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PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF NIGERIAN POLITICS AND PARADOXICAL ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN REMAKING NIGERIAN NATION

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Abstract

For decades, Nigerian politics is subject of national discourse. This is as it negatively affects governance; creates hardship and poor human condition, and threatens national existence. Interrogating these situations, some scholars argue that Nigerian politics is poor owing to its lack of philosophy and philosophical application of policies in governance. These scholars claim that philosophers are largely removed from governance, policy formulation and implementation. But, has Nigerian politics not been radiating ideas that constitute philosophy? Are philosophers really removed from Nigerian politics and governance? In critical response to these questions, this paper analytically examines Nigerian politics and governance to determine its philosophical foundation and the role philosophy can play in remaking Nigerian nation. The study admits that Nigerian politics is poor; but discovers a paradox glaring in the fact that the same philosophy that is negatively destroying Nigerian State through non masses oriented thoughts and ideas could remake Nigerian nation through thoughts and ideas that would foster quality politics and human quality existence. The study therefore explores the negative and positive philosophies that characterize Nigerian politics and governance, and reveals the negligence of the latter owing to its non egoistic end. The paper notes that philosophy can remake Nigerian nation when quality philosophy is applied in politics and governance for the benefit of the greatest number of people. This application is possible when politics in Nigeria become service driven and less attractive, when selfless thinkers involve in policy making and implementation of policies, and when political activities are guided by people oriented laws.

Keywords: Philosophical Foundation, Nigeria, Paradox, Philosophy, Politics.

Introduction

The being of politics in human societies denotes the necessary existence of its foundation. In the knowledge of this, H-G Gadamer (1967) once taught that nothing emanates from nowhere or exists in a vacuum, but from a particular foundation. This foundation as pertains to politics as a societal practice is philosophical consciousness, cognition, reasoning, thoughts, ideas, postulations and justifications. As such, philosophy is the foundational "ground from, the ground on, and the ground about" the being of politics and its praxis (Odimegwu, 2008:1). It is as well the ground of interpretation and meaning of politics and its praxis. Politics, on this basis is thus a product of unfolding philosophical ideas and thoughts.

Since politics unfolds in human interactions and exchange of rational thoughts about governance which consists of philosophy, it again means that the forces behind politics

emanate from philosophical context. As such, politics generally has philosophical explanations which are evident in socio-political ideas, thoughts and theories that form the interactions and systems in politics and propel political institutions and practices (Chinweuba 2019a). The varied politics at the center of civil society therefore results from different manner of philosophy propelled by varied human condition and aspirations as well as the nature and mode of the civil society. This finding portrays politics as offshoot of philosophy, and its varied practices as depiction of philosophy glaring in thinking differently, rationally and proactively. In human civil societies then is philosophy which is the catalyst behind the pursuit, exercise of power and power interactions.

Because of its discordance with the interest of the greater population, politics in Nigeria has remained subject of national discourse. Based on its poor nature, Odey (2002) depicts Nigerian politics as "activities of organized cliques, cabals, political jobbers, looters and robbery consortium that collaborate with imperialists and convert leadership into breeding ground for unemployment, insecurity, hunger and hopelessness" (14-15). These negative qualities however raises the question of whether the non masses oriented politics practiced in Nigeria also have philosophy as its generating ground. To this, a critical investigation rather shows that the trouble with Nigerian politics is not lack of intellectuals or philosophical foundation but lack of selfless pragmatic philosophy and the political will to drive such philosophy amidst socio-political forces within the country. Thus, projecting the present poor politics in Nigeria are also academics with quality philosophic education. This reality projects political outcomes in Nigeria as emanating from philosophical foundation visible in the intellectual lenses of political policy advisers, stakeholders and interest groups who have less commitment to public interest.

Because of the foundation such politics as played in Nigerian has in philosophy, there is now "a lingering concern in the academia about the relevance of philosophy as a discipline in today's world" (Chimakonam 2017:12). This concern is however not about the potency of philosophy in human societies like Nigeria, but its positive application for the general good. These imply that the relevance of philosophy in human societies is not only a parochial one, but that visible from true and negative dimensions. It is true when the greatest number of the citizenry benefits from this relevance and negative when otherwise. On these non unanimous grounds, application of Machiavellian rational thoughts and their political opposites are philosophical exercises despite their different ends in human societies. Giving clue to these philosophical dimensions, Plato acknowledges that existing states are bad because their resolutions are ineffective remedies lacking radical measures emanating from true philosophy, which enhances the true view of public and private rights and the end of human troubles (Asiegbu, 2011). This however gives clue to the fact that sustenance of Nigerian politics either way still depends on philosophy.

