

Interrogating Ogungbemi's Anti-God Humanism: Between Absolute Certainty and Absolute Uncertainty

by

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Abstract

Segun Ogungbemi, a professor of philosophy of religion and African philosophy at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria, has spearheaded “a war against God” in the substantive part of his scholarship. The importance of Ogungbemi's ideas is reflected in the attitude that the solution to African challenges should be sought within African people, as God does not have the moral requirement to be of any significant assistance. His grounds for this stance against God are shrouded in his skepticism about God's goodness, coupled with a strong belief in the intellectual capacity of humans to provide solutions to their own problems. This paper aims primarily at examining Ogungbemi's anti-God intellectual attitude with a view to appraise the strength of its foundations, and determine how successful his anti-God humanistic picture can be in the reality of contemporary Africa.

Keywords: anti-God humanism, absolute certainty, absolute uncertainty, Segun Ogungbemi

Introduction

The idea of God (i.e., his existence and attributes) has been keenly contested among philosophers. Some have seen the concept as an explanatory necessity in the attempts to unravel the world origin and its constitution. Others have seen it as needless in all its ramifications. Hence the perennial debate between the pro-God philosophers and the anti-God philosophers. Membership in each of the camps is earned through different argumentative routes. For instance, different arguments have been employed by pro-God philosophers to arrive at the existence of God. Such arguments have been classified, based on contents and styles, into different categories, namely, cosmological, teleological, ontological, etc. Similar story holds for the anti-God camp in that each of the philosophers here has different premises leading to their common conclusion that purports to deny the claim that a being commonly referred to as God does really exist.

Professor Segun Ogungbemi represents one of the few foremost African philosophers whose dislike for the concept of God is not hidden. One of the few because, except for those like himself, who give in completely to the western way of thinking, perhaps due to his philosophical training not only in the western tradition, but also in a foreign university, it is not a popular academic pursuit to want to deny that God exists in Africa. As a matter of convention, the concept of God is an absolute category in the mind of an average African, a concept with pre-philosophical appeal to both the learned and their ordinary counterparts on the street. Although it may not be totally correct to assert that there have not been people in Africa, philosophers and laymen, who have had causes to doubt the existence of God, but one hardly find such doubts boldly argued for on pages of academic journals and other documents. This may be due to the fear of the evil consequences accompanying the denial of God's existence in the public domain, which may include avoidance by people of one's immediate social circle and even excommunication from the community at large.¹ It appears therefore that one must have a seriously cogent reason for one to damn the accrued consequences and deny publicly within African, especially Yoruba setting, that God exists.

This is what Ogungbemi's scholarship is built around, that is in one form or another. As a professor of philosophy, Ogungbemi understands well the central role played by evidence in the debate about the existence or inexistence of God. In fact, he has given some to support his anti-God view about the world, especially the African world. With the foregoing background, the present paper is poised to achieve three major objectives: (1) to find out what those reasons are; (2) to appraise whether the reasons are sufficiently strong to deflate believer's ground for believing in the existence of God; and finally (3) to determine how successful such anti-God humanistic picture can be in the light of the contemporary African realities.

To achieve the overall aim of showing that Ogungbemi interprets belief in God out of context, the paper assumes the theoretical position of a typical Christian philosopher, who actually do believe in God and practices philosophy. In line with this, there is a distinction we must make to situate Ogungbemi's attitude within its proper perspectives. This is the distinction between "no-God" and "anti-God" views in the debate about the being of God; and it is to this that we now turn.

Two Views of the Universe: No-God and Anti-God

Basically, there are two ways of attacking the concept of God. One way is to deny his existence. To do this, one only needs to come up with convincing reasons to support the conclusion that God does not exist. When one succeeds in this, that is, when one is able to provide the evidence against the existence of God, one would have successfully defended atheism. The history of the debate on the existence of God is replete with such attempts. It would be apposite to state here that the problem of evil has taken a central position in the attempts at denying the existence of God. Simply put, the argument from evil goes somewhat like this: if God exists, there would be no evil in the world, and there is evil in the world; therefore God does not exist. The original insight into this problem is said to be given in Epicurus' riddle: "Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" (Hume 1987) Modern and contemporary scholars (Hume 1987; Smith 1992; Drange 1996) have since adopted different versions of the argument from evil.

