

Enthroning Responsible Governance: An Appeal from Adam Smith and Traditional African Morality

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Abstract

The African societies have been tagged 'under developing' or 'not developing'; and this is obvious in the fact that the African postcolonial states have not been able to overcome their countless problems and challenges. The central problem has always been the problem of governance. Most of our postcolonial African political leaders have been enmeshed in the crisis of self-succession; a persistent desire and craving for political power at all cost. Different 'measures' and 'means' are therefore employed to fulfill their undying passion for power, fame and wealth. These 'means' include assassinations, blackmailing, election rigging, stirring up of ethnic violence, thuggery, rituals, corrupt practices, irresponsible and irresponsible behaviours at the level of governance. Political and social behaviours in Africa have assumed this competitiveness without recourse to moral sentiment. This paper employs secondary data analyzed through textual analysis in presenting Adam Smith's Moral Sentiment and the Traditional African concept of Sympathetic Impartiality as bail-outs attempt at evolving humane political and social systems. It concludes that political ethics is fundamental to effective service delivery in Africa. And that Adam Smith's Moral Sentiment and the Traditional African Concept of Sympathetic Impartiality provide a good ground for effective and responsible governance in Africa if embraced.

Keywords: Governance, Moral sentiment, Sympathetic Impartiality, African Politics and Corruption.

1. Introduction

The African crisis is not just a crisis of relevance but also a crisis of development (human development) or better put the development that concentrates on the welfare of the people. For instance, government's involvement in infrastructural development should be an attempt at enhancing the welfare of the people and not a means of winning the ground of legitimacy which will lead to the possibility of returning those who constitute the government to power in the next elections. The people are not mere appendages or 'indexes' in the society but rather the central point of reference whose existence gives meaning to the existence of government. The government and its operators are the primarily agents that can promote viable development. Development can only be initiated by those who govern because the means of moving the people and the society forward lie in the hands of those who are in possession of both the political and economic powers. How can a country develop and improve the welfare of the people when the power industry is grounded? A country where all businesses run on either diesel or petrol as an alternative power supply businesses that rely on electricity can only under develop the people and frustrate their economic prowess.

How can a country develop when the people do not form an integral part of the process of policy formulation and implementation? In other words, the policies initiated do not incorporate the well-being of the people as a central requisite in governmental activities. How can we avoid ethnic crisis when there is obvious marginalization of the minority groups and outright impoverishing of those minorities in whose environments the natural resources that serve as the mainstay of

the economy are found? There is obviously a loss of moral consciousness in the leaders as they interact among themselves and with the citizens they represent. There is a fall of social order in the African states resulting into several unwanted situations.

Okere (2003:3-4) underpinned the events in African states thus:

Start from where we are and look west- there is Liberia, Sierra Leone and until now, everybody's pride, even Ivory Coast- it is war. Now go north and east of us, from Sudan through the Central African and Uganda. It is war. Go southeast of us to the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, there is war. A little more south and southeast, Angola is on and off war. Zimbabwe is being prepared for a war for white interests. In the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Somalia, the home of the warlords – these are coterminous with quasi-permanent war. But the phenomenon of war is the quintessence of the failure of governance, the very image of chaos.

At the heart of the failure of the African states is the crisis of governance. The inability to foster peace within the states is the bane of the African states. If governance fails, the state fails. This is the African dilemma.

Okere (2003:4) continues:

Elsewhere in Africa, where there is no shooting war, you probably have some form of reign of terror – insecurity of life and property, armed robbery and hired assassinations, thousands of riot-ready, unemployed youths. For the rest, the whole continent enjoys the enviable distinction of being the underdevelopment capital of the world, the unemployment capital of the world, the poverty continent and the AIDS continent, the misery zone.

The idea of politics in Africa revolves around the concept of crude and cruel competition in which the human life has no value. In most African states, aspiring to contest for a political office is nothing but a suicidal mission. The reason for this is that serious attention has not been given to morality as the ground foundation for humane interpersonal relationships. The failure of governance is evident in different facets of the African societies.

What is governance?

