITY WITHIN THE YORUBA FRAMEWORK: IMPLICATIONS FOR MAN AND SOCIETY**

**Olatunji A. Oyeshile**

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

## **Abstract**

To what extent can we accept the proposition that morality in African culture is exclusively derived from religion or from the people's conception of the deity? Our answer to the above question is important considering its effect on interpersonal relationship and the people's attitude towards the community. We therefore in this paper consider again the lively debate on the religious and secular origins of morality in traditional African society. Our conclusion is that although religion plays a prominent role in the life of Africans, morality from which the people derive and exhibit their sense of right and wrong, good and evil is never exclusively based on religion. Rather there are many origins of morality such as religion, rationality, prudence, societal custom and habit, and need for peaceful co-existence in society.

## **Introduction**

Conflicts, especially religious ones concerning the socio-political configuration of many African states on the one hand, and the individual's commitment to his community on the other, would seem to be based upon the fusion of morality and religion. The intellectual dimension to these presuppositions is even more poignantly expressed by scholars like Bolaji Idowu<sup>1</sup> and John Mbiti who claim that "Africans are in all things religious and that religion is the basis of morality"<sup>2</sup>. But to what extent can we

accept the proposition that morality in African culture is exclusively derived from religion?

Our answer to the above question is important considering its effect on interpersonal relationship and the people's attitude towards the community. We therefore in this paper consider again the lively debate on the religious and secular origins of morality in traditional African society. Our conclusion is that although religion plays a prominent role in the life of Africans, morality from which the people derive and exhibit their sense of right and wrong, good and evil is never exclusively based on religion. Rather there are many origins of morality such as religion, rationality, prudence, societal custom and habit and need for peaceful co-existence in society.

Our revisit to the origin of moral values at this material point in time is expedient and relevant considering the contribution it makes to our understanding of man and his commitment to community. A case for a secular origin of moral values will show that religiosity (theism) or the lack of it (atheism) cannot be an obstacle to approaching and finding solution to human predicaments. A secular approach to morality is a positive development towards common humanism as it is devoid of dogmatism and unnecessary sentiments which make resolution of conflict difficult in most African countries beset with one conflict or the other. Above all, we show that both the secular and religious origins of morality if properly internalised can enhance development since they both aim at the achievement of the good society although from different perspectives.

## **Morality and Man**

Morality in every human society arises from the need to distinguish right or good conduct from wrong or bad conduct so as to ensure harmonious living in society. Harmonious co-existence is important not only to ensure the continued survival of the society but also of its qualitative development. When we are concerned with good or bad conduct, we are at the realm of morality. Furthermore, due to the importance attached to morality men have internalized the principles, values and conduct that would guide in choosing the right course of action from time to

time. This is not to say, however, that men do not consciously choose a wrong course of action. Morality is therefore concerned with human conduct. In other words, it is concerned with right and wrong actions; judgments and beliefs about what is good and bad, without which the society (any human society) cannot develop. It is obvious then that morality is necessarily tied to human behaviour or conduct because if this was not the case, there would be no need for praising or blaming people for their actions or training them to behave in certain desirable ways in the society<sup>3</sup>.

What makes an issue moral and how do we distinguish between a moral issue and a non-moral issue? Let us note that moral issues arise in everyday life when one is presented with such questions as: What should I do or not do? How should I act? And what kind of a person should I be? These are questions that concern both the individual's behaviour and character<sup>4</sup>. Though these questions can be seen to emanate from an individual's point of view, an analysis of these questions would show that they affect the well-being of others in society. We can say therefore that moral issues arise "fundamentally when the choices people face will affect the well-being of others by either increasing or decreasing it, causing either harm or benefit"<sup>5</sup>.

Going by the analysis above, wearing a blue shirt instead of a red one, drinking beverages rather than coffee, playing football rather than baseball are not moral issues because they do not affect the well-being of other people. They can only become moral issues if it is established, for instance, that by playing football rather than baseball the well-being of others will be affected. On the other hand, the selling of drugs, the battering of a spouse are moral issues because the choices which an individual has made concerning these issues affect the well-being of others. The selling of expired drugs, or drugs to teenagers without prescription can cause physical as well as psychological harm to others.

