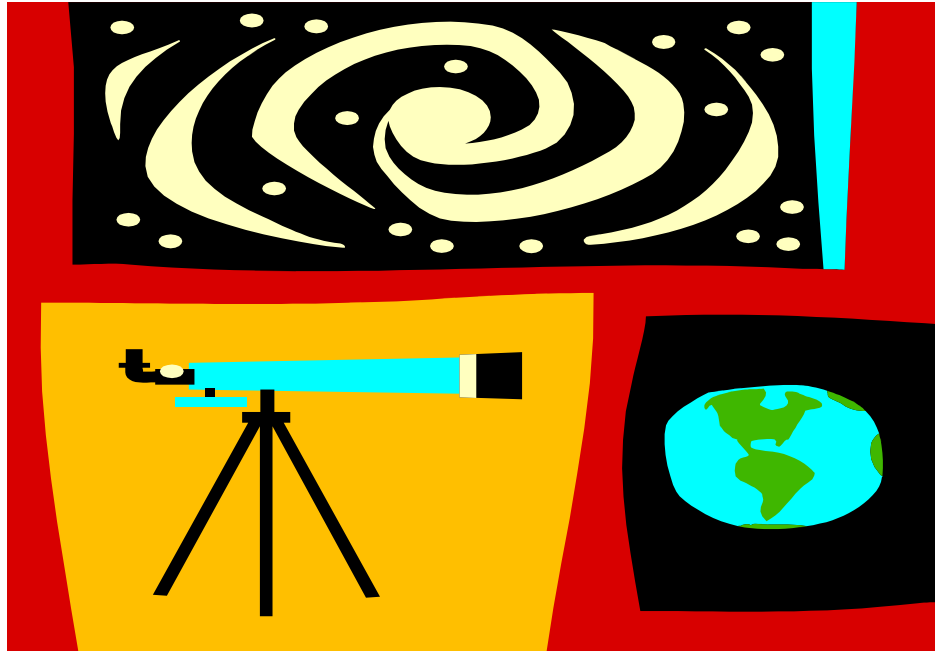


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**TOPIC: ETHICAL REVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE
NIGERIAN DEMOCRATIC SPACE**



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DELIVERED BY:

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Ethical Revolution and Development in the Nigerian Democratic Space

Introduction

I have been asked to speak on the topic, “Ethical Revolution and Development in the Nigerian Democratic Space”. No doubt, the issue of ethical revolution and development is topical and the scope of this discussion, which is the Nigerian democratic space, makes the task not less simple. I shall seek to approach this topic not from a historical viewpoint strictly. While I draw some references and instances from the Nigerian historical experiences, my interrogation of the topic shall be from a philosophical perspective.

Two important tasks of the philosopher consist in conceptual clarification of ideas and promoting social ideals through philosophical intervention in political and national affairs. It is my hope that this lecture shall achieve this twin task. A commonplace intellectual attitude in philosophy is to ask fundamental questions, which are considered more important than the answers. In this regard, some relevant questions that shall guide our reflection in this lecture include: What is revolution? Why ethical revolution? Is ethical revolution logically possible? Perhaps it is, does ethical revolution necessarily lead to development? What are the moral problems encountered in the democratic space in Nigeria? Is ethical revolution desirable and achievable? How can it be realized? What are the

cogent ethical principles and frameworks that can guide such a revolution? Should such principles be strictly exogenous in nature or should they be purely informed by the cultural and social exegesis that necessitate the call for ethical revolution?

Conceptual framework

In understanding the phrase - 'ethical revolution', the word 'revolution' is a key. Revolution essentially means evidential turnaround; a fundamental change in power or organizational structures. In the political parlance, the word revolution ordinarily suggests a forceful overthrow or replacement of an established government or order, considered impervious in order to pave way for a favored new system and a completely new order.

