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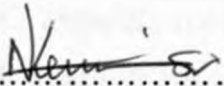## *A CRITICAL EXAMINATION*
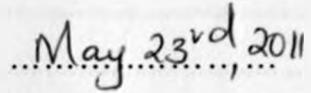
BY

KEVIN KARIMI

A PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN PHILOSOPHY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

DECLARATION

I, Kevin Karimi a member of the Little Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, hereby declare that this project is my original work and has never been submitted for examination in any other University. Information from all other sources is duly acknowledged.
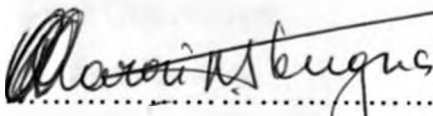
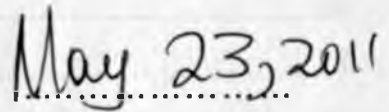..................................   ..May 23rd, 2011

Kevin Karimi
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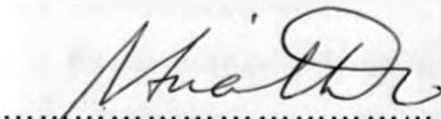
This Project has been submitted for examination with our approval as University Supervisors

....   May 23, 2011

Dr.   Karori Mbugua   Date
Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies

....   23/5/2011

Dr. Oriare Nyarwath   Date
Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies

i

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION

This Work Is Dedicated To

My Grandma Juliana Gachoreria

My Parents Mr & Mrs Njeru Gachoreria (Disciplinarians)

My Very First Teachers on Moral Values

And

To All Subsequent Teachers/Lecturers Who Have Shaped My Life To What I

Am Today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

"We know that in all things God works for good for those who love Him!" (Romans 8:28) To God Be Glory!

My profound, immeasurable and heartfelt gratitude through the Chairman Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Prof. Waruta D.W., goes to the University of Nairobi, for the award of the scholarship to pursue my Masters Degree.

I thank God for the gift of the Little Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, the congregation to which I belong. Thanks to my superiors for allowing me to take this opportunity to study. It has been a golden chance. Many thanks to my sisters in our community at Magiwa, I treasure everything you have done and been to me.

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Special thanks go to Ndichu Francis Murira of Kenyatta University, the library staff Tangaza College, the library staff Hekima College, thank you for every resourceful reading material you all assisted me with while I studied this noble course and during my research!

To my friends, Social and Spiritual Mentors, where would I be without you? You are ingrained in my life; may you be inspired even more to keep encouraging me so that I can have something to give in return, by encouraging you too when you need me along life's journey. We can only give what we have, as I share that my best and most humbling lesson this far is that;

"Knowing one's ignorance is the best part of knowledge."(Lao Tse, c. 565 BCE.)

ABSTRACT

This study is a critical examination of the long standing debate between the theories of moral objectivism and moral relativism. The debate goes back to ancient times when philosophers like Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle among other Greek philosophers began to ask what a good life is and how it can be attained.

The problem under investigation was to evaluate arguments by moral objectivists and moral relativists in order to establish whether the two views can be reconciled. The research objectives were to analyze how objectivism and relativism conceptualize the moral notions 'right and wrong, good and bad.' To establish which between the two perspectives is more logically consistent and thus more plausible and which view accounts best for moral experience and progress.

The research was qualitative, employing library and an integrated approach of conceptual and prescriptive analysis methodology. The researcher studied the works of scholars in books, journals, local daily and unpublished research work.

From the arguments advanced in the two views, moral objectivism and moral relativism, the debate cannot be resolved in absolute terms. However, some forms of resolving moral conflicts have been discussed. In the final analysis, this study found that the views of objectivism remain consistent and more plausible because relativism condemns itself to an objective standard of making moral judgments through its self refuting claims resulting into its auto-assimilation into objectivism. This enables us to arrive at a possible compatibility though not by mutual agreement in their claims, but in a way that relativism can be said to complement objectivism and objectivism accepting temporal relativism. Notable in the debate is a common characteristic that, theory and practice find their place in the two theories.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Human beings are moral by nature. Their judgments, decisions and actions have an ethical import. Their actions can be evaluated as right or wrong, good or bad. The question of how people arrive at passing that vital judgment; 'that this action is right or it is wrong' is paramount.

Ordinarily when an action adheres to some moral principle(s) it is said to be right or good. Conversely when it does not adhere to or violates some moral principle(s) it is said to be wrong or bad. This kind of judgment is not made in isolation of the environment in which people live. People are first individuals, and then they belong to a unit or agent(s) of moral transmission which could be the family, the religious group one is affiliated to, the peer group, the school, the state or the wider society.

Philosophers have attempted to provide criteria that would be used by people to arrive at morally sound judgments. In this debate there are four perspectives from which people view morality, namely Absolutism,

Objectivism, Relativism and Subjectivism. While this study focuses on the debate between moral objectivism versus moral relativism other perspectives, moral absolutism, moral universalism, and moral subjectivism are generally highlighted because at times they have an overlapping aspect on each other and some scholars use some terms concomitantly.

Moral Absolutism – This is the view that morality applies to everyone, everywhere and always. According to Manuel Velasquez (2007) ethical absolutism "states that one and only one correct morality exists." p.278 Louis P. Pojman (1992) says that the absolutist believes that there are non-overridable moral principles which ought never to be violated. Pojman cites Kant's system as a good example of this claim. Kant in his categorical imperatives states that, a person should act on that maxim that one would will at the same time it becomes a universal law. This is the first formulation of the categorical imperative which provide a common platform or a moral standard which is not discriminatory either to the individual as a moral agent or to other moral agents. Kant in this regard says for instance, that a person ought never to break a promise or never tell a lie no matter what. Once a person has made a commitment to another through a promise or a contract, such commitment ought not to be broken whatsoever because then if everyone made promises they would

2

not keep, life in such a situation would be very difficult. If everyone did not see the need not to tell lies, it would be difficult for anyone to tell when they are getting the truth from their counterparts. Such life would be full of suspicion opening up other loopholes into the loss of integrity and creating room for hatred and disunity among people.

Moral Universalism – This is the view that moral principles can be applied across board so that they are binding for everyone, everywhere and always; a view that is also held by the absolutists and objectivists. Environments and cultures differ but human nature is the same everywhere hence morality is founded on objective universal principles. According to Douglas Birsch (1999) **universalizability** is connected to the crucial idea of moral equality and because of this equality we can universalize our legitimate ethical evaluations because we are moral equals. If we are all moral equals, there is no relevant difference between us that would justify someone else to act differently.

Moral Objectivism – This is the view that there are some objective moral norms and values that transcend both culture and the individual. This view stands in a moderate position to moral absolutism. Moral objectivism also differs from moral absolutism in that absolutism does not flex its muscle on the stand that there is only one morality that exists. Moral objectivism accordingly is not as rigid as William Ross (1930) asserts that

3

these moral principles are *prima facie* principles, but may be overridden by another moral principle in cases of moral conflict. For example while a principle of justice may generally outweigh a principle of benevolence, there are times when enormous good could be done by sacrificing a small amount of justice, so that an objectivist would be inclined to act according to the principle of benevolence. There may be some absolute or non-overridable principles but there need not be any or many for objectivism to be true (Beckwith 1996:16).

Moral Relativism – This is the view that there are no objective moral norms or values that transcend either culture or the individual. Moral relativism has the following forms, Conventional ethical relativism, and subjective ethical relativism.

Ruth Benedict (1934) argues that morality is merely conventional, that it is a useful term to indicate socially approved customs, nothing more nothing less. Like many proponents of moral relativism, Benedict says there are no transcultural objective moral principles to which all people everywhere and in every place are obliged to subscribe, therefore morality is culturally relative. This claim does not seem to recognize the transcendental nature of fundamental principles like preserving life, respect for human dignity, personal integrity among others. There is no

4

culture that approves of killing, rape, or dishonesty therefore to assert that there are no transcultural objective moral principles is implausible.

As Louis P. Pojman explains conventional ethical relativism is the view that there are no objective moral principles but that all valid moral principles are justified by virtue of their cultural acceptance, recognizing the social nature of morality (Pojman 1990:23).

On ethical subjectivism, Pojman states that our moral judgments spring from our personal predilections and aversions. Our morality is a matter of individual taste and as such it is equally unarguable (Pojman 1990:22).

From the foregoing views, heated debates have been generated among philosophers, aligned to absolutism, objectivism, relativism or subjectivism. This study focuses on the debate between the objectivists and relativists. According to Beckwith 'the moral objectivist is usually stereotyped as being narrow-minded, intolerant and dogmatic for holding the belief that there is only one set of objectively true moral values. The moral relativist is usually portrayed as open-minded, tolerant and non-dogmatic for holding the belief that there are a number of alternative moral systems each of which is valid for the person, culture or nation that embraces it. However, these stereotypes are far from accurate and irrelevant to the question of each view's plausibility because it implies the

arguments are describing the proponents rather than their views' merit'
(Beckwith 1996:3).

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study is a critical examination of the arguments advanced in the
debate between moral objectivism versus moral relativism on how people
determine what is morally right or wrong, good or bad. Moral objectivism
claims that there are objective moral norms and values that transcend
both culture and the individual. Moral relativists, on the other hand,
assert that there are no objective moral norms and values that transcend
either culture or the individual instead moral claims are merely opinions,
personal preferences, cultural rules or emotive exclamations.

People are part of one environment or another and seem to be influenced
by the skewed relationship between the agents of moral transmission and
the norms. Consider an individual who is part of a culture of an ethnic
community, a religion, a family, a peer group, a nation, a school, all with
norms specific to their context. It is evident that objectivism and
relativism under such circumstances cannot be both right or both wrong
from the same perspective and time. This raises the problem and the

6

question of how anyone involved in a moral dilemma can determine what is "right" and what is "wrong", "good" or "bad". Which view is accurate?

While these two camps appear diametrically opposed to each other, there are points which they share. Beckwith notes that moral objectivism just like moral relativism, seems to be consistent with our observations and intuition (Beckwith (1996:3). We are able to distinguish between an upright person for instance from a social misfit in a way that the two views, moral objectivism and moral relativism, would not negate or confuse the value of the actions of the two persons as either good or bad. Therefore, one can ask the following questions.

Research Questions

- ➢ Do objectivists and relativists define and use their concepts in the same way?
- ➢ Can the two camps be reconciled?

1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has the following objectives

(i)   To analyze how objectivism and relativism have conceptualized the moral notions "right and wrong, good and bad."

(ii) To establish which of the two perspectives, namely objectivism and relativism, is more logically consistent and thus more plausible.

(iii) To make an analysis to establish which view, objectivism or relativism, accounts best for moral experience and progress.

1.4. JUSTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Moral dilemmas are part of our everyday life and they vary from situation to situation and person to person. Dilemmas are not premeditated and as such there is a need to identify practical dimensions that will enable people to reach a rational resolution based on a moral standard that promotes moral progress.

This study endeavours to provide a criterion for the human capacity to apprehend and strive for moral ideals not for mere survival but for viability as well. As moral agents bound by their actions, people should seek the knowledge that lays bare crucial factors they should consider when making moral judgments.

