

PHILOSOPHY, POVERTY AND THE RE-MAKING OF THE NIGERIA NATION

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ABSTRACT

Philosophy is a discipline that has to do with critical reflective thinking. This kind of thinking is important for the development of any human society. By producing theories engendered from critical thinking, Philosophy provides us with useful tools for the emancipation of the poor and the overturning of exploitative political systems. Nigeria as a nation is in dire need of economic progress. However, this cannot be achieved without the input of critical minds. Thus to re-make Nigeria as a nation, the thought process and pattern of her citizens are to be redirected in the appropriate direction in order to make progress. It is a lack in this regard that largely accounts for her low level of development in spite of her abundant human and natural resources. This paper is an attempt to resolving this problem, through sustained critical reflections on the sources and causes of poverty and how best to address the needs of the disadvantaged. The paper concludes that to endorse Philosophy is to be on the side of freedom and creativity; which is economic progress.

Keywords: Philosophy, poverty, development, exploitation, political systems, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a nation richly blessed with mineral resources and a fair weather. Amidst all these advantages she still suffers economic, development and political crisis. It can be identified that Nigeria does not regard disciplines which are not oil or medically related; this is because she feels it is only through oil or the medical related disciplines that her economy can progress. So rather than achieving progress even with these myopic and ideology system, she has only succeeded in endangering and injuring her economy and this has led to various economic setbacks which she has faced in years past, even till this time. Nigeria's political system is one filled with corruption and all forms of irregularities; both among the leaders and citizens alike, and this have been degrading for Nigeria. She is referred to as the 'Giant of Africa' but what can be pragmatically identified is nothing short of developmental, leadership and economic dwarf. On its own part, Philosophy as a discipline is considered by many Nigerians as one of the most irrelevant in Nigeria today. Ironically, the progress and development of any society is fundamentally dependent on the level of reflective and critical thinking adopted and implemented. The thrust of this piece is to address the shortcomings facing the Nigerian economy and politics which has hindered proficiency in development; while establishing the place of Philosophy as a tool for redirecting the hearts of Nigerians into good politics, developmental and economic progress.

PHILOSOPHY: THE MOTHER OF ALL DISCIPLINES

No discipline is self sufficient to cater for all the affairs of a nation or state. This is the reason why we have several disciplines in the sciences and arts among other hosts of disciplines. Each is expected to bring out the dynamic ideas of their field to work, in other to produce proficiency and efficiency in that section of affairs. This basically shows why a medical doctor cannot be in charge of a construction project but would rather be proficient in his medical or clinical field;

while the construction engineer takes care of the construction affairs. In the real sense of it, no discipline is unnecessary or irreplaceable. Thomas Flynn as quoted in MacDonald (2013, 63) characterizes philosophy as targeting the establishment of basic truths about human nature and the cosmos.

The term philosophy is derived from the Greek words, 'Philos' and 'Sophia' which means 'love' and 'wisdom' respectively. Philosophy therefore means the love of wisdom. Definitely, it is concerned etymologically with attaining knowledge and its applicability (wisdom). This knowledge is multifaceted and translates or is broken down into microcosms which become different disciplines. It is in this regard that Philosophy becomes the 'mother of all disciplines'. Philosophy is understood to be a discipline that encompasses all other disciplines, though a discipline like every other discipline but still a discipline which has a command over all disciplines (Ogbujah, 2006, 2). This command over all disciplines does not insinuate the disposal or irrelevance of others, but reflects the fundamental and foundational role it plays as the mother of all other disciplines. Similarly, Philosophy is a watch dog which guides and interrogates all disciplines. Could this be the reason for having a philosophy of every discipline?

In the words of Onwuama, philosophy is:

[A] critical, reflective and unbiased investigation on development aimed at providing principles, theories for development. Philosophical issues for development refer to those areas and problems of development that are reserved exclusively for philosophical clarifications and hermeneutics. (2011, 167)

This is achieved through various theories which are propounded to settle individuals and group cases (in context and content). Nnamdi (2011, 85) views philosophy as “a method of distinguishing fact from fallacies, sifting truth as sacrosanct... it is a method of securitizing our otherwise unexamined beliefs and practices in order to purge them of falsehood and error.” This shows that philosophy is concerned with trying to identify truth in things through procedures and processes which are unbiased and strategic. What have been considered truth in today's world are parchments of fallacies which have tried to fit in into people longings as such are adopted as truth. All these philosophy aims to rectify.

NIGERIA'S QUAGMIRED ECONOMY AND POLITICS

An average Nigerian, when confronted with issues bearing on Nigeria economy, politics and general development, will surely speak from the negative perspective. Several Nigerians have lost hope in their country; this is because the country in itself has contributed nothing to their existence or future. Nigeria is a high respected and known African country, gifted with mineral resources and the most favourable climatic conditions. Yet, the positive effects of these gifts do not reflect in the country. The problems facing Nigeria cannot be said to bear on just one sector but on all sectors. Basically, the level of development when viewed from the economic and political spectrum is nothing to write about.