Let us note again that moral issues are not restricted to matters that concern the well-being of others alone, they also arise in cases where only the agent's well-being is affected<sup>6</sup>. For instance, the agent's choice of committing suicide or continuing to struggle for survival in a desolate environment is a moral issue not because the act of suicide indirectly affects the well-being of others in society, but also because it affects the agent's well-being. This is better appreciated when it is realised that the ultimate

goal of morality is human well-being or the good life. From our analysis of morality, we have seen that choice, freedom and well-being are very important. We have also shown that others matter when an agent makes a choice. This perhaps shows that morality is a social phenomenon.

Ethics as a branch of philosophy studies the principles of morality such as the rightness of human actions, moral obligation and justification of moral actions. Frankena says that “ethics is a moral philosophy or philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems and moral judgments”<sup>7</sup>. Moral philosophy or ethics, according to Frankena, arises when we pass beyond the stage in which we are simply directed by traditional rules and move beyond the principles we have internalized to the stage in which we think for ourselves in critical and general terms, just as the Greeks were beginning to do in Socrates’ day, to achieve a kind of autonomy as moral agents<sup>8</sup>. We say here that moral philosophy or ethics involves critical self-reflection by moral agents themselves, which ultimately helps in providing general rules about morality. This means that ethics is the systematic study of morality. In other words, “ethics consists in the systematic and critical study of man’s moral beliefs. It deals with the principle of right conduct, especially with reference to universal or specific modes of life”<sup>9</sup>.

## **The Concept of Character in Yoruba Moral Universe**

There is a general consensus among the Yoruba that morality is summed up in the word *iwa* which, in its ordinary English translation means character<sup>10</sup>. *Iwa* (Character) has many derivatives and it is the very stuff which makes life joyful and pleasing to God. Due to this, it is often stressed that “good character must be the dominant feature of a person’s life”<sup>11</sup>. From this conception of *iwa*, it is common to hear such aphorisms as:

*Iwa rere lesò eniyan* (good character is one’s guard or the beauty of a person inheres in his good character).

The term *iwa* sometimes has ambivalent meaning because it is used in different senses to portray a person’s character whether good or bad. Wande Abimbola has shed light on the different senses of the term<sup>12</sup>.

We can at least distinguish about four or five senses in which the term is used, all of which are related.

Etymologically, the word *iwa* is formed from the root *wa* (to be, to exist) by addition of the prefix *I*. Therefore, the original meaning of *iwa* can simply be interpreted as “the fact of being, living or existing”<sup>13</sup>. The second meaning of *iwa* is character or moral behaviour. This originates from the idiomatic usage of the original lexical meaning of *iwa*. Taking this to be the case, *iwa* construed as character is the essence of being. Simply put, *iwa* in this sense concerns the ethical aspects of man’s life as distinguished from other areas of human endeavour such as politics and economy. In the third sense, the word *Iwa* (character) is used to refer to either good or bad character. This sense of the term can be demonstrated in such statement as: *Iwa okunrin naa ko dara* (The man’s character is not good) *Iwa omo naa dara* (The child’s character is good). The fourth sense of the term character is when it is used to refer to good character alone as in: *obinrin naa in iwa* (The woman has good character)

The fifth sense, which is a derivative of the earlier senses of *iwa* is when one talks about *iwapele* (gentle or good character) and *iwa buburu* (bad character).

The Yoruba have high regard for *iwa* and they see it as one of the aims of human existence. In order to achieve one’s aims in life, one must embrace *iwa pele*. A person that refuses to exhibit good or gentle character is seen as a brute. The Yoruba say of such a person: *ki seniyan, nse lo fawo eniyan bora* (He is not a human being, he merely assumes the skin of a human being). A well-behaved person is described as *o seniyan* (he acts the person). He can also be referred to as *Omoluwabi* (one who behaves as a well-born or a morally upright person)<sup>14</sup>.

