A reflection on morality and religion

Author:
Jaco Beyers[1] ⬤

Affiliation:
[1]Department Religion Studies, Faculty of Theology, and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Jaco Beyers,
jaco.beyers@up.ac.za

The aim of this contribution is to reflect on the relation between religion and morality. An overview of the different theories of the origin of morality is provided. According to Blanchard, there are four traditional ways in which the origin of morality can be explained: (1) origin from nature, (2) origin from ourselves, (3) origin from culture and (4) origin from an objective moral law. The last instance creates the possibility for religion to be identified as the origin of morality. In reflecting on the relation between religion and morality one realises that the question that needs to be discussed is whether religion is indeed the provider of morality or not. It is also necessary to determine if religion is the guarantor for morality. The aim of this contribution is to reflect on the relation between religion and morality. An overview of the different theories of the origin of morality is provided. In reflecting on the relation between religion and morality one realises that the question that needs to be discussed is whether religion is indeed the provider of morality or not. It is also necessary to determine if religion is the guarantor for morality. What happens in a secularised society? Is it still possible for morality to exist in a secularised society? It is clear from an understanding of secularisation as differentiation – the separation of spheres – religion and morality can be separated and can exist independently in a secularised society. The influence of the evolution theory by Charles Darwin led to a new way of understanding the nature of morality. Some reflection on the influence of evolution on morality is presented here. One prominent recommendation resulting from this investigation is to emphasise that religion can provide the morals for morality.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This contribution reflects the intersection of anthropology, philosophy, religion studies and ethics. The discussion is based on a philosophical reflection on the relation between religion and morality.

Keywords: morality; religion; secularisation; evolution; Darwin; Blanchard; secularism.

Introduction

> For all the centuries of experience, men have not yet learned how to live together without compounding their vices and covering each other 'with mud and with blood'. (Niebuhr 1936:1)

Niebuhr's negative remark that the human inability to treat others with decency and respect forms the backdrop to this conversation. According to Niebuhr, it appears as if it is human nature to act immoral instead of acting morally. The question is whether if left unsupervised, will human nature resort to morality or immorality? Is it possible to search for ethics, virtues and morals in human nature or are these implanted within the human mind and derived from a different source outside of the human mind? Is the origin of morality solely to be discovered in religion, and if so, what if society becomes secularised? Do irreligious individuals then have no morals? How should the relation between religion and morality be interpreted? This study focusses on the relation between religion and morality as a precursor to how individual religions view the origin and function of morality.

In order to understand morality, it might be necessary to survey the landscape. Morality is one signpost marking a landscape filled with signposts denoting something different and something related to morality.

The word ethics, for example, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (Little 1970) refers to the science of morals. Morality on the other hand is explained by the same dictionary as the fact or quality of being moral, implying good moral conduct. Moral refers to a person's moral qualities, principles, habits, conduct or practice. Moral is presented as the ability to distinguish between right and wrong (virtue and vice), good and evil in relation to actions or character (Oxford English Dictionary).

Another key term forming part of the domain of ethics and morality is the concept of virtue. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (Little 1970), virtue refers to the quality of a person. The origin of virtue is associated with a supernatural or divine being. Virtue can be a quality or an act or mighty work also derived from divine origin. One possible use of virtue is to refer to the 'conformity of life and conduct with the principles of morality and the voluntary observance of the recognised moral laws or standards of right conduct' (Oxford English Dictionary). It appears as if virtue may or may not be derived from a divine being. Virtue can be related to religious or to a non-religious origin. Virtue is held in high regard and seen as superior to that which is not virtuous.

This human ability to distinguish between right and wrong is perceived as an innate quality of the human mind. Specific sets of rules prescribing human conduct and actions arose over time through social consensus in communities and are often closely related especially, but not exclusively to religion. To distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong as an innate human quality implies that humans are born with the ability to discern between right and wrong and that religion can tap into this innate quality to identify the criteria for distinguishing between right and wrong. Humans already possess the ability to distinguish between right or wrong, or so it seems.

Throughout the ensuing conversations, this innate human quality will be discussed from biological and psychological perspectives. What I want to focus on is the relation of religion to morality. The goal of this contribution is not to convince of any monopolar origin of morality. Neither is it to discuss the particular moralities as expounded by different religions. The goal rather is to seek to illuminate the relation between religion and morality. In order to do that some critical evaluation of theories of the origin of morality is required.