Due to development and changing times, we are now living in a multicultural society with immigrants from one society to another. Our interactions cannot be meaningful or productive where norms and values between cultures are not recognized and upheld.

The arguments in the debate between moral objectivism and moral relativism are informative and well founded. They play a significant role in creating awareness among people on what is right or wrong, good or bad and regulating behaviour in the society.

1.5. DEFINITION OF TERMS

In this study the following are some of the terms that have been used and they all take the moral sense not the non-moral sense.

Right – that which is ethically correct in accordance with norms and values.

Wrong – this is what is ethically incorrect or inconsistent with the moral norms and values

Good – that which promotes and enhances a good life, thus we can speak about lives of people being good because they live(d) well, but we cannot

9

refer to objects as being good in a moral sense because such objects are value-neutral.

Bad – that which negates the attainment of a good life.

Moral Dilemma – the state of being unable to choose between two or more moral actions that are of equal importance yet only one choice must be made at the time.

Logical dilemma – one cannot choose between two actions that are impossible to combine, for instance choosing between life and death. Just as one cannot choose between night and day at the same time, we cannot choose right and wrong at the same time.

Physical dilemma – one cannot possibly choose to be in two places at the same time.

Culture – will refer to the way a group of people do things, including how they understand each other and their norms and values within such a set up.

1.6. LITERATURE REVIEW

In analyzing various schools of thought, attention in this study is paid to the concepts that have been used by scholars to defend their positions on moral objectivism and moral relativism.

According to Kelly Walsh (2010) there are several reasons why relativism is flawed. He has cited some of the arguments advanced by Ruth Benedict, a proponent of moral relativism, with the example of the practice among the Kwakiutl where in their culture it did not matter whether a relative had died in bed of disease, or by the hand of an enemy, in either case death was an affront that had to be wiped out by the death of another person.

Walsh observes that failure to allow for cross-cultural ethical judgments we are forced to permit the immoral practices within other cultures like Kwakiutl's indefensible murder of the innocent people allowed by the principle of moral relativism.

Walsh has also examined another claim by William Graham Sumner a relativist who asserts that moral standards are determined solely by a community's mores. Walsh says this is not the case because morality is

absolute, universal and objective. He continues to challenge the view of Sumner by stating that mores are subject to shifting and that people within the same culture are also known to question their own mores. What causes them to question mores of their own culture? If the mores were right, they would not need to shift. For Walsh this is an indicator that the mores can be wrong and if the mores can be wrong then they cannot reasonably be presumed to correctly determine what is right and wrong as they may be wrong in themselves. Walsh also notes as he concludes that something cannot be both subjective and objective at the same time like Ruth Benedict purports. Walsh also notes that Sumner in his argument does not account for members of a particular society who have rejected their own cultures, ethical principles and moral practices demonstrating that there exist universal moral principles which transcend cultural divides. Walsh acknowledges cultural relativism is evident but it does not necessitate, prove or demand moral relativism.

Damien Anthony Cole (2004) in his PhD Thesis has endeavored to show that moral relativism and moral objectivism are not mutually exclusive but each is part of a coherent whole. He has argued in particular for both relativism and universalism from where he has arrived at identifying two types of moral principles. One type he called the principles that are context dependent and the other type, those that are not context

12

dependent. Those that are not context dependent he called basic principles, identifiable with objective principles that would always suit everyone and everywhere, always. Those that are context dependent he has called the limiting moral principles identifiable with cultural or societal principles limited to those involved. He believes that no matter the context, any moral judgments being made under any of the two categories cannot be in error.

Damien also says his approach allows for 'Conviction U and Conviction R.' this he did so as to accommodate the convictions of the universalists represented above as (U) and (R) to cater for the conviction of relativists. He did this with a view to making what he calls the everyday business of making moral judgments become a little easier if it is no longer impeded by the prospect of a debilitating confrontation between moral universalists and moral relativist. In spite of arriving at such a moderate position, he acknowledges the difficulty into which his position would put the "hard-line adherents" to moral relativism and those of moral universalism. This acknowledgement shows that this study does not solve the problem of arriving at a mutually inclusive position. His view would suit the more malleable people than those who are rigid or as he calls them hard-line adherents to a given view so that the universalist would stick by their guns and the relativists the same. A good example of the hard-line

13

adherents is Kant on his absolute moral principles which he says must be kept no matter what, for instance, you must tell the truth no matter the consequences of such truth telling (Cole 2004:26-27).

In the African set up, there exist many laws, customs, set forms of behaviour, regulations, rules, observances and taboos constituting the moral code and ethics of a given community or society. According to John S. Mbiti some of these moral codes are held sacred and are believed to have been instituted by God or national leaders. They originate in the 'zamani' where the forefathers are. Any breach of this code of behaviour is considered evil, wrong or bad; for it is an injury or destruction to the accepted social order and peace (Mbiti 2002:205).

In a study by Oriare Nyarwath (1994), he endeavors to explain some of the things that were considered evil, wrong and bad, expressed generally through taboos in African contexts. He sought to demonstrate why taboos seemed to be so forceful in directing people's actions that they did disregard some prevalent opposing conditions which made them appear either unreasonable or undesirable. The African context is the best example from where cultural relativism is highly cited and practiced in great variance. Taboos were a negative sanction in all communities meaning that a taboo was objectively wrong, but particular things that

14

were a taboo in one community were not considered a taboo in other communities, they varied from one community to the next. This is where cultural relativism asserts that what is right in one place may be wrong in another.

The meaning of the word taboo is that which was forbidden implying it was wrong, yet in the African context what was forbidden/wrong in one culture could be permitted and therefore right in a different culture. Below are some examples.

Nyarwath in his study explored various taboos among the Luo people covering aspects of religious beliefs, family, sex and death. While most of those taboos were focused on the Luo community, many other African communities generally shared in most of them but not all. For instance it was a taboo among the Luo for a married man or woman to engage in extra-marital affairs, otherwise their child could suddenly die. This was to prevent getting children out of wedlock and possible killing when a man was found with another's wife.

Among the Maasai contrary to the Luo community, it was a sign of generosity, friendship and hospitality for a man visiting another man to spend the night with the wife of the host. Tradition has it in Kenya that

the Maasai did practice as a gesture of hospitality, a man having sexual relationship with his age mate's wife or the wife of those men with whom one was initiated into adulthood through circumcision.

Among the Luo, their culture did not allow getting a child with anybody regardless of that person's social and genetic background but among the Kikuyu, it was acceptable that a married woman could get a child with a man other than her husband mainly for genetic reasons as we would call it today from scientific explanation, but traditionally it was out of experience and common understanding as they did not have scientific background then. For the Kikuyu it was as a guard against a family getting wiped out by a disease in case the parents had a genetic combination that was prone to deadly disease(s) as noted above.

Taboos were indoctrinated to members in the society and they were unquestioned. People just believed and adhered to them as they were passed on but Nyarwath asserts that people need reason to liberate them from fear of the unknown or unknowable and the threatening imaginations. He recommended that people be educated on the rational approach to taboo institutions. Reason creates creators or shall we call them co-creators who carry society over the inevitable changes. Nyarwath's work advocates the objective sense of social norms and values

because it has highlighted many of those taboos that were once held sacrosanct but have since been abandoned due to overriding factors. Many more cultures have also abandoned practices that are now deemed anachronistic and lacking in rational justification. From his work we can compare norms and values between one society and another and infer that some mores were better than others as proponents of moral objectivism assert.

There is no culture known, in the past or present, to have opposed values like generosity, respect for elders, hospitality, hardwork, benevolence, courage and many more. These values were demonstrated through norms in very significant ways in their varieties as each culture deemed fitting. So moral objectivism still prevails where cultural relativism is best illustrated, as we have seen there were norms and values that went beyond the individual and culture. The recommendation by Nyarwath to educate people as opposed to being indoctrinated with norms and values is apt.

In the debate between Gilbert Harman who defends moral relativism and Judith Javis Thompson who defends moral objectivism, Harman says that moral relativism, when speaking on what is right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust, virtuous and vicious, is always relative to a choice of

moral framework, showing that what is morally right in relation to one moral framework can be morally wrong in relation to a different moral framework. Thus no moral framework is objectively privileged as the one true morality. Judith J. Thompson holds to the opposite view that in ethics there are possibilities of finding correct answers to moral questions. In her view, some moral disagreements are like disagreements whether a house proposed for sale is Victorian in style or otherwise. This was in relation to the example given by Gilbert Harman that moral disagreements are like disagreement on what to pay for a house. The agreement does not come ahead of time but the sale will depend on various other factors so that the buyer and seller can settle on a final price (Harman G., & Judith J. Thompson, 1996).

In the case of Harman, the sale entails negotiations which are not uniform or static, as can be demonstrated by the diverse cultural frameworks. What is right in one cultural set up may be wrong in another cultural set up. Conversely, Thompson argues differently by acknowledging the principles that are well established and do not change regardless of where they are viewed from. Hers is an argument for that which is knowable *a priori*. As many scholars have discussed a principle like honesty does not require place or time to be right as a relativist would claim that what is right at one time could be wrong another time; and what is right in one

18

place may be wrong in another place. Discriminating against other people is wrong everywhere and always. No form of negotiation would morally make those principles otherwise in their essence. Thompson makes a more credible argument using the example of a Victorian house whose price or value can be determined prior to the sale agreement if it meets the standards that qualify it to be Victorian just as one can evaluate an action to pass as honest or discriminating intrinsically.

James R. Beebe (2003) has presented arguments for and against conventional ethical relativism, as well as subjective relativism and found that both views have serious objections. For instance there are cases whereby people may find themselves torn between two cultures, like the laws of the state coming into conflict with religious doctrines. In countries where abortion is legal, for instance, the Catholics are at a dilemma whether to adhere to the teaching of the church or to the legal provision made by the state because the Catholic Church does not allow abortion. Here the relativists are at a loss on their defense if what is right in one society could be wrong for another. This is a case of people in one society bound by different practices taking into consideration that it is moral to obey just laws.

Beebe also argues that the relativists assert there are no true moral standards for all people at all times while implicitly they would want their claim to be held as the true position for all people at all times, this is a contradiction on their part. Another flaw is that although moral values may differ from one culture to culture, their very formulation within each culture is based on what those concerned term as an objective standard to cater for them all without discrimination, so how can the relativist reject or deny objectivism?

However, conventional and subjective relativism have also put forward very challenging arguments against moral absolutism. Beebe recognizes the contribution conventional ethical relativism and subjective relativism make to people's peaceful coexistence through respect for one another and the virtue of tolerance and that they are also right about the evils of ethnocentrism. Beebe concludes by saying the relativists and absolutists face serious objections which they must first resolve if they are to be considered fully adequate in their views of morality.