We should note that we cannot compare *iwa* (character) with other valuable things such as money, houses, children and other assets which a man may aspire to have in life. The reason according to the Yoruba is that if a man has other valuables and lacks character, he is regarded as having lacked all. Such a person will not even be respected in society. It is even vehemently believed among the Yoruba that such a person who lacks character will sooner than later lose other valuable possessions. Although, the contemporary society seems to place less emphasis on character, due to the prevalent quest for materialism, it is still the

case that those who uphold the tenets of morality still live a more organised life when one compares their family settings and the social institutions they find themselves in. Many scholars have argued that the present level of societal decadence is as a result of our moral estrangement.

For the Yoruba therefore, since character emanates from Olodumare, deviation from the path of good character is not only an affront to Olodumare but also results in the estrangement of man from the Supreme being. To avoid being punished due to moral estrangement from Olodumare, a man must offer sacrifice (ebo) through the divinities to ensure reconciliation.

### **Polemics on the Religious and Secular Bases of Morality within Yoruba Universe**

Some religious scholars such as Idowu, Adewale, Awolalu, Dopamu and Abimbola (the latter a linguist) argue for the religious origin of moral norms. According to Bolaji Idowu: “Morality is basically the fruit of religion and that to begin with, it was dependent upon it”<sup>15</sup>. This claim by Idowu is used to dismiss other sources of morality such as social origin and common sense. He believes that God has implanted the sense of right and wrong in every man, irrespective of whether he realizes this fact or not. The argument is stressed further to the effect that what the Yoruba usually regarded as *eewo* (taboos) are what have usually been disapproved by Olodumare (God in Yoruba belief). In other words, what has not been sanctioned by Olodumare is regarded as bad, wrong or morally pernicious.

One interpretation which Idowu’s account leads to is that morality is viewed in terms of negative injunctions since they are things that are forbidden and a person is moral as long as he abstains from these taboos. From the issue of taboo there is then a leap to the claim that the Yoruba do not make an attempt to separate morality from religion. Adewale<sup>16</sup>, taking inspiration from Idowu’s account, claims that in the traditional Yoruba

belief system, the distinction between religious law and moral law is very hard to see. It is what religion forbids that society also forbids and society approves those things which religion approves. What Adewale's account suggests is that in traditional Yoruba belief system, there are no differences between religious injunctions and moral injunctions. But to what extent can one agree with this claim? And because it is taken for granted that religious laws are not fundamentally different from moral laws, Adewale believes that there are only two questions for the Yoruba moralist namely: what conduct do the gods command and what conduct do the gods forbid? This account shows at least that the deity's concern with morality is not only in terms of prohibitions (negative imperatives or taboos) but also in terms of positive moral commands that are expected to be carried out by men in order to live the good life.

Perhaps the strong link of religion with morality in traditional Yoruba belief system is as a result of what Omoyajowo describes as the "spiritual affinity between God and man"<sup>17</sup>. This affinity is said to embrace the whole personality of man. Granted this, it means the whole of man's endeavour of which morality is an aspect is subsumed under the Supreme being and by extension under man's religious belief. This is a tendency that is believed to be common among all African peoples as shown in the following claim that religious and moral affinity embraces the whole personality of man, such that:

It is man's self-hood, it is an inner capacity for reason, for freedom, and the sense of morality or right and wrong. It is only in acknowledgement of this spiritual kinship that we discuss the concept of man in Africa<sup>18</sup>.

An argument for the religious origin of morality in Yoruba society can be constructed from the claim that *iwa* (character) is linked with Olodumare<sup>19</sup>. The reasoning goes thus: If *iwa* is linked with Olodumare, it means the latter is the embodiment of good character. And if Olodumare is the embodiment of good character, he expects human beings to have good character as well. For anybody therefore to have deviated from the path of good character will constitute a sin against the divine law of Olodumare and as such a person who has deviated from the path of good

behaviour will then be punished for his misdemeanor. A person can escape being punished by the divinities if he offers sacrifices to the divinities which will then show that he has reconciled with Olodumare. It is also believed that character is very important even in the worship of the divinities and Olodumare in Yoruba culture. Hence, the Yoruba regard good character as the essence of religion. This is commonly reflected in the expression “*iwa lesin*” (character is religion).

