

MAN, SOCIETY AND THE QUESTION OF SOCIAL ORDER IN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper is a critical analysis and reflection of the various concepts involved in our contemporary society more generally in regards to African development. It takes a critical look at certain fundamental questions that revolve round the concepts and subject matters of man, society and social order in an attempt to see how they promote societal development. Given cognizance to the fact that human ultimate action in life tends toward self-satisfaction which is happiness as well as good life, however the attainment of good life prompts some philosophical questions such as, what is the nature of man? What is society? What is meant by social order? What is the relationship among the three concepts? How can social order bring about development in Africa? These and other issues are to be critically considered in this article. It is an accepted fact that a philosophical discourse, essentially, entails the clarification of concepts. It is this requirement that this paper attempts to meet.

Keywords: Man, Society, Social order, Africa, Happiness, Awolowo

Introduction

The primary concern of Political Philosophy is on human mode of existence within a given state. Some of the fundamental issues that pre-occupy the minds of political philosophers include; the aim of political life; how man ought to live in the state, why should man obey the state and others. Generally, it is described as normative, reflective, prescriptive and conceptual examination of political life. In other words, given that the fundamental and ultimate aim of philosophy is to examine the problems and issues that arise within the universe especially those problems or conditions that confront human beings, political philosophy is a normative activity, which proposes standards, patterns or types of political life. It is therefore a discipline which creates ideals or norms for government and society by instructing them about what they ought to do. Ujoma asserts that political philosophy has the sacred task of setting standards of judgment and defining the ways by which public power can be employed for constructive purpose¹

In this modern society, various problems bedeviling African state which are endemics: wars, armed rebellions, economic stagnation, epidemic, famine, low standard of living, ethnic conflicts, social alienation, religious intolerance, tyrannical rulers, oppressive

political regimes, poor infrastructures, human rights violations and lack of social and procedural justice etc. That is, Africa is faced with the problem of democratization of many of its social systems which create social disorder. However, Olusegun Oladipo once asserted that the African Philosopher must seek to put his or her knowledge to the development and progress of his or her immediate society, it is on this basis that the work takes a look at the title; *Man, Society and the Question of Social Order in African Development*

ON THE NATURE OF MAN

The question, 'what is man?' is an ontological question and one of the fundamental questions in philosophical discourses. Precisely, it is a metaphysical question. Metaphysics as we know is one of the traditional branches of philosophy that is concerned with the question of what reality is. The question, 'what is man?' appears to be a simple one but, it is one that is very difficult to answer. This perhaps explains why man has been, or is still being studied from different perspectives, but all aim at the same goal and that is, the discovery of the true nature of man. However, man still remains a mystery in some ways. Man can be studied experimentally, philosophically, sociologically, scientifically, culturally, phenomenologically, religiously and in some other ways.²

But, no doubt, the essential nature of man is difficult to understand. What a chimera is man! Pascal exclaimed. Because, in attempting to understand the true nature of man, the following questions must be asked: What is the origin of man? Why does he exist? Is he free? Is he completely part of nature or does he transcend nature? What is he living for? Does his life has any ultimate meaning? Has he any ultimate value? Is there a force over and above him who controls his existence? If there is such a force, can it be known? Is man essentially a material entity? Does man possess a mind or is he a spiritual being? Is he an individualistic or a social being? Does his behaviour say all about him? Is he a pre-determined being? In fact, a list of the pertinent questions to be asked will be inexhaustive³

Notwithstanding, some answers have been given to these questions, which may in some way, indicate the nature of man. Take for instance the Christian ontology that sees man as a unique, conscious and free living being, created by God and occupying a special position in the universe. The Christian Bible makes us to understand that man is made in the image of God to have dominion over the earth and everything therein.⁴ Opposing this position is the scientific view that traces the origin of human life to biochemical evolution. Let us recall here, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. According to this position, man is not specially created by supernatural God but simply arose from a series of biochemical evolutionary processes. This view, therefore, does not see man as a unique and free entity but a collection of molecules; an accident on the stage of evolution whose existence is determined by biological, chemical and physical laws. An identical notion is the Marxian theory on the nature of man. Here, man is also seen as just a natural phenomenon – homo sapiens – but Karl Marx says further that “the real nature of man is the totality of social relations”.⁵ In our attempt to understand the nature of man, we should also take cognizance of the existentialists' position on the nature of man. To the existentialists, epitomized by J.P.

Sartre, man is essentially a free being – man is condemned to be free.⁶ Furthermore, B.F. Skinner, the Behavioural psychologist, appeals to human behavioural patterns in the attempt to understand human nature and Sigmund Freud's psycho-analytic theory appeals to genetic and hereditary factors as ways to understanding human nature.