Revolution in Marxist theory is the collective struggles of workers against their exploitation. Marx argues that revolution is a planned struggle that exposes the limitations of freedom in a capitalist society. Simultaneously, it is a tool that engenders virtues of solidarity among the oppressed in the process of their liberation. In advocating for a socialist order, thereof, Marx argues that violent revolution is the most efficient means for creating a society without class distinctions as well as a potent means of achieving freedom from alienation. His prescription of revolution is said not only to be unavoidable, it is indeed the only way to overthrow the bourgeoisie and liberate the proletariats.

In moral and social philosophy, there are no final answers to the question of whether or not citizens have a legal right to revolution. Related to this is the normative question of when and whether a revolution can be ethically justified. A positive answer in this regard necessarily leads to such phrase as 'ethical revolution'. In this sense, ethical revolution is the revolt against an unethical government. 'Ethical revolution' may perhaps, then, be distinguished from 'political revolution'.

Political revolution abrogates positive law; it renounces not only the contract establishing positive law but also dissolves the institution of power in a state. An unethical government is one that fails to adequately protect its citizens from both foreign and domestic threats; fails to defend the rights of the citizens or abridges those rights unnecessarily; it exists solely to exploit its citizens and provides no system to balance the power of the governed versus the power of the people. Suffice to say, an unethical government is one that exists in spite of the will of the governed. 'Ethical revolution' is, therefore, simply the ethical defense of a revolt against an unethical government. For a revolutionary movement or force to be ethical, minimally, there must be a realistic expectation of success; not just in seizing power but in advancing human freedom and happiness.

But there can be ‘ethical revolution’ in a quite different sense from the normative appraisal of political revolution. As a conceptual possibility, ethical revolution could mean in the substantive sense, a new drastic beginning and a complete overhaul and transformation of the society with values, mostly (if not entirely) new to the subsisting order. It is a radical change in moral beliefs, behavior, attitudes of the members of the society. Understood in this sense, ethical revolution is also often referred as moral revolution. Moral revolution, as the name suggests, is a revolution in morals. “Morality is seen as a set of social rules, norms and values that guide the conduct of people in a society. Morality can be conceived in one hand as a system of moral beliefs and rules, and on the other, consisting of moral attitudes and responses to moral rules” (Gyekye 1997). These two conceptions of morality result in two conceptions of ethical revolution.

Gyekye identifies one as the fundamental changes in moral belief and rules and the other, changes in moral attitudes of a person. He identifies these as ‘substantive’ and ‘commitmental’ moral revolution respectively. The former involves a shift in the existing moral paradigms or moral conceptual schemes and the adoption of new ones while the latter involves a change in attitude, responses of individual members of a society to the society’s moral belief. Given that society together with values is a continuum, it is skeptical to think of substantive revolution as a logical possibility without contradictions. This is because morality is a system of value that gradually forms rather law that can radically transform and be invoked through appropriate enforceable mechanism. While it is not the interest of this paper to explore further the truism of such skepticism, it is however important to note in the main that such notion of ‘ethical revolution’ is different from an ethically justified legal right to rebel.

Ethical Revolution in Nigeria

The enthusiasm and call for ethical revolution in the Nigerian democratic space is well known; albeit pedestrian clarification. However, given the clarifications in the preceding section, it is clear that the intended meaning of ‘ethical revolution’ when contextualized in Nigeria political annals is not that of a morally justifiable right to rebel. The cry for ethical revolution in Nigeria has a long history with deep-rooted causes under the general umbrella of moral crisis. There are many moral problems confronting the Nigeria state. Moral problems in Nigeria are as a result of human greed or selfishness as well as the system structure conducive for all kinds of vices with impunity. The most fundamental one that has necessitated the call for ethical revolution is political corruption; it is the most evident moral vice in the Nigerian democratic space.

Political corruption is the use of power by government officials and agents for illegitimate private gains; it is a common trend in the Nigerian democratic space. An illegal act by an office holder constitutes political corruption if the act is directly related to the duties of the officer; if it is done under the guise of law or involves trading influence. In this regard, bribery, extortion, nepotism, graft and embezzlement are all forms of corruption. According to Kwame Gyekye, “political corruption is a moral problem because after being exposed, perpetrators do not have the dignity to come out to explain themselves; the people do not talk about the funds but the action and how shameful it is.” Corruption requires individual moral choices and depends upon the human capacity for avarice and evil. It stems from individual incapacity to make appropriate and desirable moral choices. No matter how one tries to rationalize it, political corruption has no moral justification. Such practices undermine the legitimate process of a system of government and leads to poverty and underdevelopment.