As such, human societies owe its progress and development to adequate rationality, critically and differently positive thinking. This positive philosophy manifests in politics when deeply inculcated in human consciousness and sustained by adequate human needs, quality human living conditions, service driven and less attractive politics, as well as people oriented laws (Oguejiofor, 2006a). It is the great need for this positive philosophy in Nigerian society that compels this study to portray the paradoxical role the same philosophy that negatively destroys Nigerian State through non masses oriented thoughts and ideas could play in

remaking Nigerian nation through thoughts and ideas that would foster quality politics and human quality existence.

The Concepts of Philosophy and Politics

The outstanding concepts in this treatise are philosophy and politics. Philosophy is a critical rational thinking. It is an academic discipline that shapes and sharpens human reasoning faculties, abilities, thoughts, expressions and actions, and urges human inquisitiveness to know. This is as it imbues human persons with rationality, foresight, profundity, criticality and dynamism, as well as analytic and innovative character necessary for effective performance. In this way, the concerned persons are made capable of consistent, sound and valid reasoning that give rise to ideas necessary to surmount the vicissitudes of life, and initiate, facilitate and achieve the proposed end. These mean that philosophy as a rational discipline is like a double edged sword. This is in the sense that it can be applied in achieving a positive or negative end. Philosophy is therefore a rational habit of the mind, a manner of perception and reasoning that employs the principles of logic, dialectics, hermeneutics and analysis in tackling life issues; hence its centrality in every aspect of human existence.

Politics, on the other hand incorporates all the interactions and deliberations that has to do with governance in a civil society. Politics thus revolves around struggle for power which enables the possessor to determine what policies a group or state should carry out (Eminue 2001). As such, socio-politics corroborates the entire tussle which precedes and surrounds any decision of the state or government (Jouvenel 1957). The practice of politics is therefore the processes that projects one to control public opinion and decision-making regarding "what a society should do; when, how and why, as well as who should determine what is done" (Elijah and Ette, 2018:25). Seen in this light, politics is also a human activity within the political state, associated with running a government, an organization or a movement. In this way, politics involves how people achieve the power or authority to govern and are governed (Magstadt 2009). The term politics therefore extends to processes that empower one to govern, the analysis of governance, and the workings of government which meddle with every sector of the civil society (Appadorai 2004).

The Realities in Nigerian Politics

Politics in Nigeria is self driven as it appears to have been structured towards neglecting common good. This is as the laws guiding it do not command strict commitment of politicians to masses' interest. As such, politics in Nigeria is predatory in nature. This is more so as it enhances politicians' opportunities in using their expertise to extract resources or rents from the public coffers and the rest of the masses (Fukuyama, 2012). In the knowledge of this, Evans (1989:561) maintains that Nigerian politics gives politicians and rulers unlimited power and access to "economic rents". This is as it avails the members of the ruling class, party and their cronies the unchecked opportunities to extract the "highest level of resources" from the public and divert them to their own private uses (Fukuyama, 2012:210). Thus, politics in Nigeria is popularly understood as a sure means of accumulating the much needed capital based on the often unchecked access it givers to public treasury (Ezeugwu and Anichebe, 2008). Because of these, politics in Nigeria is not largely for the service of the people but a means of accumulating personal wealth (Onuigbo, 2005). As such, Forsyth (1982) gives clue that politics in Nigeria is the most lucrative business that confers undue economic prosperity on its players. This predatory nature is today more visible in the present administration where fuel

pump price, value added taxes (VAT), electricity tariffs, bank charges, etc are on the increment. Predatory politics as seen in Nigeria is as well characterized by the present administration's huge borrowings and padding of budgets which are gradually looted into private pockets. Along with these, internally generated revenues and national incomes are now considered as "national cakes" which people in Nigerian politics cut as they please.

Because of the power and access politics gives to wealth, Nigerian political arena is now monetized by politicians. This adversely widens the gap between the massive dominated poor and few subjugating rich politicians. Politics have thus become the occupation of the highest bidder and elites who alternate themselves and their cronies in leadership and political positions. Characterizing Nigerian politics also is the fact that there is no permanent enemy, friend, party and ideology, but a permanent private interest. This parochial interest revolves around remaining in politics so as to maintain personal enrichment from the public treasury. Since the rule guiding politics in Nigeria are mainly applicable to the members of the opposition parties, there are increasing human right abuses, tribal and ethnic discriminations, marginalization and irresponsible politics perpetuated by members of the ruling party and their loyalists.