As Ohuawunwa (2022, 37) observes, “a collapsed economy is a collapsed nation.” Unfortunately, Nigeria's economy over the years has suffered from mismanagement of funds, lack of proper accountability, corruption and lack of expertise and this has landed her economy into shambles; it is so porous that it favours foreigners more than citizens. This has triggered many of the first world countries to pocket the Nigerian economy as Nigeria only does their bidding in the name of partnership. Every new government who takes over power is either borrowing from other nations, World Bank or other international organization to get funds they would use to carryout projects. Nigeria runs to them as the only hope and they enslave the

Nigerian economy even more in the pretence of wanting to assist. Some even go to the extent of offering the nations property as collateral and even selling off some to get funds. As such, Nigeria continues to owe debts that are in the real sense of it, unnecessary to have been incurred in the first place. It is appalling that the majority of the goods consumed in Nigeria are imported and from these same 'First World' countries. Paradoxically, many of these countries are not even as blessed as the Nigerian society but they have been able to critically use the available judiciously, while Nigeria has only managed to invite and increase poverty among her citizens. When foreign companies are interested in exploitation, the Nigerian soil becomes the perfect site. Nigerians are being employed and paid peanuts which are not in tandem with the level of labour exerted into work (another form of slavery).

Also, when one looks at the budget approved by the senate, one would think that the country actually cares for her citizens. But this is not the case. Instead, Nigerians do not see the impact on the society as there is always an ulterior motive behind the budget. Contracts are given to thieves clothed as contractors who would only use substandard materials, mismanage and siphon a huge amount of the funds given to them to carry out a task. In fact, approval of bills has now become another means of stealing from the Nigeria economy. This is one of the most outstanding reasons why there is next to no development in Nigeria. Public sectors are erected in weak structures and poverty even though huge sums of money are allotted to them in the budget. It is not that there are no cases of poverty in other countries of the world but it is most pronounced in Nigeria. As it stands, many Nigerian have lost hope in the economy of their country.

Quite sarcastically, Bierce (2023) defined Politics as the “strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles.” This is the kind of politics that can be found in Nigeria. Nigeria cannot be said not to have engaged in healthy politics. This is because the act of politiquing has been greatly misunderstood in the Nigerian milieu. Politics is seen as a “do or die affair”, where politicians make use of whatsoever means at their disposal to win elections for positions they are not qualified for. This is why election period becomes an avenue for reckless killings and kidnapping. Those who have held political offices are not in any way interested in the well being of the people but in their own pockets. A man who has nothing enters into office and when he is to leave the office, he has already acquired what a full community can be sustained with. People no longer bother to ask how and where he made his fortune even with the declaration of property/assets before entering into office. These politicians are not bothered about being investigated even after leaving office because they can always lobby around it. Achebe opined that:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian Land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise up to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmarks of true leadership. (1998, 1)

Campaigns grounds have become deceptive avenues to lie to Nigerians while discreetly distributing illicit funds to bribe citizens to vote them in. On election days, thugs are sent out with weapons to disrupt the electoral process thereby bridging a democratic activity. However, outgoing leaders now decide who would replace them in office, as if the position is a family or personal property. The intention for a political arena that is party structured is to ascertain a level of competency and diplomacy, in other to achieve a good candidacy for the supposed service in the office. But this is not actually the case when closely interrogated into.

Okolo supports Achebe's line of thought when he said that “Nigeria has a problem with leadership and insists that there can be no serious change in the country unless it occurs in the leadership” (Okolo, 1994, 16). The true purpose for party politics has been killed and buried as what we have

now is a 'god-fatherism' oriented political system. The so-called god-fathers decide who becomes and who does not, as such though not physically in office but indirectly controlling the seat of power. In this way, the affairs of Nigeria has been piloted by leaders whose personal interest stands as the epicenter of governance (Ugwu, 2020, vii).

Moreso—even though the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria emphasizes the autonomy of each of the arms of Government—when the Nigeria political system is examined critically one might be tempted to ask: are the arms of government still three or one? This is because the arms of government in Nigeria are obviously being controlled by the Executive. Justice dies day by day and laws are enacted or regulated in a manner as though to please the executive. There have been countless cases of the executive ignoring the verdicts of the judiciary and the legislative. The legislative and Judiciary are seen as slaves of the executive because they only do the bidding of the executive. So in the real sense of it, the Executive is the only arm of government that is active in Nigeria, though beclouded in corruption.

All these deceptions have impacted negatively upon the mindset of the children and juveniles as they have been misoriented to believe that political leadership over the people is all about stealing and causing violence. Now when a child is asked why he or she intends to be leader in the future one will be shocked to hear things like: I want to make steal my own money and be rich. What most persons refer to as national cake. This cancerous menace has eaten enormously into the hearts of many Nigerian citizens. This therefore portrays the sources and causes of the economic and political state of a quagmired Nigerian situation.