In using the phrase ‘ethical revolution’ in Nigeria political history, therefore, it is a campaign against political corruption, which is seen as a consequence of moral depravity of individual persons and groups. Since 1966, many Nigerian leaders have made such campaigns and pronouncement a cliché. For instance, Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu in 1966 revealed his intention of seizing power: “to rid the country of irresponsible politicians, incompetent and corrupt bureaucrats, restore respectability and accountability to the Nigerian public service” (Mbaku, 1998: 48). Brigadier Sanni Abacha re-echoed same in 1983 when he said that the military “was compelled to seize power from the Shagari government to save Nigeria from rampant corruption, ineptitude and profligacy that had characterized both the federal and state governments of the country” (Agbese, 1998: ix).

The idea of ‘ethical revolution’ became more prominent in Nigeria, especially, during the Buhari-Idiagbon led administration of War Against Indiscipline (WAI). In 1998, General Sanni Abacha came up with the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC), targeting drug trafficking, money laundering and other miscellaneous financial crimes. In all these efforts, as well as subsequent ones such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) in the current democratic space, the idea of ethical revolution implicitly involves effecting moral outlook and changes in the perception and actions of individuals in Nigeria.

There are, in the minimum, three fundamental problems in the above prevalent idea of ethical revolution, which have significantly affected development in the Nigerian democratic space. Uzochukwu Njoku (2007: 4) identifies two of such problems. Firstly, such conception “falls into the danger of drawing a straight and simplistic line between individual acts and social realities,

overlooking the historical processes, which have created some social problems, and mixing the private realm with the public sphere controlled by powerful institutions.” Secondly, such conception of ethical revolution “does not sufficiently confront how individual persons themselves are trapped within social structures. It further falls into the problem of reducing social goodness and evil to entirely personal issues independent of social systems, which shape our actions and imaginations” (Njoku, 2007: 4). Thirdly, there are no clearly defined ethical principles underpinning such revolution; thus having the consequence of arbitrary evaluation of the success or failures of such ethical revolution programme.

Whither Ethical Revolution in Nigeria

Contrary to the hue and cry for ‘ethical revolution’ in Nigeria political discourse, I think it is more pertinent to speak of either ‘moral evolution’ or ‘moral restoration’, or both. My rejection of the house-hold phrase of ‘ethical revolution’ is not only because of its nebulous character, but also because the gulf between its theoretical fantasies and praxis seems unbridgeable. By moral evolution, I mean strategically planned piecemeal progress involving collective value metamorphosis of every unit and group in the state towards right values. Unlike it, moral restoration is more of an ingenuous consciousness and active re-awareness of the traditional values that define us as a people and their consequent injection in the democratic space. Both moral evolution and moral restoration are gradual movements towards changing the status-quo moral order. Though the former is more futuristic, the latter leans more on the benefit of hindsight and traditional cultural moral experiences. The implicit assumption of moral restoration is that our national values used to be better than what currently obtains. The ‘then’ virtues are now today’s vices. Hence, there is the need to restore the most fundamental of our collective values that define us as a people, traditionally.

