

**Moral Education in Aristotle: Implications for Political Leadership,
Governance, Nation-Building and Development in Africa**

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Abstract

One of the beauties of Aristotle's Ethics is the relationship it shares with his Politics. The two works deal with one and the same subject, namely, the philosophy of practical activity: that is, all human activity which is not directed merely to knowledge or truth but to the practical realization of human happiness. While Ethics shows what form and style of life are necessary to happiness, the Politics displays what particular forms of institution are necessary to make this form of life possible and safeguard it. One of the banes of modern politics, especially in Africa, is the separation of good moral conduct and political life. Politics as we know it today does not preoccupy itself with 'the question of morally fine and just' as was the case in the Ancient Greek city-state of Aristotle's time: where a noble and virtuous life was considered necessary for the well-being of the society. In this work, attempt will be made to examine and analyze Aristotle's moral education in the light of the debilitating state of politics, bad leadership and irresponsible governance, and resultant under-development that have bedeviled most parts of African countries today. Aristotle believes that moral education is that training whose aim is principally the production of virtuous citizens. Education of the citizen means the education that makes him simply good. A fundamental presupposition in moral education is that virtue is teachable. Thus Aristotle wrestled with this view to refute a seeming Socratic position that 'vice is ignorance.' For him, 'intellectual goodness is both produced and increased mainly by teaching, and therefore experience and time are required for it. Goodness of character is the outcome of habit. But since good habit is difficult to acquire

through mere education ('reasoned-instruction'), Aristotle turns to legislation for the regulation of human behavior and the whole of human life. He believes that people are by and large readier to submit to punishment and compulsion than moved by argument and ideals. The work therefore argues that the reason why most African countries are backward in achieving good political leadership, good governance, nation-building and development is simply because their political office holders have chosen to extricate morality from politics. It is the thesis of this work that the key to discovering solution to African developmental predicaments and political irresponsibility lies in the fact when political actors start to merge politics with morality as it was the case in the Greek time of Aristotle. This work is analytic in method, argument and presentation.

Keywords: Moral Education, Political Leadership, Nation-Building, Development, Irresponsible Governance.

1. Introduction

Human beings, according to Aristotle (1968), search for happiness in an endless variety of ways. While some look for happiness through pleasure, others go through the way of political powers, wealth, and/or literary fame etc. Unfortunately, little or none thinks of attaining happiness by living a virtuous life. In his ethical and political treatises, Aristotle argues that one cannot ignore morality in search of one's happiness. In other words, happiness cannot be achieved unless complete goodness in a complete life time is available. Therefore, Aristotle says: "a man will be happy if he acts as a good man acts" (Aristotle, Bk. 1, Ch. 9). The separation of good moral conduct from political life, especially in most African countries today, has done more harm than good to modern day politics and society. There is no gain-saying that the way and manner politics is played today in almost all African countries show and buttress the point already made that most political actors in Africa today are simply irresponsible and greedy, covetous and lack the noble and virtuous life which Aristotle considered necessary for the over-all well-being of society and its citizenry. This irresponsibility that is being exhibited by most of these political office holders

has been mapped out as reasons for the whole lot of decay, corruption, underdevelopment and all kinds of abuse of power and authority that have bedeviled most African countries today. It is equally on account of these that the philosophy or sit-tight-syndrome of most political office holders, dishonesty in government, electoral mal-practices which range from rigging of election results, snatching of ballot papers, thuggery and other practices that include intimidation before, during and after elections find their homes in our government and politics. Thus dishonesty in politics leads to loathing of public treasury, and converting of public facilities and properties to private ownership. The separation of morality and politics is also the reason why power and authority have become political tools in the hands of those in powers and authority for vengeance and other means of shutting up the public from voicing out their resentments against bad governance and leadership. In this situation, laws and legislations become instruments of intimidation, harassment, unjust arrest and detentions; avenues for those in power to make laws that suit, benefit and protect their interest alone against the interest of the general members of the society who are under their leadership and governance. Such gives rise to insecurity, and makes security forces and agencies political stooges, weapons for their pay-masters. While security institutions turn to become trap zones, anyone who expresses his dissatisfaction over government inability to give the people good governance is caged or locked up. It is in the light of the following that Aristotle's moral education becomes very significant and appropriate; for it suggests that moral education must be taken very seriously if societies must get out of the mess its political officer holders plunge them into.