Notice that, although philosophical atheologians have inferred denial of God's existence from the argument, Epicurus' puzzle does not necessarily end in atheism. The puzzle, it seems, is a road that leads to at least two destinations. Hume and others have followed it to atheism. That is a no-God view of the universe. On the other hand is the view that since God is capable of doing some things in the world, but has apparently refused to do them, then he/she is no good God. This is an anti-God view. The anti-God view does not deny the existence of God. It appears God has to exist before he/she can be justifiably described as impotent and malevolent. In other words, the attributes of impotence and malevolence make sense only within the context of an existing entity. Thus, one may argue that any argument which purports to deny God of any of his/her attributes such as all-powerfulness, all-goodness, all-mercifulness, etc. on the ground that the happenings in the real world do not exhibit any of such attributes, is an anti-God arguments rather than a no-God argument.

One way of establishing the claim that the anti-God philosophers implicitly concede the existence of God is their practice of comparing God with human beings, and finding him morally deficient on that account. A viable tool in the hand of the anti-God philosopher – a tool through which he advances his anti-God campaign – is the holy book, either of the Christian or Muslim. How does he do this?

To demonstrate the “wickedness” or other supposedly negative features of God, for instance, the anti-God philosopher only needs to search through the holy books, and get some instances of God’s actual display of such unhuman characteristics. As it shall be shown shortly in the case of Ogungbemi, the core of the argument of anti-God philosopher against the being of God, not against his/her existence, is a confused or otherwise deliberately distorted hermeneutics of the contents of the Bible as a standard text not only of the Christian religion, but also as a God-centred reference book.

In what follows, I explore the view that Ogungbemi’s intellectual attitude, as revealed in his several contributions to the philosophy of religion, fits well in anti-God, not no-God, philosophical programme. I do this by examining some of the cases Ogungbemi has against the idea of God. My aim here, broadly speaking, is two-fold: one, to establish the claim that Ogungbemi is not an outright atheist; and two, to find reasons from his scholarship to support this claim.

Grounds for Ogungbemi’s anti-God View

Ogungbemi seems to have a miscellany of reasons for being so negatively disposed to the idea of God. He adopts Anthony Flew, R. M. Hare and Basil Mitchel’s (1989) style of the argument from evil, according to which

Someone tell us that God loves us as a father loves his children. We are reassured. But then we see a child dying of inoperable cancer of the throat. His earthly father is driven frantic in his efforts to help, but his heavenly father reveals no obvious sign of concern.

The idea of God suggested to Ogungbemi by the above quote is one which is morally reprehensible and insensitive to human plights. God’s attribute of all-goodness implies, to Ogungbemi, that there ought not to be any evil in the world at all.

The wars and conflicts in many parts of the world, namely central Europe, Central Africa, West Africa, etc. have rendered many innocent people either injured or dead. In contemporary Africa, constant unrest have led to starvation, famine, family dislocation and deterioration of life. It is estimated that about four million African children die yearly. The earthly fathers normally perform their duties within possible limits and most cases prayers are offered to the heavenly father who is believed to be benevolent. But the benevolent heavenly father has not shown any “obvious sign of concern”. The end result is the death of the innocent children. (Ogungbemi 2007)

Ogungbemi has an anthropomorphic conception of God. He thinks that if God is like human beings, then it is not likely that his children would be suffering, and he, being all-powerful, and therefore capable of ameliorating or completely eradicating the suffering, would refuse to do something about it. That, to Ogungbemi, is inconsistent with the nature of human beings, let alone God, who possesses compassion in perfection. A God who cannot come to the aid of a suffering child by healing him and put a smile on the face of his devoted Christian parents, is not likely to be a good God.

Let us put the foregoing in a biblically historical context. One of the weightiest moral laws in Christendom is the imperative to love one another. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) was told by Jesus to preach the theme of love as a fundamental religious doctrine. A moral lesson from the parable is: Love the lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbour as you love yourself (Luke 10: 27). This commandment is a product of the nature of God himself. God is love. Ogungbemi (2007) does not believe God has thus given us a humanly possible commandment, for according to him, “if we spend all our time to love God with all our hearts, with all our minds, with all our strength, etc., when shall we have time for our own selves?” The ultimate conclusion from this question seems to be that God is a selfish being who is only concerned in being loved by his mortal creatures while he makes no provision for them to love themselves. This is, at best, a childish understanding of the imperative to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. To love God is to love fellow human beings; and to love fellow human beings is to abstain from all social vices that may have negative consequences on them. So the question, “when shall we have time for our own selves?” (Ogungbemi 2007) does not have any argumentative force whatsoever to defeat the imperative to love God.