Though Akin Makinde believes that there are origins of morality other than religion, he makes a strong case for the religious origin of morality supporting his claim from *Odu ifa* corpus and the African religious universe<sup>20</sup>. For example, he talks about *ogbon* (wisdom), *eko* (study), *otito* (truthfulness) and *mimo iwa hu* (good conduct), which are used in Yoruba moral system as the expression of God’s will for mankind. In making a strong claim for the pre-eminence of religion over other sources of morality, Makinde states that: “Whatever one may wish to consider as origins of African systems of morality ... religion is certainly the most prominent contender”<sup>21</sup>.

Good character is the major sources of happiness destiny, the good life and the life of fulfilment as the *Odu Ifa* corpus demonstrates.<sup>22</sup> In the *Odu* corpus according to Ogbe-Egunda, we see how Orunmila married Iwa and became very successful:

E wa womo Iwa berere o  
E wa womo iwa berere  
Iwa gbe dani  
Iwa pon se hin  
E wa womo iwa berere

Which translates:

Come and behold the countless children of Iwa,  
Come and behold the countless children of Iwa,  
Iwa carries (children) in (her) arms  
Iwa carries (children) on (her) back  
Come and behold the countless children of Iwa.

Furthermore, good character enables one to journey through life as Irete-

Idi asserts:

Iwa pele l'okun aiye  
Fi ro peti l'owo eni  
O da fun Orunmila  
Ti o nlo fi iwa pele  
Gba okun aiye l'owo okan-le-ni-rinwo imale

Which translates:

Gentle character it is which enables the rope of life  
To stay unbroken in one's hand.  
So declares the oracle to Orunmila  
Who by means of gentle character  
Was going to win the rope of life from the four  
hundred and one divinities.

Lack of good character according to the Yoruba can be responsible for endless fear and uncoordinated life as shown by Oworin-sedin:

E jo re, e je o sa:  
Iwa won ni 'ma le won kiri.  
O da fun Aniwonikun  
Ti yi o ma beru t'osan t'oru;  
O je hu'wa 're,  
O je hu'wa atata  
Aniwonikun, ki o ye 'sa kiri bi ojo.

Which translates:

Leave him alone, let him run:  
It is their character that chases them about.  
So declares the oracle about Aniwonikun  
Who fears incessantly day and night  
Will you but practise good character,  
Will you but practise sound character,  
Aniwonikun, and stop running about like a coward.

Some of the Odu Ifa corpus quoted above shows that morality in

Yoruba society has a deep root in the people's conception of Olodumare, the supreme deity, who is believed to be the *orisun* (source) of human existence.

The other group of scholars consisting of Gbadegesin, Oluwole and Oladipo argues for the secular basis of morality in traditional Yoruba belief system. To them religion is just one of the factors that account for the moral norms of the Yoruba people. Other factors include rationality, custom and habit within the society. According to Gbadegesin, those who argue for religion as the base of morality because of the close connection between *iwa* and *ifa* corpus must have misconstrued the nature of the *ifa* corpus as solely the signification of the supreme deity. But *ifa* is not just a religion, it is also a source of Yoruba collective wisdom<sup>23</sup>. The reason is that *Orunmila* (Yoruba deity of divination) speaks in parables and whenever traditional thinkers have the need to establish a point, they make allusion to old age parables. Furthermore, the fact that *Orunmila* was even blamed in a story for maltreating his wife shows that the oracle itself is not spared as far as moral judgment of actions is concerned. Gbadegesin believes therefore that the Yoruba adopt a pragmatic approach towards morality. This means that the Yoruba apply suitable measures to ethical situations without relying on any rules. This attitude may be extended to religion which sometimes serves as the motivation force but not the ultimate appeal in moral matters<sup>24</sup>.