2. What is 'Moral Education?'

In the thought of Aristotle, moral education is the training whose aim is principally the production of virtuous citizens. It is "the education that makes one simply good" (Aristotle, Bk. 5, Ch. 2). It is also the education than can prepare a

person for good political life. A fundamental presupposition in Aristotle's moral education is that virtue is teachable. Aristotle wrestled with this view to refute a seeming Socratic position that 'vice is ignorance' (Aristotle, Bk. 1, ix 8-11). For him too, 'intellectual goodness is both produced and increased mainly by teaching and therefore experience and time are required for it. Aristotle further claims that goodness of character is the outcome of habit (Aristotle, Bk. 2. Ch. 4). But since good habit is difficult to acquire through mere education, Aristotle turns to legislation for the regulation of human behavior and the whole human life. He believes that people are by and large readier to submit to punishment and compulsion than moved by argument and ideals.

3. Politics in time of Aristotle

Aristotle truly envisaged that the separation of good moral conduct and political life would do harm to society that he sought to merge his Ethics and Politics together. It is very clear that the two works of Aristotle deal with one and the same subject, namely, the philosophy of practical activity; that is, all human activity which is not directed merely to knowledge or truth but to the practical realization of human happiness. That means that while Ethics shows what form and style of life are necessary to happiness, the Politics considers what particular forms of institutions are necessary to make this form of life possible and safeguard it.

It is unfortunate that in spite of Aristotle's effort, politics as we know it today, remains ever separated from morality in the way political actors do not preoccupy themselves with the question of the morally fine and just (Aristotle, Bk 1. Ch.3) as it was the case with the Greek city-state of Aristotle's time. During this period, noble and virtuous life was considered necessary for the well-being of the society. Instead, today, politics is seen and called 'dirty game' by those who play it because political actors use it as avenues to make 'nonsense money' and indulge in all kinds of fraudulent activities and atrocities.

It is on this note that MacIntyre (1989) reflected that the Greek ‘*politikos*’ means something precisely different from what we mean by politics today. According to him, Aristotle’s word covers both what we mean by ‘political’ and social life. This is why he reaffirms that Aristotle did not discriminate between ethics and politics. At this point, one wonders the reason why Aristotle had to merge the two works—Ethics and Politics.

In the words of Mbukanma (2000, 4), “In the small city-state, the institutions of the polis were both those in which policy and the means to execute them were determined and those in which the face-to face relationships of social life found their home.” Also, he says that in the assembly, citizen meets his friends; with his friends he will be among fellow members of the assembly. Mbukanma further thinks that Aristotle’s claim was right that what matters in social relationship is a person’s moral conduct and a reasonable possession of the good things of life under his control. As he puts it thus in Bk. 7, Ch. 2 of his work that “life is best, both for the individual and for the cities, which has virtue sufficiently supported by material possession.” In other words, when the Greeks asked what the best form of constitution was, Aristotle says they were asking what the best form of constitution that could guarantee human happiness was. As he provided the answer in his Politics, Aristotle says obviously that the best constitution must be one which is so ordered that any person whatsoever may act and live happily (Aristotle, Bk. 7, Ch. 2 & 1).

On this note, since the ethics and politics have the same goal, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, naturally paves way for the *Politics*. And as Smith (1995) rightly observes in Aristotle’s Ethics, Ch. 4, the last chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics* points forward to the *Politics* and sketches for that part of the treatise the order of the inquiry to be pursued; an order which in actual treatise is not adhered to.