According to Scott M. Sullivan (2010) there is a problem with moral relativism and he goes ahead to present arguments for and against moral relativism. He was able to show the flaws in the arguments that are upheld by relativists. For instance on the argument from tolerance, guilt

and compassion, where moral absolutists are accused of creating guilt and making people feel bad about their actions and lifestyles because of oppressive people who think they can tell others what is right and what is wrong. Scott responds by saying that feelings are not the standard for determining morality otherwise we would be allowing rapists, robbers, or a Hitler to feel good about their immoral acts. On the aspect of tolerance and compassion, Scott says if these are really good, then the relativists advance a self-refuting claim because then tolerance and compassion should be held as universally good by all people and at all times. He continues to say only the objectivist can have a real moral disagreement with another, because if relativism is true, there is no wrong opinion to tolerate, every view is equally true. The relativist just agrees with everyone and agreeing is not tolerance. On the flipside of the coin, grave immoral actions are intolerable, should we tolerate genocide, enslavement or tyranny among others Scott asks?

On the argument from different cultural values, Scott responds by saying that there is a hidden false assumption in this argument, that it is good to obey one's culture, this too should be relative. He notes that it is possible also that entire culture can morally err for instance cultures that have been known in history to enslave others fall in this category. Scott sees lack of consensus as a baseless ground for refuting existence of truth. He

also distinguishes between norms and values that have never been disputed by any society, for instant, killing innocent people has always been wrong in every culture, truth telling, courageous patriotism have always been praised, while vices and immoral acts have never been praiseworthy in any culture like cowardice, disrespect towards parents and rape to mention just a few.

If the relativists should argue that parental or societal influence where morals are said to be learned traits and not real show the relativity of morals, Scott says that learning morality does nothing to prove its subjectivity, history and science are learned too but that does not make them relative. From every day experience parental or societal influence does not imply subjectivity going by the differences that can be attested to among people. For instance, members of the same family born and brought up by the same parents do not end up behaving the same way or as taught by their parents, some children right from their family are malleable and therefore easy to deal with than others. The principle of autonomy can be seen to prevail in such circumstances. Children from very upright families are seen to turn out in later days to be deviants or social misfits. Consider the case of a Kenyan self confessed serial killer who not only shocked the citizens but his own mother who could not

believe his son is a killer in spite of bringing him up as a God fearing and humble child (Sunday Nation June 13th 2010: 6).

Conversely children from dysfunctional families can be seen to strive for excellence and that which is objectively good, right and end up as very responsible citizens by transforming their misfortunes into hard work and future fortunes. The underlying principle of hard work and determination overrides subjectivism in favour of objectivism.

To the relativists claim that 'everyone should have the freedom to live out their morality, Scott says that the argument presupposes that freedom is already an objective good and that everyone ought to respect it.

Having identified the strengths of moral relativism and its flaws, Scott raises other plausible arguments that make him arrive at the conclusion that it does not take much to see that moral relativism is one of the weakest and most transparent philosophies ever proposed yet it is still very widespread in our culture.

The first argument against moral relativism according to Scott is that by asserting that no one should impose their morality on others, the relativists themselves are imposing their morality on others, thus showing

they cannot live by their own rule. The question like "who are you to judge?" is itself a judgment against whoever the question is directed to and is therefore self-refuting.

The second point is that relativism is unlivable. Scott says that from the ivory tower of the university relativism can pretend to be true, but in the "real world", the relativists act like everyone else. In cases where they may encounter robbers stealing their property or breaking into their houses the relativist will not allow for immoral acts as relative to the robbers but they will take an action immediately to safeguard themselves and recover their goods from the robbers.

Third is the incongruence in the relativists' claim that anything is wrong including intolerance. May be one's personal moral value says it is okay to beat women and minors, to practice slavery, to steal, to be corrupt and see nothing wrong with that. Also why change a culture if there is no real standard to govern morality? What could possibly be the moral standard by which a cultural reformer demands change? There is a difference between moral saints and moral devils.

The fourth point is that it would be impossible for the relativist to say anything is right including tolerance or compassion. For them the actions

of Hitler and Mother Teresa do not morally differ at all. Moral progress can only be an incoherent phrase in the relativist's vocabulary.

Lastly relativism reduces itself to moral nihilism. Moral nihilism is the view that there are no moral values. If there are no moral norms then there should be no criminal codes and that way there would be nothing wrong with stealing, neglecting one's children, underpaying and cheating employees. This would imply that "anything goes" if relativism is true. There is no difference between being a moral relativist and having no morality at all.

Scott concludes his observations by saying that traditional morality holds that morals are prescriptive in that they are not simply describing what everyone is doing but authoritatively prescribing and governing what they should do.

From the forgoing views many scholars concur on the flaws of relativism and the strengths of objectivism. There is a strong assertion held by objectivists which the relativists do not seem to uphold, that is, what is 'good' ought to be understood intrinsically. It is a quality which does not depend on empirical findings. When we talk of good or bad, virtue or vice, just or unjust, we are talking about an intrinsic value contained in itself.

G. E. Moore (1992) in *Principia Ethica* argues that 'good' is not analyzable. Moore claims that 'good' is a simple concept like 'yellow', in that it cannot be broken up into smaller concepts that together, will equal 'good' or 'yellow'. Ochieng'- Odhiambo says it should be noted that giving a definition or analysis is not the same as "giving its meaning". He agrees with Moore who acknowledges that while we cannot define 'good' or analyze it, that does not deny us the criteria which enables us to say what makes something good (Ochieng' –Odhiambo 2009:35).

As such, could the failure to recognize this intrinsic good by the relativists be the only reason that led to the debate? If so, does the concept 'good' constitute what objectivists call the moral truth that transcends culture or the individual? If not, what other considerations should be made to achieve a moral standard that befits the objectivists and relativists views adequately. The views of each camp form a basis of the discussions in the next two chapters.

1.7. HYPOTHESES

The following are the hypotheses that this study set out to determine.

1. Moral objectivism is the more plausible and logically consistent view of morality.

26

2. Moral relativism complements moral objectivism.

1.8. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on qualitative research method, looking into the ideas of other scholars in books, journals, magazines and unpublished research work.

The study also adopts an integrated approach which combined conceptual analysis and the prescriptive method. Conceptual analysis was necessitated by the various concepts applied or used in the debate on morality. When concepts are well understood they enable the subject under investigation to present readers with a ground for learning and filling their knowledge gap. The prescriptive method has a direct impact on the study since this method of philosophy aims at establishing the criteria for assessing values, judging conduct, and appraising art. Prescriptive method critically examines what we mean by concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly among others.

CHAPTER TWO

MORAL OBJECTIVISM

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter undertakes to make an analysis of what objectivists consider to be right and wrong, good and bad and their response to the question of how to arrive at a meritorious position in making moral judgments. Their argument is that 'there are objective moral norms and values that transcend both culture and the individual' (Beckwith 1996:3).

That there are norms and values that are acceptable by all cultures as a matter of principle is not in question. Many scholars have noted that so far there is no culture which was against truth telling, honesty, integrity, loyalty, and justice to cite some examples. There is no culture where cowardice, dishonesty, corruption or genocide is praiseworthy; instead these vices have been condemned by all cultures. More examples will emerge in this analysis to drive the point home that there are indeed objective moral norms and values that transcend both culture and the individual. It is worth noting that objectivism tries to highlight that each norm has a corresponding value which gives the claim credibility and coherence.

The objectivist maintains that what is right for one person in certain circumstances is right for another in the same circumstances. Louis P. Pojman a proponent of moral objectivism, observes that, where the relativist goes wrong is when they make an unwarranted slide from the observation that different cultures have different rules to the conclusion that no culture's set of rules is better than any other culture's set of rules, or even an ideal set of rules. Pojman sees the purpose of moral rules as that of survival of the society, the alleviation of suffering, human flourishing and the just resolution of conflicts of interest (Pojman 1990:34)

When we observe the norms not to harm others either physically or psychologically, not to kill innocent people, not to be corrupt among others, we agree with view of Pojman that people in any society are likely to enjoy greater benefits and guarantee survival of their society through this arrangement than when each individual focuses on self (egoism) and when faced with conflicts, people will be duty bound to find just ways of resolving such conflicts.

2.2. OBJECTIVE MORAL NORMS (RULES) AND VALUES (PRINCIPLES)

We have seen that there are moral norms (rules) that are universal and have an immutable bond with values. Values are founded on principles and principles entrench values implying they are not different and as such the two terms principles/values will be used interchangeably in this study. Some scholars however do not pay particular attention to the difference between moral norms and values and have somehow or sometimes used values to talk about norms.

According to Francis J. Beckwith (1996) the following ten moral sets are examples of the core morality – principles necessary for the good life

1. Do no kill innocent people
2. Do not cause unnecessary pain or suffering
3. Do not commit rape
4. Keep your promises and contracts
5. Do not deprive another person of his or her freedom
6. Do justice, treating equals equally and un-equals unequally
7. Do not commit adultery
8. Tell the truth
9. Help other people
10. Obey just laws

Beckwith continues to say that these principles are not arbitrary because they have valid reasons to be believed in and they form rules necessary for

any satisfactory social order. They are central to the smooth progression of social interaction and the resolution of conflicts (Beckwith 1996:16).

It appears Beckwith here does not make a clear distinction between moral norms and principles. He has used the terms concomitantly so that his list contains both norms and principles. This should not be treated as a serious problem because we can intuit the difference when making reference to any of the norm or principle in the set of codes above. At the same time, the analysis will take into consideration the underlying difference and try to keep the use of norms and values as distinct in meaning when making reference to any.

As far as possible norms will refer to the rules of conduct and values to the underlying principle on which the rule is based. Often people might not like a rule but upon assessing its value, they are willing to give up something in themselves for it. Fairness or justice in any group norm gives the members a sense of belonging, responsibility and cohesion. When formulating company rules; say for instance the rule to be punctual in reporting to work and executing duty, when such a rule is bent by a few for their personal gains and that goes un-reprimanded, the rest of the workers can easily follow suit and cause a lot of inconveniencies and inefficiency in their place of work. But where corrective measures are

applied without discrimination the response will be different by each person taking individual responsibility to adhere. When individuals come together to form a group of whatever sort, the identity of the individual is lost and as such the one way to ensure that sanity or sobriety is achieved at a group level is to adopt and maintain an objective standard for all parties involved, which is best anchored on the principle of justice.

2.3. EXCEPTIONS AND NATURE OF OVERRIDING MORAL FACTORS

There are situations that may require an exceptional response from the expected or the ordinary norms. According to Porter (1980; 1985) exceptions might appear to overturn principles, but in fact, such exceptions reinforce the principles. If we discover some cases contrary to what we believe to be generally right, then, our belief is supported by the fact that there are only a few contrary cases; in general, the belief is seen to hold true. The principles are not invalidated by the exceptions but are verified in their general soundness. The contrary cases can be seen for what they are; unusual instances which, by virtue of being usual, support the rightness of our general principles (1995:37).