Though no one can dispute the fact that religion influences the moral norms of the Yoruba, "it is still the case that the Yoruba separate the secular from religious in their moral thinking"<sup>25</sup>. In other words, the fact that there is a close connection between religion and morality or the fact that the moral system is religiously coated is not enough a premise to show that the moral norms of the people are logically derived from the existence of a god. It is not even an axiom in terms of which a moral system is rationally justified. Our claim here is that within the Yoruba moral universe, it is often the case that some moral issues are decided on general or universal moral imperatives. For instance the saying: 'Biaba begi nigbo, ka fi oran ro ara eni wo' (when we fell a tree in the forest, let us put ourselves in the position of the felled tree). The metaphorical implication of this statement is that we do not do unto others what we will not want done unto us. Even the saying that, "Boju bari, enu a pamo" (It is not all that the

eyes see, that the mouth reveals) and “Olofofo o gba egbaa, ibi ope lo mo” (The tale-bearer earns no monetary reward but only thanks) all point to the fact that these moral injunctions are designed by men themselves to be able to live successfully. We can imagine what interpersonal relationship will become, if a person reveals all that he sees or gossips about other peoples’ affairs.

Sometimes a man’s inability to search to the depth of other people’s mind with regard to ethical issues does not make the creation of a god inescapable and hence forces the Yoruba to the conclusion that “a philosophical solution to the problem at hand cannot consist of scientifically proven judgment”<sup>26</sup>. The implication of the above therefore, is that the Yoruba now leave judgments concerning the issue of justice in the hands of the gods. Hence, it is common to hear such utterances as: *Olorun a da* (God will decide/adjudicate justice) or *Oju Olurun to* (The eyes of God see it all)<sup>27</sup>. To say all the above things however is not to indicate that the Yoruba individual despises secular ethics to constitute an irrational endeavour. On the contrary, when the individual gets to the end of a rational process, especially when a solution is not forthcoming, he introduces god into the scheme of things.

From our analysis, it is perhaps clear why Oluwole suggests that even though the Yoruba system can be said to incorporate some religious elements, the morality of the Yoruba is a system involving the evaluation of human action<sup>28</sup>. The moral norms of the Yoruba if it is said to be founded on religion, or explained in due reference to good will mean simply that all their rules of behaviour are taboos. Furthermore, it is often stated that the gods forbid some forms of behaviour, for instance, we can say that *Ogun* (god of iron) does not allow stealing while *Oya* (river goddess) forbids telling lies. According to Oluwole, if the Yoruba man is asked why he thinks these acts are wrong, he does not refer to the gods but to factual reasons for explanation why one ought not to steal or tell lies. Hence, the gods are made rational in terms of moral matters, because what they sanction or do not sanction must be acceptable to the rational mind<sup>29</sup>.

In a similar vein, the Yoruba do not always wait for the gods to dispense justice in hell or heaven in matters they are capable of handling themselves and this explains the reasons why people are blamed or praised for their actions and the existence of penal codes to check the behaviour

of people. In fact, to leave judgments in the hands of God when man is capable of determining the factual basis of the issue at hand would be to deny him of his freewill and embrace a fatalistic interpretation of predestination. By fatalistic interpretation, we mean that orientation of holding to the belief that what will be, will be in spite of human effort. This attitude will seem to discourage the belief in cause and effect. To the contrary however, the Yoruba believe that events have causes which are natural and man-made. They only appeal to the Supreme Being when natural and human explanations to account for events fail.