4. Politics in Moral Education

At this point, the role of politics in education is necessary to be examined. This is because Aristotle believes that politics is interest in the kind of education that helps a political society and its citizens to grow and develop. Thus the goal of politics is the practical realization of the happy life. Aristotle's constitutional theory, i.e., his view about the kind of government that can provide the human good, does not stipulate moral theories that the state may have to adopt. Instead, his thought is that political legislation should be able to provide the citizen with a sense of what is right and what is wrong—acceptable behavior in the polis for it is the virtuous life and not dense population that makes a good city (Mbukanma, 2000, 5). Therefore, for Aristotle, citizenship training is tantamount to moral training; hence in the *Politics*, he presents two educational goals: (a) the training of men to live a virtuous life; and (b) the training of men for a life of 'leisure'. A life of leisure is an elevated and gentlemanly sort of life. It is a life of 'thinking and speculation' which equally requires a great deal of learning and education (Aristotle, Bk. 8, Ch. 2 & 3).

5. The Training of Man for a Virtuous Life

Earlier in this work, it was noted that Aristotle believes that the goal of politics is the practical realization of the happy life. Thus the best and happiest life for the individual is that which the state renders possible and this it does mainly by revealing to him to appreciate them. But like Plato (1987), Smith (1990) cited that Aristotle believes that the state is above all, a large and powerful educative agency, which owes the individual increased opportunity of self-development and greater capacities for the enjoyment of life. So for Aristotle, education in goodness is best undertaken by the state. It is the state's right and responsibility to educate and train its citizens in moral and political life. The state, more than any person, knows the art and science of education. However, moral education of

the young can sometimes be undertaken by private citizens when the state fails or neglects to do this. But this can only be a make-shift arrangement.

One further reason why Aristotle prefers state-control of education to provide instruction is that ‘since there is but one aim for the entire city, it follows that education must be one and the same for all (Aristotle, Bk 8, Ch.1). This observation, no doubt, is very important in this context because since Aristotle maintains that moral activity is intimately connected with political activity, one may ask which one of them is the best form of constitution that can guarantee human happiness. Although Aristotle did not provide a clear-cut answer to this, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he insists that the interest of the legislator should be such that it makes good men of their fellows by making good behavior habitual with them. That is the aim of every law-giver, and when he is unable to carry it out effectively, he is a failure; nay, success or failure in this is what makes the difference between a good constitution and a bad (Aristotle, Bk. 2. Ch. 1).

Aristotle further understands good government as good when it aims at the good of the whole community, and bad government when it cares only for itself. Bertrand Russell (1971, 200) once followed Aristotle in describing what a good government is supposed to be. According to him, “the good and bad governments are defined by the ethical qualities of the holders of power, not by the form of the constitution.” This means that it is not enough to have a good constitution; the state needs virtuous politicians to live out the good acts of a decided constitution.

6. Political Leadership, Governance, Nation-Building and Development in Africa

With the x-ray of the crux of the matter in this argument, it becomes necessary to make the study significant by situating the subject matter in the context of politics in Africa. Without doubt, Africa has never been lucky with good politics. Hence the situation calls for urgent attention. There are claims in some quarters that the arrival of colonization and imperialism in Africa is responsible for the

deficit recorded in politics, development and/or nation-building in Africa. While this can be completely swept under board s far from being true, the situation of the Pre-colonial African calls for urgent examination.

In the instant case, there are elements of Aristotle's philosophy of conduct that found resonance in the pre-colonial life of the traditional African. Like every other human being, the traditional African believed that the good of a man consisted of all sorts of things that made a good condition of life possible, namely, food, clothing, housing, children, education, friendship, etc. That is to say that one could not possibly continue to exist and exercise one's human powers unless the means enumerated above were there for one. However, the question that one may likely ask is: does the good life consist in the possession of all these basic needs of man?