William Ross (1930) says moral principles are *prima facie* principles – valid rules of actions that should generally be adhered to, but may be overridden by another moral principle in cases of moral conflict. The point Ross is making here is that only another moral principle can warrant a situation to be said to be in conflict when dealing with norms not just any other principle. For instance many scholars have made reference to this example where the principle of truth telling may be overridden by the principle of preserving life of someone who is being searched for by another after escaping because of a bitter conflict they have been involved in, where the pursuer does so with the intention to kill or maim the other person. Even if you have seen exactly the place the escapee has gone to hide and can volunteer such help to the one in pursuit, the principle of truth telling here is harmful and it is better to save life than to tell the truth. This principle is supported by the cardinal virtue of prudence in preventing harm to another.

In the following cases, many scholars are in agreement on the objective stand of each but this study has borrowed largely from the views of Porter. In medical practice, the principle of confidentiality may be overridden by the principle of truth telling especially where the patient intends to cause harm to self or others like in a case of a patient who threatens to commit suicide because of a disturbing health condition. The family should be

warned so that they can take the necessary care and further assistance sort, to assist the patient to accept the condition and be positive about it in a way that promotes life coping skills as opposed to terminating life.

Porter adds that if we should violate any principle we are only saying that such a violation may be allowed in certain circumstances but not that the violation is right. In a case of terminating the life of an elderly cancer patient who is undergoing excruciating pain, this does not mean that killing is right but only that in this moment it is permissible. Killing is wrong and preserving life is right, but we are temporarily suspending our adherence to that principle for the sake of some overriding considerations.

It is right to honor commitments but we have no obligation to honor a commitment to a person who has confided in us a plan to carry out a terrorist act as in a case of a suicide bomber who has entrusted the deadly chemical with us for safekeeping till s/he returns at the appointed time. We should never hand back such substances or tools of destruction on establishing what they are and intended for.

On the sanctity of life, Porter, like many other scholars, says the moral norm not to kill can be overridden in the circumstances that one has been attacked and, in self defense, kills the attacker. Every person has the

moral obligation to defend themselves and protect oneself from being harmed. In this case the attacker has done the wrong thing by intending to kill another while the victim is protected by the principle that one can only kill in self defense (Porter 1980 31 – 33).

Such examples bring out the distinct character about moral objectivism distinguishing it from moral absolutism, a view which does not allow any reason to bend the rule. However, that does not make moral objectivism self sufficient and perfectly successful. Next we examine the strengths and shortcomings of moral objectivism.

2.4. THE STRENGTHS OF MORAL OBJECTIVISM

Moral objectivism supports the role of reformers, who may be seen as individuals fitting the subjectivists view better, but the difference in their acts is their approach to moral norms and values. Subjectivists appeal to personal preferences, opinions and emotive exclamations, but the reformers go out of their way to reinforce existing objective norms and values that are either getting obliterated by contradictory practices or abandoned all together by the larger society. The reformers are not concerned about themselves but that which is morally binding for all in principle. Such reforms include abolition of slave-trade because the

35

dignity of the human person was at stake, doing charity based on the duty to help others and principle of benevolence, recognizing the rights of women because they are equal moral agents not to be discriminated against, among others.

Beckwith cites the views of Louis Pojman who says that what divides many of us is not a moral principle but how that moral principle should be applied. Pro-life proponents for instance believe that the moral norm, do not kill innocent people includes the fetuses, but the pro-choice do not, yet the two camps do not disagree on the fundamental principle, that life is sacred (Beckwith 1996:15).

Another point to note is what Manuel Velasquez observes when he says that disagreement in ethics might signal nothing more than that some people are more enlightened than others and that we should not assume that if ethical truth exists, everyone must know it, (Velasquez 2007:280)

As Velasquez acknowledges, having a knowledge gap among some people about existence of ethical truth does not imply lack of truth but it could be among the explanations that make the relativists talk of norms and values being right at one time and being wrong a later time when probably the knowledge gap is filled for the individual or the community

in question. Indeed there is no account that shows a change of moral principles as outlined by the objectivists above but there is a lot of literature on the changes that have emerged over time in the application of such principles in various communities and situations thus constituting relativism. A good example is proposed by Egbeke Aja (1997), who argues that, to understand African moral values, there is need to revise with urgency, many of the familiar cultural patterns in order to meet the new conditions imposed by colonialism, especially its education system and consequent mechanical civilization. Aja says, the rapid scientific and technological progress of the current era bids fair to alter our daily lives and our way of thinking so profoundly that new African moral values will have to be based on the universal human needs and social imperatives. Therefore objectivism is still self sustaining unlike relativism which is susceptible to its own claims.

2.5. SHORTCOMINGS OF OBJECTIVISM

Moral objectivism bends the norms and principles in certain circumstances implying that they are not absolute. Thus moral objectivism can be seen as a double edged sword when it comes to overriding factors. Such a provision can be a loophole leading to abuse or misinterpretation of the principles. The following are some examples to illustrate this point.

Sometimes people can pursue principles for personal interests, like when a person demands to have a right to their freedom and ignore a norm. A lady can decide for reasons like career, or an important trip she has to make, to terminate a pregnancy so that it does not interfere with her personal freedom to do something she considers important. While individual choice is based on the principle of freedom it is a loophole in this case through which termination of life is carried out.

When growing up, children are supposed to get parental guidance so that they become morally responsible adults. In some instances, children can demand for freedom so that they are not under parental guide or supervision and often in their curiosity at this adventurous stage of development, while in pursuit of one discovery or another, particularly when they get into wrong company, they can land into serious problems that can ruin their future ending up as delinquents. The right to freedom here goes against the value of the dignity of the human person.

The claim of objectivism where what is right for people in one situation should be right for others in similar situation is challenged in certain circumstances. Moral objectivism does not tell us or account for the norms and values that happen in similar situations but are practiced differently

like in the case of religion. In the religious set up, there are disparities from some simple to very complex matters arising from the norms and values of the adherents of religious faiths.

In norms and values related to honouring contracts and commitments, it is acceptable among Muslims to practice polygamy while Christianity advocates monogamy. Even among the Christian churches themselves there is no consensus whether polygamy is right or wrong, therefore some Christian churches allow for polygamy while others like the Catholic Church remain strict on monogamy. The underlying issue in any of these practices is that when people marry, they are expected to honor this contract they have entered into by remaining faithful and committed to one another in marriage till death. Indeed strong emphasis is laid on marrying the number of wives one can adequately take care of and equally, meaning one applies the principle of justice to all, in cases of those who allow polygamy if such a marriage arrangement is to be considered morally binding. Failure to do so becomes a ground for divorce. Instead of opening too many possibilities to allow for divorce which is a serious threat to the institution of marriage, Christians opt for monogamy to curb this threat on the assumption that one wife may not be a burden for a man to take care of as when a man has to marry three or four wives. On this basis would polygamy pass as the wrong thing to do and

monogamy pass as the right thing to do or the vice versa? What would constitute the rightness or wrongness of either case?

So far neither polygamy nor monogamy has guaranteed the survival of marriage; divorce and separation cases have dominated many marriages in the two arrangements with a new pattern of life coming up, that of single parenthood and the choice of cohabiting rather than commitment to the contract of marriage. Commitment and honoring a contract in this case is null and void.

Another example highlighting people in the same situation is the religious crisis between members in the Anglican Church in the west and those in Africa. Their bone of contention is, some members of the church from the West advocating homosexual rights and marriages, and those from Africa opposing the move as immoral. The objective right or wrong about this matter in the Anglican Church has not be arrived at, yet they cannot be right or wrong at the same time being in the same church.

From these discussions we see cases where people in the same situations respond to moral issues differently. Perhaps the objectivists need to redefine what "people in the same situation or circumstance" entails and probably show what that would include and what they would exclude.

40

Would their claims for instance include doctrines? Would the regional boundaries matter?

There are times when that which is considered objective is not sufficient reason for people to act morally. The attempt to satisfy all conditions at hand subjects objectivism to some form of temporal relativism if it be termed so. Once again on the marriage institution, among other reasons why people come together in the union of marriage is that it should be characterized by selfless love as an underlying factor. The parties involved come together bound by love. If love be considered an objective value for holding the institution of marriage, homosexual marriages would not be condemned as wrong because those engaged in them come together as people who are equally bound by love. Instead, this arrangement is highly contentious all over the world. How does objectivism resolve such a conflict where the same standard is used to defend the right and the wrong?

There is a problem of 'a context within a context' in resolving moral disputes. For instance religion is faced with the problem of providing the source that would be used to resolve ethical disputes. According to Douglas Birsch, ethics is open to everyone no matter what their particular religious beliefs may be and serious problems arise when we fail to

separate ethics from religion. Fundamentally, the main problem is our inability to resolve the dispute over what text contains the divine commandments if we base our claim for what is right as that which God commands us to do and what is bad as that which God commands us not to do. Would the answers be sought in the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, the Torah or some other religious text? This claim implies that good is arbitrary (Birsch 1993:3).

There are countries that are more homogenous culturally and the problem of cultural relativism may not arise like it is in Africa because of the numerous ethnic groups. Therefore a question can be asked, does that characteristic support moral objectivism adequately? It appears the characteristic of homogenous groups of people is not sufficient to ensure support of moral objectivism, because moral objectivism is also faced with challenges from moral subjectivism besides cultural relativism.

2.6. CONCLUSION

Objectivism lays bare the norms and principles that can be said to be morally binding universally. The exceptional cases as identified when the right thing to do is temporarily suspended, have emerged as a

42

reinforcement of the principles due to the prevailing circumstances. They do not warrant the removal of the rightness or wrongness of an act done in accordance with the norm or against the norm respectively. The flexible characteristic in applying moral norms and principles is compatible with the nature of human beings who are dynamic. Moral norms and principles argued for by objectivists can be used as a constant variable or standard upon which people can appraise their moral progress because while people and cultures are dynamic, objective moral norms and principles have not been seen to change.

These norms and values appear to be the goal human beings are striving to achieve, in terms of promoting the dignity of the human person, sanctity of life, satisfaction in life through hard work, personal and communal integrity through honest living, loyalty and self esteem in a life of virtue, justice in interpersonal relationships and many more. All these values stand as the constant variables upon which people can rate their actions and appraise them.

CHAPTER THREE

MORAL RELATIVISM

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the claims of moral relativism, a view which stands in opposition to the claims of moral objectivism. The relativists assert that there are no objective moral norms or values that transcend either culture or the individual, instead moral claims are merely opinions, personal preferences, cultural rules or emotive exclamations.

Our moral formation begins at childhood so that we grow up knowing what our society approves and what it does not approve. According to James Rachels (1986) in the course of growing up, each of us has acquired some strong feelings; we have learned to think of some types of conduct as acceptable and others we have learned to regard as simply unacceptable. These feelings influence our opinions, the way we view certain things and practices and though at times those feelings may be challenged by other views of people from different societies, they carry an underlying prejudice. Relativism is characterized by such different views, norms and values which are unique to each society.