Now, what is it that all the above add up to in our attempt to comprehend the true nature of man? To my mind, all these bring up the fact of the complexity of human nature. Why? The reason is, all positions appear to say some truths about human nature and it may seem plausible then, to add up all these partial truths to get the whole truth about the nature of man. And this perhaps, is what Ogunmodede tries to do when he says:

*Man is a being and person, that is both homo sapiens and imago dei; a thinker and a reflection; rational and spiritual, logical and emotional, critic- deductive and intuitive-inductive, individual and social, contemplative and dynamic, scientific and metaphysical, moral and religious.*⁷

Indeed, one cannot but agree with Ogunmodede, for a cursory look at man will indicate his material features as depicted in his biological or anatomical elements, and also his immaterial features, which are depicted in his rationality, consciousness, dynamism and freedom (at least, his ability to make choices). But in all we have said so far, it appears we have left unrecognized one very important nature of man, that is, man's social nature. In fact, this seems the most important factor of the human nature. This is because it is one essential nature of man that cannot be disputed. The others we have mentioned earlier may be disputed. But, it is not possible to deny the very obvious fact that man, essentially lives in a group of other men, no matter how small? Hence, man following the Platonian and Aristotelian conceptions, is a social animal. This is the most essential nature of man in respect of the totality of this essay. The Yoruba theory of human nature also emphasizes the sociality of man. According to S. Ade Ali, “the Yoruba idea of man embraces and emphasizes the sociality of man ... corporate existence ... in the society”.⁸

In essence, for a comprehensive discourse on social order, the essential nature of the human person must be put into consideration. And if one undertakes a study of different submissions that have been made on the most appropriate social order for the human society by socio-political thinkers through the ages, one will find that they are all hinged on what such thinkers have considered as the most essential nature of man; and they have all concluded further that any appropriate social order must cohere with the essential nature of man.

But to us, one essential nature of the human person that cannot be disputed and which should also condition the social order is his sociality. Though some may want to object to this, however, we feel a denial of this is nothing but an attempt to disregard the most obvious fact of human nature. For one thing, every man is, at least born into a nuclear family, which is itself a unit of an extended one and on and on like that unto the larger society. Everyone is simply born into a group of other men. It is just impossible to exist and

live in isolation because, not only in the person not born to live a solitary life, again, individual capacities are not sufficient to meet the basic human requirements.⁹ And here, it becomes expedient for us to shift focus to a discussion on the nature of the human society.

THE HUMAN SOCIETY

We concluded the preceding section by indicating the most fundamental nature of the human person; man's social existence. The human person is essentially a social being. And this brings us to the conceptual clarification of another basic term in our discourse, society. The concept, society, can be defined in so many ways; however, in the context of the present work, we are taking society to mean, in the simplest of terms, a collection of different individuals within a milieu. It is the group life lived by human beings. Man, we said, cannot successfully live a solitary life. Let us illustrate this in some ways. When a man is born, he is born into a family of at least, a father, a mother and the newly born individual. The baby grows into adulthood and at a time in life, he or she gets married and raises a new family and on, and like that. So we see, that every single individual is a member of a group. And here, we find the relationship between the concepts, man and society. Simply, a collection of individuals makes up a society.

The group life that man lives in, is epitomized by the following: the nuclear family, the extended family; the village or clan; the town; the city; the state and indeed the global village. However, in relation to this essay, our concern is with the politically organized human group. But, what is politically organized society? We shall, here too, provide a simple definition. A politically organized society can be simply defined as a group of people (occupying a territory) with a defined structure of leadership and 'followership' in the real political sense. That is, a society of men where there is a government of some sort that runs the affairs of the group on behalf of all. And, it can be said that this type of human group is the most prominent of all human groups. Then, how did the politically organized human society evolve?

The origin of man cannot be stated with precision. It is also a matter of debate. At least, we can identify two lines of argument: The religious (Biblical) explanation of the origin of man traces it to God's creation of the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden and the scientific theory states that human life arose according to chemical and physical laws (biochemical evolution).¹⁰ But irrespective of the debate concerning the origin of human life, one thing is sure ; at a time in history the human person appeared on the face of the planet earth and subsequently came his group or societal life. This started from small family units, then to the clan or village life, to towns, and to what we may call the first set of politically organized human societies as depicted by the Greek city-states of the ancient times. By and large, as human population grew larger, various societies started to evolve a defined structure of the leaders and the led (followers). For one thing, societies became larger and there arose the need for the creation for governmental units to administer these societies, with the specific function of the regulation of relations, actions and behaviour of individuals in such a way as to minimize areas of conflicts and to resolve them when they do arise.¹¹

With increase in the population of human societies, conflicts started to arise from clashes of interests and also from overstepping of bounds. However, if society is to exist as an on-going entity and humanity must be preserved, the society has to evolve an organ to resolve conflicts in a binding manner; and, it is the societal organ for the authoritative resolution of conflicts that is called government.¹² But throughout the recorded history of man, he has practiced different forms of government ranging from Monarchy, Aristocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy to Dictatorship and etc.