Despite Pierre and Peters (2007) claim that governance is a notoriously slippery concept frequently used by social scientists and practitioners without a concise definition, we shall attempt to define governance in order to provide a ground for our postulations in this paper.

One of such broad but yet interesting definition states that “governance involves interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power is exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens or other stakeholders have their way” (Plumptre and Graham 1999:3). They further define it as “the process through which...institutions, business and citizens’ groups articulated their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences”.

Marilyn Wyatt (2002) conceives governance as a transparent decision-making process in which the leadership of a non-profit organization, in an effective and accountable way, directs resources and exercises power on the basis of shared values.

The United Kingdom modest definition holds that “Good governance is about the use of power and authority and how a country manages its affairs. This can be interpreted at many different levels, from the State down to the local community or household. Governance analysis considers all the mechanism, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests and exercise their rights and obligations. It concerns the way that people mediate their differences, make decisions and enact policies that affect public life and economic and social development” (DFID, 2007:7)

The concept of governance obviously involves the concepts of power, influence, government, leadership and citizenship, services rendering, decision making for the welfare of the people and etc. A point that is worthy of note is the fact that governance has to do with the provision of public services for the good, welfare and well-being of the people. When there is a failure to procure viable services for the good of the people, then governance is pronounced bad or irresponsible. Thus, the idea of bad and irresponsible governance becomes an undeniable lexicon in most African states given the failure to promote the welfare of the people. Good governance sets out to meet the needs of the people first. It is people-centered form of governance.

The African Development Bank (ADB) conceives good governance as one that embodies and promotes effective states, mobilized civil societies and productive private sectors (UNDP, 1999).

This obviously reveals the fact that governance is not just government’s project; it encompasses civil societies, private sectors and the citizens. Good governance is achieved through everybody’s commitment to its promotion. Good governance is the process of harmonizing and managing all diverse elements in society (i.e. social, political, economic

and cultural) to attain a desired level of socio-economic progress for all its members (UNDP 1999).

Thus, good governance enhances and caters for the basic needs of people and promotes their relevance in a political community. All the people in the society can contribute to the realization of good governance. Bad governance is the opposite of good governance. It is the reversal of everything good governance is.

2. Objective of the Study

The overall objective is to underscore the fact that ethics is a necessity for proper governance in all human societies. In order to effectively demonstrate this, this paper employs Adam Smith theory of moral sentiments and African traditional morality. The paper also intends to show that beyond Adam Smith's argument for competitive capitalism and the market forces, he also encouraged the demonstration of moral values in the pursuit of self-interest. Lastly, the objective of the study is to show that traditional African communities [pre-colonial African societies] possessed some unique moral values and social virtues that can and will aid development and good governance in the continent if embraced.

3. Methodology of the Study

This study utilized secondary data analyzed through textual analysis. According to Mckee (2003), textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. According to him, when we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text. This is due to the nature of Political Thought as a branch of Political Science that relies on analysis, critical evaluation and logic (Agbude, 2014). This study therefore subjected the concepts of governance, moral sentiments of Smith and traditional African society to rigorous interpretation and re-interpretation in order to fulfill the objectives of this study. This methodology is chosen because it allows for the possibility of evaluating, interpreting and critically subjecting the variables in this paper to analysis.

4. Effects of Bad and Irresponsible Governance

4.1 Corruption

Corruption is a testimony of failure of governance. When corruption is endemic as witnessed in the last decade, instructions of governance are abused by illicit and self-serving behaviours of political leaders. The socio-economic and political consequences of corruption (which include inability to deliver services and increased inequalities) lead to deciding legitimacy of government, and seriously undermined values and political equality (Afronet Position Paper quoted in Etuk, 2003:129).

