

The Cultivation of Philosophic Attitude: Imperative for Good Governance in Nigeria

Kingsley E. Nsirim (Ph.D)

Department of Educational Foundations
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Port Harcourt, Rivers State
Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the problem besetting good governance in Nigeria. It argues that the problem of governance faced by the nation does not really derive from the form of government be it democracy or otherwise, the country has chosen to operate. The paper, rather locates the problem in the curriculum content of Nigeria's educational system which does not give credence to training in philosophy. The paper contends that the curriculum content of the country's educational system must go beyond the emphasis on technologically and discipline driven educational contents to include a conscious programme content in philosophy.

Keywords: *Good Governance, Philosophic Attitude, Education.*

Introduction

Alfred Whitehead's declaration set below is pertinent to the introduction of this discussion. According to him:

*There can be no successful democratic society till
general education conveys a philosophic outlook
(R.R. Rusk 1997:328)*

The contemporary world is faced with the challenges of providing good governance to their citizenry. There is the general concern of how best societies could be organized so that the masses could be provided with the basic needs of life. In order to actualize this duty of providing for the people, societies have chosen one form of government or the other in the belief that they will be able to actualize their objectives of good governance. Nevertheless, the existential realities of life have shown that no one form of government has been able to take man to the expected end. If the above observation is correct, it becomes necessary for one to ask the following questions. (1) why has man not been able to contend with the problem of providing good governance in society? (ii) is there any form of government that is yet to be practiced which would have provided man with the much desired good governance?

In an attempt to address this problem of unresponsive governance, Nigeria has experimented with different forms of government. After she was let loose from her

British colonial master, Nigeria as an independent nation adopted parliamentary democracy and after a very short time, the military forcefully took over government and for a very long period the country was enmeshed in timocracy (military rule), and then from 1999, Nigeria officially assumed presidential system of democratic government till date. However, at present the country appeared to have lost faith in democratic government. Otherwise, how could one explain the incessant cases of agitations by the various ethnic groups across the country and more vehemently, the call for “restructuring”.

Thus the position of this paper is that the problem besetting governance does not inhere in the form of government be it timocracy or democracy. This paper contends that the problem is basically that of the gap in the curriculum content of our educational system, which more than anything emphasizes the acquisition of academic corpus of knowledge and technological pursuit to the detriment of balanced knowledge in philosophy.

This gap in our education curriculum content, is implied in Achebe (1985:11). Censure of Nigeria and its leadership when he declares that:

*...Nigeria has been less than fortunate in its leadership.
A basic element of this misfortune is the seminal
absence of intellectual rigour in the political thought of
our founding fathers...*

By this statement, we are inclined to think that Achebe did not mean that our founding fathers (and by extension Nigerian leaders) did not pass through the four walls of the formal school system or that they did not possess enough knowledge or the requisite qualifications in their various areas of academic specialization. By absence of “intellectual rigours”, we think Achebe meant that Nigerian leaders at the various levels of government, be it the federal, state or the local government levels are not educated in such a way to be able to appreciate the fact that leadership is actually all about giving service to the populace. It is our belief that with the right type of education in place, that is education that goes beyond mere acquisition of academic corpus of facts of the various disciplines, to include education that emphasis training in weighing issues critically, questioning and balancing issues rationally (which are all contained in the philosophic attitude) good governance would come to take its root in the Nigerian nation.

What is Philosophy Attitude?

Philosophic attitude refers to behaviour or life style that pursues a conscious rational reflection of thought common among philosophers. Its origin is traced to Greek philosophy. Stumpf (1999:6) avers that “from the very beginning Greek philosophy was not a matter of only seeing or believing but of thinking. What Stumpf means by this statement is that the activities of philosophising go beyond observation and belief to include more importantly the activity of thinking.

Our concern here is to discuss some philosophic attitude, bearing in mind that “the specification of this nature is itself a major philosophical task (Udoiem 1992:7). This

fact is in consideration of the diverse nature of philosophy which cut across virtually all spheres of human endeavour. These philosophic attitudes include:

Criticism

The word “criticism” in philosophy discourse is not used in its ordinary negative sense of condemnation or fault finding or disregard of the views of other people. Criticism, critique or critics are all derived from Greek word “Krino” which means to place something in judgement. This means, criticism in philosophy discourse has to do with a situation where one usually take a look at an idea and think about it with a view to taking a better option. Enoh (2009:3) drawing from the etymological meaning of criticism defines it as “to appraise, evaluate, examine, judge or comment”. He goes further to say that “It is to see something differently from what is presented”.

We may therefore not be wrong to conclude that it is because of the importance of criticism in philosophy discourse that John Dewey (as quoted in Ucheaga 1994: 416) defines philosophy as “the criticism of criticism and vision whose major function is to free man’s mind from bias and prejudices and to enlarge their perception of the world about them”. In the same manner Ezekiel –Hart (2021:4) in her valedictory lecture stressed on the necessity of critical thinking when she notes that creative thinking marched with action readily results in innovation with its attendant self-regeneration of society.