While the idea of ethical revolution, at least as popularized in Nigeria, focuses on the agents of corrupt and immoral practices without due cognizance of the structural factor, the consciousness involved in the ideas of both moral evolution and moral restoration are expressions of humans as causes and effects of societal structures. In ethical revolution, understood in the substantive sense, focus is generally on moral and individual responsibility. Though “the act of discipline, selflessness, kindness, charity and magnanimity of just a single person is potentially contagious and can inspire and re-orientate a thousand persons,” (Ketefe, 2014) but without a structural moral reform to nurture the ‘moral-neonates’, they are most likely to relapse into the old-ways of moral ineptitude. However, both moral evolution and moral restoration, to differing degrees, recognize

the influences of social structures, cultural and historical forces on people's actions and preferences. Just like moral evolution, their fundamental presupposition is that the prevailing moral order is contaminated deserving of a better constructed moral universe. The question of how to transcend from the 'now' to the 'projected' marks, significantly, the difference between moral revolution and the moral evolution as well as moral restoration. While abrupt and drastic transition is the route in moral revolution, in the senses of moral evolution and moral restoration, moral change involves a gradual, mutually reinforcing positive change at the societal and individual levels. I thus consider a synthesis of moral evolution and moral restoration, which I henceforth call 'moral-restorative-evolution' as imperative for development in the Nigeria democratic space.

But a pertinent question that deserves further reflection is: what ought to constitute the ethical principles of moral-restorative-evolution in order for it to be a sine-qua-non for development in Nigeria democratic space?

Ethical basis of Moral-restorative-evolution

To base the quest for moral-restorative-evolution on clearly defined values and ethical principles, Kantian deontological ethics as well as insights from traditional Yoruba ethics can be harmoniously used. Kant in his ethics talks about what he calls the categorical imperative in deciding the morally good actions. A form of Kant's categorical imperative "requires treating human beings as end-setting, ends-in-themselves" (Beck, 1971: 414), and not as mere means to an end. This form is called the second formulation of the categorical imperative.

Understood in the above sense, moral-restorative-evolution in Nigerian democratic space would mean that no member of the state should be treated and perceived as mere means. Each member of the state would need to act in contribution to the entire state on the basis of the universal maxim. The universal maxim states that one ought to act only when such an act can be willed to become a universal law. The implication of this is that the status and actions of members of the state including government machineries would be defined by the common good of the whole.

Each citizen has an unenforceable duty to contribute to the progress of other fellow citizens. This can be achieved by securing a democratic space where the rights of humans will be protected. Agents of the state in the judiciary, legislature, and executive arm would earn the respectful obedience of the citizens through being accountable and morally upright in their official and non-official capacities.

Also, there are essential elements of Yoruba ethics that could rescue the moral problems in Nigeria. We might want to ask what the nature of moral thinking in the traditional African societies is and the possible relevance in the context of development in Nigeria democratic space. Morality among the Yoruba is associated with good behavior and character. It means “iwa” (character and good conduct). According to Oke (1988, 96), *iwa* is “rated above all other valuable things, such that a person who has all the other valuable things and opportunities of life but lacks good character or moral beingness, which is the essence of proper human existence, will sooner than later forfeit all his material possessions which would not let him be moral.”

“*Iwa* is the highest moral virtue in the Yoruba value system; it is never courted for its own sake, but rather for its pragmatic purposes. These pragmatic ends can be thought of in terms of both material and non-material benefits accruing to the moral agent himself/herself and to others who fall under the direct or indirect influence of his/her action” (Balogun 2013: 113). It is for this reason that Yoruba ethics has been characterized as being community-centred. The communal values of the Yoruba are anchored in the notion of common will (the common or public interest), which the community believes supersedes individual interests; the community at the same time recognizes the rights and duties of each individual (Oyeshile 2003). The Yoruba moral system emphasizes “good personality/name” and “well-ordered relationships with others” (Balogun 2013: 116).

The concept of truth is another essential element in Yoruba ethics. The word *otito*, according to E.O. Oduwole (2006:14), stands for truth in the Yoruba language. There are two basic aspects of this word; one is cognitive and the other is moral. In its cognitive aspect, truth is a property of statements and propositions. In the moral sense, truth has to do with persons and their character or the motives or intentions behind actions or behavior. *Otito* (truth) in its moral sense is closely associated with character and what is morally good in Yoruba culture. It is regarded as the ultimate good and ultimate moral virtue. In this sense, unlike the cognitive sense, the opposite of truth (*otito*) is lies (*iro*). *Iro*, is further characterized by such words as *eke* (deceit), *odale* (covenant breaker), and *ika* (wicked person). Regarded as moral virtue, *otito*, for the Yoruba means *ohun-ti-o-to* (that which is proper) and has synonyms such as *ododo* (honesty), *isedede* (to do what is right or the right thing), *a i seru* (not to be deceitful), and *ohun ti-o-dara, eto* (good and right).

