

Moral Education and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper made concerted effort to establish the fact that ethical or moral education plays a fundamental role in the development of any nation. Using Nigerian nation as an example, the paper argued that governmental policies and decisions geared towards the development of the nation must be based on sound ethical and educational foundation. The paper recommends teleological ethics or teleologism as the moral basis upon which developmental processes in Nigeria should be anchored. The interconnectivity of ethics, moral education and national development was exposed in the paper. Following this, human actions and inter-personal relations were shown to have remarkable effect on the development of a nation; hence, the need for them to be founded on a solid moral and educational principles (teleologism) if the much desired development will not continue to elude Nigeria.

Keywords: Moral education, Ethics, National Development, Teleologism.

Introduction

Nation building is an all-important issue in the annals of the development of any country especially the developing countries of the world. Nigeria as one of the developing countries is not left out in this conscientious effort at building and reconstructing the country.

For instance, in the recent past, the then Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Charles Soludo, at the wake of his inception in office made a policy that all banks in the country must provide a capital base of N25 billion or merge with some other banks to be able to provide the capital base. This particular policy, no doubt, was informed by the need to reconstruct the financial/banking sector of the economy with a view to developing the nation.

Such revolutionary policies have been introduced by different leaders and administrators in different sectors of the economy at different times. All are geared towards the development of the Nigerian nation. Yet the much desired development has not taken place, Development, as it were, is multifaceted, it is not one-directional. It cuts across every sphere of a given economy, namely, economics, politics, religion, social, intellectual or human development, etc.

In this paper, we are concerned with the overall development of the Nigerian nation; it is our opinion that ethics or moral education has a lot to do with the development of Nigerian nation. Here, it will be argued that governmental policies and decisions geared towards the development of the nation must be based on sound ethics and education. In this case, we recommend teleological ethics. Again, human action and interpersonal relations in so far as they have a bearing on the development of the nation must be founded on a solid moral cum ethical principle of teleologism otherwise the much desired national development may continue to be a mirage.

The paper, therefore, proceeds with a clarification of the concepts of ethics, education, national development and teleological ethics in the light of their usage in this

paper. And then it will dwell characteristically on the roles and importance of ethics and moral education in national development in Nigeria.

The Concept of Ethics

Ethics, otherwise called moral philosophy, has been given several definitions by different scholars as a result of their different mental inclinations. Bronstein, Yervant and Krikoriem, for instance, say that “the subject matter of ethics or moral philosophy is the general principles which are assumed in coming to a decision as to what choice among alternative courses of conduct one ought to take” (1). What Bronstein and others seem to be saying is that, ethics consists of certain principles which guide the actions, decisions and conduct of human persons.

Perhaps, the etymological definition of ethics must have informed the above view on ethics. Etymologically, ethics is derived from the Greek word “ethos” meaning customs, norms, habits or accepted ways of behavior, especially for an individual or a community. This definition seems to reinforce the fact that as a branch of philosophy ethics is concerned with the understanding of what is meant by such terms as “good”, “right”, “justifiable”, “duty”, “responsibility”, etc. in judgements as to how persons ought to conduct or behave themselves.

According to E. O. John, ethics is also “a systematic investigation into norms of human behavior” (15). This definition shows that ethics is basically the concern of man, referring to a certain code of conduct or a set of principles by which men live. Ozumba was not far away from this view when he identified ethics as a branch of philosophy which deals mainly with the morality of human actions and conduct (4). Similarly, Norman Shields defines ethics as a conscious and purposeful behaviour which is concerned with the obligations and rules that relate to it. Indeed, Omoregbe’s succinct presentation of the concept of ethics is noteworthy here. According to him:

Ethics is concerned with the question of right and wrong in human behavior. It deals with how men ought to behave and why it is wrong to behave in certain ways and right to behave in certain other ways (Knowing ix).

The aim of all ethical reflection is, then, that I myself shall be good and that the world shall become good through my action (Bonhoeffer 55).

