

A Philosophical Interrogation Of Leadership, Development And Environmental Sustainability Of Extractive Industries In Nigeria

*¹E. O. Akintona, ²V. O. Adefarasin and ³U. S. Odozor
Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta
Department of Communication and General Studies,
Philosophy and Leadership Studies' Unit
²Department of Philosophy, OOU
akintonaeo@funaab.edu.ng
victor.adejarasin@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng
odozorus@funaab.edu.ng

Abstract

The world will know no peace or escape corruption unless it revisits Plato's popular dictum, "until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils." Human development and civilisation are best described by human conception of reality and purpose of life. This shapes humans' behaviour and handling of material wealth. The mind houses human perception about reality and plays a significant role in its development, without curing it, no nation can escape corruption. Since the engine room of philosophy is the human mind, it has the responsibility of stimulating morals and breeding leadership to advance economic and environmental development through its tools of ethics and critical thinking. It is within this parameter that this paper interrogates philosophy as a way of resolving the problem of poor leadership, corruption and environmental sustainability within the space of extractive industries in Nigeria. This paper adopts conceptual and analytic approach to show the continued relevance of philosophy to national development. The paper concludes that without repositioning philosophy in its right perspective, the scourge of high-profile corruption of state actors in the mineral exploration industries in most African countries may become very difficult.

Key words: Corruption, leadership, spirituality, materialism, human nature

Introduction:

Human beings by nature are corrupt and perhaps need philosophy to cure it. Plato's ugly experience with the Athenian politicians, particularly, with the murder of Socrates prompted his submission that the politicians were suffering from ignorance and that the only remedy is to educate future politicians to become philosophers. He claims that "Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils." (Plato, *Republic*, Bk V-VI) This statement had since generated polemics amongst scholars, yet, its relevance cannot be simply dismissed in the global polity. This paper adopts conceptual and analytic approach to interrogate why and how philosophy will continue to be relevant in addressing the problem of poor leadership and corruption particularly within the space of extractive industries in Nigeria. The paper discovers that even though oil and gas is the pivotal to the country's economy, the sector has been plagued with issues of bad leadership, non-functionality and environmental degradation. The paper seeks to examine the underlying principles and values to revamp this anomaly and thus concludes that without repositioning

philosophy in its right perspective, the scourge of high-profile corruption of state actors in the mineral exploration industries in most Nigeria may become very difficult.

What is Leadership? A leader is simply a guiding or directing head capable of bringing people together to achieve results they could never achieve working alone. Leadership is not about building one strong, charismatic, or extraordinary individual, but helping others to explore their potential and ensuring that they achieve a set goal. A good leader connects his team together for a common purpose and builds a relationship that allows for effective communication and problem-solving skills. He is a visionary thinker ready to encourage, motivate and inspire his team to produce the best. A good leader should be a motivator always willing to improve the existing situation and achieve a defined vision by rallying people together. He is a team player, empathetic and seamlessly envisioned. He builds a mind-set of togetherness to accomplish a shared goal and help people to adjust to a changing environment. A leader encourages others to take the actions they need to succeed. To be a great leader, it is necessary to learn and cultivate effective leadership skills.

Leadership is a skill that can be learned. Leadership is about positively influencing others in achieving a goal. Integrity top the chart of the quality of a good leader: he should have empathy for his team and welcome diverse opinions. He should be equipped with different leadership styles so as to know the most appropriate for each task at different times. He may be monolithic or multi-dimensional in his approach, depending on which approach will be more appropriate and effective for his task; whether autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire or paternalistic style. To be successful, leaders should know that people are complex and that human beings respond not only to the traditional carrot and stick but also to ambition, patriotism, love and many other desires and emotions. A good leader must be enduring, patient, honest and proactive to issues.

Plato and Leadership: In Plato's Republic, leadership and justice are foundational to building a good society. He argues that if the state is not grounded on the good principle of justice and leadership of the philosopher king, such state will know no peace (Plato, *Republic*, 471C-505B). For him, a leader should be verse in the principle and culture of the constitution and education of the state or else those under his leadership and guidance may be intellectually and socially misled into anarchy and tyranny. Plato argues that a true philosopher is the "best" person of his time, not in the sense of being omniscient and omnipotent but intellectually and morally excellent in his approach to issues: he should be guided by the principles of perfection (John Philippoussis, 2025:127).