It is, however, in this contemporary age that politically organized human societies have become more formalized. And by this, we are referring to contemporary states and their essential features. These essential features include: population (citizenry), government and its institutions, territorial integrity, sovereignty, laws established to regulate human conduct, production (economic activities) etc. Though, this is not to say that human societies that preceded the contemporary ones did not possess these features but, these features were not as eminent and formalized as we have them now. Simply we can say these features were in their embryonic stages. Moreover, in contemporary states the interconnectivity between the political and socio-economic objectives is more obvious.

So, one can say that man, since his appearance on the face of the earth has been living a social life; in a society or group of other men. And, this has guaranteed his continued existence. And again, like we said, this indicates the relationship between the concepts, man and society. A society is a community of individuals and individuals are individuals in a society.¹³ But the reality of this issue goes beyond the fact that man essentially lives in a group. The fact is, man, recognizing his social existence has always sought for the best way to structure, arrange or organize that society of his. No matter how small a group of individuals is, those who make up such a group still think, individually or collectively, on how best to run such a group. And indeed, one appreciates the need for a constant search for the most appropriate system or structure for societal administration when one recalls the dynamic nature of man and his society. Human society, throughout recorded history, has continued to evolve and expand hence, mankind must continually strive to make any societal structure it adopts to fit into the present condition of the society. At this juncture, we are led to an exposition on our third concept as depicted in the title chapter, that is, social order.

SOCIAL ORDER AND THE HUMAN SOCIETY

Social order can be defined as the societal structure, arrangement, organization or the system by which a human society is run.¹⁴ However, it is pertinent to hint that in philosophical literature, and indeed in the literature of the Humanities, social order has had different conceptions. For instance, another prominent connotation of it (social order) refers to it as the societal state of unity, peace, harmony, tranquility and general well being of everyone. The two definitions given above seem to be the two most prominent conceptions of social order. But, as regards this essay, we are referring to social order as

societal structure, arrangement, organization or system of societal administration. After all, it is only when a societal is properly structured, arranged or organized that we can have peace, harmony, unity and general well being in such a society.

We mentioned above that throughout the recorded history of man, he has always sought for the best or most appropriate structure, arrangement or organization for his societies. In other words, what we mean is that mankind has always sought for the best or most appropriate social order. Again, we must say, social order in this regard incorporates the political and socio-economic objectives and practices of human societies. In fact, these two, political and economic objectives, in contemporary times, cannot be isolated from each other. Political and economic activities of any human society are mutually reinforcing and what obtains in one affects and conditions the other, vice versa. Perhaps, this is the logic behind the academic area of study called Political Economy. Where, I want to believe, it is presupposed that one cannot adequately study the political activities of a particular society in isolation of its economic conditions and vice versa.

The relationship among our concepts; man, society and social order becomes obvious here, so let us state it: *Man, though an individual entity, essentially lives in a group or society with other men. Now, the only way to ensure the continued existence and well being of both the individual and the society is when the society is rightly structured, arranged or organized, that is, when the social order is right.* This indeed explains why mankind has evolved and tried different social orders in the pursuit of an ideal society. And we must say, the social orders so evolved and tried have been condition by the prevailing conditions of human societies down the ages. Walter Rodney did outline social orders that have been practiced by mankind based on the human (and societal) development as: Communalism, Slavery, Feudalism, Capitalism and Socialism respectively.¹⁵ Let us now discuss these in some details.

Kwame Gyekye defines communalism as “the doctrine that the group (that is, the society) constitutes the focus of the activities of the individual members of the society. The doctrine places emphasis on the activity and success of the wider society rather than, though not necessarily at the expense of, or to the detriment of, the individual,”¹⁶ Thus, in communalism as a social order, property was collectively owned, work was done in common, and goods were shared out equally.¹⁷ And, in the Marxian parlance, this is the first stage of human development; that is, this was the first social order mankind practiced at its inception on the face of the earth. There is no society without a communalist past.

Slavery as a social order can simply be described as the societal arrangement where the members of a human society or group are divided into two sub-groups of 'Slave masters' and their 'Slaves'. Slave masters/owners constitute the minority and the slaves, the majority. Slavery as a social order was subsequent to communalism in human developmental stages. According to Rodney, slavery resulted from the extension of the domineering elements within the family and by some groups being physically overpowered by some others.¹⁸ Slave owners ruled over their slaves who carried out a lot of tasks for their masters. The main task however, was the production of food.