The undeniable evidence of irresponsible governance is always that corrupt practices become ubiquitous. Every facet of the society reflects corrupt practices as the basic and underlining factor in almost all human interpersonal relationships. Gould (1991) defined corruption as an immoral and unethical phenomenon that contains a set of moral aberrations from moral standards of society, causing loss of respect for and confidence in duly constituted authority. This definition underscores the fact that corruption involves devaluation of values and loss of respect for social, eco-political institutions and for those in place of authority. Another important definition of corruption is by Dobel (1978), who conceives corruption as the moral incapacity to make disinterested moral commitments to actions, symbols, and institutions which benefit the substantive common welfare. It is a uniform argument in the definitions above that corruption is a moral failure. To my mind, a moral failure can only be rectified through appropriate moral cautions in any political community.

For Jain (2001), corruption can be defined as an act in which the power of public office is used for personal gain in a manner that contravenes the rules of the game. This definition reveals that general corrupt practices cannot be explained in any society without reference to those in the position of power. Waterbury's (1973) definition of corruption as "the abuse of public power and influence for private ends" further shows that society's corruption has a link with political leadership. Thus, the presence of corruption is located within the purview of the failure of governance. This will automatically lead us to the second evidence of bad and irresponsible governance in any polity.

4.2 Under Development

Understanding development will ease the difficulty in describing underdevelopment.

There are three perspectives from which we can look at the concept of development. The first perspective is to see development as a vision, description or measure of the state of being of a desirable society. However, different people have different visions of what is desirable based on their ideological inclination. Three different views can be delineated. The first vision is the vision of a modern industrial society, which is elaborated by modernization theorists. The second is a society where every individual potential can be realized in conditions characterized by the capacity to obtain physical necessities (particularly food), employment, equality, participation in government, political and economic independence, adequate education, women quality, sustainable development and peace. This vision, which is otherwise referred to as human-centred development, places a lot of emphasis on empowerment of the people. The third vision is the one that sees development as reducing poverty, improving health, mitigating environment degradation, etc. The second perspective of development is to see it as an historical change in which societies are transformed over a long period of time. Some scholars have argued that the process that produces development in some parts of the world was at the same time responsible for producing under development in other parts. This process has been dominated by the struggle between pro-market and protection movements. The third perspective of development is to see it as consisting of deliberate efforts aimed at improvements on the part of various agencies, including governments and all kinds of organizations and social movements. In this context, the important point to make is that it is crucial for people to be the agencies of their own development (Igbuzor, quoted in Oladoyin, 2010:75).

The second perspective of development, as explained by Igbuzor in the quote above, seems to be central to the concept of development. Development cannot totally be separated from the idea of effectively meeting human necessities of life, integration of the people into policy formulation and implementation process, poverty reduction (since no country can totally eliminate it), improvement of the health, physical and social well-being of the people, empowering the people for self-fulfillment and self-realizations. The people must be at the center of development because development is about the people. The third perspective emphasizes the improvements of life of all agencies which include both public and private sectors. Underdevelopment is a term often used to refer to economic underdevelopment, symptoms of which include lack of access to job opportunities, health care, drinkable water, food, education and housing.

Underdevelopment is the reversal of everything development is. Both corruption and underdevelopment are products of bad and irresponsible governance. Therefore, the development of the African states will never come through international donor agencies but rather a conscious art of incorporating good governance as a major tool of national development and nation building. Good governance is a necessity in effectively manage funds from international donor agencies. It is an undeniable fact that "Africa has been afflicted with bad governance and this has cost the continent two lost decades, the 1980s and 1990s" (Odunuga, 2003:170). Now we could conveniently add that this decade (2000s) is being wasted too.

How do we revive the concept of good governance in Africa? One point that is important is the fact that good governance entails respect for the sanctity of the human life which will definitely result into the pursuit of people-oriented development.

5. Adam Smith and Traditional African Morality

We must, in Africa, explore Adam Smith's concept of moral sentiment as a basis for appealing to the leaders and the followers on the exigencies of good governance as a tool of redressing the African dilemma. Both the leaders and the followers must get to this point of obeying and consenting to the law of moral sentiment. Even the Machiavelli's prince, in Adam Smith's theme, possesses the inherent human nature of sympathy for others. Thus, we are positing, in this paper, that we Africans (as well as all human beings) need to integrate human sympathy in all our interpersonal relationships.