Perhaps Ogungbemi has a more damaging reason for objecting to the divine commandment to love God, namely, “God has not shown a practical demonstration of such love because Satan who is his arch enemy has not been pardoned.” (Ogungbemi 2007) God’s plan to keep Satan in a permanent place of torture, in Ogungbemi’s view, does not accord with the nature of God as love itself. Same for Jesus, who failed to extend the principle of “love for enemy” to Judas Iscariot. Thus Ogungbemi (2007) concludes, “If the divine beings e.g. God and Jesus the Christ, could not love their enemies as themselves, how can ordinary mortals do it?” Whereas Ogungbemi’s worry about God’s moral failure to love Satan may, indeed, be genuinely substantive, and may require further explanation from the theist; it is not clear the sense in which he says Jesus the Christ has not loved Judas Iscariot. If by this, Ogungbemi refers to the avoidable death of Judas Iscariot, then Jesus could not have been blamed because during the former’s death, the latter was equally facing his own death. Besides, Judas Iscariot was solely responsible for his own death; Jesus was not. Judas chose to hang himself out of all equally competing moral choices available to him. The choice either to be saved or not was his, and he chose not to. Jesus Christ could not have imposed his love on him; that would be contrary to the nature of love. Peter equally sinned, but chose forgiveness over death.

A version of the above argument is employed in Ogungbemi's (2008) "Death: a Moral Issue", which in my opinion, is the most celebrated of his philosophical problematizing in recent times. Accordingly, God's giving up on Adam and Eve at the instance of their very first moral failing, has a dire implication on the morality of God himself. This proves the likely conclusion that death would not have been a lot we have to cope with as human beings if God had pardoned the *mistake* of our first parents. An earthly parent, for instance, would not condemn his/her child on his/her first act of disobedience. But that was not God. "Considering the claim that God is omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent, and so on, the haste he took to eject his tenants from their abode because of one offence casts doubt on his ability to have those attributes." (Ogungbemi 2008) No less morally worrisome is God's negative predisposition to man redeeming himself by not allowing him to take a second bite of the tree of life to escape the death penalty that was hanging on him and his wife. This, at best, shows a wicked and an unforgiving God, not inexistence of God.

Ogungbemi is also irked by a morally fickle God, who gives commandments that undermine his earlier commandments. To illustrate this point, Ogungbemi cites the case in Exodus 20 where God handed to Moses the Decalogue, a document containing ten divine precepts, amongst which was the commandment not to kill. "But it is the same YAWH who instructed Samuel to ask Saul the first King of Israel, in 1 Samuel 15: 1-9, to go and kill all the Amalekites including innocent children and animals for an offence which that generation knew nothing about (Judges 10:12; 1 Sam. 15:2)." (Ogungbemi 2008) Another example of God's moral inconsistency can be found in the event of Mary's impregnation by the Holy Spirit, which Ogungbemi sees as an act of adultery, since Mary was supposed to be betrothed to Joseph. This contradicts God's commandment given in the book of Deuteronomy 22:23-24, where the carnal knowledge of an already betrothed woman by another man is punishable by stoning to death. "To a rational mind, the issue that is at hand is the contradictory aspect of the law that came from the Divine and recorded in the Holy Bible" (Ogungbemi 2008).

Ogungbemi's point in the two cases above is almost the same, namely, that God has an unstable moral temperament, which sometimes makes him command two logically contradictory courses of action at different times. This point, it appears, rests on the assumption that God operates on the same logical canon with human beings, so that God's reasoning could be adjudged rational or otherwise based on its obedience to the logical principle by which human thought is ruled. To repeat, this is an anthropocentric view of God. It needs to be emphasized therefore that any attempt at judging God's moral attributes on the tribunal of human rational standard runs the risk of using inappropriate logical apparatus as a judging mechanism. After all, God's ways are not ours. Irene Adadevoh (2008) writes to this effect:

Anthropomorphic super-naturalism simply demonstrates that under any sound reasoning context, the supernatural idea of God is based on strong selective emotions that may or may not violate familiar canons of human rationality. Where there is violation of such rationality, it means that, human inference with the nature and belief in God simply reflects strategically the relative shortcomings of social and human judgment. And it will be humanely superfluous to presume that, given such shortcomings, the nature and belief in God should be an exception.