Origin of morality

The sociologist, Ott (2007:182), describes morality as 'the expression of the dialectical dynamic between personal autonomy and the social solidarity wherein one is truly a member of humanity'. Morality is presented as a social phenomenon, which only exists because of the relations among and between others. Ott (2007:182) continues to explain that 'morality is grounded in actions that put into praxis the longing for that which is other than the antagonisms of the existing status quo'. Morality is here presented as being the opposite of the animosity experienced between entities. Morality should, however, not be reduced to refer to mere social, amicable human interaction. Morality relates to all relations and interactions between entities. This should include not only inter-human relations but also human to nature, human to animal and human to the supernatural. Inter-animal relations are a bit more complex as animal behaviour might be perceived to result from instinctual impulses and not adhering to an objective moral code.[1] For the sake of clarity, this presentation will deal with morality as human behaviour.

1. Compare in this regard how morality is perceived as the distinguishing characteristic that differentiates humans from animals. This has been an argument presented by Aristotle, Aquinas, Calvin, Kant and others.

Where does this human trait of morality come from? What is the source or origin of morality? There are several possible responses to this question. According to Blanchard (2000:563), there are traditionally four possible answers as to the question of the origin of morality.

Nature as source for morality

This view implies that the origin of morality lies in nature. Through interaction with nature, humans witness and observe moral values in animals and plants. This, however, can be problematic as nature does not always present morals that are accepted in human societies. For example, there is no moral in parasitic plants killing other plants for its own benefit and survival, or predators killing more animals than are necessary for consumption, or ants keeping aphids as slaves to produce food.

Humans are part of nature. From a biological perspective the nature as source for morality theory implies that morals are derived from human evolutionary processes. It is through gradual development that morals emerged as part of human makeup. The sociologist, Bellah (2011:83), is an exponent of this position when he states that ethics does not come from nowhere. Humans are shaped by a long biological history. Elements of human behaviour such as sex, aggression, politics, nurture (the first form of love), and even ethics appeared a very long time ago, probably millions of years ago, according to Bellah (2011:83). Humans are embedded in a long history of biological and cosmological history that influence everything we do (Bellah 2011:83).

Evolution can, however, not account for moral values, according to Blanchard (2000:563). It is impossible to jump from molecules to morality. Where does rationality fit into this? To make moral judgements is to measure oneself against oneself, according to Blanchard (2000:563). We will later return to a discussion of the influence of evolution on morality.

When nature is considered as the origin of morality, it is clear that morality is grounded in particular contexts. The stages of development of humanity leads to creating appropriate moralities for each stage and context of development. Nomadic hunter-gatherer communities had different moralities than sedentary agrarian communities. This development is seen, for example, in the development of moralities of different communities in the Old Testament. The semi-nomadic cattle farmers had a different ethics than the peasants as opposed to the ethics of the city dwellers (cf. Hempel 1989:154–161). The federal tribal system had different ethics than the monarchic period as opposed to the exilic period. The way in which society was structured influenced and determined the ethics and morality of ancient communities.

Ourselves as source for morality

Blanchard (2000:563) indicates that a second possible source of morality can be ourselves. Humans decide what is right and wrong. This would imply that humans from the beginning

of human existence had a capacity for moral discernment. Morality is then innate part of human nature. Within ourselves, we have the necessary skills and knowledge to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

According to Blanchard (2000:563), the problem with this theory is that the huge variety of possible ideas as to what constitutes right and wrong creates a challenge. This highly subjective and elective way of understanding morality is problematic in the sense that it assumes humans know innately what is right and wrong. The moral choice each individual makes must then be considered the correct choice. But humans do not necessarily reach the same moral conclusions if confronted by similar ethical dilemmas. Whose choice of morality will then be considered as correct?

The sociologist, Niebuhr (1936:xi), in analysing individual morals indicates that it must be acknowledged that humans are 'endowed by nature with a measure of sympathy and consideration for their kind'. It will appear as if humans have the ability to always choose that which is right and good. But as Niebuhr indicates, that is not always the case. Humans are good and able to make moral good choices, but society drives us to act unjustly (Niebuhr 1936:4). Society influences human choices (Niebuhr 1936:51). Niebuhr (1936:6) argues that the urge for power threatens morality: 'power is poison and it is a poison which blinds the eyes of moral insight and lames the will of moral purpose'. Some types of power can never be brought completely under social control (Niebuhr 1936:20). Although morality may be innately human, it does not guarantee moral decisions.