The implication of the above on development in Nigeria is that truth, as conceived by the Yoruba, creates life and promotes mutual understanding in society. While truth sheds light on societal problems, *iro* (lies) conceals it. Saying the truth and acting truthfully creates new things, situations, and makes things better, but *iro* is destructive and disintegrates forces of development. Standing by the principles of truth makes confession and acknowledgement of guilt easy. Its absence makes

development impossible and where lies prevail, in a society, moral decadence and degeneration becomes obvious.

On the account of the above brief exposition of values in Yoruba consequentialist ethics as well as the insights from Kant's deontological ethics, I think a synthesis of the two frameworks can cogently serve as basis for restorative-moral-evolution. In this wise, the salient moral values of the Yoruba, which used to be part of the guiding principles of social order in pre-colonial Nigeria, can be restored. In the same vein, the consciousness of the moral salience of deontological ethics can be nurtured for progressive evolution among the Nigerian citizenry.

One possible critique of this proposal of complementing Kantian ethics with Yoruba ethics in the process of fine-tuning the ethical principles of moral-restorative-evolution in Nigeria is that Nigeria houses over two hundred different cultures with different traditions and customs. An attempt to use one suggests a forceful implementation of its principle even though it might contradict others. Critics may be forthcoming that choosing traditional Yoruba ethics may expose us to the presumption that the traditional Yoruba ethics and past are idyllic, which is not. It might also be asked, of what import will the ethical principles of moral-restorative-evolution be for development in Nigeria democratic space?

Moral-Restorative-Revolution and Development in Nigeria Democratic Space

What link does moral-restorative-evolution have with development? What characterizes the Nigeria democratic space? The democratic space in Nigeria defies easy characterization. It is a space of centrifugal forces contesting for power and the people's votes. It is not a space necessarily defined by its representation of the people's will; nor is it a space catalyzing institutional development and value reconstruction. While it is an emerging space without full characterization and maturation, the dynamics and nature of the Nigerian democratic space in its less than 30 years cumulative experience are worrisome. There are ethnics, sectarian and class cleavages, insecurity and terrorism, poverty, injustice and low life expectancy rate. More fundamentally, there is contraction of the democratic space for popular participation and promotion of individual freedom.

Democracy as the rule of the people in the Nigeria refers actually to the rule by a few persons recycling themselves in the corridors of power. By implication, indeed all manners of totalitarian regimes could pass for democratic government. In other words, democracy in Nigeria is actually a rule by the few and this leaves the door open for such moral ineptitudes as corruption, indiscipline, state falsehood, avarice, greediness and nepotism, political falsehood and dirty politics, among

others. Nigeria's political crises, "which often degenerate into armed insurrection, are the result of a lack of moral probity" (Oyeshile 2003). Though democracy is often conceived as one of the most prominent systems of government, in the Nigerian situation however, it is in some light seen as an impediment to the developmental process. Arguably, while this failure is a consequence of the inadequacy of practice and not the inherent nature of democracy itself, it calls into question the moral dimension of democracy.

The above challenges notwithstanding, is there a relationship between moral-restorative-revolution and the quest for development in Nigeria? The concept of development is arguably a complex one. This complexity, it appears, arises from the difficulty in both the definition and description of development. This complexity further raises fundamental question, especially those concerning the belief that the development of a nation must be measured by economic achievements. However, a combination of analysis of a country's gross national product per capita, the outflow and inflow of cash, the indicators of life expectancy, infant mortality and adult literacy rates without mention of the moral maturity of the citizenry do not even explain the totality of the idea of development. As correctly pointed out by Oyeshola (1989), the measurement of development necessarily considers the conditions of reality that allow the people to take their lives through all such sectors as economic, religious, cultural, social, moral, and politics into their own hands. In other words, development must be seen from the perspective of enhanced capacities and possibilities of improving the self-determination of a people.