All these definitions proffered by scholars suggests that philosophy is a discipline that does not take issues for granted without due consideration. Thus criticism could be said to mean placing an issue on a table and finding a better perspective for the good of man.

Rejection of Fallacies

Philosophy is much about living a thoughtful life (Life of reason). To philosophize entails reasoning correctly, correct reasoning in turn demands knowledge of how to think and reason correctly. Knowledge of logic guards against falling prey to fallacious statements (errors in reasoning). Fallacious statements or errors in reasoning occur when the conclusion (claim) we make does not logically follow from the premises (reason giving). Fallacious arguments usually resemble correct (good) arguments, but when closely examined, they are found not to be so. Such arguments may appeal to morality, emotions and feelings but certainly not to reason.

Questioning

The history of western philosophy, as we know it today began from asking questions about man’s daily life and existence. The importance of questioning in philosophy discourse is such that it “is not much the answers that are given but the questions (Emmet 1991:17), as questions help us to identify problems. The fore-going examined items on philosophic altitude normally leads to thorough understanding of issues under consideration.

What is Good Governance?

It might be necessary here for us to engage in a little exercise of conceptual analysis of some sort. This is because if we must understand the term “Good Governance” the component elements “Good” and “Governance” need to be understood before a relational meaning of the term “Good Governance” could be attempted.

The Good

“Good” generally connotes what is cherished, desired and acceptable. If we take the meaning of “good” as given to be true, one may be tempted to ask the question. Are all that is cherished, desired and acceptable good? This question is necessary since there could be instances where what could be considered to be good could in the end produce some negative effect. For instance, we could consider “fame” and “wealth” to be good because we cherish and desire them, yet these two phenomena could ruin some men and women. If then, we believe the foregoing postulation to be true, can we then say that fame and wealth are good?

In an attempt to come to terms with this seeming conflicting nature of “good”, Dougherty (quoted in Udoidem 1998:88) distinguished between two types of “good”, the real or proper good, and the apparent or improper good. According to Dougherty proper good are those “that towards which a thing is essentially tending is judged to be its proper good. By good we mean what is fit for a thing, what is due its nature, the further existence that will complete its basic tendencies and its incidental tendencies as well...”

Here Dougherty distinguishes between the “seeming good” which he called “apparent good” and the “permanent” -real good. According to him it is the permanent or “real good” that should be pursued by all human beings because they are naturally inclined to such good.

In a similar notion, Udoidem (1998:88) quotes Aristotle as attesting, to the natural tendency of man for the good in the following words: “good is a man’s own possession which cannot easily be taken away from him”. Also drawing from Aristotle’s works, he further says that “every art and every enquiry and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good, for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that which all things aim”.

From the above x-ray of the “good”, it is clear that anything that is good is desired by all normal human beings. Hence, it is its appealing characteristic of desirability that makes it imperative for man to always continually seek the good. Also, since it is not all “good” that is desired by man are of ultimate benefit to him, man needs knowledge to be able to distinguished between the “real good” and the “improper good”.

Governance

We would not bother ourselves seeking an all-round definition of the term “Governance”. Rather, we shall settle for the definitions given by two international organizations as outlined in Omoregbe (1999:2). First, according to him the World Bank defines Governance as “the manner in which power is exercised in the Management of a country’s economic and social resources for development”.

Also, he says UNDP holds a similar view of this notion when it defines it as “complex mechanism, process, relationship and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences”.

Judging from the above two definitions we can confidently deduce that Governance is the way leadership is exercised for the benefit of the people.

Thus combining the foregoing meanings of “Good” and “Governance” therefore, “good Governance” can be said to mean the ability of political leaders to identify, harness and provide the “proper good” for the benefit of the society and the citizens.

Also implicating, a loftier and more declarative stance, Bovaird and Löffler (2004:316) defines “Good governance” as “The negotiation by all the stake holders in an issue (or area) of improved policy outcomes and agreed governance principles, which are both implemented and regularly evaluated by all stake holders”. Therefore as far as we can see “Good Governance” as provided here is aimed at ensuring that the outcomes or result of government policies and programmes are right and beneficial to the people.

The correlation between Education and Governance

There exists an enlightened relationship between Education and Governance. This striking relationship was brought to public attention by Plato in his doctrine of “philosopher-King” as the guardian of the ideal and just society.

Education has been an age-long activity of man designed to acquaint him with the right types of experiences, values and knowledge that are intended to enable him to contend with the problems of living in society. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE) (2014: v) identified three of such problems as economic, social and political. In the realm of politics, education helps to identify, preserve, consolidate and develop the political culture of the society.