From a theological perspective, John Calvin argues (cf. Sizoo 1989:8,12) that all humans contain a spark of religion or what he calls a *semen divinitatis* (seed of knowledge of the divine) (Sizoo 1989:9,10) planted or ingrained within us. This is what differentiates humans from animals: the innate knowledge of God (Sizoo 1989:8). All humans have the ability to know God and by knowing God, humans know the will of God and are therefore able to act justly and morally (Sizoo 1989:13,14). But if knowledge of God is only depending on human ability, Calvin states that the knowledge of God will be skewed, as humans are unable to know God by themselves. Humans run the risk of creating an image of God and then God becomes a product of human invention (Sizoo 1989:14). Following our own ideas will lead us away from God to superstition (Sizoo 1989:14).

Since the fall of Adam and Eve, human nature has been completely corrupted and utterly unable to recognise and pursue anything moral, resulting in each human choice to be bad and sinful. Knowledge of God and his will is only possible through Scripture, which reveals God's true nature (Sizoo 1989:37). Humans are no longer able to distinguish between right and wrong. Knowledge of God's will is only possible when the light of God's Word shines forth (Sizoo

1989:37). The Holy Spirit guides human decisions to act morally in faith acceptable to God (Sizoo 1989:43).

Culture as source for morality

A third possibility for the origin of morality is identified by Blanchard (2000:563) as morals are rooted in culture. Public opinion and community consensus contribute to the formation of socially accepted morals (Blanchard 2000:563). This position differs from the previous argument that morality comes from within ourselves in this regard that morality is presented here as the result of a collective effort and not individual decisions.

This position assumes that morals are socially constructed based on social consensus on what is right and wrong. The group morals may stand in contrast to individual morals. It is merely by way of consensus that public opinion is regarded of higher value than private opinion, especially when it comes to the agreement how society functions.

Niebuhr (1936) addressed the relation of individual and social morals. According to Niebuhr (1936:83), the individual ethics is of higher value than the group ethics. Social groups tend to rely on intelligence and rationality to construct morals for society.

The sociologist Berger (1967:4) indicates how homo sapiens participate in what he calls 'world-construction'. Society consists of several institutions such as religion, morals and ethics, education, judiciary and economics. These elements become part of the 'social program' constituting the 'nature of things' and how society agrees to conduct itself (Berger 1967:24). The process of social construction consists of three stages (cf. Berger 1967:4): externalisation, objectivation and internalisation. Externalisation is the outpouring of human mental activity, resulting in among other things, morals. Objectivation refers to a process whereby that which has been created by human effort attains an autonomy and is set up over against that which produced it. In the process of internalisation humans re-appropriate the entity created and re-establishes it in the subjective consciousness. As a result, the reality that humans have created has become the one that governs human society. Humans become the product of society (Berger 1967:4).

Applied to morals, it would imply according to the Culture theory, that humans create morals through externalisation as byproduct of social interaction. Morals then become autonomous through the process of objectivation and eventually become institutionalised through internalisation and consequently govern society.

Objective moral law as source for morality

A fourth possible origin of morality is according to Blanchard (2000:563) an objective moral law existing outside of human nature, personal choice or social consensus. According to this position, a higher force or power guides human intellect in

establishing a moral code external to human conscience, which provides moral direction to humans. An external source, whether it is considered of divine nature or not, provides independent criteria to discern right from wrong. Humans are guided into generating or replicating a moral code existing independently from human conscience and is communicated or revealed to humans.

This position opens up the possibility to assign the task of independent lawgiver to a divine godhead. The understanding that morality can be assigned to a divine origin assumes a connection between religion and morality.

The evolution theory presented by Charles Darwin has as implication that there is no force guiding human evolution and the establishment of morals (Blanchard 2000:112). The acknowledgement of a God led some to the denial of any divine godhead. This is the case with Richard Dawkins and others carrying the label of atheist. Dawkins (2006:2) questions whether we indeed need God in order to be good. According to Dawkins (2006:219–220, there are four reasons why evolution might be the reason for human goodness. Firstly, the human selfish genes drive humans to assist those within our own social group. Secondly, reciprocal altruism (Dawkins 2006:217) suggests people do good to others in order to receive in return good treatment. Thirdly, a human wish to have a good public reputation for being kind and generous, drives people to act morally good. Fourthly, Dawkins (2006:218) suggests that humans want to demonstrate their superiority among peers by acting in a moral way. Our urge to do good, according to Dawkins (2006:221), may be labelled as what he refers to as misfirings in the course of evolution.