From the foregoing definitions one can discern that the major concern of ethics is the regulation of the behavior and conduct of man as it affects the overall wellbeing of the state or society in which he lives. This particular observation becomes clearer and appreciable when it is recalled that had referred to the state as individual writ large. Whatever, then, affects man in his overall development has a direct effect on the development of the state or society as a whole. Thus, if ethics is conceived to be the study of moral principles upon which human actions, decisions or conducts are to be based, for him to realize his full self, it follows that ethics also provides regulating moral principles for the proper development of the state. Ethics is therefore a *conditiosinequanon* for the development of a nation.

When this point is properly understood, one begins to perceive the necessity and important role of an ethical principle in the development of any nation and particularly in Nigeria. This point will be amplified later in the course of this paper. But presently, let us consider the meaning of education and national development. To summarize our discussion on the nature of ethics, a distinction needs to be made between normative ethics and meta-ethics. Normative ethics attempts to set forth a set of ethical beliefs as a coherent system deducible from one or more general principles (Harlverson 279). It a branch of ethics that is

concerned with the principles by which human actions are to be judged good or bad, right or wrong. Meta-ethics on the other hand, is analytic in character as it denotes the search for the meaning of certain key terms that appear in ethical statements. According to Uduigwomen, “unlike normative ethics, meta-ethics does not propound any moral principles or goals for action, except possibly by implication” (4).

Meaning of Education

Education can be defined as a process and as a product. It is a process of cultural and normative transmission and socialization from generation to generation (Orji 3). This is similar to the definition given by Egunjobi and others. For them, education is the process of transmitting societal lores, values and desirable attitudes from one generation to another (2). As a product education is seen as a change in behaviour. In this sense, Human behavior is the product for one to be educated there must be a change in his behavior. Thus, education is the sum total of all the experiences (formal and informal) which a man comes across in his journey of life. In otherwords, education is beyond what goes on within the four walls of a school.

The Concept of National Development

The concept of national development is not such an easy concept to explicate. The reason is that several other concepts, clauses, and phrases such as nation-building, social engineering, national reconstruction, national planning, etc. are used to connote one form of development or the other in a given nation.

Following this, V. A. Panandiker identifies development as that “improvement in standards of societal living and participation in matters economic, social and political” (56). The above definition reinforces our earlier observation that the concept of development is multi-faceted, cutting across every sphere of the human society.

Similarly, quoting Edward Wiedner, C. C. Ikeji defines national development as the ‘means of selecting and accomplishing progressive political, economic and social objectives that are authoritatively determined in one manner or another” (57). Thus, a planned change which is derived from a purposeful decision to effect improvements in a social system is national development. National development refers essentially to the standard and organizational behavior necessary for the implementation of schemes and programs of socio-economic and political change undertaken by the government, groups and individuals in the society.

Most scholars have argued that development in the right sense of the word does not only mean the provision of social infrastructure. For such scholars, the basic development of any nation is a function of the right moral attitude of the individuals that make up a nation. This position is not incorrect and we tend to agree with this view as it were. Thus, our thesis that the proper development of the Nigerian nation is dependent upon a sound ethical education or principle revolves around this view.

T. E. Ogar seems to disagree with the preceding views of development when he defined development categorically as an “attitude of the mind, a total change of the mind in its systematic and critical basis” (93). Much as we agree that development has to do with the human mind, we insist that this is not the only concern of development. For our purpose in this paper, we define development thus; that steady and gradual growth or change from not so good a state to a relatively stable and better socio-economic, political, religious, and mental state. In this sense, development encompasses every aspect of a nation’s life both human and non-human aspects, though it has more to do with the former than the latter.

Omogbe was therefore right when he described national development in the following terms. In the development of a nation, of primary importance is the human

dimension and of secondary importance is the non-human dimension which includes such things as land, natural resources, roads, buildings, machines, etc. according to him, 'to talk of national development is to talk primarily of the development of human persons' (Omoregbe knowing 195). This is where the education of the individual comes in.