It has been suggested that to claim that Olodumare is the sole origin of Yoruba moral norms is inconsistent with the existential aspects of the people's life. For instance, when one examines some of the proverbs and institutionalized practices of the people there is lack of consistency and coherence of an outlook based on the conception of a deity. Rather, what one finds is an outlook that one would call an essentially "this-worldly" and pragmatic orientation<sup>30</sup>. Let us note that our claims here are substantiated in the everyday life of the Yoruba as discernible in their attitude towards one another, in their proverbs and wise sayings. The Yoruba belief in morality is primarily "this-worldly" and pragmatic because the people try as much as possible to find natural reasons for why things happen in particular way and it is pragmatic because they are ready to manipulate events, even the Ifa oracle to ensure that things favour them. This is aptly captured by D.O. Fagunwa when he reports on the musings of the great hunter Akara-Ogun in Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irumale as he proceeds to divine what lies in store for him:

When I cast the pieces of kola, the result was inauspicious. For if it spoke good, would two pieces not face down and the other two up? Alas it was not so for me; sometimes three pieces faced down and one up, and at other times all four faced down-the matter of this kolanut was simply beyond my comprehension. So when I had cast them many times without good augury, with my own hands I turned two up and faced two down saying, "with his own hands does a man mend his fortune; if you kola pieces will not predict good, I will predict that good for you."<sup>31</sup>

Their pragmatic nature also stems from the fact that they are ready

to abandon some of the divinities and lesser deities that serve as intermediary between them and Olodumare if the divinities do not respond favourably to their requests. It is often common to hear such saying as: “Orisa ti a ke ke ke ti ko gbo ike, ti a ge ge ge ti ko gbo ige, oju u popo ni ngbe” (The divinity who is incessantly coddled but fails to respond to coddling, who is incessantly pampered but does not respond to pampering, will end up discarded in the street)<sup>32</sup> This even explains why some divinities are not being worshipped in some traditional Yoruba communities. To say therefore that the attitude of the Yoruba concerning morality is “this-worldly” and pragmatic does not mean that they have totally abandoned Olodumare, rather they appeal to Olodumare in cases where moral problems, dilemmas and crises cannot be simply solved by human efforts. And this suggests also that both the religious and secular origins of morality are complimentary.

Furthermore, if we grant that some of the moral norms of the people are associated with their conception of God, these moral norms do not exhaust the variety of norms that we have in Yoruba culture<sup>33</sup>. The reason is that there are certain norms of behaviour that arises out of the attempt by the people to grapple with the different strata of human existence. This becomes the case because morality is inextricably linked with human action and as such covers a wider range of human activities and experiences than religion. It also accounts for its diversity and variety from time to time within a society and among societies<sup>34</sup>.

From the various arguments presented so far, we can see that though religion plays considerable role in determining the moral norms of the Yoruba, it is definitely not the sole origin as there are other sources of Yoruba moral norms such as custom and habit, human rationality and even human experience. It would therefore be wrong to claim that Yoruba morality is exclusively dependent on religion. What one cannot deny or dispute in Yoruba and other African societies, according to Kudadjie, is that:

Religion significantly influences what Africans consider good or bad, right or wrong. Religion determines much of the moral code of an African people, especially those values which may be called negative - the don'ts, the taboos<sup>35</sup>.

What the statements above indicate is that moral values in Yoruba and other African societies have some elements of supernaturalism. Based on this, good acts would then be taken to include those acts that have been approved by the oracles, those laid down by the builders of the community, comprising mostly of elderly people and those built on the stock of experiences that a given society has<sup>36</sup>.

Let us re-emphasize that there are various origins or sources or foundations of Yoruba moral norms all of which revolve around the concept of *iwa* from which other related concepts such as *iwapele* and *omoluwabi* are derived. The implications of a secular origin of morality for man within the African society are far-reaching. For instance, a case for a secular origin makes the individual more committed to human values because it prevents religious dogmatism and unnecessary transcendentalism in moral issues affecting people from diverse backgrounds. The secular basis also emphasizes common humanity and avoids division along religious basis in society's development. It also gives a proper basis for assessing conflict in a society like Africa, by removing the religious veil that may lead to and may not help in resolving ethnic conflicts that often lead to civil wars. It is on this basis that we submit that even though there is a strong fusion of morality and religion in almost all societies, especially African societies, human beings are still tied together in moral matters by factors other than religion.