In Bk X, Plato highlighted some criteria for a true leader. A true leader should be primarily an ethical agent and not a theatrical actor (a hypocrite). His selection or election should be based on his humility, nobility, honesty, sincerity, dignity and integrity. He should have been seen lived an exemplary life. He should not be self-centred or lagged knowledge and moral strength in the pursuit of the people's common goal. He must not only be committed to wisdom and truth-seeking but values justice in his interactions with others. He must also be temperamentally moderate in his approach and shows restraint in his actions. He must be considerate and decisive on any crucial issue. The Platonic-inspired leader must seek to be courageous in his vision and resilient in the face of uncertainty.

In Plato's Ideal state, the citizens are divided into three categories: the guardians, the auxiliaries/soldiers and the commoners. The guardians are the rulers of the state, the auxiliaries/soldiers are to defend the state and the commoners are to provide the material needs of the state. Plato recommended a long and rigorous educational programmes for the

philosopher-kings before they can take up any official assignment. They are not to own private property, family or anything that may want to detract their attention from governance. There will be justice and harmony in the state if each sector adheres to its function. In the Socratic Plato's pedagogical scheme, all children, (regardless of ancestry) with abilities and motivations are recommended to be well educated, in public schools and on public funds, for as long as their abilities and motivations allow them excel as a leader. In other words, leadership is neither a "birth-right" nor hereditary, but a result of personal potential. The idea here is that a well-educated child will grow to be a well-educated adult. Nonetheless, female children are not exempted in the preparation for governing and administrative positions for both political and military leadership (Plato, *Republic*. 445b-457b).

It is worthy of note that virtue is identical to knowledge or wisdom for Plato, hence the philosopher-king must be a virtuous man. A vicious man is a wicked man suffering from ignorance and ignorance for him was the cause of poor leadership as in the experience of the murder of Socrates by the politician. He proposed four cardinal virtues that should guide the philosopher-king: Wisdom is the virtue of the rational part of the soul (reason); courage is the virtue of the spirited part (the higher emotions), while temperance is the subordination of the spirited and the appetitive parts (both the higher and the lower emotions) to the rule of the rational part (reason). Our contention here is not about the luxury of leadership position but that the office requires stringent and rigorous educational training.

Even though many scholars criticized Plato for making the philosopher-king the leader, his position is still much relevant in the modern period. Karl Popper (1945 & 1969) accused Plato of indirectly postulating a totalitarian State under a dictatorial justice of an authoritarian ruler¹. This is not correct. There are elements of misinterpretation of Plato by Popper. Plato describes the philosopher-king as a person who is able to combine philosophical knowledge and temperament with political skills and power. A person who had undergone critical and rigorous training and education; a person free from the vices that tempt others to abuse power; a person who is intellectually superior, and uniquely able to apply his knowledge for the good of the state. Such a person is not expected to grow to be an authoritarian ruler. Plato does not intend to concentrate power in the hand of just few selected philosopher-kings but want to avoid making a naïve set of people rulers of the state. Hence, if you are not a philosopher, you are not fit to lead.

However, it is argued that if you are a mere soldier or a farmer, you may likely remain one until the end of your life, and that office may not be available for your children, unless they will be recognized as philosophers. If one excels in his category of stratification, he can actually cross border. In that instance, he would have measured the standard of a philosopher. It is only if you are a philosopher that you merit leadership position. Plato believes that training is essential for leadership and that is why he recommended that leaders must all be well-educated, else they may lack the necessary experience required to rule. Whether by succession, election or selection, a ruler must have acquired the quality of a philosopher-king. In other words, the leader must have been a seeker of wisdom, having traits like charisma, courage, carefulness, intellect and/or brilliance. Character plays a dominant role in platonic leadership. Aristotle, for instance, argued that achieving excellent character is a prerequisite for attaining happiness and well-being in life, while Plato asserted that the character of leaders makes a large difference in whether or not they are able to rule effectively on behalf of the community (Philippoussis, 2025:112).

Philosophy and Human Development: Philosophy is love for wisdom. The philosophers' laboratory is the human mind, while the engine room of human perception and development is

the mind. In other words, if the human mind is cured of moral decadence, the problem of corruption and bad leadership automatically dissolves. Put the best policies in place, if the people's mind are corrupt, no development can be achieved. Development is not about material development alone but mental as well. Philosophy relies heavily on the power of reflection, curiosity, criticality and objectivity (power of logic and critical thinking) to solve human problems. It uses its power of logic and critical thinking to investigate and resolve these problems. Philosophy seeks to understand the mysteries of existence and reality; investigates the nature of truth and knowledge, and raises basic values for human existence. Pecorino (2000) explains philosophy as an activity of thought, critical and comprehensive, and a quest after wisdom; its intellectual process includes both analytic and synthetic mode of operation. Philosophy is part of the activity of human growth, an integral and essential part of the process of education. The common ground between philosophy and education is the development of the human intellect and the realization of his potentials. Through philosophy, we acquire valuable set of skills of becoming an active inquirer, thinker, and problems solver. Philosophers are trained to develop skills of critical thinking, argumentation, information management, research, communication, abstract reasoning, analytic and synthetic reasoning (Adler, 2000).