How SELFISH so ever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner. That we often derive sorrow from the sorrow of others, is a matter of fact too obvious to require any instances to prove it; for this sentiment, like all the other original passions of human nature, is by no means confined to the virtuous and humane, though they perhaps may feel it with the most exquisite sensibility. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it (Smith, 1790:4)

The proposition is thus that the human person carries within his bowels, sentiment (sympathy) as an integral part of his being whether he is virtuous or non-virtuous; moral or immoral. The most cruel leader in Africa, according to Smith's proposal, has this idea of sympathy (feeling for humanity) in him.

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. His agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels (Smith, 1790:4).

What this implies is simply that the human person is a sympathetic being; and such nature of his should be translated into his interpersonal relationships at every level in the society whether social, economic, political etc. Man must be able to empathize by endeavouring to envisage the feelings and the outcome of his actions on his fellow human beings. This ontological nature of man should be employed in the art of governance such that the political leaders should reverse the table and endeavour to imagine and conjure on himself the effects of his policies on the masses who are their fellow human beings. The pains, the travails and the groaning of the masses who cannot afford the basic necessities of life should drive our political leaders to the pursuit of development ideology that will enhance and promote the well-being of the people. All legislative laws should incorporate a sympathetic affinity with those governed.

According to Adam Smith, the force of sympathy is so much in man that he even sympathizes with the dead.

We sympathize even with the dead, and overlooking what is of real importance in their situation, that awful futurity which awaits them,...it is miserable, we think, to be deprived of the light of the sun; to be shut out from life and conversation; to be laid in the cold grave, a prey to corruption and the reptiles of the earth; to be no more thought of this world.... (Smith, 1790:4)

Not only does man sympathize with others, he also enjoys being sympathized with (at least as a subject of human consideration)

But whatever may be the cause of sympathy, or however it may be excited nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow feeling with all the emotions of our own breast; nor are we ever so much shocked as by the appearance of the contrary. Man, say they, conscious of his own weakness, and of the need which he has for the assistance of others, rejoices whenever he observes that they adopt his own passions, because he is then assured of that assistance; and grieves whenever he observes the contrary, because he is then assured of their opposition. (Smith, 1790:4)

Political leaders should not detach themselves from both the pleasure and the pain of the governed. The governed, among themselves, should integrate the concept of sympathy in relating with one another so as to have a society that is humane and thus provides the ground for the fulfillments of individual goals and aspirations. No one is expected to pursue a course to the detriment of the well-being of others. As a matter of fact, this theory of moral sentiment must be extended to organizational behaviour; and all in managerial positions should rule and direct the course of the organization with the considerations of the humanity in others-both in the shareholders and the stakeholders.

Adam Smith also noted that the weaknesses in man could lead to the perversion of our tendencies towards sympathy. This inherent nature of sympathy in man towards his fellow man has been corrupted by a perverted understanding of life which he called the disposition to worship wealth and power. For instance, corporate managers engage in corporate fraud through creative accounting in order to emerge wealthy and famous. Political leaders engage in so many dubious activities and legislations in order to amass wealth and power.

This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition, though necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments. That wealth and greatness are often regarded with the respect and admiration which are due only to wisdom and virtue; and

that the contempt, of which vice and folly are the only proper objects, is often most unjustly bestowed upon poverty and weakness, has been the complaint of morality in all ages (Smith, 1790:4).

Man's passion for the well-being of his fellow men was replaced by the pursuit of wealth and power since they (wealth and power) guarantee respect and adoration. Those who are in possession of power and wealth through dubious means are equally venerated not minding the source and the route taken to acquire them. Wealth and power become tools of winning human respect and adoration. Therefore, every man seems to go for them without recourse to the effect their actions have on their fellow men. Of course, given the tenability of the tenets of both ethical and psychological egoism, man's pursuit of his well-being cannot be adjudged as immoral. However, man's pursuit of his well-being must not exact a negative influence on the well-being of others.

How do we cover up for the inadequacies of this moral sentiment in Adam Smith since he noted the disorderliness in man's tendencies to respect and pursue wealth and power at the expense of the well-being of his fellow human beings?

