

THE NEXUS BETWEEN MORALITY AND POLITICS

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Abstract

In the midst of the present political dispensation in Africa, in which issues of justice, equality and fairness are being called to question, the issue of the connection between morality and politics is being brought to the limelight again, considering the fact there are a lot of practices going on the political landscape in Nigeria today that are totally at variance with the norms and prerequisites for the conduct of such actions. The basic principle is that people must practice leadership with integrity and values. Contemporary political practices show that there is a large number of active political issues as a foundation for right and proper conduct of state politics. For instance, in Nigeria, issues such as corruption, vote buying and selling, campaigns bereft of ideas and main issues, certificate forgery and numerous doubts about the integrity of political actors occupy the centre stage of the political life. A thorough consideration of the issues mentioned above calls for reassessment of the way politics is fast being separated from morality, which has led to the popular saying that "politics is a dirty game." Due to these anomalies that are prevalent today, this paper calls for the stringent implementation of the ethos of political engagement be they electoral or constitutional. The assessment is that religious institutions might play a crucial role in the formulation of rules that can influence the political establishment, when making policy decisions and implementing them. The paper

shall adopt the expository and analytic approach in accomplishing its task.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of morality in politics is an issue that has attracted so much attention among philosophers, scholars, politicians and citizens through the ages. It is particularly topical in times of dramatic political developments that put under severe strain moral constraints on individual and collective choice and action. Today, we are facing an array of pressing issues in both national and international politics, which raise difficult moral questions. At the same time, our trust in political leaders who are entrusted with devising and implementing solutions to these issues is sorely tried by their words and actions.

Under these circumstances, the problem of the relation between politics and morality takes is of paramount importance. In the light of this, this paper attempts to explicate the relationship between politics and morality. It seeks to answer important questions like; can politics and morality be active at the same time? Can a politician be moral? What determines political policies, morality or political will? just to mention a few. Thus, we shall reexamine the meaning of morality, politics and the relationship between politics and morality.

THEORITICAL ELUCIDATION

MORALITY

To think that one definition of morality will be adequate enough is baseless. The reason for this is that morality seems to be used in two distinct broad senses: a descriptive sense and a normative sense.

However, in this work, we shall be discussing morality in the normative sense. In the first place, morality refers to the set of standards that enable people to live cooperatively in groups. It refers to a code of conduct that would be accepted by anyone who meets certain intellectual; and volition conditions, almost always including the condition of being rational.¹

That a person meets these conditions is typically expressed by saying that the person counts as a moral agent. However, merely showing that a certain code would be accepted by any moral agent is

not enough to show that the code is the moral code.

Morality is defined as a human behavior that is freely subordinating to the ideal of what is good, right, and appropriate, this is not about discovering new principles, but the better application of those that already exist and are accepted. Morality is often associated with ethics, but also with the church and religious belief in general.

According to the Biblical view, morality derives directly from God's revelation to mankind, as it has been described in the Bible. The relationship between morality and religion is often discussed, and ethical philosophy believes correctly that moral action depends on religion. "Divine Command Theory includes the claim that morality is ultimately based on the commands or character of God, and that the morally right action is the one that God commands or requires. All versions of the theory hold in common the claim that morality and moral obligations ultimately depend on God."²

POLITICS

The word politics comes from the Greek word *polis*, meaning everything that concerns or belongs to the *polis*, or city-state. Since the city-states no longer exist, the modern form of this definition is what concerns the state. Thus, politics can be defined as the study of the state, its aims and purposes, the institutions by which those are going to be realized its relations with its individual members and with other states. Politics is also defined as the study of the government a collection of officers who make, interpret and enforce rules for the whole community. This definition of politics offers a highly restricted view of politics. According to this definition, politics takes place just within the government departments, cabinet rooms and legislative chambers. This means that politics is the matter of politicians, civil servants and lobbyists. According to this view the vast majority of the people are not involved in politics. All the institutions that are not engaged in running the country are regarded as non-political.³

This definition can, however, be narrowed still further. This is evident in the tendency to treat politics as an activity carried on by certain designated organization (parties). In other words politics is regarded as an activity connected with political parties. Thus, only

politicians are considered as political, whereas civil servants are seen as nonpolitical. In the popular mind, politics is associated with the activities of political parties and politicians. This extremely narrow view of politics helps to explain why negative images have so often been attached to the word politics. Politics is often described as a negative phenomenon because only politicians are seen as decision-makers.