However, the development of the human person is primary for the growth and advancement of a nation's socio-economic and political development. When the mind undergoes rigorous training, it becomes critical and intelligible to grasp development. Philosophy is one discipline that improves the mind with its power of critical thinking ethics, and logic. Development is not measured by mere *per capita* income or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the state but by the qualitative life of the citizens. Gboyega (2003) defines development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. The most important aspect of human development is moral development. So, development involves both the material and mental well-being of the citizens; it is not directed towards the most powerful or the rich, but a leveler to the citizens. Moral development on the part of the citizen is a *condition-sine-qua-non* for the development of any nation. It must precede economic and political development. In fact, science and technology cannot develop a nation if the citizens are not morally developed. How can there be development in a country where public funds are embezzled by those who controls them?

Ogundowole (1998:92) defines development as a "rounded and multidimensional phenomenon, a mere mechanical notion, special displacement of object, forward and backward, upward and downward. It may mean rectilinear, rotatory, oscillating..." Development does not only revolve around human well-being, it is measured by it. National development therefore refers to the ability of a nation to improve the well-being of the citizens by providing for them social amenities like quality education, portable water, transportation, health care and other essential infrastructures. Naomi (1995) posits that national development is not just about economic growth or the provision of social amenities alone, but an equitable distribution of amenities to the populace. Unfortunately, Nigeria does not only seem to lack the necessary technologies to explore her own resources, she lacks good leadership. She relies heavily on foreign equipment and expertise. Nigeria is rich in natural gas and oil with the largest gas field in Africa, yet, she does not mine even a tenth part of it because she lacks appropriate equipment and expertise needed to develop the gas industry. Despite this, she continually experiences a high degree of corruption, indiscipline, non-patriotism and ultimately, bad leadership which draw-back her development.

Nigeria is underdeveloped because the managers of her economy are corrupt and not sincere: her leaders are only interested in embezzling the wealth of the nation. There are media reports of huge amount of embezzlement at every sector of the economy running into millions and

billions of Naira and dollars every day. Funny enough, no culprit had ever been brought to book. All we hear are media prosecutions and propaganda. No economy will grow if its managers turn the state into an instrument of wealth accumulation, and ignore the provision of the necessary infrastructures required to improve the welfare of her citizenry. Corruption and development are antithetical to each other, the two cannot cohabit, where one is present, the other suffers. Mimiko (1998) argues that no development plan supervised by hardened corrupt-leaders will witness any form of growth or advancement. The strategies for development of nations are contained in the development plan of nations. Nigeria had had series of good and well-articulated development plans (development plan targeted at corruption, employment and reduction in poverty level) for years, but all were failing, not because the strategies were not worthwhile, but they lack proper and sincere implementations due to corruption and bad leadership. Unfortunately, Nigeria has not been able to produce corrupt-free leaders who will implement her strategic plans honestly.

Extracting Industries and the Nigeria Economy: Nigeria began to record a significant increase in the production and export of crude oil from about 0.8% in 1958 to about 33% in the 1970s and by the early 1990s, the role of oil in the Nigerian economy had remarkably risen to about 90% of foreign receipts, 70% of budgetary revenues, and 25% of GDP. In the 2000s, the country had become Africa's largest oil producer and the world's seventh largest oil exporter. As at 2001, the oil and gas sector accounted for 90 - 95% of Nigeria's export revenues, about 90% of foreign exchange earnings, some 80% of all government revenues, 40% contribution of GDP, and 4% of employment. (Chenge, 2022:1461)

In 2024, record has it that Nigeria's crude oil revenue rose to about #50.88 tn. Data from the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission, an agency of the Federal Government, confirmed that Nigeria produced a total of 408,680,457 barrels of crude oil in 2024. While a January 2025 report by Statistical Research Department, showed that the average price of crude oil in 2024 was \$80.53 per barrel (PUNCH, January 15). As the industry requires huge capital investments and expertise, oil multinational corporations (MNCs) dominate the activities of the industry as they account for over 90% of the industry's operations (Osamuyimen, 2015).