The possible link of moral-restorative-evolution to development in Nigeria democratic space is self-evident especially bearing in mind that development itself has a moral dimension. Benjamin Ike Ewelu (2008) opines that there are two inevitable factors in social order and development. One is the internal discipline coming from moral consciousness; second is the external control coming from law enforcement agents and the law courts. Moral deficiency, no doubt, remains an impediment to the development process in Nigeria. The adoption of moral-restorative-revolution can yield a change in the Nigeria democratic space, eradicating corruption from its grassroots amongst citizens of a state.

For the democratic space to thrive, some vital moral qualities are indispensable to be upheld not only by the leadership but also the fellowship: "honestly, patriotism, patience, fortitude, a temperament for consultation, consensus, building and compromise, the courage to take the right decisions, even if unpopular, to step on powerful ties, and to sacrifice sacred cows when the occasion demands" (Tambuwal, 2013).

A change in morals both at personal and structural levels cannot be realized overnight. Hence we cannot continue to talk of moral revolution as it has popularly been the case, except if it is construed as a mere wishful thinking. To realize a flourishing democratic space, the moral tenets of democracy must evidentially be at work. There should be planning with evaluative mechanism to gauge outcomes. The people must not only be desirous of value change, there should be as well a commitment in will-power and lived-reality. This is more important of view of the nature of morality itself, which is that it should be a consequence of self-chosen habits and not acts to enforce.

A change in self-moral perception of the systemic whole of Nigeria is a precursor to the structural moral-restorative -evolution. This means that we must put in place structures for such moral restoration and evolution to come about. The general political space, the culture of governance and the institutions meant to checkmate public administration need to be subjected to the ethical paradigms of moral-restorative-evolution. The paradigms in question, as earlier mentioned, are respect for human life and dignity, fostering communal humane bonds, and formation of virtuous habits. The importance of creating and strengthening structures cannot be over-emphasized. Human beings, as Thomas Hobbes once said, are by nature egoistic, acquisitive and loving undeserving honour. Though Hobbes may be accused of exaggeration, but our experiences as humans inform that there are tendencies towards his characterization of human nature. The lesson to be learnt in Hobbes is his suggestion of social contract, which involves building of institutions and structures. Such non-agency avenue of checking individual excesses has immense impact in changing individuals transmitting national values to future generations.

Having explained above the necessity of structural and individual dimensions of moral-restorative-revolution, it is pertinent to inquire on the mechanism of realization. In order to achieve the foregoing, massive education across different strata of Nigeria socio existence is a key. The moral-restorative-evolution of the Nigerian democratic space to a more just form is inevitable in so far as there is massive and continuous public enlightenment on the inherent values of each and every human life, on the value of dignity in labour, values of excellence in character, honesty and modesty in attitude, and self-restraint in action and expression, well-ordered communal relationships, social responsibility among others (Fayemi & Macaulay-Adeyelu 2009: 44).

The society should emphasize the value of hard work, diligence, self-reliance, and the importance of acquiring character traits such as honesty and social responsibility to be truly educated. Such education should not just limit morality to something being taught only; it should be lived;

endurance and devotion to duty are not only to be taught; they are to be exhibited (Awoniyi 1995, 376). Morality should be taught by examples through direct instructions, proverbs, moon light folktales, myths, songs, etc. (Fayemi & Macaulay-Adeyelu 2009: 50).

At a time, when the Nigerian democratic space is occupied by insecurity, underdevelopment, violence and social disorder and all efforts towards mitigating these problems have proved insufficient and perhaps impotent, it is necessary that all Nigerians should embrace our clarion call for moral revolution. Such a task should consist of promoting a new culture of truth, honesty and moral re-orientation across different strata of the Nigerian state. This moral re-orientation should begin from classrooms, citadels of learning, to various government offices and all political office holders in the nation. Thus, this is required as the necessary and sufficient conditions for development in the Nigerian democratic space.

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