POLITICS AS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Is politics something associated solely with government and state? The term is widely used in other context than that of the government and state. People are often said to be acting politically in their relations with their bosses and colleagues in an office, or in the management of the club of some kind, or in many other situations in which government, state and political parties are not mentioned. Nevertheless, much western political thinking rests on a distinction between the public realm and private life. The distinction between the political and the non-political coincides with the division between an essentially public sphere of life and private sphere. How can we differentiate the public sphere from private sphere? The traditional division between the public realm and private realm conforms to the distinction between the state and civil society. The institution of the state are considered as the part of the public sector, whereas the civil society belong to private sector. Thus, public sector is regarded as political, whereas the private sector is considered to be nonpolitical. Thus, politics is an essential public activity and it does not take place in private sphere of life. It does not have right to infringe upon private affairs and institutions.

THE BOND BETWEEN POLITICS AND MORALITY

Politicians and philosophers have always pondered the potential connection between politics and morality, going back to the earliest stages of intellectual thought. Additionally, they were supposed to address the issue of where to situate those notable concepts that are directly related to the discussion, such as right, good, virtue and vice, personal liberty, and the public interest. But the crucial query is: Should politics be governed by conventional moral precepts and

demands? In fact, this question has produced two opposing points of view. The Aristotelian and Machiavellian schools of thought are excellent examples of these two diametrically opposed camps.⁴

For Aristotle, the hallmark of human actions including politics is the pursuit of moral virtue, which in turn will guarantee common happiness for the individual and the society at large. The Machiavellian advice to "The Prince," in contrast, saw no need to elevate the concept of morality in politics because neither human nature nor the workings of politics call for it. He advised leaders and aspiring politicians to avoid thinking about the potential role of morality in politics. Whatever stance one chooses to adopt, the fact remains that morality and politics appear to be related in some way. Politics and morality both contribute to the control and direction of human behavior. Politics regulates relationships between groups, various socio-political organizations, and the state with the control of state power as the focus, whereas morality regulates interpersonal relationships and interactions between person and group.⁵

The difference between private and public morality in social life can be found in the flexibility of the relationship between these two concepts. The idea being conveyed is that each person is a moral agent with a private and public life. Politics and morality are intertwined within each individual. When a person transits from a private to a public life, the crucial connection between politics and morality is highlighted. Without defining the place of individuals within the political enterprise, it is meaningless. The scope and justification of politics are determined by the people's actions. The importance of political activities to people is largely justified by their moral standing. When the major players in politics have no moral inhibitions, we can ask ourselves what effect politics will have on the lives of people living in a society.⁶

The early theories of morality and politics distinguish very little if at all between these two ideas. In their moral and political ideas, Plato and Aristotle did not distinguish between these two ideas. For them, politics and ethics go hand in hand. According to Aristotle, issues with political institutions and individual morality are intertwined. Aristotle held the teleological belief that human deeds should be assessed according to their results. The achievement of

universal happiness is the highest good for him.⁷

In his book "The Leviathan," Thomas Hobbes contrasted Aristotle's ideas. He argued that people have a self-interested nature. He illustrated this with his famous idea of "war of all against all," which he believed would occur in the state of nature where there would be a devastating competition between men. Hobbes is arguing that in such an environment of chaos and conflict, moral and just principles has no place. Henry Cudworth and Samuel Clarke, two early intuitionists, both disagreed with Hobbes' point of view. They believe that morality is universal and objective. This claim sparked a discussion in moral philosophy about whether morality should come from reason or feelings. Other theorists, such as Hume and Hutcheson, contended that moral judgment cannot be based solely on reason that reason can only serve to aid us in recognizing moral actions and not to motivate us to carry them out.

Another participant in this discussion Vassil Prodanov claims in his article morality and politics in a changing world that the "moralization of politics and politicisation of morality" is to blame for our inability to establish the proper place of morality in politics. He made the case that academics and theorists frequently assess moral issues politically and political issues morally. This, in his opinion, has helped to intensify the conversation about the interplay between politics and morality. This essay and those who are interested in seeing the art of politics have a moral anchorage face a challenge as a result of these controversy: the growing need to find the place of morality in politics.⁸