The traditional African was sure that good life was not seen so much in the possession of material things but in the way a person conducted his moral life. The belief then was a good name (Eziafa) was more desirable and commendable than the possession of material goods of life. Therefore, a person may be blessed with the good things of life and yet he was not called good by virtue of his possessions. On the other hand, a person living in misery and want due to perhaps an indifferent attitude towards the improvement of his life or the life of the community in which he lived, could not also be said to be living the good life. Therefore, to dissipate one's energy in the pursuit of illusions and pleasures was in the traditional African mentality a morally reprehensible attitude in life. And this is because while pleasure was a worthwhile pursuit, an unreflective pursuit of it at the expense of a noble life was morally reprehensible. This brings back to mind the traditional African concept of life.

Sarpong (1974) views traditional concept of life of a traditional African as something not to toy with. According to him, it was worth living; hence it must be acquired, retained, prolonged and sought for. The traditional African had the belief that life must not, and will not cease, even though life is at perpetual war

with invincible death. On no account must life not be communicated because life must be nurtured. And above all, life is good and must be enjoyed to the full. The point in this philosophy of life is to show that life is good and that a morally good life is not something contrary to the very nature of life. The moral life constitutes the essence of life that is regarded as authentic. Thus a good person is that person who in each act he or she does or refrains from doing seeks the good of all the persons who were affected by his or her actions.

Thus the morally good person thinks not only of himself or herself but the good of all members of his or community. In a bid to seek for his or her own personal good however, he or she makes sure that he or she does no harm to the other person and his or her interest. This moral consciousness is partly due to the belief of the traditional African in the unity of blood, commitment to co-existence and indestructible solidarity of the ancestral group (Mbukanma, 2000, 144).

For a life to be called good, therefore, a person should, ‘through hard work be able to lead a descent life and provide for the needs of his descendants. He should be God-fearing, kind, generous to his fellow tribesmen, hospitable to strangers, and grateful to those who show kindness to him. Above all, he should seek honour, posses the spirit of solidarity with his compatriots, unite with them to repel a common danger or achieve a common good. He should keep his word and not be deceitful.

7. Politics, Governance and Nation-Building

In politics, there have been attempts to conceive politics as a dirty game. Those who do so believe that in politics falsehood plays great role and small place is left for truth. They also argue that states are built on lies and on lies they have been demolished; hence the separation of politics and morality.

When politics becomes separated from morality, people tend to manipulate the concept of development and nation-building to suit their selfish interest. It is on this note that some think development is a form of domination where people are

dominated, controlled, managed and their destinies shaped by those who neither share their lifestyle nor their hopes nor their value systems. In that sense, politics without morality becomes mechanistic. A mechanistic politics sees human beings as sharing the same law of progress with the laws of physics (Njoku 2005, 14).

The Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition has ever considered development from the natural law point of view. In their understanding, nature is understood as having made everything for a purpose. Thus, for them, developmental processes have ends and these ends vary according to the subject in question. At the individual level for instance, they argue that the end of humans is the human good; a value that is basic and forms part of the common good. One of the instruments of achieving the common good is law, which Aquinas understood as a dictate of reason and principle of human act (Lissaka, 1996). The Aristotelian –Thomistic understanding sees the end of law as the realization of the common good whose effect is to make men good simply.

But at the level of non-humans, on the other hand, the laws of physical sciences dominate the concept of development. In this sense, development is seen as synonymous with domination. The founding fathers of mechanistic idea of development include Francis Bacon (1595), Thomas Hobbes (1651), and Rene Descartes (1644) among others. In their logic and philosophies, they primarily understand that the law of progress (development) is one and the same with the laws of physical sciences. For them, the idea of progress of human society is that the laws of physical sciences apply in the same way in the human sphere; thus from the domination of nature, humans can be dominated at all level (Njoku, 2004, 14).

