

Moral Philosophy as the Core of Good Governance in Nigeria's Democracy

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Abstract: The need for good governance is at the core of every democracy. As Nigeria claims to be practicing democratic government, it is expected that good governance will be the core of its political life. Developed countries are not only democratic but also place a high premium on good governance at the center of governmental affairs which seems to be absent in developing countries. Nigeria joined the league of democratic countries in 1999 and this young democracy still has many hurdles to cross especially in the area of good governance. Democracy was first conceived in the 5th century B.C. by the Socratic Philosophers to meet the need for people to get good representation in the decision-making process of their state and country. The paper holds that there is an urgent need to examine the rightness and wrongness of human actions to be able to address the question of good governance, especially in a country like Nigeria in which citizens and different ethnic groups agitate for marginalization and lack of transparency and accountability in the activities of government. It calls for the role of Moral Philosophy, as it introduces the need for Moral education for true democracy in Nigeria. This paper attempts to state the nexus between moral philosophy and good governance and the relevance of moral philosophy to democracy in Nigeria. It states that good governance is not only needed for sustainable development in this 21st Century but also possible in Nigeria, if Philosophy is given its rightful place in governance.

Keywords: Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Good Governance, Democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy etymologically means love of wisdom. This means that a philosopher desires to know the truth and attempts to proffer solutions to problems that affect man and his society. It does this through questioning why, when and how the problems of human beings arise. The philosopher is therefore interested in questions that affect mankind of which good governance is included. According to Udoidem (1992:12), Philosophy as a very broad sense of search for knowledge began with human consciousness when man first raised the questions: 'what,' 'why' and 'how'. Good governance is a burning issue in Nigeria and this needs urgent attention. The contributions of philosophers are more needed at times like this to situate our great country, Nigeria on the right path to national development.

The concept of good governance has been the concern of the ancient philosophers since the 5th century B.C. as they shifted their focus of interest from the basic element of the universe to man and the development of his society. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle each felt the need to present what they called an ideal state that would bring happiness and the welfare of its people. This should also be affiliated with effective management in a democratic order. Democracy is a system of government that is people centered in nature. Dahl (1982:33), defines democracy thus:

*...any system that is rooted in the notion that ultimate authority
In the governance of the people rightly belongs to the people, that
Everyone is entitled to an equitable participation and share in equal
Rights and equitable social and economic justice are the birthright of
Everyone in the society.*

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In 1999, Nigeria joined the league of democratic countries after many years of military rule which was laced with autocracy and dictatorship. Orievulu Kingsley puts it thus “the long span of military dictatorship (1966-1999) marked the dark days of Nigerian politics, and its legacies still influence present day politics in a great measure” Ironically, most of the military rulers are now leaders in this democratic era. The question to ask now is, can they really replace their culture of dictatorship with that of democracy? Democracy is a government where the people have a say on how to be governed and demand good representation. Good governance is the right of every citizen of this great country.

Kew Davidson (2006:17) believes that
Politics at the federal, state, and local levels of the Nigerian federation are dominated by the powerful Mandarin who built vast patronage networks during the Military days and who now use political office to expand These networks and their personal fortunes.

Good leaders that would promote good governance is the root of the problem with the type of democracy practiced in Nigeria. Efemini (2000:55-57) prescribes that, the word “ democracy” is usually used to describes governments that come to power through elections irrespective of the quality of the elections that bring such a government into power. Good governance is still a challenge for many governments especially in less developed and developing countries.

The objective of this study is to examine the crucial role moral education at every level of education and to the general public can help bring about good governance in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

To give appropriate focus to this paper, it is necessary to first of all clarify the key concepts used. These include: Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Good Governance and Democracy.

Philosophy

The term “Philosophy” originates from two Greek words *philien* [to love] and *sophia* [wisdom]. This is translated to be “the love of wisdom”. Philosophy is a parental and academic discipline which is concerned with proffering solutions to human and societal problems. It is an activity that seeks to understand truths about people and the world around them. This discipline is divided into five branches namely: Metaphysics, Ethics, Epistemology, Aesthetics and Logic. Each branch covers a critical aspect of philosophy and is an answer to questions that are often asked about problems that plague humanity. According to Velasquez (1997:2),

The word philosophy comes from the Greek words philien, meaning to love , and Sophia, meaning wisdom. Philosophy is the love of wisdom. It is the pursuit of wisdom about what it means to be a human being, what the fundamental nature of God and reality is, what the source and limits of our knowledge are and what is good and right in our lives ant in our society.