ADDRESSING NIGERIA'S POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES THROUGH THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF PHILOSOPHY

Succinctly put, philosophy is focused on giving an interpretative understanding of reality; a goal and liberation oriented discipline from the bonds of ignorance for developmental sustainability (Onwuama, 2011, 49). The progressive affairs of a nation are reflective of the critical minds and implementations. Embracing philosophy is the direction for and towards Nigeria economic progress. Philosophy as a field of study can directly help Nigeria's economy by encouraging critical and reflective thinking; considering what is right and wrong, and exploring big questions. It helps to ask and address questions like: What have been the shortcomings in the Nigerian economy? What are the factors responsible for these shortcomings? How can these shortcomings be resolved? What are the impact on the citizens and its long time benefits?

While philosophy itself does not directly create economic growth, it can provide a basis for developing and implementing policies and strategies that support progress. Philosophy can help structure guidelines for economic activities that are fair and responsible. It has always been the case that majority of the economist who have held Nigerian offices have not seen the need to reflect adequately on the long time benefit (the futuristic), they have only focused on the present and this has greatly affected the Nigerian economy. By thinking about different ideas of what is right and wrong, policymakers, business leaders, and economists can make informed decisions that focus on long-term sustainability, fairness, and overall economic growth. Philosophy promotes skills like: thinking carefully, reasoning logically, and analyzing information. These skills are important for identifying economic problems, evaluating different options, and coming up with new solutions. By using careful thinking and analysis to tackle economic challenges, policymakers can make smart choices that drive sustainable growth and address social and economic issues. By thinking about these ideas, policymakers can design economic policies that are inclusive, promote fairness, and create an environment where businesses can succeed and thrive.

Furthermore, challenged with the breakdown of order and gross marginalization of people in the society through politics, philosophy is obliged to not only confront these social-political ills, but to seek for justifiable grounds in which humanity can return back to the track of civilizing process. Philosophy is instrumental to the political sphere or system; this is because it asks question like: Who should rule? With what and how the society should be governed? It establishes what is fair, and the role of the government. These fundamental questions are necessary for any political or leadership system which intends to grow or develop. In the Nigeria context, philosophy will help in establishing the fact that those who intend to hold public offices should first acquire adequate knowledge of what they seek to be admitted into. This will help the leaders recognize the need for an *ethos*, because a leader is expected to be one whom others can aspire to be like. It will equally bring to mind that consciously and unconsciously there are other learning from every footstep he or she makes as a leader; so they would strive to obey the law as no one is above it.

Secondly, Philosophy will help present and future leaders be it in the Judiciary, Legislative and Executive to recognize the fact that they are first citizens like any other Nigerian out there. Nwekeaku (2014, 26-35) averred that “Nigeria's constitution provides for fundamental rights of the citizens and roles for every level of government, thus it is not the lack of good laws that troubles Nigeria but the lack of good governance that seeks to twist these laws to its own curves.” As such, there is a need for an integral participation in trying to lead and govern the people accordingly; since it takes one from the people to understand the plight of the people. Philosophy through its reflective capacity will establish into leaders the fact that they are servants chosen by the people to service and not to be lords over them. Every position or office is not held for eternity but for a period of time, this philosophy through critical thinking will help the leaders recognize and understand, so there will be no attachments in all of their dealings while in office. It will help them develop a sense of community (altruism) rather than the self (egoism or greed). This way element of corruption and loquacious spending would be curbed intrinsically.

Pragmatically therefore, there is a need to appoint and give offices to individuals who are experienced in the required field. Many offices in Nigeria are given to people who have little to no experience in that field, so they occupy the seats and turn their position into avenues to learn rather than act. It is porous to note that even though Nigeria is blessed with countless numbers of philosophers, the leaders have not seen the need to incorporate them into committees and offices which requires critical minds inputs. In Nigeria universities students studying philosophy are seen as wasting their time because philosophy is not valued and has been greatly reduced to nothing. One can hardly see a politician in Nigeria who is a philosopher but this is what has engineered the sporadic increase in foreign nation's successes. Little wonder; there approach to philosophy as a discipline is not the same in Nigeria. There is therefore that need to incorporate philosophers into the system as the importance of philosophers in predictive analytics, public policy making, political analysis, peace and conflict management or resolution cannot be underestimated.

CONCLUSION

To Buttress, the economic retrogression and political mishmash in the Nigeria society has led to poverty and lack of development. These, in turn, have continuously affected the citizens and the proper way of thinking from generation to generation. Such situation has been sustained for long because philosophy and philosophers help has not been sorted. Philosophy therefore can play a role in shaping policies that encourage critical thinking, creativity, and curiosity. By emphasizing philosophy in institutions, Nigeria can develop a new generation of thinkers who are equipped to handle complex economic challenges, come up with new ideas, and contribute to innovation,

entrepreneurship, and economic growth. It can inspire policies that reduce corruption, increase transparency, and ensure a level playing field for everyone in the economy. Lastly, by integrating philosophical insights into economic policies and strategies, Nigeria can create an environment that supports sustainable economic growth, social development, and overall progress. This fundamentally becomes a re-orientation and reconstruction of the minds of the citizens and leaders to achieve an economic and politically progressive nation which is necessary for development.

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