Consequently, politics in Nigeria compromises education, religion, human life and health, legal, security as well as law enforcement institutions, and paves way for annihilation of the fundamental rights and economic life of the masses. It as well abhors all the ideas and practices such as referendum, restructuring and rational popular opinions which put other human societies on the track of sustainable development. As such, politics remains a devastating factor in present Nigerian state. This is as it makes the greater population of the people poor and paves way for very few people to become millionaires through the unchecked access such people have to national resources. Coupled with these is the fact that Nigerian politics is politics of uncertainty characterized by monopoly of public offices, diversion of public funds into private pockets, crumbling infrastructure and general poverty (Asiegbu, 2011).

Consequently, Nigerian politics is now synonymous with being smartly dishonest. As such, political manifesto is largely viewed by the public as bunch of lies philosophically composed for the mere purpose of garnering people's support. In similar way, campaign promises are taken as mere means of winning elections and not to be fulfilled (Anoje-eke, 2018). These, indeed explain the general apathy of the larger Nigerian population during elections.

Philosophy and Nigerian Politics

Philosophy is love of wisdom. It thrives in *sufficient knowledge of the good, interrelation of truths, visible and intelligible world, intelligent opinion and appearance and reality displayed in politics (Stumpf, 1994). It stimulates human rational faculties and imbues man with openness to change, mastery of persistent drives of appetites and emotions,* consistent logical and critical connections between ideas, and between these ideas and realities. *Since Nigerian politicians are not generally deficient in these intellectual qualities offered by philosophy, it means that politics* in Nigeria is not actually disconnected with practical intellectualism and fundamental philosophical knowledge and values. Rather, Nigerian politics is structured and based more on negative but practical intellectualism (philosophy) that promotes parochial ends.

To this end still, some of the philosophical ideas and blueprints underscoring politics in Nigeria are recycles of old philosophical ideas which are not *in tandem* with modern existential and dynamic societal changes. Despite these, there are though minute but genuine philosophies in Nigerian politics. These aspects of philosophy visible in Nigerian politics portray politics as simply not only a struggle for power but an attempt to mold Nigerian society according to one's taste or philosophical views (Neumann, 1950). Based on these, many agents and representatives of Nigerian politics are philosophers *par excellence* both in principle and practice. What obtains in Nigerian politics rather is manifestation of quality and egoistic philosophies where some people are trying to project quality philosophy and others are apparently trying their best to abort it for their egoistic aggrandizement (Etuk, 2000). The influential factor here is the socio-political forces, societal and democratic systems which pave way for parochial and negative philosophy. This is why Plato and Aristotle earlier nursed fear for democracy, alleging that its socio-political forces largely neglects public opinion, quality education and paves way for politics visible in oligarchy and tyranny (Aghamelu and Ani 2009).

Philosophical Foundation of Nigerian Politics

It is true that every human activity was once a thought and idea in the mind. These thoughts and ideas are rationally fashioned; hence we call them philosophy. Since philosophy underlies and shapes human activities, Nigerian politics as a human activity derives from the forces of philosophy. As such, philosophy is foundational to Nigerian politics not only in the determination of political theories and praxis Nigerian politics depends, but in other outstanding dimensions. Such dimensions include the analysis, criticism, clarifications and defense of the grounds and contents of varied forms of politics practiced in Nigeria. With its operational tools of argument, reasoning, criticality, proof and evidence, philosophy is still employed to justify political beliefs, theories, manifestoes, positions, policies, actions and structures. In cognizance of these, Odimegwu (2008:85) noted that "the whole process of politics includes the normative postulations of the political philosopher".

Philosophic foundation of Nigerian politics therefore portrays philosophy as generally underlining political contexts, basic assumptions, positions, nature, knowledge, thought and morality of Nigerian politics. This implies that philosophy determines what Nigerian politics is, will be, should be, and criteria for evaluation of this politics. It then means that philosophic foundation of Nigerian politics points to the philosophical "positions and critical reflective processes that took place before to originate, that take place alongside to sustain, that take place after to justify" Nigerian politics (Odimegwu, 2008:87). As an intellectual force, philosophy necessarily evolves and propels political thoughts, ideas and actions; shaping, guiding and driving them to an end. More so, as political contents derive from philosophy, their continuous existence and dynamism, directions and mode of operation are synthesis of philosophical exercises. Thus, philosophy not only generates politics, it necessarily meddles with it and sustains its existence. In effect therefore, all the aspects and dimensions of politics in human civil society are connected to, shaped and controlled by philosophical reflections. As such, politics everywhere in its positive or negative dimensions is negative or positive philosophy, respectively.

