KANT'S ETHICAL IMPERATIVE: A PARADIGM FOR POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOCIETY

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Abstract

In this article, "Kant's Ethical Imperative: A Paradigm for Political Development in the society." I argue that Political development is the driving force that propels other aspects of development. Politics is the engine room where every other segment of development is wheeled. It thus seems that in Nigeria, political development lacks the modus operandi that is a prerequisite for the developmental strive that is needed to move the nation forward. The reason, it can be argued is the absence of a solid moral base upon which the edifice of politics and governance can be anchored. It is our premeditated opinion that Kant, in his ethical imperative has paved the way forward, that can extricate Nigeria from this quagmire and redirect her politics for the development that politics is intended to accomplish. I have deplored the philosophical method of appraisal to synthesis Kant's Ethical imperative of Kingdoms of Ends for political development in the society.

INTRODUCTION

When one examines closely the history of political development in Nigeria, one would be struck by the fact that from 1914 to 2019 more than a century of Nigeria's co-operate existence, Nigeria has not been able to attain the political development that is much desired. We shall because of the scope of our paper limit our discussion to the last two decades (1999 to 2019). Our interest is not in constitutional development but on the structures and institutions of political development and their impact on the body polity against the overall good of the citizenry. It is apparent these structures and institutions are not tailored towards the improvement of the lots of the masses as they are not founded on any moral base. Against these indices one can rightly describe the political edifice of Nigeria as suffering from moral epilepsy. This is engendered by the collapse of moral values, political recklessness and ideological bankruptcy. Omoregbe supports this view when he states, "it is clear to all right thinking Nigerians that the basic problem of the nation is a moral one."[1] Moral rectitude is a sine qua non for probity. It is clear this is grossly lacking in our political life. Otakpor makes the point even clearer when he asserts, "… that a sober reflection on the moral life of the nation would reveal that all is not well with it… All this is because there is

no morality."[2] In this presentation, the fulcrum of our supposition rests on the fact that political philosophers, we serve as the watch-dog, the gadfly and the conscience of public life. It is our well thought out opinion that Kant's ethical imperative holds the key to moral reawakening and political revival of the Nigerian political system. Kant's ethical imperative is the paradigm for the political impasse and quagmire of the Nigerian society.

Because of the scope of this paper, we shall limit our discussion to just one imperative; the imperative of'Kingdoms of Ends'. Kant posits that man is living in a moral kingdom, where he is viewed as an end in himself, as a sovereign, not a subject, a law giver of the laws he is called to obey. We shall using these formulation of this imperative, x-ray the Nigerian political structure with regards to the value it attaches to the human person, his freedom, rights, dignity, his equality and respect for his person. Every right thinking Nigeria would agree that in Nigeria the human person is a tool, for the satisfaction of the political aspirations of politicians. The instances are just too many to mention. These include among others: workers welfare, lack of freedom of opinion, lack of respect for human dignity and brutality of all sorts etc. Kant argues that the human persons should be the epicenter of all political actions.

Our contention in this presentation is that Kant's imperative is the panacea to Nigeria's political quagmire. We shall very briefly examine Kant's ethical imperatives, articulate the imperative under consideration, and examine also the Nigeria political scenario and using Kant's imperative chart the way forward. We shall conclude with a critique of Kant and an evaluation of the article.

Kant's Ethical Imperatives

Kant believes that ethics is the most important branch of philosophy.[3] This is because it deals with the morality of all human actions. He anchored his moral philosophy on four primary principles. It is on these principles that human actions can be seen as moral actions. These principles include:

1. Goodwill. 2. Reason. 3. Duty. 4. Law

Goodwill is unconditionally good. "A Goodwill is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition."[4]**Reason:** Kant argues that reason ought to control human action. Reason is the controller of human action. Reason examines and sanctions actions considered good and discards those considered bad.[5] It is the capacity to reflect, originate and inhibit

human action.[6] The function of reason in moderating human action serves as a check on the excesses of the impulses of passion so that goodwill can produce good actions. Kant sees reason therefore as: "a practical faculty"[7] and the minimum requirement for morality. For him, it is because man is rational that he is moral.

Duty: Kant makes the emphasis that duty ought to be done for duty sake. Human actions for them to be moral action must be devoid of all self-inclination and selfish interest. Duty is the action performed following the dictates of reason and goodwill. He makes the distinction between actions that are done from duty and those that accord with duty.[8] Actions done as duty require and action done because duty requires. It is the latter that is duty for duty sake. Kant defines duty as the necessity of acting from respect for the law.[9] Duty then is as the law commands and not as I command.