The mechanistic thinkers of development sought to drive practice from the theories of physics. No wonder Descartes says that he wanted knowledge such that knowing the laws of physics; one can become lord of nature. That was why they maintained that the idea of progress in human society is one and the same with that of the laws of the physical sciences; hence it must be applied in the

same way in the human such that from the domination of nature, humans too can be dominated at all levels. The mechanistic logic therefore sees human development as domiciled in the worldview of the experimental sciences. Hence using the apparatus of physical sciences to dominate nature to our own use, humans can also be subjected to the laws of progress and utility.

The problem with the mechanistic logic of development is that laws and policies of government are made to dominate rather than to create progress in a society. People see politics as avenue to manipulate and dominate. The upper class influences legislation and other government policies to work to their credit and favour; hence the society collapses and lawlessness, corruption, anarchy etc become the order of the day in such a society. Also, this kind of situation breeds revolution because the enslaved would one want to be free.

Imperialism in Africa, in its entire sphere, was rooted in this kind of logic of domination. For instance, at the beginning of the imperial era, Europe has a superior power and knowledge of humans and nature, according to Njoku (2004, 15). Colonization was thus conceived as a form of development, which interest was to meet the needs of the colonizer. According to Tucker (1991, 27),

The idea of progress with its attendant notions of perfectibility and inevitability gained pre-eminence in the period of the French and English revolutions. Armed with the confidence of having history if not nature to their side, the new economic and political revolutionaries of Britain and French set about changing the world and the way in which it was believed to be universally valid. As such it provided a conceptual and moral basis for colonialism and imperialism.

Imperialism was thus implanted via the medium of culture-contact or acculturation. In the process, it seemed to be a reality that the values of the culture with stronger force dominated, even if the contact was simply a case of

mutual cross-cultural pollination. The British policy of Indirect Rule and the French's and Portuguese's policies of assimilation were coined to serve this purpose: to rule and dominate and explore the colonized territories for the interest of their home economics.

Development was therefore seen as imposition; hence colonialism became a development of imposition achieved by the exercise of alien political powers over a conquered territory through all kinds of arbitrary measures designed for the economic exploitation and social degradation of the colonized people (Njoku, 2004, 15).

To demonstrate how bad this logic is, one can then understand while till date, though these policies seem to have disappeared the land of Africa, especially Nigeria, their effects and ripples are still being felt and witnessed all over the continent of Africa and the country Nigeria where they were practiced. For example, till date, Britain still determines and controls the affairs of Nigeria: her policies, and her politics. Nigerian laws made at the both chambers of the House of Representative and the Senate appears to favour Britain more than it does for Nigeria. This is also the case with other African countries, whether Cameroun, Togo, Congo, Gabon etc.

Now with all these manipulations, Africans till date, have been made to think and feel they cannot develop without the West. They are made to see themselves in every sector of life as not succeeding without the West. They think and see themselves as poor and as people who need help from their colonial masters. It is this kind of logic and philosophy that have dominated the sub-consciousness of an average African, controlling his vision of life: the way he thinks, reason, and behaves. It is also behind the formulation of this kind of policies and politics seen in Africa today. It is logic of dependence. Africans see themselves as a people who must depend on the West for their survival, growth, development and well-being. Any effort to extricate the African from this mode of thinking proves abortive because he, the African, thinks it is a mortal sin disentangling his

thought and being from the West. No doubt, all revolutionary moves to break this unfortunate linkage and bondage yield no result. Till date, African remains socio-political and economic stooges implanted by the western forces and for the Africans.

The mechanistic thinkers proved to be capitalists also. Their insinuations continue to be that since they were dominant class, their policies would be maintained even at their absence in all the third world countries. This philosophy has continued to be part and parcel of ‘African philosophy’ as it is being taught, professed and practiced by most African politicians and academia. And this is why these dominant capitalists attitudes have continued to engage the local elites who benefited from their dependence on their capitalist masters by earning its revenue on the export market and spending its profit on imported luxury goods (Rapley, 1996, 18-19).