3.2. FORMS OF ETHICAL RELATIVISM.

Ethical relativism takes various forms as already indicated at the beginning of this dissertation. These are conventional ethical relativism and the subjective ethical relativism. Conventional ethical relativism, according to Pojman (1990), is the view that there are no objective moral principles but that all valid moral principles are justified by virtue of their cultural acceptance and he recognizes the social nature of morality as an aspect which gives conventional ethical relativism power and its virtue. It is because of this social aspect that conventional relativism is applauded by many people as an enlightened response to the problem of ethnocentricism. People are challenged to respect the beliefs and practices of other cultures that are different from theirs, and not to condemn or judge them harshly. This response to ethnocentricism encourages the virtue of tolerance which allows for peaceful coexistence. Pojman also echoes the views of Ruth Benedict, a proponent of ethical relativism, who says that through tolerance we shall arrive at a more realistic social faith in one another, accepting as ground of hope and as the new bases of life which mankind has created for itself from the raw materials of existence (Pojman 1990:24).

Within the conventional view of relativism, there are two theses that further illustrate moral conventions. James R. Beebe (2003) has outlined these as:

The diversity thesis, which basically states that 'what is considered morally right and wrong varies from society to society, so there are no moral principles that all societies accept.'

The Dependency Thesis, the view that 'what really is morally right and wrong depends upon what societies think is morally right and wrong'.

The first thesis does not make any value judgment or give value meaning, it only states the way things are as a matter of fact about people's diverse opinions and denies universal principles. The second thesis becomes the core of conventional relativism by acknowledging that what a culture accepts is right and what it does not accept is wrong. The dependency thesis asserts that all moral opinions are equally right and none is better than the other while, objectivists hold that only some moral opinions are right regardless of culture or individual (Beebe 2003:20, Pojman 1990:27-28).

According to Melville J. Herskovits (1973), cultures are flexible and so we find mores change over a period of time. The norm for acceptable conduct within a culture may change as the culture shifts its ethical base. The

challenge in cultural relativism is that the people involved in most of those bases are often the same. The ethical base might change but not the people. For instance, among many cultures, the place of a woman traditionally was in the kitchen, today that perception/norm has changed and a woman can sit at a round table with men to deliberate on important matters concerning the people they work with or policies of their work place as well as other social matters in general. So women today can be both in the traditional ethical base, and when it shifts to the place of work, it relates to the same people in a modern culture.

We do not always have homogenous groups people, so that people who belong to an ethnic group form only one ethical base, or that the people in a given religion form another base and nothing more, religion goes beyond communities and regional boundaries, so that a person in Kenya for instance can share a religion with other people from multiple countries of the world even without meeting physically. People can have a cross-section of ethical bases simultaneously. Also there is a possibility that they can belong to an ethical base and not another. People who come together in an institution to work might come from the same community but not the same religion, or come from the same institute of training but coming together with their different backgrounds to embrace a new culture of the new environment with its norms and values. Their

47

interaction may not even be voluntary; their meeting in such a place could be for short or long term purposes.

The multiple ethical bases in which people find themselves can also be a source of ethical dilemmas looking at the variance in norms and values between one ethical base and the other. Conventional relativism asserts that what is right or wrong for an individual is what his culture approves as right or wrong. So what would be the transitional mechanism to ensure appropriate adjustment within people to adhere to the norms and values of every ethical base they shift to? If as the relativists assert, any ethical bases is as good as another, it is at this point relativism is said to imply 'anything goes' and as such a person has no moral standing. Only an objective approach to norms and values enables people transcend and embrace that which is morally binding and they adjust to new environments successfully.

Herskovits observes that the force of the cultural experience channels our judgments. In fact, he says, the need for a cultural relativistic point of view has become apparent because of the realization that there is no way to play this game of making judgments across cultures except with loaded dice, (Herskovits 1973:56).

This proposal is inefficient because life is more than trial and error; if people make moral judgment with 'loaded dice' they are likely to make big mistakes with lasting consequences. Clarity of thought when making moral judgments on what people want to achieve is a better approach towards life and the uncertainties there in. That there are uncertainties in life does not mean there are no reliable means to count on when making moral judgments. Objectivism has outlined such means through principles of moral norms.

3.3. CULTURAL RELATIVISM

This is the view that different cultures have different norms and values that may be right for one culture but wrong for another culture. Cultural relativism, another name for conventional relativism, also holds that what is right in a culture at one time can be wrong at another time, a view supported by Herskovits, Graham Sumner and John Dewey among other relativists who assert that cultures can make anything right and it can make anything wrong.

James Rachels (1986) asserts that cultural relativism challenges our ordinary belief in the objectivity and universality of moral truth. It says, in effect, that there is no truth in ethics; there are only the various codes

and nothing more. Moreover, our own code has not special status; it is merely one among many. Rachels asserts that it is important to separate various elements of the theory because on analysis, some parts of the theory may turn out to be correct, whereas some others seem to be mistaken. He outlines the following aspects of cultural relativism.

1. Different societies have different moral codes.
2. There is no objective standard that can be used to judge one societal code better than another
3. The moral code of our own society has no special status; it is merely one among many.
4. There is no "universal truth" in ethics – that is, there are no moral truths that hold for all peoples at all times
5. The moral code of a society determines what is right within that society; that is, if the moral code of a society says that a certain action is right, then that action is right, at least within that society.
6. It is mere arrogance for us to try to judge the conduct of other peoples. We should adopt an attitude of tolerance toward the practices of other cultures (Rachels 1986:14).

These aspects as pointed out by Rachels are characteristics of cultural relativism and how the norms therein ought to be understood. Though on the better part of the analysis the relativists appear to condemn the views of objectivists than lay down their norms and values, they do not dispute the existence of fundamental principles upon which the moral norms are founded. At least they recognize there are moral codes of society upon which what is right or wrong is judged by the specific society. They acknowledge the importance of a principle like tolerance albeit to their own disadvantage because tolerance then assumes an objective status.

50

3.4. ETHICAL SUBJECTIVISM

The other form of relativism is moral subjectivism a view which holds that it is the individual's choice that determines the validity of a moral principle. The claim made by Ernest Hemingway (1932) about subjectivism says, so far, about morals, I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after.

However, from the argument of Hemingway, to say that what one feels good after is moral and what one feels bad after is immoral is misleading. Supposing a robber plans and executes a robbery, upon succeeding in this mission the robber will feel good about the act and the loot. That for the robber is right but for the victim who feels bad after being attacked it is wrong. So who is right and who is wrong? since the two cannot be right and wrong at the same time to validate a moral principle because each individual would strive to win the case in their favour. The moral outcome in this case would be judged right and wrong at the same time which is absurd.

Similarly, if a rapist defiles a child or an elderly lady who is vulnerable and cannot defend oneself, the rapist might feel good about his achievement in his planned act. The defiled person will not feel good about the act. This is the same act but eliciting different feelings in different people, so according to who would the act be judged as right if for the subjectivist what matters is the good or the bad feeling for the act to be moral or immoral respectively? The act of rape is a violation of another's rights. It is demeaning and can have devastating effects thereafter causing a lot of harm to the victim. Therefore from the views of Hemingway, how one feels about an act, cannot be the means to determine what is moral or immoral since in any act, there are individuals involved, the one executing an act and the victim both with independent feelings. Upon whose feelings will the judgment be made to determine that it is right or wrong?

Other subjectivists assert that 'morality is like beauty which is in the eyes of the beholder' (Pojman 1990:22) suggesting that an individual should be left to do that which they consider best for them without being challenged by any other person or moral agents because subjectivism does not recognize what others think or feel about an individual's choice of action, their autonomy comes first.

Subjectivists are not faced with some of the objections in conventional relativism where, for instance, conflicting cultures may confuse the individual or force an individual to follow majority who might as well be wrong, thus going against the conscience of the individual and freedom to choose. The saying that 'one man's meat is another man's poison,' favours the subjectivist, to mean that what may appeal to one person may not appeal to some other person and they do not have to differ about moral decisions and choices because they depend only on the individual.

According to James R. Beebe (2003), subjectivists also assert that all lifestyles are equally good and therefore people only need to tolerate each other. On one hand, it is possible to see the point of subjectivists if we assume that each person is responsible in the actions they choose based on the fact that each person has a conscience. While the conscience is the inner voice and guard against the individual choosing that which is wrong, there are people who are said to have a 'dead' conscience and therefore they will not find it difficult or have any guilt in doing things that are a great violation to other's rights even if for them they think they are right. If such people are to be tolerated, it means the subjectivist is also accepting an objective standard as well in making moral judgment since tolerance is an objective virtue.

While the individual enjoys personal liberty when choosing what they want to do, the subjectivist can also be faced with the challenge of resolving the problem of conflict of interests from within. If the individual fails to reach a desirable solution in an ethical dilemma, this might not support the view that the individual's choice determines the validity of a moral principle. Some people have been reported to have harmed themselves, common in cases of committing suicide due to choices they made in their lives that could not be reversed, even though at first the same individual strongly desired to do so but on realizing they made a mistake, they decide they cannot live with it and take away their lives. For instance, in cases where a spouse decides to cheat on a partner and goes ahead to cheat because it is right for him or her. Eventually that partner might discover other factors that might make the relationship not to continue but because of the attachment of one party to another, one may not be able to cope with such reality and harm themselves or their partner leading to grave consequences like imprisonment, loss of life, or divorce.

The subjectivists assume the status of lack of entitlement. According to the subjectivists view, no one may judge someone else, no one is entitled to judge or has authority over other peoples' actions, even the critique we are making on this view would not be possible because their claim does not

support the critique as something worth thinking about, and at best it would remain our subjective view. The opinions of others are irrelevant to the subjectivist yet no person is totally independent but dependent to some extent on others for one thing or another, either as a recipient or a provider. These interpersonal relationships constitute the reference to an adage like, 'no man is an island.' People are social beings who interact with other human beings and their interaction is affective, influencing others negatively or positively. Such effects cannot go unaccounted for when assessing what a good life entails and morally binding actions.

Lastly the subjectivists claim that no one knows with finality or certainty that which can be termed as absolute moral standards or which source contains such absolute norms and values given the many ethical bases an individual may find oneself in, so the individual should have the liberty to make their choices in whichever way that works for them without recourse to any such reference or any other moral agent except self. The question however, in this case would be, if no one knows with certainty the absolute moral standard or the source, this claim is self defeating for the subjectivists because their choice of action has no moral base or backing in a way to suggest the individual has no knowledge on morals.

3.5. CULTURAL RELATIVISM IN PERSPECTIVE

People in every culture have norms and values that define who they are. Some of the norms and values are still upheld while others have become anachronistic. Those that are still in force are held as the people's cultural heritage with some cultures revisiting their 'lost glory' gone with their abandoning some of their norms and values. According to Robert C. Solomon (1996) we are a multicultural society in which the differences between us are often more pronounced than the similarities. The idea that what is right might vary from culture to culture and community to community can be seen as both an attractive and repulsive thesis. On the positive side, relativism can encourage acceptance of differences and reduce friction. On the negative side, it can aggravate disagreement and increase hostility (Solomon 1996:73).

Solomon goes on to say that to accept cultural relativism and to be an ethical relativist does not mean that one cannot compare moral systems, evaluate them and choose between them. In many cases, two systems include principles in common which can be employed to judge one course of action as morally better than another, below are some examples cited from various communities common in the African set up which, unlike

56

other continents, offers the best place to compare moral systems, from culture to culture and within those cultures over time.