### **Implications of Morality for Contemporary Society**

The preceding sections have afforded us the opportunity of establishing the interconnection between the religious and secular origins of morality in Yoruba culture. The pertinent question at this juncture is this: what are the implications of *Iwa* (character) towards achieving sustainable development in contemporary African society marred by violence, corruption, selfishness, bad leadership, dearth of integrity and fall in the standard of education? The answer is simply that the full embrace of moral values as enunciated in traditional Yoruba belief system will help to overcome, some of the problems stated above. Whether from religious or

secular origin, the Yoruba moral system abhors selfishness, wickedness, greed, adultery, covenant breaking and such other moral vices. The best we can do in this circumstance is to adhere to this moral values strictly. For instance, economic and political activities are marked by impatience - the urge to make it fast. But Yoruba moral system tells us that one cannot achieve anything without patience (suru). Suru (patience) is taken to be Baba Iwa (father of character). It is through suru that Olodumare organizes the world. It would have been difficult to achieve any social control in human organizations if no one exercises patience. In interpersonal and international relations, patience plays a prominent role. For instance, in a situation of war between two countries, the warring parties still have to go to the negotiating table and this is only possible through patience.

The strictly positive moral norms like good neighbourliness, loyalty among friends, selflessness, fidelity between husband and wife, truthfulness among others are moral norms that enjoin co-operation, which we are in dire need of in contemporary society. This is important because the Yoruba realize that no man can live in isolation and, therefore, the individual must be ready always to sacrifice or suppress personal interest for the general good. The Yoruba saying that: “Emi abata ni nmu odo san” (The influence of the fountain makes the river flow) clearly illustrates the need for interdependence. Since the goal of morality is primarily to ensure human well-being through the injunctions of Olodumare and other human designs, then every individual as a social being has to ensure the good of the community to which he belongs since this is the only way his own well-being can be ensured.

Olodumare, not only as the source of our being, but also that being from which some of our moral injunctions emanate does serve as the basis of cohesion in human society. The argument is simply that the awareness that we all accept and internalize the belief that we have a common source of being reinforces the belief in men that they should live together in harmony. Although we may ask the question: If this is the case why is it that human beings are still engaged in conflicts of various forms and magnitudes? To answer this question an appeal is then made to the secular nature of man. Taking it for granted that Olodumare created all, we do not all live in the same environment. Not only this, we have different desires and aspirations. Even the means by which we fulfill the desires

and aspirations varies from individual to individual depending on custom, habit, economic position and political affiliation. This is the reason why men then appeal to such factors (secular in origin) which allow them to come together since there has to be social order and harmony before each individual can achieve his goal.

Another implication of the religious basis of morality especially among the Yoruba is that a person's conduct on earth is believed to be the sole determinant of the judgement which he receives in the life after death. The Yoruba say: "Iwa ti a ba hu laye ni a o fi dani lejo, oun na ni a o jere" (A person's character on earth will be used to judge him and it will also determine his inheritance hereafter). This to some extent is an admonition that one should behave well on earth and desist from what will bring pain to others. There is a meta-question here: Since people are well aware of this, why do we still have people who behave contrary to the injunctions of Olodumare? Although, the scope of our essay does not extend to this sphere, suffice it to say here that this question has been a major problem in religious circles. Perhaps, this is why legal and political sanctions have been introduced to govern human conduct. Above all, many people still believe that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, progress and development. Even though people's immoral attitude is at variance with religious institutions and places of worships, man still need to return to God to make meaning of his secular life.

## ENDNOTES

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2. J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969).
3. O. Oladipo, "Morality in Yoruba Thought: A Philosophical Analysis", *Quest*, Vol. I, No. 2 (1987), pp. 43-51.
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5. *Ibid.*
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7. W.K. Frankena, *Ethics*, second edition, (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India Private Ltd., 1995), p.4.
8. *Ibid.*
9. J.O. Kayode, "African Ethnics on sex" in S.O. Abogunrin (ed.), *Religion and*

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