Nigerian Politics and Dimensions of Philosophy

Philosophy, like a double-edged sword can be applied in any direction. Among the ranks of philosophers are therefore not only the likes of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, but also the Sophists; Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, and the cynics, skeptics, subjectivists, relativists, stoics and epicureans. These philosophical differences are on display in Nigerian politics; where philosophy has been largely applied in advancing common good and personal gains. Though few, there are politicians against the present poor political *status quo*. These are progressives reasoning along Socrates, Plato and Aristotle towards ensuring the actualization of the goal of the political state, which is happiness for the greatest number of people. These politicians are more propelled by positive philosophy and their understanding that Nigeria as a State needs epistemic and metaphysical choices to surmount her problems. Many of them had not rested their oars in evolving philosophical ideas that will result to reconstruction of the Nigerian state. The efforts of these politicians however lend credence to the contextual view that philosophy underscores, affects political milieu and propels political processes.

Unlike this political current are politicians that are Machiavellian in thought. Like the "Sophists", they apply philosophy in politics for personal gain (Stumpf 1994:31). Hence, they aim at justifying the present politics to win personal advantage. Some of them are holding political offices. Others surround the ruling class as party members, loyalists, advisers, ministers, directors, ambassadors, diplomats, secretaries, personal assistants (PA), stakeholders and friends. These negatively influence politics with philosophical ideas and blueprints that are neither *in tandem* with modern existential and dynamic changes in Nigerian society nor with public interest (Abu 1997; Bakare 2011). Some of them also act as sycophants using all kinds of philosophical sophistry, fallacies and justifications in defending political manifestoes and actions that are devoid of public interest. With this negative and "gangster" kind of philosophy; politics that is not detrimental to the "people in government irrespective of the drastic consequences on the governed" is now viewed as moral, good and just (Areji 2005:57).

Paradoxical Role of Philosophy in Remaking Nigerian Nation

The paradoxical role of philosophy in remaking Nigerian nation lies in the fact that as philosophy is used to advance egoistic politics in Nigeria, the same philosophy can be used to advance quality politics for common good. Philosophy has in fact "the ability to show the way" in apparent political and national darkness Nigeria, and Africa in general has fallen (Oguejofor, 1998b:xix). The capability of philosophy in remaking Nigerian nation however lies in its positive and speculative nature which can be employed to advance the common good of the greatest number of people. Philosophy thus stands to foster a logical movement beyond empirical investigations in the search for answers to Nigerian predicaments. Thus, empirical investigations as characterizing science produce truths which are valid only in the realm of experience. But through the power of reason, philosophy produces results which are universally valid and sound in the realm of experience and beyond (Chinweuba, 2019b). Hence, philosophy is highly relevant and indispensable even in the midst of scientific exploits, methods and results applicable in human societies for societal development. This is why scholars like Scrutton (1995:7) avers that "a discipline like philosophy constitutes a superior virtue; one of attaining the realm of necessity, where the real contents of the true world are revealed".

In remaking Nigerian nation therefore, philosophy can effectively provide a good way of life and determine the right course Nigerian politics in particular ought to take (Ejeh, 2009). Since love of wisdom defines philosophy, philosophy should in Nigerian context be concerned with and bother on national and social concerns, search for, and cling to truth. In addition to these, philosopher should contemplate national issues; assume the role of "Gadfly" and hold congresses, press conferences seminars and colloquia towards addressing national problems (Etuk, 2000:84). Philosophers must along this line prick "the conscience of fellow citizens-whether they are lawyers, security officers, public servants or government officials through constructive criticisms" (Okafor, 1998:84). They should continually seek for forum where they can engage our lawmakers, law officers, security officers, public servants, civil servants, traditional rulers, religious leaders, captains of industries, market leaders, trade union leaders, transporters and government officials in interactions and dialogues. They should be involved in national affairs by continually investigating, engaging and interrogating ideas, actions and contributions displayed in the context of nation building.

Conclusion

This paper unravels the foundational nature of philosophy to politics. It discovers that the contents of politics; manifestoes, rallies, actions, etc were once philosophical ideas prior to their being physically real. In this direction, the study notes that philosophy plays a paradoxical role in Nigerian state. A part of this role is negatively visible in the advancement of Machiavellian type of politics that now prey on Nigerian masses. The other part is positively glaring in advancing Socratic, Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy of politics which gear towards promotion of common good. Besides, the paradoxical role of philosophy in remaking Nigerian nation is real in the positive and speculative nature of philosophy. With this nature, philosophy produces the dynamic vigor of positive intellectualism capable of sustaining Nigerian nation in present changing human environment.

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