Feudalism, as a social order, succeeded slavery in human developmental stages. In feudalism, the principal means of livelihood was still agriculture but land, necessary for that purpose, still remained in the hands of the few, who took the greater share of the wealth. However, the workers on the land (now called serfs) were no longer the personal property (slaves) of their masters (feudal lords).¹⁹

Communalism, slavery and feudalism obtained during the ancient and mediaeval times in human history. Societies were not as developed, as they are now, human production skills were rudimentary – mainly farming, hunting and low level technological skills; even leadership was in the hands of family heads and monarchs. However, human societies, with their present level of development and economic activities require somewhat, a more comprehensive type of social order and this is what we find in Capitalism and Socialism as they both obtain in this contemporary age. Hence, we shall provide brief expositions on both social arrangements now.

Capitalism is an economic and socio-political system in which individuals are allowed to own, manage and control any aspect of the economy according to their ability and resources. The system also allows individuals limitless profit from these economic activities. Contemporary societies are mainly conditioned by political economic activities. Herein, there is a proper government with all its essential institutions that controls the affairs of the society as a political authority. However, a line of thought holds that this political authority should not control the economic activities of the society. Thus, any societies has structured according to this thought is a capitalist societies; such a society has capitalism as its social order. The features of capitalism as a social order are: Private ownership, management and control of the means of economic production, distribution and exchange; economic competition; strong individual motive to make profit(Maximum); idea of a free market etc. In essence, the production of goods and services is usually for profit and not for general welfare hence, there is no equitable distribution of the wealth of the land.

Socialism as a social order can be described as “a form of society in which men and women are not divided into opposing economic classes, but live together under conditions of approximate social and economic equality, using in common the means that lie to their hands of promoting social welfare.”¹⁹ To a great extent, we can refer to socialism as the modern cum contemporary form of communalism. In the socialist arrangement or societal structure, the people in such a society jointly own the means of economic production and it is further believed that a socialist society ensures equitable distribution of goods, services and indeed, the wealth of the society.

Considering the nature of contemporary human societies, there is always a political authority (government) in place. Now, since it is not possible for every member of the society to actively participate in the societal administration, the socialist principle therefore holds that the state, through its government (the people's representatives) should

control the means of economic production and activities on behalf of the general populace and should ensure the equitable distribution of the wealth produced and also the public welfare. In the socialist order, every individual is a worker, who works for the benefit of the society in general. However, the affairs of the society are actually run by the representatives of the workers who will indeed form the government. Akinyemi Onigbinde's definition of socialism as a social order is very apt here:

Socialism is that political economic arrangement in which the control of production and the distribution of the goods and services of a society rest ultimately in the hands of those who provide the labour to produce such goods and service – the workers. By rest it is meant that socialist communities aim at letting economic affairs be controlled by representatives of the workers.²¹

Our expositions on capitalism and socialism as social orders have been on a general note. In other words, we have presented these societal arrangements in their broad, universal senses. However, in practical terms, there have been various models of these universal principles. Different societies have adopted these principles differently. And we must also say that capitalism and socialism are opposing principles of societal arrangement-though, some have attempted a reconciliation or marriage of the two. But really, there is more to these social orders (i.e. capitalism and socialism) beyond our brief mention here. Because, these social orders, in respect to contemporary human societies, incorporate the political and economic objectives of the societies although, the economic objective is more fundamental than the political objectives.

By and large, the most appropriate social order remains an issue of debate.

Conclusion

Since men live in society, the issue of how best to organize the society remains important. The task therefore is to address the issue of social order, and in doing this, considering the submissions made by Obafemi Awolowo and many African philosophers in their various philosophies as the pivotal for social order in the state, and this explains why we have such socio-political ideologies like: Marxism, Nkurumah's Consciencism, Azikwe's Neowelfarism, Senghor's Negritude, Lockean Social contract, Hobbesian Leviathan and Awoism, the rationale for social order must be the task of the government, the stable and functioning society where citizens cooperate, respect laws, maintain social harmony must be the central point of government.

Awolowo was of the view that man is composed of physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual entities. His dignity is evident from his creation according to God's own image and likeness, and as the only free, creative, and purposeful dynamics in the world. There is sorrow, and suffering from a shortage in man's life in the world. It is at this shortage that the humanistic and welfarist posture of his political philosophy emerge. Thus, for social order to be achievable the government must address economic and political inequalities such as; implementation of social welfare program as well as promoting fair labour practices. By addressing inequality and promoting justice and fairness, society

can create a more equitable, just and harmonious environment for all citizens. The purpose of governance is nothing but to improve, organize and implement good policies. Man according to Awolowo cannot live alone but associate himself with others in society²². Awolowo accepts that both the political and economic objectives of a society should condition the type of social order the society adopts.

It is not only in a society that man realizes himself, but it is in the state that man does so fully. The state is like an extended family. It is the creation of man and it emerges from a number of natural and economic administrative factors. Since the state is created by man, its purpose is to ensure that man is able to realize his natural desires and aspiration. The principle is, therefore, that the state is for man, and not man for the state.

Endnotes

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