The situation in Nigeria currently shows that the efforts to change the status quo in which the local elites feasts on the shoulders of the poor are thwarted. Njoku (2004, 19-20) reiterates rhetorically thus: “why cannot a refineries be made to work? Why does the 6th greater exporter of petroleum not provide enough fuel for her citizens? Why do Nigerian politicians and big oil merchants prefer to import oil instead of repairing and maintaining the refineries in the country? One answer to these whole questions is that the local oligarchy is benefitting from the pathetic system. Hence laws and policies are made to sustain and maintain them. Whether in education, health, economy, business, politics, etc—the same policies are for the interest of the capitalists who continue to control Africans though local elites.

In governance, Tamayo (2014) made it clear that the Greek word ‘*kubernaein*’ and the Latin word ‘*gubernare*’ both refers to the same English word ‘governance’. Thus governance etymologically means ‘to steer.’ It refers to the manner of steering, or governing or directing and controlling a group of people or a state. Plato in his *Republic* (1997) was said to have been the first to use the

word ‘governance’ in the metaphorical sense when he said that essentially, governance is related to politics. Plato thus understands politics as the ‘art of governance’. Therefore, just as politics talks about governments, institutions, power, order and ideals of justice, governance also deals with the public sector, power structures, equity, and ideals of public administration.

Governance is distinct from politics in the sense that politics is broader than governance. But while the study of politics entails the concept of ‘good life’ and the ‘ideal society’ the study of governance is attuned to the concept of democracy, and on how the government and the civil society arrive at a decision in meeting up with their needs.

Africa as a continent has never got it right in the issues of governance. Hence every aspect of Africa’s systems, politics, economy, education, even religion bleeds as a result of bad governance. Bad governance in politics is no doubt responsible for bad governance in other segments of a nation; whether in education, economy, social life of the people and religion. And the root cause of them all is lack of moral education in politics. Bad governance thus brings out underdevelopment. It is a serious cankerworm in nation-building.

In nation-building, Orwell (1984) states that it involves a situation where people adopt appropriate means to maintain an internal order as they pursue their ideal and take appropriate measures to safeguard the community from attacks by non-members. In Onyeocha (2000), nation-building is seen to involve the general co-operation that is needed in a country to develop higher education on a large scale...raising the level and standard of life, increasing social interaction, maintaining postal services and communication, and coordinating activities. Nation-building therefore demands that the people should be recognized in their own right and the authority also recognized in its own right.

Authority should be entitled to all the powers it needs to promote the general welfare of the people. Mutual understanding between the people and the leaders exist in nation-building. And with this understanding, the leadership will be

expected to face up to its responsibilities on behalf of the people. It should be careful to recognize, operate within, and never seek to exceed the limits of its powers. Experience in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular shows that Nigeria is constantly besieged by insecurity, corruption, adverse politics, economic stagnation, and socio-religious bigotry due to the absence of morality in politics. And this has got it consequence on the development of Nigeria

8. Conclusion

The thesis of this paper is that moral education is eminently important in the development of any nation. Aristotle's teaching on moral education shows that no society can be considered developed where the morality of its citizenry is in questionable character. Pre-colonial Africa had its rich value system that helped in the development of traditional African society. Its contributions to human development were immense. The advent of colonialism some say brought all kinds of diseases in the way modern day Africans play politics. This paper therefore claims that the most deadly wound or sore impressed on the minds of most Africans is the contact between the traditional African and the West. It came with that degrading opinion that Africa has to be helped in order to develop. Such kind of mentality encourages all forms of paternalism that have made many Africans become perpetual beggars and post-colonial slaves in the hands of their post-colonial masters and the whole of the western world. The paper therefore concludes that being moral even while playing politics is a sine qua non for the development of a nation. And that no amount of dishonest and fraudulent lifestyle can be equated with a life of morality. It is in this sense that Aristotle's moral education becomes very significant a theory to reckon with for the development of any given society or nation.

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