Some communities that practiced female genital mutilation and those that did not practice it had a discriminative character. Those who did not practice female genital mutilation (FGM) were looked down upon, then, as cowards and their clan or society as made up of immature women because this ritual was considered an important stage of initiation into adulthood and anyone who did not undergo it would be considered a child no matter how old one was. For those who practiced it, they gave it a high value as a rite of passage from one age to the next and one that came with a sense of social status into adulthood. Over time, things have changed a lot and the practice is now highly discouraged because of the threat it causes to the health of the young girls and later complication especially in their reproductive health. Many cases went unreported of women who died during childbirth due to complications related to their genital mutilation earlier in their lives. The attempt to stop female genital mutilation is a better system than earlier norms and values pegged on the practice traditionally.

Another complex moral issue that discouraged the practice of FGM was the high mortality rate among young girls due to loss of the expertise as

the 'traditional surgeons' passed on the practice to the less experienced generation. Cases of over-bleeding and unhygienic conditions saw the rise of those young children contracting the deadly virus of HIV-AIDS and the practice was considered a threat to the sanctity of life and future of a generation.

On the positive side, there were cultures that did not practice circumcision for men but these days scientific research has shown that the risk of contracting the HIV-virus is reduced among men who have undergone circumcision and this practice is now highly encouraged among men regardless of their cultural background, while it is discouraged for women. Therefore some mores are truly better than others and are to be encouraged and valued.

In the past children were highly valued and protected in the society. It was a collective responsibility of the society to see to the right upbringing of every child regardless of whose child one was. This was a norm observed and valued by both the elders and children. Everyone understood that arrangement. However, in present times, this norm is no longer upheld with the seriousness it deserves, following the disintegration of the union and bond between members of a family with the extended family and the community. Instead, the break up of this

bond is being bridged by innumerable local and international organizations as an intervention and provision for children protection amidst gigantic challenges and deplorable state the children have found themselves. UNICEF (1999) made reference to the state of children in the world highlighting the plight of children and their rights. Other organizations like UNHCR and Save the Children (2002) too played a key role in formulating children protection policies among other organization like Plan International that participates in giving yearly children protection reports, rating the best governments and the worst in providing in their budget for the needs of children ranging from health, social care, education and right to life. Individuals are in search for freedom and independence leaving many to children suffer abandonment either psychologically, emotionally within the family or physically because the parents are unable to take care of them. The moral responsibility of parents toward their children and children to their parents is quickly fading away. Many children are abused and maltreated in many ways which include child labour, children being sent to war and their vitality is lost at a very tender age. The appointment in 1997 of a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for children and armed conflict was among the attempts made to prohibit the participation in hostilities of those below eighteen years of age as well as stop the use of child soldiers. This was as a result of Machel's landmark UN study of

1996. If we compare the moral system of our day today it is highly wanting in relation to the past and morally accepted standards of the society, not only of the past, but of the present. Human dignity is highly compromised and human rights highly violated.

In the western world a person's autonomy in ethical issues is highly emphasized but in the African set up the voice of the community is emphasized. In western culture, cultural diversity may not be at the centre of moral discussions, instead, ethical issues for them revolve around controversies that affect the person's autonomy, like individual choice in matters of abortion, euthanasia, gender discrimination, colour, race and the like. According to Thaddeuz Metz (2009) what constitutes right or wrong is roughly communal for Africans. Metz quotes some of the African scholars like John Mbiti who, in his analysis of African worldviews says 'what is right is what connects people together, what separates people is wrong' (Metz 2009:3).

Metz also talks of Desmond Tutu, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and renowned chair of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission who said, 'harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summmum bonum* – the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like a

plague.' Metz echoes the words of these scholars saying that harmonious or communal relationships are to be valued for their own sake, not merely as a means to some other basic value such as pleasure. An action is right just insofar as it is a way of living harmoniously or prizing communal relationships, one in which people identify with each other and exhibit solidarity with one another, otherwise an action is wrong (Metz 2009:3)

These are some of the observations that illustrate cultural relativism in different contexts that can be evaluated and analyzed to show instances of moral progress on one hand from various moral systems or moral decline on the other.

3.6. THE STRENGTHS OF ETHICAL RELATIVISM

From the above discussions a point of strength that can be identified with relativism, is the room it gives to new ideas and room for improvement of the welfare of people. This was well captured in the recognition that some cultural practices, like initiation into adulthood, were a serious threat to life and needed to be abandoned by stopping for instance female genital mutilation, while taking on the practice that supports and promotes the value of life, like male circumcision to reduce the risk of contracting HIV-AIDS among men.

James Rachels (1986) says cultural relativism warns us, rightly about the danger of assuming that all our preferences are based on some absolute rational standard. They are not because, we may find that many of our practices are merely peculiar to our society and it is easy to lose sight of that fact. This reminder is only made through the claim of relativism but it does not feature in objectivism (Rachels 1986:23).

Another strength which Rachels identifies is that through proper understanding of relativism open-mindedness is achieved, so that people are more accommodating of the differences that exists between them and those they interact with who may not necessarily come from the same society, or who have different views of life and the choices they make on personal level. Being open-minded allows people to learn from others and relate to them with respect, giving others unconditional positive regard even if they do not agree with their points of view. Showing tolerance in some ethical issues which have already been discussed earlier like in the case of having to live or interact with people who are homosexuals. Even if one does not approve of homosexuality, the value and dignity of such a person ought to be respected and upheld in the public sphere (Rachels 1986:23-24).

3.7. SHORTCOMINGS OF ETHICAL RELATIVISM

The following are some of the shortcomings of ethical relativism. Louis Pojman (1992), among other scholars, holds that ethical relativism is a mistaken theory and that cultural differences do not demonstrate that all ways of life are equally valid from a moral perspective. He continues to say that, if indeed, ethical relativism were true, it would spell the death of ethics. In spite of cultural divergences there is a universally valid core morality.

From the relativists' arguments that what is right for an individual is determined by their culture, James Beebe (2003) has observed that there would be nothing wrong with a culture that practices ethnocentrism because as such, that culture holds it as right. Similarly, there would be no problem with moral objectivism. If the relativists accept that any culture is right in what they approve, then their claim also includes the culture of objectivists. Therefore they have no case against the absolutists or objectivists amongst other cultures (Beebe 2003:19).

Douglas Birsch (1999) presents moral relativism as making the production and identification of new ethical guidelines mysterious. From the claim of relativism that legitimate guidelines are those that are approved by the

society, we know that sometimes these change. The mystery is that guidelines change when there is no apparent reason why they would. This observation makes relativism volatile and thus implausible.

According to Herskovits (1973) among other relativists, ethical relativism entails intercultural tolerance. However the claim by the relativists is self refuting, in that their claim takes the universal nature, so when they say no moral principles are universally valid, how then can tolerance be universally valid? Tolerance would be understood better in this case as an objective moral standard.

Pojman notes that Herskovits seems to be treating the principle of tolerance as the one exception to his relativism as an absolute moral principle. From a relativistic point of view, there is no more reason to be tolerant than to be intolerant and neither stance is objectively morally better than the other, which is yet another self refuting assertion (Pojman 1990:24).

The subjective view has not fallen short of limitations either, which are also closely related to those of conventional relativism. If there is no true moral standard, then their claim too would not be true which makes their

view a self refutation. It should not be recognized or upheld by anyone yet as it stands, it is a universal view.

Pojman says that moral subjectivism makes morality a useless concept because on its premises, little or no interpersonal criticism or judgment is logically possible. An individual is left to oneself because on what basis would another question the acts of someone else since everything is dependent on the choices of the one involved?

Although the subjectivists, as noted by Beebe, claim all lifestyles are equal, this cannot be held as true because we cannot certainly compare the life of Philip Onyancha, a recent self proclaimed serial killer, to an honest Kenyan who maintains the social order and strives to be morally upright. Onyancha put the public into a mood of panic when he confessed to be serial killer. He was on a mission to kill up to a hundred people under the instructions of his high school teacher who initiated him into a cult, an act that was to leave a hundred innocent lives lost were it not for the intervention of some women who raised an alarm about this strange behaviour (Sunday Nation, June 13th, 2010:4 - 6).

In other scenarios, if someone chooses to earn a living by robbing others and depriving them their peace and security, there would be no standard

on which to condemn such an act. Such a person would be having the best of what s/he wants using the means most appealing to them. However, this poses a contradiction to morality, where morality is supposed to characterize proper resolution of interpersonal conflicts and the amelioration of the human predicament.

With moral subjectivism, we would not be able to distinguish between morally upright people and the immoral. It would mean that all acts of altruism mean no more than acts of terrorism or genocide. There would be no difference between the acts of Mahatma Gadhi and those of Osama bin Laden.

Notably also, cultural relativism does not seem to make a distinction between moral progress and moral decline because it is taken to mean that what happens at any time is right according to that time and the culture. Cultural relativism relies so much on collective conscience of the society and that has had some repercussions, in that some cultures have been known to err in the past as was in the case of the Jewish holocaust by the Germans, or apartheid in South Africa.

If we approve relativism in general, we would accept all forms of atrocities that are accepted by certain cultures and we would have no room for

reformers. Reformers, as history has it, were viewed at first as headstrong and violators of the status quo. First being treated with high suspicion and rejection but later they emerged to have held the right position of what ought to be done. Thanks to such reformers as William Wilberforce who opposed slavery in the eighteenth century and today it is a thing of the past. Other reformers like Jesus Christ defied the order of his day and instead chose to do what appeared wrong and contrary to the norm of the society, like healing on a Sabbath but in so doing he made the law complete in its theory and practice as written in the Holy Bible (Luke 14:1-5). It took the courage of a reformer to stop the culture of killing twins among those communities, like Nigeria, where it was considered a bad omen whenever someone gave birth to twins and they would be killed immediately.

The relativists view is not livable in our day to day life as noted earlier that should a relativist be attacked by a group of robbers, whose group norm states that stealing is right, the relativist will not give way to the group of robbers but will fight back and defend their property and even call for help from relevant authorities to get protection from the enemy.

Lastly there is a distinction between acts of benevolence and malevolence. We cannot equate the good life earned by people who have made a

difference in their own life and the life of others by acts of altruism and the seemingly 'good life' led by gangsters who have earned their comfort through terrorizing innocent people around them, robbing them not only their property but peace of mind. The acts of upright, honest and self mortifying people, cannot be equated to the acts of rapists and thieves simply because the relativist believes a culture can determine what is right and what is wrong depending on what they accept and what they reject; because then the question would be, they accept or reject based on what standard or criteria of judgment?

3.8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion moral relativists' claims in spite of the shortcomings rest on a genuine insight and many lessons have been drawn from it. They include the need to be open-minded, cultivating the right attitude towards others and it guards against the vice of arrogance if any person is to be considered morally upright.