POLITICS AND MORALITY: ANY RELATIONSHIP

Political science, in general, aims to discern and resolve many ideological conflicts. One of the issues that is constantly at the top of political discourse is whether morality and ethics should be pivotal factors for the political decision-making process in contemporary societies. The core values that stimulate moral political debate are deeply rooted in the personal belief system of the individual, determining how he or she defines his or her own place in the society. Those values of primary identity are race, gender, sexual orientation, and especially religion, which is the basis of many of individual's

most fundamental values.⁹

Moral politics pulls us out of the area where facts and reasoning dominate, and social scientists – especially those specializing in political science feel more comfortable in the realm of the value system. Moral policies are for the most part dealing with values, especially those values that are accepted by society or the state, and those values that are defined by the society or the state as perverted. “As we have changed from a commercial society to an industrial one, we have developed a new set of values in which self-control, impulse renunciation, discipline, and sobriety are no longer such hallowed virtues.”¹⁰ The state acceptance of values reinforces the social status of certain groups, and reduces the status of others

The subject of political analysis in contemporary life today is a special matter of consistency of personal values and attitudes, and political practices, when the faithful is in a position to exercise power. The basic principle is that the faithful must practice leadership with integrity, and his personal values and attitudes must correspond and be consistent with his political views and decisions, even at the cost of losing the support of the electorate. The contemporary political practice shows that there are a large number of active political issues as a foundation for right and proper conducting of state politics. This field is subject to pressure of the type leading to serious compromising with that which is worthy and carnal, thus compromising with God and His instructions.

The possibility of re-moralization poses some significant questions: Where do moral values come from, and what, in particular, are the sources of moral values in a postindustrial society? This is a subject that, strangely enough, has not received much attention (...) Most people would say that values are either passed along from previous generations through socialization, or are imposed by a church or other hierarchical authority.¹¹

The answers to these questions will still have to be sought after deep in the sphere of spirituality of God. The assessment is that religious institutions might play a crucial role in the actual imposition of views to the public in order to influence the political establishment when making policy decisions.

According to the morality point of view, there is a need to

stress the principle of not making or carrying out any political decisions, pertaining issues deeply tied in with morality and laden with moral scruples, in an exclusively secular sphere, and without any participation of the spiritually-oriented segment of society and without taking into account the opinion of the religious faith sector. Any issue that contends ethical or moral elements is an issue that should be delegated to the spiritual and religious camp, in order to try to offer more adequate solutions in a given historical context. My understanding is that answers to moral questions or issues with moral character in it, must have a moral source, and accordingly for this point of view that is the Bible. Fukuyama concludes that:

The virtues of honesty and reliability, which are keys to social cooperation and are intangible compound of mutual trust and engagement, are called 'social capital'. Many people have argued that such virtues have religious sources, and that contemporary capitalist societies are living off the cultural capital of previous ages- in America, chiefly its Puritan traditions. Modern capitalism, in this view, with its amoral emphasis on profits and efficiency, is steadily undermining its own moral basis.¹²

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Morality and ethics as social categories are crucial for generating a sound political culture in any society. Through the process of political socialization, these categories influence not only the culture in a nation but its political ideologies as well. Even though there are differing views in regards to the source of moral foundation which concern the societal realm outside of the religious or theological environment, it is this religious i.e. theological environment that is the only viable sustainable milieu for moral existence. The principles of morality and ethics established as societal standards are the bases of individual and societal development. The outstanding illustration of the fusing and separation of the provinces of ethics, law, and theology is the growths of the doctrine of Natural Law... Rules based on reason were law by nature or natural law. In this way began the identification of the legal with the moral.¹³

Their impact upon society is sizable, and if we look at the jurisprudence segment of society, that which is apparent is the existence of an eminent moral and ethical human characteristic responsible for the appropriate preparation of a legislation founded in ethics and morality. This is not always the case, due to the secular public overtones and the predominantly secular political sphere. Notwithstanding, repeatedly throughout history, these two categories of ethics and morality have made a huge beneficial impact driving forward the positive societal development in many segments of society. Even if religion cannot tell us anything about what the specific moral rules ought to be, is it necessary in order to secure the observance of the moral code?... Still, the belief in an all-knowing and all-judging God remains a tremendous force in ethical conduct today.

We may underscore the substantial impact that these two categories of morality and ethics have played in shaping societies in general and political relations in particular. It is morality that digs deep inside a man's personality or inside a person's heart, for his or her benefit in general. The morality in politics or the concept of moral politics has the potential to pervade the political scene and to become an indispensable factor in profiling the political life in contemporary societies.