Teleological Ethics

This is otherwise known as teleologism. It is a type of ethical theory or system which holds that the moral worth or value of any act consists in the tendency it has or is intended to have in producing a good or bad result. Simply put, teleological ethics is that ethical theory that considers the end result of actions. Accordingly an action is right if and only if the rule under which it is carried out produces an overwhelming good or value over evil. An action is wrong if the reverse is the case. According to Frankena, "a teleological theory says that the basic or ultimate criterion or standard of what is morally right, wrong, obligatory is non-moral value that is brought into being (14). In other words, for the teleologists, it is the non-moral value that acts as the touchstone for morally acceptable or good actions. Thus, according to this theory, an act can only be considered praiseworthy if it has the tendency to promote or realize that which is the end or goal which all human behaviour having moral value must aim at realizing.

Moral Education and National Development in Nigeria

The importance of ethics in the development of a nation cannot be overemphasized. From the foregoing discussions we have shown that there must be in existence a solid ethical principle upon which every aspect of a nation's development must be founded if it must truly be called development. We have further put forward teleologism as that ethical principle upon which any aspect of a nation's development can be founded. We intend to amplify this particular view in this segment with the Nigerian nation as a case study.

Recently, the preoccupation of those governing this country is mobilization for development in the area of technology, science, education etc. Attempt is being made such that our villages will transform into modern cities, our cars, large and small scale manufacturers will improve and Nigeria will relate better and more gainfully with those other countries of the world. In fact, the Nigerian governments over the years have continued to make policies geared towards the achievement of this type of development. But, the question remains; what line of action ought we to take in order to realize these developmental programmes? What ought we, both as individuals and governments, to do as to attain this level of development in every sphere of our national life? In simple terms, the paper posits that the answer is in the teaching, learning and practice of ethical principles and moral education in our schools, colleges, tertiary institutions and at the individual and governmental levels.

In other words, for these developmental processes or programmes to be realized, our schools, colleges, tertiary institutions, governments, its institutions and people must develop a forward looking attitude and mindset with national development as the end point or goal. When this is established, then our actions, behavior and conduct in all spheres and at all levels of the Nigerian society will be influenced by this moral standard. Hence, individual conducts and governmental policies and programmes in all aspect would be appraised as either right or wrong, good or bad based on their tendency towards the development of the nation or not.

It is believed that a policy, unduly formed in favour of development of any kind without proper recourse to this type of ethics and moral education is a misguided one. It is a policy that could lead to abundance or improvement of technological, social, political, scientific condition of a state, but not to development; it is our view that any meaningful national developmental effort must be people-centered. The point being made is simply that the most important aspect of the development of any nation is unarguably the development of human personality. It is the moral development of the citizens that constitute the country's national development. In fact, "moral maturity is a mark of human development, and it is the most important aspect of national development" (Omoregbe, Ethics 147).

To buttress the point being made here, it will not be out of place to recall Plato's division of the state into three parts, namely, the rulers, the auxiliaries and the labourers. According to him, "the state develops or prospers in the right direction if each of these parts functions well, that is, if each carries out its responsibilities well" (15). It is our opinion that this division conforms analogically to the division found in a nation. The human and the non-human parts of a country like Nigeria need to function well for there to be proper national development.

Between the two, the most important is the development and proper functioning of the human person, for it is through its development that the other non-human aspects of the society will be developed, thereby ensuring adequate national development. If the human person is not properly harnessed on the basis of moral principles and education, he will mismanage the non-human resources at his disposal to the detriment of the nation at large.

The study of ethics or morality and subsequent imbibing of moral principles by individuals in the country will inculcate in them the right type of values and attitudes that are required for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society at large. This is true national development. Again, being exposed by means of education to the nature of ethics and principles of human conduct, the individuals in the society, upon whose shoulders the task of ensuring national development lies, would acquire appropriate skills, abilities and competence both mental and physical as equipment to live in, and contribute to, the development of the society.

Indeed, when the principles which distinguish between right and wrong actions and decisions are established in the minds of the people of Nigeria through moral education and continuous practice of same, it is our belief that the following changes will take place, all geared towards the development of the Nigerian nation; there will be respect for worth and dignity of the individual, shared responsibility for the common good of society, moral and spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations, respect for the dignity of labour, etc. these and similar values constitute the basic or fundamental pillars of any meaningful development in a nation like Nigeria. Thus, we agree with U. W. Uche that value (moral) education inculcates in the individual some societal expected behaviours and group activities, attitudes, values and feelings. (68).