Moral Philosophy

Moral philosophy is also known as Ethics which is one of the major branches of philosophy that concerns itself with the rightness and wrongness of human actions. It emphasizes moral values. Ethics is derived from a Greek word ‘ethos’ which means custom, habit or character. Omoregbe (2006:3) defines ethics as ‘the branch of philosophy which deals with the morality of human actions’. While Ozumba (1995: 53) defines ethics as the ‘...theory of morality which deals with principles of good conduct. It deals with judgment as to rightness or wrongness, desirability or undesirability, approval or disapproval of our actions’. Morality is a term that involves human affair which can be private or public. Private morality refers to our interactions that are said to be private matters while public morality involves activities done in public or service to the public (Oke *et al.*, 2005: 2). This means that any action taken will one way or the other affect the society at large. It is therefore pertinent for people to be moral for the betterment of the society and Nation.

Good Governance

The concept of governance is derived from the Greek word *kubernaein* which means to steer and was first used by the great philosopher Plato (Wikipedia.org). Governance is defined by the World Bank (1989) as “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development”. At this

juncture, it is important to state that there can be good governance as well as bad governance. Good governance is one that is transparent, fair and just to the affairs of people and Ogundiya (2010:201) sums it thus:

It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent,
Responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and
Follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized,
The views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices
Of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making.
It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society.

The growth and development of any nation is hinged on good government and people are the core of governance as without them, there can be no government. Governance is a concept that has its roots in politics. It refers to the way of controlling people or a state and can be good or bad. According to the Human Rights, good governance should have the following attributes: transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation and responsiveness (www.ohchr.org). Good governance refers to a term used to describe how public affairs and resources are managed by institutions to meet the need of the public. According to Agber (2011:287), 'good governance involves the various processes by which the activities of government are carried out: it refers to a government that is committed to and is capable of effectively addressing the allocation and management of resources so as to respond to the collective problems of the people and fulfilling the term of the social contract or unconstitutional obligations to the citizenry'.

Democracy

Democracy is a form of government in which the form of leadership is for the people, the core of governance. The birthplace of Democracy was Athens in Greece around the 5th century B.C. which had the aim of getting people involved in their governance and this was also people inclusive.

Victor Inoka (2006:59) defines Democracy thus:

*Democracy is a system of government which has among
other things the fundamental principles of equality of men;
respect for individual rights, and liberty. To this end therefore
democracy is a government of all, by all and for the good of all.*

This shows the crucial role played by the people (the governed). One popular definition of democracy was defined by Abraham Lincoln, a former United States President as 'Government of the people, by the people, for the people.

Etymologically, democracy is derived from two Greek words "demo" which means people and "kratos" which means power. This translates to be "power to the people". The power of governance lies with the people and this has made democracy, the most popular sometimes referred to as the best system of governance in the world. A classical and popular definition of democracy is that of Abraham Lincoln, a former President of United States of America which states that democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people.

Here, we can see that government is to focus on the general goodwill and consent of the people. The concept of good governance is one of the pillars of democracy and a much needed requirement for sustainable development in the world today. This system of governance embraces fundamental human rights, Equality, Justice, the principle of the rule of law, separation of powers to mention but a few. Good governance is therefore a value laden concept.

Okaba (2004:15) defines democracy thus:

Democracy should be considered as a value, a process and a practice capable of possessing a distinctive culture. The value, processes and practices of democracy are essentially characterized by the presence of an institutionalized mechanism by which the citizens through regular competitive and properly conducted elections occupy political positions. There is respect for the rule of law, accountable governance and the protection of human and civil rights...Democratic policies are not capital-driven, but people-oriented. The policies see human advancement and liberty as the focus of sustainable development

As stated above, the first proponents of Democracy as a way of governance, were the Socratic philosophers in the 5th century B.C. They believed strongly in a people-centered system of governance which for them includes the happiness and welfare of the people. Leaders for these philosophers are expected to be morally accountable to be able to lead. There is no doubt that the failure of governance in Nigeria is mainly because the leaders lack of moral values. This

is the secret ingredient needed for good governance. According to Aristotle, a leader must possess virtue in order “to be...fit to hold office in his turn” (Politics; Bk3.430-31). In this 21st century, the developed and developing countries, strive very hard to have good governance because it is people oriented as it enhances the development of individuals and the society.

Good Governance as a Democratic value

In international development, good governance is a way of measuring how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources in a preferred way. According to UNESCAP, "Governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented". The concept of 'good governance thus emerges as a model for comparing ineffective economies or political bodies with viable economies and political bodies. In conceiving good governance, attention is focused on the responsibility of governments and governing bodies to meet the needs of the masses as against the attempt to meet the needs of select groups in the society. The importance given to good governance is due to the impact it may have on human development and economic growth, which together account for national development. According to Grindle (2004 536), the relevance of getting good governance comes precisely from its relationship with the development of a country and the reduction or poverty.