Politics must found the people's power on stable ethical principles in order to reproduce and maintain it in the long term. The ethical principle derives from the ethical demands that human beings place on themselves. And what human beings mostly demand, according to all historical examples, is that they have the ability to exercise their free will. This is the fundamental criterion behind Machiavelli's set of virtue ethics which constitutes the benchmark for political conduct. Free will is a presupposition of virtue, but it is not virtue itself. Virtue requires the ability to constrain free will, and in an Aristotelian note, the good practical judgement heavily depends on this ability. In addition, it might be limited by circumstances, or fortune, but in the end free will cannot be ruled out because of fortune.

In the same manner, Aristotle argued that, in final analysis, responsibility for moral and political agency lies with the individual irrespective of the circumstances and the social context within which the individual acts. In a few words, the amoral conception of free will

understands free agency as unlimited and irresponsible self-assertion based on power, whereas the ethical conception of free will understands free agency under the “laws” of self-restraint. In the first conception free agency will be naturally heavily depended on fortune, whereas in the second conception circumstances are irrelevant to one's ability to be self-responsible (they might change the actual outcome of one's conduct but not its ethical premises). For Machiavelli self-restraint was a prerequisite for freedom, as for Plato self-discipline was a prerequisite for happiness.

Machiavelli's political philosophy, proposes an argument according to which the innate capacities of human beings for free agency, along with their imperfect moral natures, constitute the basis for political ordering. Legitimate authority depends on acts of consent, not on the quality of orders irrespective of how they are established, i.e. the ends do not justify the means under any circumstances. Thus, Hampshire here agrees, the answer to Machiavelli's problem may be that there is a recognizable basic level of common decency, which he explains as procedural justice, and that even in weighing in, politically, conflicting moral claims and competing conceptions of the good this level of common decency can never be violated. The interdependency of politics and ethics is therefore inferred by Machiavelli from the fact that the ethical value of exercising free-will must translate into the general principle of authorization; i.e. always seek consent and consultation, regardless of the relative power of agents and subjects.

Utilitarianism and idealism would simplify the problem of politics and morality by focusing, respectively, on how to achieve political outcomes regardless of moral costs for the agents involved, and on how to achieve the salvation of moral integrities regardless of practical costs for the collectivity. They both underestimate the importance of the mediating agent's moral decisions; the political figure who personifies the conflict between political, public and private morality and understands and endures the moral predicament, notwithstanding the absence of a philosophical solution. It is this outcome from the union of the political role with the moral character which best represents the seriousness of the problem and reveals the insufficiency of monistic explanations of morality. As we have

already mentioned, the existence of widespread lying and deception in politics is not, in itself, enough to justify the conclusion that there is a conflict between morality and politics, or that politicians are morally worse than us. This latter view is an over-simplification, and one reason for this is that, when politicians lie, it may not be in order to further their own ends; it may be in order to secure important and desirable political ends.¹⁴ 'In order to do the right thing, one has to do the wrong thing; in order to be or do good, one must also be or do evil'.

On the other hand, doing the wrong thing in order to do good does not wipe out the moral wrongness of the action. This is the kind of moral dilemma politicians usually have to face and this is why the problem of the moral character is so pressing. How a political figure is going to respond to a moral conflict and what would be the outcome of this response depends on their moral disposition and their understanding of ethics. In the face of such moral dilemmas, politicians themselves may feel both that they have sacrificed their integrities and that it is politics that has demanded that sacrifice of them. Alternatively, politicians may act as there is no moral dilemma at all, either because they do not accept the peculiar moral demands of politics (a case of moral absolutism), or because they believe moral integrity is irrelevant (a case of unlimited utilitarianism).

NECESSITY OF MORALITY IN POLITICS

In politics, the importance of morality cannot be overemphasized for although Machiavelli states that morality has no place in politics, that is eventually impossible because the individual himself is his own moral agent and so every action he takes is influence by his own notion of right and wrong and of good and evil but, whether this can be translated to the public sphere is not a topic that will be discussed in this paper.

Now, in the Nigerian political landscape, it is the absence of morality in politics that has led to so many social and economic ills like poverty, corruption, nepotism, tribalism, and so on. This is seen on the side of the politicians and the electorates. On the side of the electorates, it can be seen in political thuggery, vote selling, stealing of ballot boxes, rigging and so on while on the side of politicians, we can see this act of immorality displayed in corruption, vote buying,

not keeping to electoral promises, inflated contracts, nepotism, cronism, religious affiliations, et cetera.