As fraught with internal problems as anthropomorphic view of God is, it seems the only humanly possible means of theorizing about God. It is the human point of view; and no theorist is a non-human. Even when they are put on the superlative proportion, the attributes, especially moral attributes, that we predicate of God are features made intelligible only in relation to human beings. God may be merciful, or loving, or powerful, etc., but only human mercy, love, power, etc. is readily available and accessible. So whatever measure of mercy, or love, or power, etc. attributed to God, is only suggested to us, though on a higher level of dialectics, by the human counterparts of these moral qualities.

However, if anthropomorphism is true, certain implications necessarily follow which may be incompatible with the nature of the theistic God. The holy Bible is replete with several of such implications. For instance, in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, the Bible records that “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1: 31). Notice that “everything that had made” includes humankind. If this is correct, one begins to wonder how this *very good* stuff, humankind, suddenly becomes a source of God’s unhappiness so much that, in Genesis 6: 7, God says: “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man and beast, and the creeping thing; and the fowls of the air; for it repents me that I have made them.” The questions arising from this episode is inexhaustible: was God, being omniscient, not aware beforehand that humankind would turn out to be so wicked?; Where did humankind come in contact with evil if truly he/she was created good?; Given the claim that God is all-powerful, is wiping out an entire inhabitants of the earth the most morally supported course of action available to him/her? These questions, if answered from an anthropomorphic perspective, reveals certain moral inconsistencies on the part of God. But these inconsistencies need not arise if we have a non-anthropomorphic theoretical perspective from which the being of God could be cogitated. The search for the possibility of such outside-of-man-point-of-view would be a worthwhile academic exercise in the field of philosophy of religion.

Appraising Ogungbemi's Anti-God Arguments

I will now attempt a critical examination of Ogungbemi's ground for holding an anti-God view about the universe. In doing this, I want to determine whether the view is strong enough to dissuade the believer from believing in an all-good, all-powerful and all-knowing God. I have earlier shown this view to be heavily anthropomorphic. One reason why anthropomorphism is disdainful to philosophers is its tendency to view the being of God in the light of human-human relationship, rather than human-creator relationship. This, I think, is one of the fundamental problems with Ogungbemi's anti-God philosophical attitude. Howsoever one decides to think from these two ways of thinking i.e., human-human relation and human-creator relation, has a far-reaching implication on the consequent view about God that one adopts.

Seeing God from the human point of view may tempt one to expect certain human moral qualities, and in an event where such human expectation is not met, one may be led to accusing God of being morally deficient. It is in this sense that certain happenings in the world, which the human mind interprets as evil, would not be compatible with the existence of God. Consider Gbenga Fasiku's (2010) argument for the compatibility of evil with the nature of God as a self-willing being: "Since the decision to act, and not, is God's, and what we label as good and evil are God's action and inaction, deriving from his power of decision, it follows that God is the author of 'good' and 'evil.'" This is beside the point that what we refer to as evil itself may be so referred due to the human epistemic limitations. Obviously, not all evils are really evil, to risk a logical redundancy. I have argued elsewhere that,

Only God has exhaustive knowledge of things and situations, hence He is described as *Oba to ri ohun t'enikan ko ri*; *Oba to mo ohun t'enikan ko mo* (a King that sees that which others don't see; a King that knows that which none knows). When a situation arises which tempts us to doubt God's existence, such as the occurrence of a premature death or an accident, we often hear such consolatory remarks as *ewe kan ko ni bo l'ara igi ki Olorun ma mo si* (a leaf will not fall off its mother-tree without God's knowledge of it). The word 'knowledge' is used here in the sense in which it refers to 'approval'; hence the saying is properly translated as "nothing happens without God's approval of it" (Balogun 2014).

The problem of evil, as Ogungbemi notes, is an intractable problem for theism, no doubt. But it only becomes such if we are able to establish that what we refer to as evil is so referred by God. In other words, does what constitutes evil for human beings constitutes evil for God? Is it not possible that most, if not all, that we, as humans, label as evil does not constitute such to an all-knowing God? The schism between human beings and God seems to suggest that both are not operating within the same level of discourse.