In a somewhat related manner, politics like education is also one of the institution developed by man to help him to attain certain of its goals. However, unlike other institutions in society, politics is regarded as an institution of all institutions. Hence, it controls other societal institutions. This view of politics as an institution of all institutions is implied in the writing of Aristotle (as quoted in Nsirim 2002:25) thus:

It is this (politics) that ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a state...Since politics uses the rest of the sciences... Legislates as to what we are to abstain from. The end of this science must include those of others, so that this end must be good for man.

As the pivot on which every other institutions of the society rotates, politics which provides policies and programmes for government could either develop, sustain or mar education. From the fore-going discussion, it does show that politics, as a specialized institution needs to improve the quality of education and listen to its heart beat, and work in concert with same education for it (politics) to survive and achieve good governance.

Philosophic Attitude, Education and Good Governance

To be able to appreciate the reason involved in linking philosophy, education and governance, it would be necessary to first and for most, identify some forms of government societies choose from as political arrangements for governance, and to juxtapose them with the means by which they could be harnessed for good governance. Philosophers right from the Greek period have speculated on the form of government that would be most suitable for man to contend with his problem of living in society. Such early speculators include Plato and Aristotle who are regarded as the founders of Greek political theory, on which the western political traditions are said to have taken their foundation.

Plato identified five forms of government (aristocracy, timocracy, plutocracy, democracy and despotism). Amongst these forms of government, he singled out aristocracy as the best form of government. He rejected democracy on the premise that it is “the best of all lawless governments and worst of all lawful governments” (Omogegbe 2007:3). And then, for Aristotle, the best forms of government are monarchy (one), aristocracy (few) and polity (many). He went further to identify tyranny (one) as the worst form of government. The above ranking shows that Plato and Aristotle had similar political belief. They had both recommended aristocracy as the best form of government and rejected democracy.

Murkherjee and Ramaswamy (2007:54) might be right in their observation when they described Plato and Aristotle as “...essentially aristocratic conservatives who spoke and defended the values of an aristocracy (noble families, landed property owners and worriers) that was on the decline”.

However, Jacques Maritain, a 15th C French philosopher has a contrary view of the best form of government. To him, democracy is the best form of government. It was his belief that democracy beats the other forms of government because of its ability to provide man with the will and means to assert their control over the government. He opines that:

...the case of a democratic state in which freedom, law and the dignity of the human person are basic tenets, and the rationalization of political life is sought in the perspective of moral values and norm... and the people control their government, they are the final judge of its stewardship.

Maritain may be right in his view because of the tenets which democracy potent. However, he seems not to have considered the problem of reconciling theory with the actual practice of democracy which philosophic attitude would content with. Indeed, after recommending one form of government or the other, the next task that these political philosophers faced was the problem of how these forms of government would be harnessed for better result. They were quite conscious of the fact that no matter how good a form of government may be, whether aristocracy or democracy, it requires certain factors to run it for effectiveness and success.

Plato identified this factor in education according to him a philosopher king should be one who possesses the requisite ability to rule. Such a ruler would have been adequately prepared for the task of leadership through a long period of education. This is because of his belief that education affords man the prerequisite training for good leadership.

In fact, he advocated the kind of education that would terminate at inculcating in the leaders (rulers) the philosophic attitude which could help them to improve their rational powers and put the appetitive elements in check; and help man to ascend the various degree of knowledge as shown in his metaphor of the “Divided line” to the knowledge of good. He declares thus:

The human race will not be free of evils until either the stock of those who rightly and truly follow philosophy acquires political authority, or the class who have power in cities be led by some dispensation of providence to become real philosophers. (Stumpf 1999:68)

However, for Aristotle what his aristocratic form of government would require for effectiveness is the law. He was of the view that the ruler and the ruled must be guided by the constitutional provisions of the society. According to him “...in any good state, the law must be the ultimate sovereign and not any person whatsoever” (Sabine and Thorson 1993:99). It is here that Plato and Aristotle differ in their postulations, for while Plato advocates for a philosopher king, Aristotle believes in the capacity of the law to bring about the much needed good governance.

Maritain, on his part held a similar view with Aristotle on the necessity of constitution for good governance. For him, “the very control of the people over the state, even if in fact the state endeavours to escape it is inscribed in the body politic” (Maritain 1951:65). What Maritain meant by the above statement is that every good government, more especially his democratic government must operate with a constitution which will act as a guide and as well, serve as checks and balances for the various component parts of the state, whether for the ruler or for the ruled.

Therefore in summary, the political doctrines of these philosophers for good governance could be outlined thus:

- I. For Plato, good governance meant a combination of aristocracy and a philosopher-king at the helm of affairs.
- II. For Aristotle, it is aristocracy that needs to operate within the framework of the rule of law.
- III. And then for Maritain, it is democracy that needs to be oiled with the rule of law.