Law: The necessity to act in a certain way is for Kant a law. Law is that which commands and compels. Kant argues that moral law is a function of reason. Kant says that the moral law can be known through reason. From this it follows that only rational creatures can be held morally accountable.[10]

Having laid this foundation we shall now examine Kant's ethical imperatives. Certain concepts are Kantian in nature and can only be understood in the context and perspective in which he used them. "Moral principles are always framed as commands, according to Kant… He refers to commands by their grammatical designation as imperatives."[11]Imperatives tell us what to do which we ought to do. "The conception of an objective principle, in so far as it is obligatory for a will is called a command (of reason) and the formulae of the command is called an imperative."[12] Imperative is a term coined by Kant to designate what he considered as unconditional, necessary and absolute moral law which he believed to be the rational foundation for all moral conduct. This imperative applies unconditionally to all without exception. The imperative commands actions as ends and not as means. Angeles defines it as "the necessary and absolute moral law believed to be the ultimate rational foundation for all moral conduct."[13]

Kant distinguishes between the hypothetical and the categorical imperatives. Hypothetical imperative commands conditionally and is usually prefixed by "if." It is a means to an end and not an end in itself.

Categorical imperative on the other hand, is unconditional, without qualification or limitation. It is not premised with ïf" but "must." It is universally binding on all rational creatures. Kant defines it as "act only on that maxim whereby thou cast at the same time will

that it should become a universal law."[14] Soccio puts it succinctly, "it is acting on the principles of acting on principles."[15] And "by maxim Kant means the rule according to which an action is done. It is the principle behind any action.[16] Seung calls it the subjective rule of behaviour.[17] Though this imperative is one Kant formulated it in various ways:

- The Principle of Universalization
- The Principle of Kingdoms of Ends
- The Principle of the Autonomy of the Will

As a result of the scope of this work, we shall examine only one principle of these imperatives: Kingdoms of Ends.

KINGDOMS OF ENDS

The principle of the Kingdoms of Ends states *inter alia* that "man is an end in itself. Our rational nature makes us persons and not things. Kant says rational natures exist as an end in itself."[18]The Maxim of Kingdoms of Ends as formulated by Kant reads thus, "so act as to treat humanity whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal never as means only."[19]

The formulation of this principle has had a long tradition in the history of ethics. It is another way of stating such maxims as contained in the scripture, "Do unto others as you would like them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12). It is a command to respect others and to accord them their dignity as rational human beings even as we hold ourselves also in high esteem.[20] The human person is not a thing. He has both the rational faculty and also wears the *mago dei* – image of God in which and by which he was created. He should not be treated shabbily or used merely as a tool, an instrument for the advancement of one's selfish ends. To do so will tantamount to a serious disservice and disregard to his human dignity. Man has a humanity that is divinized. Soccio contends that, "Kant held that as conscious rational creatures we each possess intrinsic worth…. We possess dignity that deserve universal respect… we are more than mere objects to be used to further this or that end."[21] It is this respect ha is based on this human worth and dignity that Kant qualifies as Kingdoms of Ends. For according to him, man is living in a moral kingdom, where he is an end and not a means to an end and not a tool to be used and manipulated for selfish interest. In this kingdom, man is a sovereign and not a subject. He gives the law that he himself obeys, for while giving the law, he is not subject to the will of others. In this Kant draws attention to a very sensitive ingredient of democracy; the principle of people oriented governance and the whole problem

of the management of minority opinions. These minority opinions are usually suppressed by the majority opinions.

We have tried to carefully examine the core contents of this principle of Kingdoms of Ends. It is anchored on the sublime and supreme value and unprecedented worth of the human person who wears in him rationality and the divine image. It is on the basis of these that he should be respected and catered for. There is a corresponding obligation on man to do same to others. This calls for reciprocity of action in the wisdom of 'what is good for the gander is also good for the goose.'

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOCIETY

Politics and governance are two terms that can be used interchangeably. For politics is the art of administration of the State. A review of Nigeria's political history would reveal that she has been galloping without stamina for more than a century now. Nigeria lacks both the political will and the political culture that are indispensable for good governance.