Political thuggery is a phenomenon whereby some citizens allowed themselves to be used or weaponised to use the politician to instill fear and cause violence and commit other political crimes in order to achieve a certain political result which in most cases swings the election to their favor, not much explanation is needed in explaining why this is an immoral act as it consists in abled body men and women committing crimes or enacting crimes for money.

Vote selling is a situation whereby some members of the electorate sell their vote measly amount of money. This is mostly caused by ignorance, poverty and greed and it goes beyond just selling vote it is about selling their dignity and future and one does not need a prophet to show how much harm this has caused Nigeria. This situation is however mostly caused by the politicians as they sometimes make the economic situation of Nigeria so bad that the poor man will not think twice when asked to sell his vote for money.

Rigging of election is a political phenomenon whereby false or fake votes are put into the ballot boxes after they must have been stolen in order to sway the election in favor of whoever paid the thugs to commit the act. This act shows immorality on the side of both the electorate and the politicians in the sense that it is the politician that pays for such an act to be done and it is members of the electorate that are paid to commit the act. This immoral way of getting votes has caused many unjust and corrupt and individualistic people to lead Nigeria and this in turn has led to a lot of self-evident problems in Nigeria such as poverty, ignorance due, to lack of education, lack of jobs and basic social amenities as the money meant for these have been embezzled and siphoned by corrupt leaders whom vote selling, political thuggery and rigging have helped to put in power.

One of the prime examples of Immorality in the Nigerian Politics is the Issue of broken promises with regard to the policy of Rotation of Power between the major Ethnic Groups and the proclamation of Manifestoes. A prime example of the former is the promise made by the PDP chairman to step down, that if the next PDP presidential candidate is from the North. The next candidate became Atiku Abubakar, who is a Muslim and Fulani and all of a sudden, the

PDP chairman decided to retain power instead of stepping down as he previously promised. A prime example of the latter is the various promises made by Buhari and previous presidents to change Nigeria for the better. But in most cases, the most recent being, the case of Muhammadu Buhari, who as President has done the exact opposite and pulled Nigeria deeper into a rabbit hole, that it is only now struggling to get out of with the hope of the new political dispensation that will bring about the desired leadership change that will usher in a better social, political and economic dispensation.

In addition, there is the issue of the morality behind the process of selecting politicians to occupy political positions in the polity.

Instead of election, it is usually selection mainly backed the survival of the richest. This was manifest, during the primaries of the major political parties in Nigeria before the campaigns began. The effects of what happened during the primaries are still having a ripple effect on the political harmony in the country today because of lack of transparency in the entire process. The rules that were supposed to be used for these processes which were never properly implemented fall into the same domain of morality. Hence, the call for the stringent implementation of sanctions when people are found guilty of offences, irrespective of tribe, religion, class, position, age and personality. If this is properly done, obedience to lay down ethical codes will surely improve tremendously.

What are the sources of our laws? This also plays a major role on how people respond to laws that are made for public interest or common good. There has been this clarion call for the need for a new constitution in Nigeria. Philosophers, political scientist and even scholars of other disciplines have called the drafting of a new constitution altogether. It was this clamour that led to the national Conference that was held under Jonathan's regime, whose report never saw the light of day, not to talk of the implementation of the content of such a conference. If the desired changes are not effected in the polity, the clamours for a new constitution will never see the light of day. The argument is that the 1999 constitution is a product of Decree 24, which was promulgated by a military regime. It means therefore, that our constitution is a product of military regime and as

such it did not emerge from the collective will of the people of Nigeria. Using the military laws to govern a democratic system is an aberration of the highest order. The above also falls within the realm of morality.

In conclusion, this paper subscribes to a codification of ethical norms that could guide society life. Such recommendation in the past has been rejected on the basis of the avoidance of the implementation of the morality of a particular religion. It is obvious that morality cannot be divulged from social, political and economic life, that is from public affairs. As such, common objective moral norms can be codified conventionally to meet needs of social life today. A refusal to go this way will spell doom for micro and macro societal life. I join Aristotle to uphold the fact that, “the guarantee of human actions including politics is the pursuit of moral virtue, which flows from the moral law, which in turn will guarantee common happiness for the individual and the society at large. It should not be a product of individual and relative morality that are subject to the whims and caprices of powerful individuals or groups who attempt consistently to hijack societal ethos for their own selfish ends.

ENDNOTES

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