6. African Concept of Sympathetic Impartiality

This concept forms the major thrust of Kwasi Wiredu's official position in his article "The Moral Foundations of an African Culture". This concept of sympathetic impartiality is viewed as the process whereby human sympathy forms the major thrust of harmonizing individual interests with communal interests. In Africa, for instance, where the stage is always set for conflicts of every kind, this concept would assist in fostering a stable social order.

Wiredu (1992:198) poignantly puts it thus:

In all inter-personal situations put yourself in the skin of the other and see if you can contemplate the consequences of your proposal with equanimity.

This is an appeal to leaders, even if they have no sense of Adam Smith's sympathy for their fellow humans in legislating for their well-being, to embrace the proposal of harmonizing their interests with the interests of the community and the people they represent. The concept of sympathetic impartiality advises that we always put ourselves in the skin (shoes) of others and see whether we can accept the consequences of our actions or in-actions without complain.

For instance, when the Obasanjo, the President of the First Republic of Nigeria, ordered the destruction of Odi, (over the killing of some military personnel) in the beginning of his administration in 1999/2000; would he have taken such an action if he had happened to be an indigene of Odi? Would he have ordered the death of these innocent civilians if his relatives were there?

What a lesson for good governance? Those in the position of authority should empathize and see whether they will accept the consequences of their legislations with equanimity if they are to be in the position of the governed (followers).

This concept of sympathetic impartiality can also be judiciously applied to the business world where profit maximization is conceived as the central goal of business enterprises.

Friedman (1970) argues that businesses (business organizations) are artificial persons and as such could not be said to have responsibilities. Only human persons can have responsibilities. Thus, for him, it is the executives of the organizations or corporations that can be said to have responsibilities. But their responsibility is to maximize profit for the shareholders. The executive is an employee of the owners of the business, and his responsibility is to conduct the business in accordance with their (owners) desires, which generally will be to make as much money as possible while conforming to the basic rules of the society. In this sense, profit maximization is taken as the end of every business enterprise. This makes Friedman a real proponent of materialistic capitalism. Thus, the business world has been construed in terms of profit maximization alone which in most cases leads to the destruction of the sanctity of the human life. Fake drugs manufacturing, corporate frauds, substandard products production and etc. are all evidences of the fact that the business world needs the integration of the concept of sympathetic impartiality (Agbude, et. al, 2015). The manufacturers of fake drugs that are injurious to the human person should put themselves in the skins of others and see whether they can contemplate the consequences of their actions with equanimity. Will they use or allow their families to use such drugs since it will harm them?

According to Wiredu, this is the first principle of morals. This concept is similar to the first principle of Kantian Categorical Imperative.

Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal (Kant, 1785/1949:22).

In the African traditional society, the greatness of a man is not predicated on his personal success but on the 'extent to which his/her action benefits others than himself, not of course, by accident or coincidence but by design. On this basis, the traditional Africans are said to internalize the concept of sympathetic impartiality which encourages the art of weighing the effects of one's action on others and see whether one can accept the consequence of the action with equanimity.

7. Conclusion

The failure of governance in African societies is due to the inability of leaders to incorporate the interests of others into their own personal interests. It is the general proposal of this paper that good and responsible governance can be enhanced in a society (community) when those in the position of power, whether in politics or industry, have effectively incorporated the interests of the people into their own individual interests. It is the belief of these writers that the concept of moral sentiment in Adam Smith and the concept of sympathetic impartiality in the traditional African society provide the ground for harmonizing the interests of others into our own interests. Thus, the pursuit of personal well-being should not undermine the well-being of others.

Why the choice of these two concepts? We must save Africa by all means. We must employ every theory at our disposal to appeal to the consciences of our leaders in order to build a continent that can withstand other continents in terms of development, equity, political stability, economic buoyancy etc. Adam Smith's moral sentiment and the traditional African concept of sympathetic impartiality propose the harmonization of our interests with the interests of others; considerations of others in the pursuit of our self-interests; and respects for others' feeling. These are necessary factors in engendering responsible (good) governance in any polity. This provides one of the contents of Political Ethics.

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