The idea that humans are finite and God is infinite has serious implications on the rational processes exemplified by each of them. If God does not think the way human beings do, then it seems these questions cannot be dismissed as mere wishful thinking. Similarly, if the God's point of view is the correct one, might we not err by accusing God of creating a world fraught with evils, when he/she could have made a better world, where sickness, death, sufferings, and other "evils" have no place? Leibniz's hypothesis that our world is the best out of the infinitely possible worlds does support this.

The foregoing argument applies to Ogungbemi's attack on God's failure to love Satan and Jesus' allowing Judas Iscariot to die after betraying him. I have dealt with the one involving Jesus and Judas Iscariot earlier. To respond to the charge of God's refusal to forgive Satan, one may need to allude to God's attribute of omniscience. That is, if God has first-hand knowledge of what would come to be, then he/she must have known that Satan would remain irredeemably stubborn and unreceptive to divine pardon. The fore-knowledge that Satan would not repent and embrace available amnesty, coupled with the accruable danger of being around the heavenly abodes, might have informed the divine decision to drive him/her away from heaven. Moreover, God could not have imposed love on Satan, for that would have been violation of Satan's right either to accept God's love or not.

One may explore another dimension to Ogungbemi's denunciation of God's animosity to Satan. This dimension requires that one understands the scope of God's love, and then inquire whether Satan's deed that earned him exit from heaven falls within the scope. Evidently, God's love cannot cover all things, although it is available for all. God is a holy being; and this automatically puts him at conflict with anything unholy. The Bible describes God as so holy that his/her eyes cannot behold evil (Hab. 1: 13). The question is, "Was Satan so evil that God cannot behold him?" Before his/her fall, Satan was the head of the angels in charge of God's throne. These are the closest angels to God not only because they watch over the throne of God, but also because their singing halleluiah helps to keep heaven in perpetual awe and glory. Now, for such an officer in the league of heavenly army to desire in his/her heart to want to usurp God's throne, or lift his own throne above God's in such a way that God would then be his subordinate, if anthropomorphism is true, would be an offence punishable only by death. That would be mutiny, and it falls sharply outside of scope of God's love.

Ogungbemi may concede to the rebuttal above, but still insist that the existence of hell does not accord with the belief in a benevolent God. As he argues,

The doctrine of hell-fire is logically incompatible with the nature of a loving God. In other words, it is logically impossible for God to be benevolent Being and at the same time be the architect of hell-fire. If it were true that he is a loving God and at the same time designed a hell-fire for man, he has violated the law of non-contradiction (Ogungbemi 1997).

This claim also, like others, is a product of a mistaken logic of God's attributes. To demonstrate the nature of this error, one may ask, "What purpose is hell supposed to serve?" As the Bible shows, hell is a final place for the devil and his cohorts. This probably implies that God conceived the idea of hell as a deserving punishment after Satan had forfeited his place in heaven, and had been driven to the earth, where, since then, he/she goes about recruiting for his/her kingdom. Being perfectly just God, it would be morally deficient for God to have a system of rewarding good deeds in paradise without equally having a system for rewarding evil deeds in hell. The point is, if everyone is admitted into paradise in spite of differences in the contents of their character, then God would be significantly unfair to those who set themselves apart for good work on earth. This would definitely corrupt God's all-good, all-loving nature. A loving God is an impartial God who gives to each according to his/her desert. Hence, contrary to Ogungbemi's conclusion that the existence of hell-fire is logically incompatible with the nature of God as a benevolent being, it actually confirms him as not only a good, but impartial, God.

Segun Taiwo (2008) has mounted a similar defense of theistic Christianity against Ogungbemi's critique wrapped in his moral condemnation of God's action of driving away our first parents from the eternal bliss of the Garden of Eden. Being their first time, Ogungbemi expects God to give them a warning, maybe the last warning, but he/she did not. Instead, he/she condemned them to a life of toil and travail outside the Garden. As reasoned by Taiwo (2008), however, "to say that God did not give Adam and Eve a warning is to beg the question." A crime is no less a crime, whether or not it is committed for the first time. No court of law would pardon a person for disobeying the law (e.g. involving in an anti-social activity) for the first time. Hence, Ogungbemi's moral disapproval of God's action against Adam and Eve is gratuitous and out of tune with the practice of punishment. Observing that Ogungbemi lacks the basic understanding of the religious language-game, Taiwo concludes, like Wittgenstein, that, "in talking about religious beliefs, it is important to place them within the language-game to which they belong; Ogungbemi has not done this, and this leads him to confusion about the logical grammar of Christian religious belief."