Now, considering the doctrines of these philosophers on what constitutes good governance in relation to the existential realities of life some questions naturally come to bother one’s mind, (i) why is it difficult in coming up with a unified doctrine? (ii) are all the philosophers right or all wrong in their assertions? (iii) are some of them right and

some others wrong in their assertions? (iv) if some of them are right in their assertion, which are the ones? (v) why have societies continued to have problems in governance?

Our all-in-one view regarding the questions so far raised is that the doctrines of these philosophers are not controversial, and none of their assertions is wrong. Their assertions are all correct in their own right. Their doctrines at best are complementary rather than being conflicting or supplementary. Therefore, our humble submission is that effective combination of Plato's Philosopher -king and Aristotle and Maritain's observance of rule of law will make for good governance, irrespective of the form of government that is being practiced. In fact we subscribe to Plato's view that leadership should not be an all comers affair, as it is currently the case in Nigerian democratic government.

A ruler needs to be conscious of the fact that his position as a leader entails making choices and decisions that will affect the lives of those under his leadership either positively or negatively. He does not only need to think about this or that decision, but he should also be able to think through the many streams of decisions and also appreciate the interactions that exist among the streams that would cumulatively result in the choices to be made. These processes need a good training in philosophy. On the other hand, Plato's philosopher king equally needs to operate with a good constitution as suggested by Aristotle and Maritain. This is necessary to guard against and checkmate the manifestation of selfish and despotic tendencies in man.

But the other questions are (i) what constitution? and (ii) who are the makers of the constitution? These questions are very necessary considering the widely-held view that a constitution cannot be better than the persons who made it. The constitution as important as it is to any government must be made by those who are knowledgeable, and by those who have the philosophical turn of mind to be able to create a constitution that is based on knowledge of the "real good" of the society as distinct from the 'improper good'. A constitution made by the undiscerning minds, no matter the form of government is bound to fail.

Our position is that, governance is an art whose tenets and principles have to be learnt, imbibed and strictly applied. Elechi (2005:126) attests to the professional nature of governance when he notes that "Governance ought to be an art predicated on exact knowledge of the good". Political leaders must be knowledgeable enough to be able to identify the real or proper good from the improper or 'apparent' good. This is possible in a leader with the philosophic turn of mind.

Strategies for cultivating Philosophic Attitude

The importance of philosophy in human life cannot be over emphasized. In order to equip leaders with the philosophic turn of mind the following recommendations should be encouraged by our educational system.

1. Creative and critical thinking must not be regarded in the ordinary sense of fault finding. One can be critical without picking holes or faults in something as it is the case with what is happening currently in Nigerian political space where the political

party in power does not see anything good in opposition parties. In like manner, the opposition parties condemn almost everything about the actions of the ruling party. This attitude on the part of politicians cannot bring about good governance in the polity.

2. One must be ready to free one's mind from prejudices and to give up the conceit that one already knows.

According to Epictetus (as quoted in Udoidem 1992:1), it is because if a man would pursue philosophy, his first task is to throw away conceit, for it is impossible for a man to learn when he has a conceit that he already knows. Such a mind-set would not be disposed for change.

3. One must be ready to divorce oneself from emotions, for the pursuit of reality (what is) is one of the cardinal goals of philosophy.

4. Philosophic attitude involves courage and readiness to contend with challenges and conflicts. Socrates, amongst other philosophers, against all odds stood his ground at his trial. Nigerian political leaders lack this attitude, otherwise, how can we explain the "blame game" syndrome that is in quick currency in today's Nigerian political Lexicon. A situation where president Muhammadu Buhari-led Federal government that vehemently campaigned to correct the social and political anomalies in the country, now as if its stock in trade constantly lay blames on the out-gone regime of Goodluck Jonathan for the failure of the his government to fulfil its political mandate is anomalous.

Also, there are instances where government officials both at the local state and federal levels issue official statements to the public, only to turn around to deny such statements, when they are faced with criticism.

Is this not a typical example of a government run by people with uncritical minds? Does it show the needed courage and steadfastness that are necessary to face challenges?

5. There should be moderation in positing philosophic attitude. The liberal position is preferred to extreme mindedness. Extreme exercise of philosophic attitude should not be encouraged as it may discourage further search for knowledge.

Conclusion

We have in this paper discussed some pertinent issues that are germane to good governance- that is a government that is conscious of the problems and expectations of the people. We have also noted that the form of government a society adopts does not necessarily bring about good governance. Government, we contend will answer to the needs of the society when rulers imbibe and cultivate the philosophic mindedness. The right type of education is recommended as a veritable tool for cultivation of this attitude of improving personal knowledge, moral probity and self-discipline. These qualities when properly delivered by our educational system would in turn translate into good governance.

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