God in creation and in nature has bestowed on Nigeria natural resources and personnel capable of catapulting Nigeria to an enviable political and economic height unparalleled in history. We have lost all these to selfishness and greed. Since 1914 when Nigeria became a Nation, to independence, to now the post-independence era the story has remained basically the same; the rivalry between ethnic and tribal interest, party loyalty, and the egoistic tendencies of the political elites have all constituted a cog in the wheel of Nigeria's political development. Political or civil education is poor giving way to apparent ignorance in political intrigues, making the masses gullible to all forms of political gymnastic and maneuvering. In a word political development in Nigeria is epileptic. With well, over ninety political parties there are basically no political ideologies to anchor development. This is how bad the situation is.

A PARADIGM FOR THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIETY

Having said this we shall now in application examine how this principle, of Kingdoms of Ends, can constitute the paradigm for the political rejuvenation of the Nigeria's political structure. A paradigm is a type of something, a model, a pattern, from where one can copy from, or imitate or use as a guide.

Even though, Kant's ethics deals with morality and not politics as such. It is also related to politics in a way. It is related to politics because it is a human function. In this Giuseppe says "Kant" philosophy constitutes a sure sense of direction for social and personal life."[22] Seung makes the point ever clearer, "Kant conceives of moral law in a political

framework. The function of moral law is to harmonize the freedom of each individual with the freedom of others "…Thus Kant's conception of morality covers both the life of the individual and that of the community."[23]Kant also says that there is no dichotomy between politics and ethics, they are twin brothers and they go together.

In assessing the particular principle we have restricted ourselves to, that of Kingdoms of Ends, we shall critically x-ray how the human person is treated in Nigeria's politics. Amaucheazi notes that development should be man-oriented (person oriented) and not institution oriented.[24] This ina way is what Kant posits,the intrinsic value of the human person. Kant's injunction that the human person be respected is synonymous to the political and democratic doctrine of the fundamental human rights and equality. "Kant's ethics supports the democratic view that all people are created equal" where this is interpreted to mean that no one should be discriminated against before the law.[25] In this Maxim of "act always as to treat humanity either in thine own self or in others as ends," Kant has laid the moral foundation for the concept of equality. This concept has a lot of implication for politics in Nigeria. It is in it that, the fundamental principles of the rule of law are built; (of impartiality, of equality, of fundamental human rights).

To bring it nearer home, the principle stipulates that no one should be discriminated against based on gender, sex race, tribe ethnicity, social status etc. In Nigeria, until recently in some places women were not allowed important functions and positions. This is a breach of their worth and dignity. Politics is not the monopoly of masculinity. It is a human affair that is not gender-based. Politics in Nigeria is played along tribal and ethnic lines. The North finds it difficult to vote for a candidate from the South. Even after election, they still find it difficult to accept such a presidency. The same may go for other parts of the nation. The recent security threats and crises in the North can only be explained along this line. There are some in this country who feel that to rule Nigeria is their birth right and should not be exercised by any other group.

Here too, mention must be made of the way the political class relates with the populace. It is that kind of relationship of only what I need from you and only when I need it, do I need you as well. Politicians use the rest of us as tools to advance their selfish political ambitions. They make promises to us that they do not keep. They come to us only when they want votes and once voted we are forgotten. The frequent strikes by ASSU and the Labour Union, is a case in point. The recent agitation over minimum wage is another. All these are the indices that points to the wanton way our politicians see the human person and his

welfare. Surprisingly, their own welfare, is never a matter of debate and usually there is no compromise. But in matters where the interest of the common ordinary people is at stake, politicians show *laisse faire* attitude that is as embarrassing as it is annoying.

Kant's formulation of the principle of Kingdoms of Ends is an eye opener that should also wake us up from our own political slumber to the consciousness of the respect that the human person needs to be accorded in line with his dignity that is in keeping with the divine creative act. In this way freedom; absence of restrain and constrains, equality and equity of all human persons will become more visible. The human person should be put at the epicenter of all political intrigues and democratic maneuvering.