True to Taiwo's submission, Ogungbemi has displayed this lack of understanding of religious language-game on several issues. At every instance of Ogungbemi's criticism of the belief in God, he has shown, without hesitation that he is a die-hard scientific realist and thorough-going believer in verificationist standard of meaning. It is philosophically wise, no doubt, to choose the absolutely certain theory – where what is certain is what is verifiable via empirical means – over and above a competing hypothesis, which is not so certain. However, as the history of philosophy has amply shown, certainty of the type that Ogungbemi seek has proved elusive, so that philosophers are beginning to give up on the quest for it. In the following section, I explore the implication and plausibility of Ogungbemi's attitude towards certainty, and its feasibility in the context of the contemporary African reality.

Anti-God Humanism and the Contemporary African Reality

As a realist, Ogungbemi extols the virtue of proportioning one's belief according to evidence. It is this that leads him to rejecting the psalmist description of one who "says there is no God" (Psalm 14: 1) as a fool. The fool, according to him, is a rational agent who proportions his/her belief according to evidence. Buttressing his argument, Ogungbemi tells a story how two newly acquired power generating sets and other items were stolen from two churches in one night, and the Christian God for whose worship the plants were bought neither prevented the theft nor did anything to recover the stolen items. Not too long from then, a similar act of theft occurred when some individuals went and stole the costumes of a certain local god called *Origba*, at Yagba Local Government, Kogi state, the same local government where theft of two generating plants had earlier occurred. According to Ogungbemi (1997), "within a couple of minutes after the costumes were taken, there were lightning and thunder strikes; those who went to steal the costume ran quickly to return them, and the sky and the community were at peace."

Ogungbemi thinks that, given the measure of evidence produced by the two Gods, it is more likely that only the one that acted with swiftness in the protection of worshippers' property *really* exists. The logic behind this conclusion is fairly unquestionable. One of the attributes of the living is the ability to act and react. It seems natural for one to react if one's property is stolen, especially if the property involved is newly acquired, and one has a special power, like God, to prevent the theft *ab initio* from taking place, or to recover the stolen item supposed the theft has already taken place. To Ogungbemi, God's inaction in the story is an indication of probable inexistence or impotence, whereas *Origba's* quick action provides ample evidence of existence and potency. Thus, the "fool's" rejection of God over *Origba* is a rational choice, because it is based on good evidence. Here, Ogungbemi clearly takes *Origba's* action of lightning and thunder for the certainty of his existence; God does not demonstrate such certainty. Analogously, the aliveness of a life wire consists in its being able to electrocute. That ability makes the difference between live wires and non-live wires.

Given the foregoing background, Ogungbemi is likely to find the concept of "miracle" or "being born again" very anathematic because it fails to conform to the so-called scientific paradigm, and therefore should be left out of concern of serious minds. Consider being "born again". Like that character in the Bible (see John 3: 1-4), Ogungbemi is wont to say, "Well, that sounds incredibly impossible", since no such evidence is available in science. For that will entail once again entering into one's mother's womb and being born through the biological process. But that would be judging spiritual things with materialist language-game. To be born again is an experience rather than a biological fact; it is a unique, personal experience that one has at a period of one's life. This experience is an experience of renewal, of starting on a clean slate, making the past literally non-existent. It is thus a rebirth, not scientifically, but spiritually conceived. The past is pushed into oblivion because the fellow who has this experience changes/switches from his hitherto old self to a new self. Hence, the bible say, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2Cor. 5:17).

As deducible from the above, *one* of the cardinal factors that inform Ogungbemi's anti-God humanism is his complete confidence in scientific methodology as the standard of rationality. Any claim that cannot be explained within the ambit of science, according to this view, does not add up to knowledge. But there is another one, equally forceful. This is his staunch faith in the ability of humankind to provide solution to problems as we have them on earth. In an interesting paper titled, "Towards the Perfectibility of Man: a Challenge to Africa", Ogungbemi highlights how, sequent to God's inability to cater for needs, humankind has boldly confronted nature, turning it to an ally, rather than enemy. His argument is "based on the fact that philosophy, science and technology have clearly demonstrated that human perfection is possible" (Ogungbemi 2008). Through a proper and successful use of these media, which are products of human intellectual genius, Ogungbemi envisions a blissful future for humanity, a future only comparable with the religious concept of paradise. As he argues,

The recent advancement in genetic research in which cloning is perceived as a solution to human defects, when perfected, will enhance the well-being of man. For example, if it is possible to identify the genes that are responsible for aging in human and they can manipulate them in such a way that aging becomes prolonged, it will be a welcome development. Similarly, if geneticists are able to manipulate genes that are responsible for social misbehavior like armed robbery, thuggery, racism, greed, hatred, rape, etc. and human being become better behaved, love peace, harmony, respect for human dignity, will foster unity and the money spent on security will be spent on something that will maximize human happiness (Ogungbemi 2008).