However, in spite of its oil resources, the country has not performed satisfactorily in key areas bordering on the people's well-being and the nation's economic development. Paradoxically, countries with rich natural resources ended up suffering from serious economic development (Al-Abri *et al.*, 2019).

Another very disturbing issue about oil extracting industries in Nigeria is the environmental cost of oil exploration. Since the discovery of oil in 1956 at Oloibiri in Bayelsa State and its production in commercial quantity in 1958, the Niger Delta people suffer regular oil spillage and gas flaring contaminating their farmland, lakes and rivers, destroy their local crops and deplete animal and fish production. This in no small way affects their culture, livelihoods and public health. Unfortunately, the oil and gas industry neglected the people and the region, making it unfriendly and not habitable. These led to many negative implications, which included unrest and communal crises, attack on oil and gas infrastructure and personnel, seizure of drilling rigs, sabotage of pipelines, and kidnapping of industry personnel (Elemike, 2012).

Resources which supposed to have impacted positively on the socio-economic potential of the people and serve as a means of wealth creation, peace and poverty reduction paradoxically ended up in severity and pain (Omeje, 2016). The revenues generated from this resources were not well utilized to meet the needs of the people and this eventually caused tension and conflict among the nationals of these extractive states (Chenge & Salifu, 2020). Instead of these

resources uniting the people, it sets them apart because they were not used to improve the well-being of the people. The negative uses of these natural resources prompted the United Kingdom, through its Department for International Development (DFID), to initiate a transparent guideline which gave birth to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) (David Barrett & Okamura, 2016).

EITI was launched as a voluntary multi-stakeholder initiative whose objective is to create a global transparency standard which makes open all payments made by extractive industry companies to governments, and to verify all revenues received by governments from the industry (Wilson & Valverde, 2021). The EITI mitigate the negative effects of resource abundance by promoting the transparency of resource revenues and accountability of the governments in resource rich states (EITI, 2019; 2020 cited in Yanuardi, Vijge & Biermann, 2021). In February 2004, President Olusegun Obasanjo launched the Nigeria version of the EITI, known as NEITI. This became a global flagship programme and well applauded as Obasanjo was found quoted in the words of Peter Eigen, chairman of the board of EITI:

The great moment of triumph was when President Obasanjo of Nigeria said I am going to allow the companies operating in Nigeria to publish what they pay to me, to my government, and in fact I will make it mandatory: they have to publish what they pay and I will publish what I received. That was basically the breakthrough. (EITI video: <http://eitransparency.org/eiti/video>.)

This is a giant stride in the right direction in Nigeria and it was globally applauded. Since then, Nigeria began to publish detailed revenues on extractive companies, which led to a general perception of better transparency and accountability practices.

To increase transparency and ensure public engagement, the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) involved the National Stakeholder Working Group (NSWG) and civil society organisations (CSOs) as a mechanism to ensure public accountability (El Hamad et al 2024). This has immensely contributed to the control of revenues from extractive industries in Nigeria and check excesses of leadership in managing the economy. Extractive industries are therefore encouraged not just to come and extract our mineral resources and go away, but process them here so that they could serve as avenue provide jobs and improve the well-being of our citizenry.

Conclusion:

The state of the present extractive industries in Nigeria, no doubt, calls for philosophical questions about leadership, development, and environmental sustainability. It is sad for a country which makes so much gains from extractive industries to allow her people to suffer environmental and infrastructural degradation, oil spills, gas flaring, and deforestation, to mention but a few. This paper identifies the mind as a major organ of change and development, and since the mind is workshop/laboratory of philosophy, it will not be difficult to apply it as an instrument of change to cure the minds of our leaders and citizenry. There is need for the mindset of both the managers of the economy and the citizenry to be worked-on and the value system of the society, repositioned. With its power of logic, critical thinking and ethics, philosophy could cure the leaders' mindset of corruption and insensitivity to the citizens' well-being. That is why in *The Republic*, Plato emphasized that unless philosophers are kings or kings are made philosophers, states will continue to suffer the evil of corruption. If corruption and bad leadership are diseases of the mind, this paper opines that philosophy is the right tool to cure it. The mind as an object of change and transformation in human beings requires the powers of ethics, logic and critical thinking to re-orient people's mind-set and reposition

societal values. If the human mind is cured of moral decadence, the problems of corruption and bad leadership will automatically dissolve.