Dawkins' argument is somewhat confusing and unclear (cf. Blanchard 2000:561). At first, Dawkins acknowledges that besides a life principle, that includes a form of Darwinian morality, this is however not an efficient way to explain altruism, but that altruism is rather the result of 'mistakes' when the selfish human gene is acting against its own interests. In the end, Dawkins (2006:221) acknowledges that he is thankful for the 'mistakes'.

Dawkins would argue that morality is surely not based on religion. What is the relation between religion and morality then like?

The relation between morality and religion

Niebuhr (1936:51) emphasises that religion is the source for human moral choices. 'Moral capacities of individuals have proceeded from and been encouraged by the religious' (Niebuhr 1936:51). There are however divergent ideas on this.

Religion is the provider of morals

The definition that Theo Sundermeier (1999:17) proposes for the concept religion is that religion is the communal answer to becoming aware of the presence of the transcendence. He then states that religion is expressed in rituals and ethics. Ethics is then identified as a result of the awareness of the transcendental. Joas (2006:19) confirms this when he states that religions provide the motivation and orientation for values and morals. Religions become the vehicles for the transmission of moral traditions, which are transferred from one generation to the next. The danger Joas (2006:20) identifies is that religion can be reduced to being a value system. Religion is according to Joas (2006:20) the attempt at interpreting human experiences, with the implication that religion is more than a value system.

Religion can be perceived to have the function of providing society with moral structure. Hegel indicated the importance of ethics as base for social life (cf. Cohen & Arato 1995:91). To this Paeth (2008:129) attests by pointing out religion's involvement in the process of moral formation within community. Civil society does indeed need a prescriptive function as to how society ought to behave. Humankind needs moral values (Berger 1967:147). Religion becomes relevant, according to Berger, as to the fact that religion becomes the provider of such morals in private life.

As to the proper values needed in society, Juergensmeyer (2005:6) indicates that religion promotes certain values, such as honesty, justice, fair play, tolerance, and respect. These values are necessary for the maintenance of society (Juergensmeyer 2005:6,8). The role of religion in cases of conflict in society is then to provide the values for a moral community in conflict (Juergensmeyer 2005:8).

To expect anything more from religion would be to make religion not only the lawmaker but also the judge – religion then becomes the measure against which truth and justice is measured. The moment religion becomes the peacemaker or referee in a conflict situation in society, it would require a choosing of sides. Who was the aggressor or instigator or perpetrator who acted unjust or untrue or unlawful and who has become the victim and sufferer and oppressed or harmed. In such cases, all outcomes will be highly subjective, leading to unending debates on questions as to which religion becomes the measure for what is correct and appropriate, who has the truth, what is lawful, what is just?

In such cases, religion would become the one causing harm and social division (cf. Berger 2005:15). Religion should maintain an objective position, or as Berger (2005:14) calls it, an 'intermediate' position, standing somewhere between the public sphere and the structures of state and economy. From this uncompromising position, religion will be able to suggest a moral structure to society.

The matter becomes more complex when the religious plurality of society is considered. Joas (2006:22) suggests that religions should be viewed as attempts at interpretations of authentic experiences of humans with the divine from different times and cultures. In pluralistic societies the

question arises as to which religion's morals would be accepted? Juergensmeyer (2005:5) provides a solution when he discusses the phenomenon of globalisation of religion. He (2005:6) suggests that the collective values of the globalised religion would suffice. The worldwide moral community will agree on the biggest common values among religions. Joas (2006:28) refers to this as 'productive confrontation' between religions.

The challenge of plurality can be solved by employing religions to become the providers of the moral for morals. Religion itself becomes the appeal on society to transcend its existence and strive for a better way of life. Religion then encourages ethical behaviour in society without prescribing a moral code. Religion reminds society of the objective existence of a higher power guarding over humanity. In this sense religion's place in civil society is best described by Seligman (1992):

> [T]he idea of civil society thus embodies for many an ethical ideal of the social order, one that, if not overcomes, at least harmonizes, the conflicting demands of individual interest and social good. (p. x)

Joas (2006:28) adds the condition that it should always be born in mind that it is neither religions nor cultures that act, but people. People should express their morals.