There seems to be no noteworthy controversy whether science has contributed immensely to the development of humanity. Beside its role in the increase in human knowledge of the natural environment, science has led to great inventions that have made living on earth more conducive for human beings. Scientific enquiries and their consequent knowledge have resulted in ground-breaking discoveries in diverse aspects of man's life. This is the positive side of science.

There is the other side of science, however; a side much less talked about because it represents a perversion of the scientific dream of a better world for all. Scientific theories and laws do not own themselves. They are tools at the hands of people. Being tools, they assume the shape of the intention of their discoverers. As the saying goes, he/she who pays the piper calls its tunes. The success of the scientific adventure is consistent with use of the knowledge to bring about selfish desires by its custodians. This fact first became obvious to the entire world in the ugly event of Hiroshima, where a supposedly innocent piece of scientific procedure became a deadly weapon wiping out approximately 200,000 people at once, and leaving behind an unproductive environment. Since then, the world has not known peace, as nations suspect each other of being in possession of one deadly weapon or another.

The above does not apply less to genetic engineering, which Ogungbemi thinks holds the solutions to the significant bulk of human predicaments. It appears true that a piece of genetic engineering knowledge which leads to prolongation of life, or possibly, eradicate death, may be used, with equal accurate effectiveness, to shorten life and cause other havocs, if its custodian so wishes. It's all about addition of something or subtraction of something. Hans Jonas (2009) claims that genetic enhancement opens up:

a Pandora's box of melioristic, unpredictable, inventive, or simply perverse-curious adventures, abandoning the conservative spirit of genetic repair for the path of creative arrogance. We are not authorized to do this, and we are not equipped for it – not with the wisdom, not with the knowledge of value, not with the self-discipline. And no longer will a tradition of reverence protect us, the demystifiers of the world, from the enchantment of thoughtless crime. Therefore, let the box remain unopened.

The depth of destruction nurtured in human minds is unimaginable. A piece of scientific information wrongly utilized may spell doom on the entire humankind. Unbridled genetic engineering makes the future of mankind gloomy, bleak and uncertain. Hence, there is need to set limits to the extent of scientific exploring, not because human intellect cannot penetrate so deep, but because exposure to such is not in human interest. George Annas (2001) is even more apocalyptic, describing genetic manipulation as “genetic genocide,” with “species-altering genetic engineering a potential weapon of mass destruction” that “makes the unaccountable genetic engineer a potential bioterrorist.”

Let us leave the criticism of biomedical engineering for the moment, and attend to a more relevant issue of the implication of Ogungbemi's anti-God humanism on the contemporary African reality. Currently, Africa is classified as the poorest continent in the world. Of course the continent was not created poor, but was *made* so. Ogungbemi (2007) attributes all the crises in Africa to both internal and external forces, where by these forces he means militating factors originating from within Africa and those from outside Africa. Beside poverty, African is being faced with other multifarious problems such as unemployment, inter-ethnic wars, religious conflicts, ignorance, political instability, and in recent times, terrorism that has assumed a proportion unprecedented in the African history. The insurgency of Boko Haram in Nigeria, Cameroun, Chad and Niger; Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia; al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mali and environs, to mention the leading terrorist groups in Africa, has left the continent a mere caricature of itself with wanton destruction of lives and properties, kidnapping, and other nefarious activities being perpetrated on daily basis. These and many others are what we mean by the contemporary African realities.

Many African writers have traced African problems to the problem of leadership. In the specific case of Nigeria, the late Chinua Achebe (1983) puts it more precisely, “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership.” Achebe might have meant many things by “failure” in the phrase “failure of leadership”, but the sense most relevant to our purpose here is one where “failure” means “moral failure”. Achebe’s remark may thus be rendered as: “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a moral failure of leadership.” If this is correct of Achebe, then it does not apply less to the followers. Moral failures such as corruption, embezzlement of public funds, assassination of political opponents, kidnapping, election rigging, money laundering, fraud, especially amongst youths, armed robbery, cultism, militancy, prostitution, etc. are found among both the leaders and followers.