R. C. Okonkwo, we believe, was referring to none other than the need for moral education and reorientation of the individuals if the Nigerian nation must achieve any meaningful development. In his words,

Development... involves change, Development does not end in economics or industry. For these to even take off, there must be a mobilization of human resources. This mobilization is usually aimed at the formation, internalization and crystallization of new skills, new aspirations and new goals. In other words, the paramount requirement of change in any society is that the people themselves must change. This change, I believe, must be rooted in the arts and humanities (16).

What is important here is that, the mobilization of human resources that will lead to the formation, internalization and crystallization of new skills involves moral education that will in turn bring about positive change in the human person.

The prevalence of moral decadence in the Nigerian nation accounts for some of the social ills found in the Nigerian nation which have continued to deny the country any room for development. The high level of bribery and corruption, incidence of economic, political and financial crime, murder, prostitution, self-interest and other vices have proved to be the bane of Nigerian developmental processes. Indeed, the immorality of a country's citizenry constitutes the greatest obstacle to the development of the nation. Though the Nigerian nation may be said to hold some ethical principles, the aforementioned vices render these principles weak and therefore impracticable.

At this juncture, Omoregbe's illuminating question as to how a country can develop in the face of immorality becomes worth nothing. According to him, how can there be development in a country where public funds intended for developmental projects are diverted into private and selfish ends? How can the economy of a country develop if its citizens lack a sense of duty, a sense of moral responsibility and social accountability? How can there be development in a country in which bribery and corruption, breakdown of law and order are the order of the day? How can such a country develop? Hence the consequences will be grave if we in Nigeria will pretend to divorce morality and ethical education from the politics, governance and the developmental processes of Nigerian nation. The result will be a Machiavellian type of state where morality is divorced from politics. Referring to Machiavelli's views in *The Prince*, Simon Blackburn avers that; "Machiavelli's shocking contention was that although the Prince or ruler was supposed to be an embodiment of virtue and honour, yet given the way of the world, the successful ruler is only the one who acts effectively without regard to the conventional morality of actions" (219). If the people who are supposed to contribute to the development of other aspects of the Nigerian nation are themselves immoral, one wonders what will become of the developmental efforts in the country. Indeed, it will leave much to be desired as there will be no meaningful progress in that direction.

The importance of ethical and moral education to the development of a society or nation cuts across every discipline, profession and every facet of life. In every society, morality plays a very significant role in life, for it is in the demonstration of moral values that life's most important experiences are weighed and verdicts given. Thus, we insist that moral education in particular and education in general is indispensable to development, for any country that neglects the education of its citizens refuses to develop.

Conclusion

What has been done, in the foregoing, is a clarion call for faith in the moral education of the Nigerian populace and the acceptance of ethics and ethical principles as central to all meaningful development in a country like Nigeria. We must begin to appreciate the all important stance of morality and ethics in the development of our nation.

Morality (ethics) concerns itself with human behavior. It attempts to control the action of man in his relationship with God and his fellow man. Morality ensures harmonious living between the physical and spiritual worlds as well as among the members of the human community. This is all that is needed for the meaningful development of a nation.

We have argued that the attainment of development and human perfection depends on the cultivation and practice of such virtues as diligence, prudence, justice, fortitude,

patience and patriotism, which teleological morality encourages. As Omoregbe rightly pointed out;

 Morality and society therefore have the same basis, the same foundation, and are consequently inseparable. Neither can exist without the other, for there can be no society without morality, nor can we talk of morality without society. To remove morality from society is to destroy it... the relationship between morality and society can be expressed by saying that morality is the soul of society (Knowing 198).

Omoregbe's position though may not be accepted by all, actually emphasizes the fundamental role of morality in a society that desires development. Simply put, the society pivots on morality. A neglect of this fact only leads the society to destruction instead of development. This is the sense in which we agree with Omoregbe.

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