There is a strong case that religion and morality are closely linked. Religion and morality support one another (Haselbarth 1976:2). Some morals are even enhanced when attributed with divine authority. Even without divine sanction on morals, people still have knowledge on what is right and wrong.

It appears that within religion, the religious leaders act as guardians of morals. In Africa, ancestors are perceived as guardians of morals and ethical behaviour, controlling everything from the use of property to relations between people (men and women, children and parents) (cf. Haselbarth 1976:2). Religion can be perceived as the provider of morality.

Religion is not the provider of morals

The question can be asked whether morality is truly the result of religion or is morality a general human accomplishment? We assume every human possesses a moral code and even some remnants of a moral conscience. Does the source of morality not lie in the passing down of established tradition, good upbringing and common sense? The ancient Greek school of the Stoics has long relied on experience, common sense, the Golden Rule, and the Logos-reason as sources for natural laws concerning morality (cf. Russell 2004:242). The Stoics, under the influence of the doctrine of Zeno, believed that religion does not deserve such prominent position as thought. Actually, only one thing matters according to Stoic belief: virtue (Russell 2004:242). A life of virtue is a life in harmony with nature (Russell 2004:243). One

therefore only need to act in ways creating and affirming harmony to establish virtue. All that matters, however, is your own virtue (Russell 2004:244). Virtue is not an act contributing to the benefit of others, but merely to be known as a virtuous person. There is no benefit to being virtuous than to be known as a virtuous person. There is nothing to be achieved by a virtuous life (Russell 2004:244).

The Stoic position on morality therefore emphasises that religion has little to do with morality. It does not mean that Stoics deny the existence of God. On the contrary, Zeno would hold that God is omnipotent – the General Law which is Right Reason pervades everything. God runs through the material world (cf. Russell 2004:245).

With the advent of the Middle Ages a change occurred on how the relations between realities were perceived. The ancient Greeks might have had a freethinking approach as opposed to the Middle Ages thinking prescribed by the church and theology (Blanchard 2000:37). With the Christian emperor Justinian I (483–565 CE) closing down the ancient philosophy schools of Athens, the theologians and no longer the philosophers were now looked upon as the thinkers of society (Blanchard 2000:37). Everything, also morality, was now perceived from the connection with religion. Only when supported and grounded in decrees by the church authority something was socially and intellectually acceptable.

If religion governed thought on morality, how did the rise of secularisation influence the dominant grip of religion on society? If morality is perceived to either have originated from religion or not, what effect does secularisation have on morality?

The theologian, Cupitt (2009), tries to balance the view of what the origin of morality is when he says:

> [N]o god can possibly tell me what morality is. Only my own heart can do that. Like 'purity', morality shouldn't be seen as being a matter of what gets put into us; it depends upon what comes out of us. (pp. 29–30)

Morality and a secularised society

If morality is innately part of human nature, why do all humans not subscribe to similar moral decisions and behaviour? If religion is the source of morality, does it imply that without religion morality disappears? If society is secularised does it imply that there is no space for morality? Is there an indestructible tie between religion and morality? The ambiguous relation between religion and morality becomes evident when we discuss the matter of secularisation.

There are different ways in which the secular can be defined. In this regard compare types of definitions as discussed by Paas (2011:7–9). One type of definition of secularisation refers to the process of differentiation – the separation of spheres (cf. Paas 2011:7). Social institutions are detached from the influence of religion. This is because of religion losing its

social function of societal legitimation. Secularisation causes the separation (differentiation) between spheres. This separation can take place between law and science, philosophy and theology, and morality and religion. The consequence is that one sphere no longer dominates another. For our interest, morality can become detached from the dominance of religion.

For Berger (1969:107) secularisation refers to 'the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols'. Unger (2014:198) indicates that such a separation between religion and morality results in an ethics of 'universal fellow-feeling and sacrificial solidarity' which sees the world as subordinate to the primacy of love. Morality is no longer prescribed by religious notions, but instead, as Unger indicates, morality is now formed by a universal call for love.

As a result of differentiation it is thus impossible to claim that religion is the sole provider of morality. Morality can exist independently from religion. This implies that a secularised society is not without morality, although the morality that is still subscribed to might have had a religious foundation which has now become dissolved. Part of the process of dissolving the bond between morality and religion is because of the influence of evolution.