LIMITATIONS OF KANT'S ETHICAL THEORY

No philosophical system is critique – proof or iron-cast. In Kant also, there are some uncrossed "Ts" and undoted "Is". It has been argued that Kant's ethical theory is too formalistic, intellectualistic and abstract. He sometimes does not take into cognizance the real nature of the human person. Like Socrates who reasons that knowledge is virtue, 'to know the good is to do the good.' Kant also thinks that a rational person is also a moral person. But, the human person though imbibe with rationality has also embedded in his intrinsic nature emotions, sentiments and passion and sometimes these exert greater and even stronger influence on the way he acts. Kant argues that if man were purely rational, he would not have any moral problem. That he would act according to the objective and universal laws of moralities which are based upon pure reason. But as we all know rationality does dispense man from immorality, neither does pure reason imply lack of passion. In his letter to the Romans, Paul, dealt extensively with the whole issue of the conflict that is inherent in the will (spirit) and the body (flesh). Paul laments bitterly, the things I do not want to do are the things I find myself doing and the things I do not want to do are the things I find myself doing effortlessly.This therefore means that even with the best of intentions/rationality man is still under the control of his passion. Rationality is therefore not immunity to vile action and not an automatic license to virtuous actions.

Furthermore, it is in the nature of man to pursue his own interest. But Kant speaks of'duty for duty sake'. If this is to be taken totally and completely, even our religions acts will lost their value. Religions act are done with a higher end in view; reward from God. It does seem Kant was unable to wrestle with the issue of conflicts of duty. When one is caught in between two impossible angles as it is said "between the devil and the deep blue sea." He failed to prescribe moral rules for exceptional cases when a higher good is in view. What we

call the prime facie duties – duties to the extent that no other overriding factors prevail e.g. telling the truth. The truth should be told to the extent that it will not betray the trust and endanger the safety of others.

Kant's ethics has also been criticized as being subjective since the individual reserve the faculty to legislate his own actions as a standard for universalization; If Kant's view of self-legislation is stretched, there may be no society. Anarchism will take over and this will also lead to anarchy. There may be no state anymore and no civil government. What concerns all may be reduced to what concerns one.

In a similar vein Derek submits, "Kant's moral theory is held by many to be incomplete. It is based solely on the notion of obligation or law. There is no discussion of the moral content of an action, the context of a moral action, the intention of an action, the consequences of an action, the consequences in a given context."[26] It is clear to every that there is or there are motivations for moral actions and there are also consequences arising there from, Kant did not consider all these in his ethical postulations.

EVALUATION

Immanuel Kant lived a rigorous and highly disciplined life. His family upbringing and his early education shaped in no small way his entire philosophy. This also influenced his moral philosophy that is seen as his greatest contribution. His ethics gave the highest value to the human person who he sees as an end and not as a means. In this, Kant has also helped in reshaping some democratic ideals: fundamental human rights, equality etc. This has far-reaching implications in Nigeria where the human person has no rights, no voice to air out his grievances except at great personal peril. Kant, in a way, is preaching the gospel of social welfarism and the Christian gospel of Brotherhood and solidarity for the welfare and the wellbeing of the human person.

CONCLUSION

Political development in Nigeria will continue to be a mirage until and unless, politicians demonstrate the desire to do things the right way. Ethics and morality are indispensable guides to the realization of this objective. Kanu contends that "the problem of Nigeria is the problem of leadership or management in corporate terms because Nigeria has everything … required to be in greatness."[27] We totally subscribe to this view. Nigerians are doing well in their own private business enterprises in all walks of life but in corporate matters that concern the common good, they are bad managers. The reason is the absence of ethics and morality in our national life. Our politicians (leaders) feel no qualms of conscience

when they embezzle government funds. People even praise them for being smart. They feel no pain when they rig elections and falsify election results. They are not worried if other human beings perish provided their interest is secured. A man who is morally upright will know what probity is and will be guided by ethical prescriptions of human life. So far, we have not been able to fashion out a political system that is peculiar to us. That system ought to be basedon ethical and moral principles that are couched with democratic principles of dialogue. Democracy should exploit the tenets of communal rule through dialogue. In this kind of democracy, the consent of the people that is sought through consensus that takes place under the environment of dialogue is indispensable. Collective responsibility is ensured and assured and individual misconducts are easily handled.

Let us conclude that no single philosopher can single handedly proffer solution to all the moral problems that affect man and society. No single philosopher can satisfy the intellectual curiosity of all philosophical traditions. What we have tried to do therefore, is an attempt at understanding Kant's ethical principles of Kingdoms of Ends in the light of our political and moral epilepsy. We cannot therefore claim that we have said the last word. But we have merely ignited the fire that can spur further deliberations as we flex our intellectual muscle looking for the way out of our political impasse.

END NOTES

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