These two theories, objectivism and relativism, appear intractable because relativism employs empirical evidence which is contingent, meaning it is subject to change at any time and this change is *ad infinitum*. There is no indication of a time in point or defining characteristics to be attained,

after which either the right or wrong thing in society is projected to stop changing. We can also ask whether it is the moral agent who changes in this case or the moral norms and values that change? It seems that the two change as we know that both cultures and people are dynamic and not static. This implies then that in moral relativism, the phenomenon would be between dynamic cultures versus dynamic people, whereupon there would be no reference upon which to mark moral progress. There is no point of reference because by the time anyone wants to go back to identify where they began, they would find that the ethical base has also changed since they assert that, what is right at one time could be wrong at another time or vice versa. This is what robs relativism consistence.

CHAPTER FOUR

RECONCILING MORAL OBJECTIVISM AND MORAL RELATIVISM.

4.1. INTRODUCTION

From the foregoing discussions, though moral objectivism is more consistent than moral relativism, the two views are flexible and portray an accommodating characteristic in various situations. This is what distinguishes moral objectivism from absolutism giving it an aspect of temporal relativism. Moral objectivism and moral relativism share a fundamental position in principles which is a necessary condition for evaluating and validating a good life as the major concern of ethics. Both views recognize that people have values that guard and guide their moral norms.

Robert C. Solomon has observed that the real problem begins when ultimate principles and purposes clash (1996:77). This chapter therefore will examine various ways in which the clash can be addressed. Some suggestions in this endeavor include examining and adopting some

proposals made by scholars who have discussed various views, identified and distinguished unique features in ethical issues such as the relationship between fundamental principles and norms, conventions within certain contexts, prioritizing the principles as well as the underlying relationship and interactions between the two theories.

4.2. ASSESSING CONTEXT BASED AND NON-CONTEXT BASED PRINCIPLES

The following is an attempt that has identified and distinguished certain features of ethical issues and how to reconcile the views of moral objectivism and moral relativism. Damian Cole (2004) sees the two views as being part of a whole. Damian drew a vital criterion in his study which can be adopted to back the findings of other scholars who have come to the defense of moral relativism using a contextual approach. For Cole the part of a whole judgment can be approached by looking at those principles that are not context based which he called the basic principles, identifiable with the objective principles that would always suit everyone and everywhere. Then the context based principles, which he called, the limiting principles identifiable with cultural or societal principles limited to those involved. With this kind of criterion Cole believed that no matter

the context, any moral judgment being made under any of the two categories cannot be in error (Cole 2004:175-176).

In applying these principles in ethical spheres, there might not be a very big difference even in these principles except for the way they are approached. For instance, in principle it is morally wrong to disrespect other people and showing respect to elders is a universal value, but one community might choose to show respect to elders by kneeling down when greeting them. Some other community will go into hiding in order not to come face to face with elders if they happen to meet on the same path, some will stand up while an elder is passing or when talking to them and the like. The gestures of expression might be the limiting principle but still an affirmation of the basic principle, respect for elders.

4.3. WHEN THE PRINCIPLES CONFLICT.

A classic example as advanced on the clash between principles in their application by Solomon is the ethical issue of abortion. He says, without bringing other moral agents in this dispute like religion to offer their view, the principles of 'the right to life' and 'individual choice' are in direct confrontation. A person who is not directly involved in the argument can observe and listen to both sides and conclude that they both have a point.

The observer may even get involved and choose a side, pursuing one line of argument but not the other, but this observer cannot say that the opponents in this case are both right, except ironically. Solomon continues to say that it is not valid to conclude that both sides are morally correct because they are each supported by powerful principles and strong arguments (Solomon 1996:77).

There is a need to cross examine the issue at hand and go beyond the individual in order to settle for an ethically correct position, for instance the principle to preserve life is not in dispute and is upheld by proponents and opponents of abortion. Solomon asserts that, though disagreements in ethics are frequently intense and difficult, the two sides of the debate can do more than stand opposed to one another, scream insults, and initiate legal suits. Instead they can engage in constructive talk and argument can take place on the shared ground, each providing reasons and support for their ethical position. Solomon recognizes it is difficult to think about an important moral issue without finding one's emotions already engaged, and says that the arguments may be passionate but mutual respect should prevail, which does not mean avoidance or cowardice, but listening carefully to the opinion of those with whom one disagrees. Mutual respect also means cultivating and building one's own position and arguments to be evermore persuasive. Here the point of

relativism is made that genuine dialogue and not limp acquiescence is apt (Solomon 1996:77).

In this case, employing another principle as an intervention between conflicting principles can go a long way in providing a better position like the use of the principle of mutual respect or sanctity of life to arbitrate between the problem of abortion argued from the conflicting principles of the right to life and individual's freedom of choice. However, there is no one absolute answer to ethical disputes and each case should be judged on its merit.

4.4. EMERGING ETHICAL ISSUES AND THE CONTEXT

In the 21st Century, certain practices continue to raise ethical concerns especially for the sub-Saharan Africa. Among such issues are bioethical problems, these include controversies which range from practices having to do with stem cell research, surrogate motherhood, vaccine trials, to human cloning among many others. There are not ready answers to these controversies from time immemorial to the present day. However, other attempts have been made to address them through new dimensions. For instance, Karori Mbugua (2009) has addressed himself to the concern of whether there is an African bioethics. According to Mbugua, there is a

74

need to make a distinction between bioethics as a set of moral principles rooted in a people's culture which should guide clinical care and scientific research; and bioethics as a discipline in the university, with a set of codes, standards, recognized practitioners and customs (Mbugua 2009:2)

Just as objectivism claims there are moral norms and values that transcend the individual or culture, Mbugua's call for a place and recognition of an African bioethics is an attractive thesis. As the English adage goes, 'when you go to Rome do what the Romans do' Mbugua draws our attention, not only, but especially to those who come to Africa with whatever bioethical innovations, or those locally involved, to recognize what and how the Africans do their things and how such innovations are likely to impact on her people, set of codes, standards, recognized practitioners and their customs. Mbugua says failure to recognize cultural differences and variations in the understanding of human dignity, health and diseases can lead to ethical conflicts (p.4).

The arguments for both objectivism and relativism have recognized the value of mutual respect among peoples and this should be the guiding principle when applying bioethics in the African context. Africans have moral norms and values like any other society they are not value-neutral or value-ignorant.

Mbugua observes that African bioethics can be thought of in two distinct ways, bioethics as a set of moral principles rooted in a culture (ethno-philosophy approach), which he notes has always existed in Africa and bioethics as an academic discipline (professional philosophy) which is relatively new in the continent. One distinguishing characteristic which Mbugua identifies between African bioethics and Western bioethics is that African culture places considerable value on conformity of the individual to the social group, echoing the words of Mbiti (1969: 108-109) "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am." Western bioethics on the other hand emphasizes on the individual's sense of self and autonomy of being.

However, bioethics should not be seen as a preserve of the West but can also be applied in other cultures like Africa. The application in any given case should not be seen as a source of conflict but a means of diversifying the expected outcome in the practice of bioethics. This is where Mbugua argues that some of the mainstream concerns, approaches and values of so-called Western bioethics may not be directly relevant to medical practitioners and researchers in Africa. African bioethics must pay special attention to those bioethical problems that are peculiar to the continent of Africa and the third world in general, while at the same time not ignoring

bioethical problems in the developed world emanating from cutting edge biotechnologies. Those distinctions notwithstanding, Mbugua like other scholars, notes that there exist certain fundamental ethical principles that ought to be applied across national and cultural boundaries (p.5) For instance the principles of justice, the principle of preserving life, respect for human dignity ought to objectively go beyond colour, race, sex or religion.

4.5. PRIORITIZING MORAL PRINCIPLES AS AN INTERVENTION.

In the discussions about moral norms and values, we arrived at the position that fundamental moral principles support the two camps in the debate, that is, moral objectivism and moral relativism. However there are instances when the principles themselves may conflict.

Take for instance the challenge involved in the medical principles of confidentiality and truth telling. The patient has a right to confidentiality yet as it is in the African culture where considerable value is placed on conformity of the individual to the social group as explained earlier, the family of the patient has a collective responsibility and duty to take care of their patient so they expect to know the truth in all cases. In a situation

where a patient is very sick and upon diagnosis, the patient is HIV positive, the doctor will be forced to break the principle of confidentiality to the patient and tell the truth to the immediate relatives of the patient. Here the conflict between the two principles is resolved by an appeal to the norm of the people, so that in the African culture, the principle of truth telling would override the principle of confidentiality while for the Western world, the principle of truth telling would be overridden by the principle of confidentiality because they uphold the principle of autonomy as paramount.

It is helpful when people know the kind of disease the patient is suffering from, so that the care givers get the right information on how to handle the patient and themselves. On the other hand this awareness enables the society to guard against instances of falling victim of malicious patients who do not adopt a positive attitude once they test positive. Instead of living positively with the HIV virus, some people use their status as a weapon of revenge by spreading the HIV virus to unsuspecting people. This is immoral and it should be condemned in the society because there are rehabilitative programs that aid the patients to live long and better by providing counseling services, nutritional care, medication and other forms of occupational therapy once they have accepted their

status than when they go into denial and become bitter, isolating themselves from the society.

We can arrive at another criterion of prioritizing principles from the following critique by Robert Coburn (1976). Coburn discusses an alternative account of what he calls the puzzling aspect of our moral views to which Gilbert Harman, a proponent of moral relativism alludes. Harman (1982) sees morality as 'a compromise based on implicit bargaining' involving people of different degrees of power. Coburn sees Harman's moral argument as unconvincing. The flaw in Harman's hypothesis that 'morality derives from an implicit agreement' is that it appears that most of us assign greater weight to the duty not to harm others than to the duty to help others. When the duty not to harm and the duty to help conflict, Harman suggests that the former overrides the latter, even if the balance of utilities gives greater weight to the duty to help others. The rich, the poor, the strong and the weak would all benefit if all were to try and avoid harming one another, so everyone could agree to that arrangement. But the rich and the strong would not benefit from an arrangement whereby everyone would try to do as much as possible to help those in need. The poor and the weak would get all the benefit of this latter arrangement since the rich and the strong could foresee that they would be required to do most of the helping and that they would receive

little in return. They would be reluctant to agree to a strong principle of mutual aid. A stronger principle concerning avoidance of harm would be preferred to a strong acceptance of the principle of mutual aid (Coburn 1976:88).

Coburn also recognizes another aspect about human nature, that some people are malleable than others and he introduces the genetic aspect in matters of morality. He says that because of our genetic make up, some people find it easy to fit in while others may not fit in. Some people are predisposed to engage in altruistic acts toward individuals, with whom they have no relationship, including strangers and enemies.

This claim is exemplified by great men and women in the society since time immemorial. For instance the great works of charity to the poor and needy by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the great efforts made by the former President of Tanzania Mwalimu Julius Nyerere to promote an egalitarian society where everyone would work and no one would be exploited. The works of Jesus Christ to do good to everyone including restoring the ear of his supposed enemy that had been chopped off by Jesus' disciple during the account of his arrest and crucifixion (Luke 22:50-51). These were acts based an objective moral judgment focusing on the right thing to do. The lives of these role models is said to be morally good because of the kind of

choices they made in life. They were good people by virtue of their character and the values they lived. They did not have a common ancestry, they did not live in the same nation or same time in period yet their actions solicit worldwide approval in the moral sphere. Their actions would be supported by any culture as the right thing to do in their case and anyone else involved in the same circumstances any time because they conform to fundamental principles that guide moral norms. In their case, the principle of mutual aid and duty to help others complemented the principle not to cause harm to the victims who were already in a state of deprivation. Therefore, another way of resolving the clash between principles and their application is through complementing principles besides prioritizing.