Re-reading Plato carefully will give us a clearer overview on why he recommended the philosopher-kings to rule. The philosopher-kings are not just mere graduates of philosophy, or a self-acclaimed philosopher but somebody who is not only committed to wisdom and truth-seeking but values justice in his interactions with others. He is a virtuous person who had undergone rigorous educational training. Therefore, the need for philosophy and philosopher-kings is not an overstatement in redeeming extractive industries of corruption and Nigeria of bad leadership. No nation can develop without curing itself of corruption and bad leadership.

Note:

¹ Karl Popper (1945 & 1969) is the most prominent post-war critic of Plato's Political Philosophy with his *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. I, Plato, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1945 (references to Paperback, 1969). Others were only marginally forceful as him. Popper attacks Plato from a Sophistic Libertarian standpoint.

References:

Al-Abri, I., Onel, G., & Grogan, K. A. (2019). Oil Revenue Shocks and the Growth of the Non-Oil Sector in an Oil-Dependent Economy: The Case of Oman. *Theoretical Economics Letters*, 9, 785-800. <https://doi.org/10.4236/tel.2019.94052A1> (PDF) *Mineral Resource Extractive Activities in Nigeria: Communities Also Matter!* This paper is available in: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345898463_Mineral_Resource_Extractive_Activities_in_Nigeria_Communities_Also_Matter [accessed Feb 26 2025].

Al Hamad, W., Pupovac, S. and Moerman. (2024). Transparency and Public Accountability: Does the Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative Deliver? *The Extractive Industries and Society*. 19 (2024), September Issue. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2024> retrieved 10/02/2025

Adler, Mortimer J. (2000). *How to Think about the Great Ideas: From the Great Books of Western Civilization*. Chicago, III: Open Court. ISBN 978-0-8126-9412-3)

Chenge, A. A., Oigbochie A. E. and Udoh Emem (2022) “Natural Resource Revenue Governance and Economic Development in Nigeria: Examining the Role of Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI)” *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research* ISSN: 2455-8834 Volume:07, Issue:06

Chenge, A. A. and Salifu, D. O. (2020). The paradox of plenty: Natural resource revenues and the resource curse in Nigeria. *FUDMA Journal of Politics and International Affairs*, 3(2), 12-28.

David-Barrett, E. & Okamura, K. (2016). Norm diffusion and reputation: The rise of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. *Governance*, 29 (2), 227-246.

Elemike, L. (2012). International dimension of the Niger Delta Crises: An insight into Nigeria's foreign policy challenges. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 4(3), 577-593

Gboyega A (2003). Democracy and Development: The Imperative of Local Governance. An Inaugural Lecture, University of Ibadan, 6-7

Mimiko, O. (1998). "The State and the growth/Development Agenda: Africa and East/Asia in Context" In Kolawole D. (ed)

Naomi, O. (1995). "Towards an Integrated view of Human Right", *Hunger Teach Net*, vol. 6 (3): 6-7.

Ogundowole, E. K (1988). *Self Reliancism: Philosophy of a New Order*, Ikeja: John West Publication.

Omeje, K. C. (2016). Natural resource rent and stakeholder politics in Africa: Towards a new conceptualization. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 54(1), 92-114.

Osamuyimen, E. (2015). Accountability through Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative: Whose accountability? *Accountability Business and Public Interest*, 81-104.

Plato, *The Republic*, Book V-VI (Excerpt: on the Philosopher 471C-505B)

Plato, *The Republic*, Bk X (<http://www.cityu.edu/blog/what-plato-can-teach-us-about-leadership-part-1-of-2/>)

Philippoussis J (2025), The question of Plato's notion of 'leadership' in the Republic, Department of Philosophy, Dawson College, 3040 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec, Canada H3Z 1A4
https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/4725/Philippoussis_Question%281999%29.pdf?sequence=1 retrieved February, 2025

Pecorino, P. A. (2000). A Class Note, "What is Philosophy, Anyway?" http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/SocialSciences/ppecorino/INTRO_TEXT/Chapter%2012ConclusionAVhat_is_Philosophy.htm. Retrieved 20th October, 2016.

Wilson, C., Claussen, C. & Valverde, P. (2021). Does civil society matter for natural resource governance? A comparative analysis of multi-stakeholder participation and EITI validation outcomes *Resources Policy*, 72 102084. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resourpol.2021.102084>.

Yanuardi, Y., Vijge, M. J. & Biermann, F. (2021). Improving governance quality through global standard setting? Experiments from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in Indonesia. *The Extractive Industries and Society*, 8 (2021) 100905. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2021.100905>.