The question at this juncture is, how can secular humanism of the sort defended by Ogungbemi help provide solution to the highlighted problems above? Put differently, if the contemporary African problems are reduced to moral failures of leadership and followership, can Ogungbemi’s secular humanism be the way out? I do not think this question can be answered in the affirmative. The anti-God humanism of Ogungbemi is premised on the existential claim that human beings are at the centre of the universe, and hence self-sufficient in all things. This implies that humankind has the capacity to provide solution to material and moral problems, with no assistance from God or god, whose moral status we are theoretically either not sure of or not satisfied with. Where societal moral consciousness grows on secular humanistic foundations, however, moral failures are hardly ever curable. They are like smoking; one can hardly quit. A moral prescriptive mechanism based on human intellectual capacity can hardly guarantee the kind of solution that the aforementioned problems require to disappear for human intellect is so limited that it cannot see beyond the present.

It is instructive to note why secular humanism does not hold the key to the solution of contemporary African problems. Secular humanism has nothing to do with belief in God and other associated beliefs. Thus, it has no higher authority than man from whom the moral laws are derived. It has no heaven to work towards, or a hell to avoid; no universal umpire to be conscious of. Consider an article in the Humanist Manifesto II, for instance:

Promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from rectifying social injustices.²

If there is no hope for after-life reward or punishment, then human beings are inclined to do whatever they feel like without remorse. The concepts and consciousness of heaven and hell have a way of regulating human conducts here on earth, making us to embark on the good path even if it feels difficult doing it sometimes. As they say, the most dangerous person in the world is the person who has nothing to lose.

Suppose such humanism becomes the socio-political rule rather than an exception to the rule in contemporary Africa. What implication might it have? Consider the abysmal depth of moral decadence in Africa, especially Nigeria. Sometime ago, a pastor from the Eastern part of Nigeria was caught burying some able-bodied men inside the foundational hole of his about-to-be-built church. Another one from Lagos set ablaze a member of his congregation, and is presently awaiting death in one of the Nigerian prisons. A teenager was caught with the carcass of a fellow primary school pupil around Ibadan. Different shrines across the country daily witness gory sights of humans sacrificed for money and power. A friend once told me that men in his state no longer allow their laboring wives having their babies to attend public owned medical institutions for fear that their babies' would be group-kidnapped in big Ghana-must-go bags by hoodlums working for people occupying political space. In the North (in Nigeria), Boko Haram's excesses in human killings and wanton destruction of property have led many, like Ogungbemi, to wonder if belief in God codified in conscience still has a place in the heart of humankind.

To be sure, people who think like this may be correct, after all. Belief in God is now very rare among African people. It must be rare for all this horrendous show of inhumanity to be taking place. Notice, however, that this assertion is not inconsistent with the view that belief in God is a rational choice. It must be the case therefore, that those behind the acts highlighted above are not fully convinced of, or are fully confused about, the existence of God. A true theist would not engage in any of these acts, which are acts showing lack of faith in God as omnipotent, omniscient and an impartial judge. It does not sound reasonable for one to concurrently hold a true belief in God with these attributes and still involve in these acts. The Muslims have, on several occasions and via differently media, denied Boko Haram as representative of the true Islam, which is a religion of peace. No God-based religion preaches violence and inhumanity to fellow humans. Thus the violence and evil practices presently being experienced in Africa must be a perversion of the purpose of belief in God. We conclude that a return to a God that is not only omnipotent, omniscient, but also one that gives to each according to his/her desert, is required in contemporary Africa. Such God is needed to rationalize the time-honored saying that whatsoever humankind sows, so shall they reap.

Notes

1. Segun Ogungbemi himself cites some of his past experiences both inside and outside Nigeria. For instance, see Ogungbemi, S. (2007). *Theism and the Final Cause*. In *Philosophy and development* Ibadan: Hope Publications, 159.
2. See *Humanist Manifesto II* in [www.americanhumanist.org/humanist_manifesto_II](http://www.americanhumanist.org/humanism.humanist_manifesto_II). Assessed on 31-03-2016.

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