4.6. THE CONTEXT VERSUS THE RIGHT THING

Another attempt to arrive at a possible reconciliation is made by Graham Oddie (1999) who has made a critical analysis of the objective and relative positions of morality. Oddie acknowledges that the two views have their strengths and examines the weak points from where he draws a conclusion that moral realism can co-exist happily with moral relativism in the form of moral conventionalism. This is made possible by realizing

that the attractions of moral realism are not criticisms of moral relativism or the vice-versa.

Oddie (1999: 252) like Pojman (1990:35) asserts that realism entails moral truths which make up an independent reality. Oddie goes on to say that moral realism is thus committed to irreducible, mind-independent truth makers for the claims made in at least some moral judgment. This view seems to be Oddie's basis for advocating a form of moral conventionalism to reconcile moral conflicts illustrated in the ensuing paragraphs.

He has also identified another character that can aid in resolution of moral conflicts by observing that not always that people's actions are based on moral reasons, there could be other reasons that are non-moral which can aid in producing a greater good. His claim is drawn from driving codes in different countries. Earlier we agreed with the moral norm to obey just laws. In this case the moral code of countries where the driving code is to 'keep left' is as right as where the driving code is 'keep right.' This form of relativism is what Oddie proposes to be used as moral conventionalism.

People agree to keep the moral convention as a guard against causing harm to other road users if the code is ignored. Moral conventions here

are external reinforcement of the duty to drive carefully as the art of driving is not just dependent on the use of one side of the road or the other but the general status of the person as a driver demands more responsibility, in driving as a career or personal interest. One is required to be road worthy, by being medically and physically fit. A person who is known to have unstable health like one getting convulsions, drunk, or restless is not allowed to drive because in such a state one is not only a danger to him/herself but to others as well.

When people move from a place where 'keep left' is the code of driving and go to a place where 'keep right' is the code of driving, they adjust to the new rule without insisting or trying to stick to the rules of their place of origin.

However, in the event that a person in keeping the rule and driving on the right side of the road encounters a car that has lost control and is veering off the road in all directions the rule would be suspended. In this case, the objectivist would advise, drive on the wrong side of the road in order to avoid crushing into the on-coming car where the outcome may be fatal. This context and time do not support the right application of the convention and the right thing to do because one is forced by circumstances at hand.

Therefore any moral agent ought to always know the right thing to do and watch out for exceptions which do allow for suspension of the code for higher reasons that support the rightness of the action in the moment it is done. Therefore, conventions can serve as another source of conflict resolutions to the clash between principles and their application.

4.7. AN INHERENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MORAL OBJECTIVISM AND MORAL RELATIVISM.

According to Rachels, cultures may differ in what they regard as legitimate exceptions to the rules but this disagreement exists against a background of agreement on the larger issues. He sees it as a mistake to overestimate the amount of differences between cultures because not every moral rule can vary from society to society (Rachels 1986:19). This point has already been affirmed in this study by other scholars where we note that principles such as the sanctity of life, keeping promises, honoring contracts among others are approved by all people everywhere. The moral rule not to kill innocent people is upheld as the norm by all people everywhere except in cases of self-defense. Indeed even the exceptional cases equally cut across board, as it is universally accepted by

all societies that one can kill in self defense. Similarly during wars people kill their opponents not as criminals but soldiers, innocent people, who are duty bound to protect their people and defend their territory.

All cultures praise virtue and scorn at vice. Courage, justice, prudence and temperance are great values and anyone who possesses them is considered virtuous in every society while anyone who acts contrary to those cardinal virtues is considered vicious. For instance, overindulging in the luxury of life is careless and disrespectful to other people and is considered vicious. Virtues are inherent in the arguments of the two camps as they direct how the norms maintain their values whether cultural or universal. However since moral relativism condemned itself to an objective standard in several ways, we can infer that moral objectivism is more consistent in this debate.

4.8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion we find that the debate between moral objectivism and moral relativism cannot be resolved in absolute terms especially from the various possibilities offered in this chapter to reconcile conflicting situations and principles. This debate like other philosophical problems is intractable and perhaps different generations will strive to resolve the

debate and arrive at comparatively better understanding of moral norms and values.

A major complication in this debate is that objectivism unlike relativism, does not rely on empirical evidence but on analyzing the governing principles behind every norm on what is good and right, bad and wrong, striving as much as possible not to commit the naturalistic fallacy of deriving an 'ought' from an 'is.' This point is a bottleneck for ethical relativism because it borrows so much from cultural relativism a view derived extensively from empirical evidence.

On the overall we can say that the case between moral objectivism versus moral relativism can be harmonized by the immutable bond between theory and practice. Better still, the self condemnation of relativism to an objective standard by advancing a theory to be accepted by all people, and acknowledging the role and value of principles like tolerance, declares the auto-assimilation of moral relativism into moral objectivism.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This chapter makes a summary of the findings of the study which was guided by the following research questions;

> - Do Objectivists and Relativists define and use the terms in the same way?

> - Can the two camps be reconciled?

The terms being referred to in the research questions were also captured in the first objective which was to establish the use of moral concepts right and wrong, good and bad by the objectivists and the relativists. The two camps acknowledge the moral concepts on the overall. The concepts right and wrong, good and bad appear in the arguments of the two views on face value. But moral relativism gives an empirical assessment to the concepts drawing their meaning from observable status of societal norms, while moral objectivism focuses on the intrinsic character of the concepts without appeal to culture or the individual. Objectivism here is more plausible in analyzing concepts because unlike norms, values can not be empirically verified yet they go hand in hand.

On the logical consistence of the two views, if we take the value of tolerance which is core to the arguments for ethical relativism, to be able to tolerate others, it would imply they are presupposed to be mistaken, or they are wrong that is why they need to be tolerated. How does the relativist arrive at that judgment if their claim is that, it is mere arrogance for us to try to judge the conduct of other people? Or from their claim that there is no objective standard that can be used to judge one societal code better than another? This is inconsistent.

Moral relativism is also seemingly denying itself an important aspect of the nature of human beings as moral agents. Human beings are not value-neutral like objects, they hold values which are both personal and communal from which their actions can be judged as good or bad, right or wrong. Moral norms may vary from place to place and time to time, but that is only in practice. Beckwith (1993) objecting to the argument from diversity of moral practice says that sometimes apparent moral differences are not moral differences at all but factual differences which are not value differences. Factual differences make difficult the attempt to reconcile the two camps because objectivism does not make reference to facts when arguing for moral norms and values but on their intrinsic nature which transcends culture and the individual.

However, the verdict of this study, from the conclusion of the last chapter, where a significant feature emerged that moral relativism auto-assimilates into moral objectivism; we can infer an auto-reconciliation of the debate not by mutual agreement but from the self-refuting claims of relativism to an objective standard. Besides self refutation, the same claims of relativism play a complementary role in making objective moral judgments.

In the statement of the problem we made reference to the challenge of making moral judgments with clarity of thought because the individual is affected by the skewed relationship between other moral agents and the norms. When reviewing literature on taboos in Africa it also emerged that people were basically indoctrinated with moral norms and values, without particular reference to formal education, an assumption made by this study because Nyarwath in his study (1994) did not state that, but he made reference to education as the recommendation people need in order to arrive at a rational justification on norms and values. What goes in tandem with the above assumption is, when assessing the difficulties emanating from religious teachings, it also emerged that religious knowledge is indoctrination. This, therefore, draws our attention to evaluate the role and distinction between doctrines and education in moral spheres.

89

Part of the reason that makes people find more appeal to moral relativism, self-refuting as it is, than moral objectivism, is that most of the norms and values were initially transmitted to us by way of indoctrination which is more subjective mode of knowledge transmission than formal education. This indoctrination done at a very tender age, and on what we would call 'wholesale' basis, is consequential, granted that as a child one takes not only the norms but also the values as understood and translated by the adult(s) involved, with greater emphasis on the 'don'ts than the 'dos'. The child who is being indoctrinated into these norms and values is not even considered a moral agent as yet and is not expected to make independent examination of the norms and values being transmitted. This is what we would compare to Rachels (1986) observation on people's cultural conditioning, which they may or may not shed off later in their life after getting different exposure and knowledge say through going to school, travelling outside one's culture or country, intermarriage, and religion among others.

Many individuals at this point probably develop a moral conflict from within, which might explain some of the reasons many people are said to know the right thing to do but they will still choose the wrong thing probably because of their inability to resolve this conflict, or mere appeal

90

for the new. The conflict caused by a shift from indoctrination to education on moral norms creates a new culture and divides people into camps. We can talk of moral conservatives, the moderates and the liberals, all who respond very differently to ethical issues.

Since ethical relativism borrows largely from cultural relativism, as earlier discussed, then the death of ethical relativism begins here or better still, what Beckwith (1993) calls the bankruptcy of ethical relativism begins by condemning itself to moral absolutism.

One writer has said "whenever am caught between two evils, I take the one I have never tried" Mae West (1892 – 1980). We might not refer to indoctrination and formal education on moral norms and values as two evils, but the nature of human beings is to strive to excel from the known to unknown, therefore as this maxim points, people would like to try education because they have already been through indoctrination which is a very rigid method of passing knowledge compared to formal education. After going through the process of education on moral norms and values where they discover their ability to make independent decisions and choices, some people adjust to the new found knowledge and adapt well, some adjust gradually while others will not take the risk at all. These may be the underlying reasons responsible for the divisions earlier talked

91

about and new cultures. There are advantages and disadvantages in every position.

Alongside these views we conclude with the views of Robert C. Solomon on how to address ourselves to the demands of ethical issues as part of our everyday life in order to arrive at an objective criterion of making moral judgments, since it is the view that is more consistent and logically plausible, well backed up by the arguments of relativism consequently auto-reconciling itself into objectivism. Solomon observes that:

> 'ethics without reference to particular actions and feelings is empty, but action and feeling devoid of ethics are blind. Ethics is that part of philosophy that is concerned with living well, being a good person, doing the right thing, getting along with other people, and wanting the right things in life. Ethics is essential to living in society, with its traditions, practices and institutions. Those traditions, practices, and institutions can and must themselves be assessed according to ethical standards. Ethics has both a social and personal dimension, but it is not at all easy, in theory or in practice, to separate these. Moral judgment is both the product of society and one of its constitutive features. What we call our personal values are for the most part learned together and shared by a great many people (Solomon 1996:2-3).

Therefore, like Solomon who recognizes the dual and inseparable dimension of ethics, that is, the social and personal dimensions, we can also infer that morally upright people are a product and producers of good moral norms and values, a necessary ingredient in making ethically correct judgments for harmonious living.

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