Grindle M. (2004) " Good Enough Governance: Poverty Reduction and Reform in Developing Countries", in Grindle M. (ed.) Governance, vol.17, no.4, pp. 525-548. Kauffman (2002), argues that good governance makes development possible.

Kauffman D. (2002) "Growth without Governance", Policy Research Working Paper for the World Bank, World Bank Institute and Development Research Group, No.2928.

The following indices are used to account for good governance in terms of national development:

1. Provision of public services in an efficient manner
2. Higher participation given to certain groups in the population like the poor and the minorities
3. The guarantee that citizens have the opportunity of checks and balances on the government
4. The establishment and enforcement of norms for the protection of the citizens and their properties, and
5. The existence of independent judiciary system.

Three institutions that can be reformed to promote good governance are the state (executive, legislature and judiciary), the private sector and the civil society.

Because concepts such as civil society, decentralization, peaceful conflict management and accountability are often used when defining good governance, good governance is said to promote many ideas that closely align with effective democratic governance. Thus emphasis on good governance can sometimes be equated with promoting democratic government.

In 2009, August 12, the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, while visiting Nigeria noted that, “Without good governance no amount of oil, no amount of aid, no amount of effort can guarantee Nigeria's success. But with good governance, nothing can stop Nigeria”, (Public Speech). True democracy and good governance are ‘two peas in a pod’ as one cannot do without the other. These concepts though different are often used interchangeably. Thus, though a country can claim to practice democratic government even when it does not give credence to good governance. This is the situation one witnesses in Nigeria where democracy has come to thrive without good governance. Hence there is need for moral philosophy in orientating the mentality of participants in Nigeria’s democracy.

Morality: The missing link to Good Governance in Nigeria

The expanse of democracy in numerous countries of the world has spotlighted the urgent need for ethics in governance. Ethics or Moral Philosophy is one of the major branches of Philosophy which is an academic and parental discipline that affects mankind and addresses fundamental questions like morality, justice, reality, good governance and much more. The aspiration of Ethics is to ensure good governance with key concern for ethical principles, behaviour and practices. Ethics is therefore a normative science that places value on human conduct, moral values and principles.

Etymologically, Ethics (Moral Philosophy) is derived from the Greek word “*ethos*” which means customs, habit or character and it is concerned with the rightness and wrongness of human actions.

Ezeocha (1990:52) puts it thus:

Ethics is the science that places value on human conduct, and it is a reflective study of what we ought to do, or how we ought to live. It studies fundamental issues of practical decision making, and its concern

include the nature of ultimate value and standards by which human actions can be judge right or wrong, good or bad.

In 1999 Nigeria, a country endowed with vast human and material resources, joined the league of democratic countries. A blessed nation that was once described as “the giant of Africa”, the sixth biggest oil exporter, is today, named the ‘poverty capital of the world’, because it houses people under extreme poverty. This is due mainly to bad leadership and mismanagement of the country’s vast resources. The leaders in pursuit of their selfish gains, have stunted the development of this great nation. According to Achebe (1998:1),

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

Ethical theories of philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle furnish constant caution for ethical life in the society. Socrates stated that every citizen has the obligation to obey the laws of his/her society by virtue of his/her being a member of that society. If this teaching of Socrates is adhered to, then Nigeria would experience good governance. Udoidem (1992:104) asks these pertinent questions “ why should we allow ourselves to become merely engineering and medical machines...instead of being human beings who are also engineers and doctors...? ”He makes us understand that to develop a nation is to develop the persons in it since what a nation is, depends on what the persons in it. In his view, this can only be achieved through moral philosophy. In other words, there’s the need for self-examination for good governance Joseph Omoregbe (1990: 195) explained this when he said that “...the development of human personality. All other aspects of development are subordinate and instrumental to the development of human personality”. Only ethics and moral values can bring about good governance.

CONCLUSION

This work has been able to establish a nexus between moral philosophy and good governance. It states that the job of Philosophy is to analyze issues that affect humans and society with the bid to proffer solutions. One of such burning global problems is that of good governance especially in developing countries which have being tramped by years of military rule. Socratic philosophers deemed it as crucial for effective running of a society since the 5th Century B.C. They stated the need for moral values to be instilled in man especially the leaders. Moral philosophical values aids to build a total man which in turn would enhance national development. In the paper, we have attempted to point out the relevance of moral philosophy to good governance in Nigeria.

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