The influence of evolution

According to Blanchard (2000:114–116), it was Charles Darwin and his evolution theory that brought an end to religions and moral values. Evolution as biology theory leads to a mechanistic understanding of life (Blanchard 2000:113). There are no gods or powers guiding human intellect into constructing morals. The implications of evolution are that there are no inherent moral and ethical laws that exist. Humans are what they are because of a deterministic biological process without any design in mind. There are no absolute guiding principles for society. There is no ultimate meaning in life. There is no God and therefore no absolute basis for moral standards. The only values that exist are those we invent.

Proponents of evolution hold that it is not necessarily that evolution destroys all morality within humans. Richard Dawkins (as argued by Blanchard 2000:115) believes that human behaviour as determined by biological evolutionary processes is guided by survival instincts. The result is then to equate morals with survival instincts. That which enables humans to survive is good and right. Evolution would then hold it as good for the survival of the human species to refrain from assisting the sick, elderly and weak. By assisting the weak they are allowed to perpetuate their weakness into the next generation, weakening the whole species (Blanchard 2000:116).

In his book *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins states (1976:1) that his intention is not advocacy of Darwinism but to discuss the consequences of the evolution theory: 'My purpose is to examine the biology of selfishness and altruism'. Humans are machines produced by our genes. 'The predominant quality to be expected to survive in a successful gene is ruthless selfishness' (Dawkins 1976:2). Dawkins states emphatically that he is not suggesting a morality based on evolution (1976:2). He (Dawkins 1976:2) rather wants to create awareness that human default is selfishness and that we should teach unselfish generosity and altruism.

For many people, evolution takes on the dimension of a religion (Blanchard 2000:108) bringing the whole moral structure of society into question. I sometimes get the idea that individuals uncomfortable with the stronghold of religion on society uses evolution theory as a stick to combat religious leaders and not as an instrument to present an alternative theory to the origin of humanity. One example would be that of the argument started by Thomas Huxley, one of Darwin's staunchest defenders at the Oxford debate of 1880 at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (cf. Blanchard 2000:104). Dawkins (2006:211) affirms this when he states his suspicion that 'a great deal of the opposition to the teaching of evolution has no connection with evolution itself, … but is spurred on by moral outrage'.

There are, however, different voices than that of the polarised voices of Blanchard and Dawkins on this matter. Compare in this regard the argument presented by Harris (2012) that science can indeed contribute to the formation of values.

The impact of Darwin's theory on intellectual development and especially religious thought cannot be denied. The severity of his theory was that it suggested a break in the link between humans and God leaving humanity drifting unaided through reality attempting to respond to moral and existential challenges (Blanchard 2000:105).

The opposite position to a mechanistic understanding of life is that humans consider themselves as a powerful being able to govern themselves. This reflects a coming of age of human abilities. Humans do not need external powers to instruct and guide us as to what is right and wrong.

One of the results of evolution was the justification that human races differ qualitatively. Some are superior and will persist, while the inferior races will disappear (cf. Blanchard 2000:110). Evolution led to the generation of new morals for society.

The strong reaction from religion's side against the evolution theory may be the result of a power struggle. If the ethical stronghold religion has on society is challenged, a pushback from religion can be expected. It is important to note that it is then a power struggle rather than an evaluation of right and wrong.

Consequences and recommendations

Does the presence of evil, injustice, lawlessness, cruelty, inhumaneness, intolerability imply the absence of religion or the absence of morality or the absence of both? Or may these social evils even be considered to exist because of the presence of religion, thus religiously inspired? Is it possible to differentiate between secular and other forms of morality?

If religion is considered not as the only source for the origin of morality (compare the argument presented by Blanchard earlier), then in what way is a connection between religion and morality possible? When religions are considered to act together on presenting society with morality, in what way can the relations between religions be configured?

In any secularised society the separation and differentiation of spheres is a reality. In a secularised society the traditional held theory that religion and morality are linked disappears. This is not necessarily a thread to society as morality will not be marginalised as will happen to religion.

Morality should lead to dialogue and not religious inspired violence. Joas (2006:31) emphasises that morality should lead to productive dialogue among people from different religions and cultures. The goal should be dialogue and not animosity (Joas 2006:31). Religious inspired morality assists society in acting morally. The task of religion in society can be that religion provides morals for morality.

When this occurs in society it is not religion that is prominent but the morals for morality. In this way religions can collectively agree on providing guidance on how morals for society can be structured. Religions then do not present religious elements for society to consider, but present morals for how society can structure morality. In this way religion remains part of the equation without becoming the dominant factor in society. The outcome is a moral society, with religious inspired morals.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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