

PHILOSOPHICAL ORATION OF THE PRESENT NIGERIAN VALUES SYSTEM

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Abstract

This paper is a philosophical discourse of the present Nigerian value system using the philosophical approach. It employed the logical inference and ideal statements. The work was guided by four axiological questions: what are values? Does Nigeria have any value system? What then is the present Nigerian value system? At what point was there a departure from the Nigerian traditional values system that led to value degeneration and to the need for value re-orientation? In order to answer the above questions raised, a philosophical discourse was made on values system, traditional Nigerian values system, the present Nigerian value system and a clarion call for value re-orientation in Nigeria. In the author's view, no society can achieve its target if its values are left at the mercy of the individual's situation, circumstance and time. As disclosed in the paper, the present Nigerian value system is in actual sense, a blessing in disguise. Consequently, Nigeria is presently in the doldrums because of improper placement of values and what she lacks as a nation is a proper system of values and nothing else. With this, a clarion call was made to all Nigerians both the government, leaders, teachers, students and citizens to work in synergy and shun those Western pessimistic values such as excessive quest for material possession, apparent worship of money, indecent dressing, unpatriotism, egocentrism, tribalism, ethnocentrism, witch-hunting of colleagues and ethnicity for the common good of all. This is because; according to Plato (427-347 BC), there cannot be a perfect state without a perfect man.

Keywords: Nigerian values system, philosophical approach, philosophical oration

Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of human existence, the values upheld by a society serve as the threads that weave together its identity, purpose, and destiny. A society without a firm grasp on its values is like a ship adrift in a stormy sea directionless and vulnerable to the forces that seek to tear it apart. The values of a society are more than mere customs or traditions; they are the bedrock of its culture, the silent architects of its institutions, and the invisible force that shapes its future. This philosophical exploration delves into the essence of the Nigerian value system, reflecting on its current state and implications for the nation's development. In examining the foundation of any society, it becomes evident that its values are not merely inherited traits but consciously chosen ideals that define the character and ethos of its people. As Plato (427-347 BC), one of the towering figures in Western philosophy, posited, the downfall of the ancient Athenian society was largely due to the failure of its citizens to instill the right values in the younger generation. Aristotle (384-322 BC), another giant in the philosophical realm, echoed this sentiment, arguing that a republic could only thrive when its citizens were virtuous, guided by a moral law that upheld the principles of justice and freedom. These classical philosophers underscore a timeless truth: a society's strength and

longevity are intrinsically linked to its value system. Without shared values that promote cohesion, creativity, and a sense of purpose, a society is doomed to stagnation and decay. In the context of Nigeria, the value system that once served as the cornerstone of national unity and progress appears to be under siege. The erosion of these values has profound implications, not only for individual conduct but also for the collective aspirations of the nation. To fully grasp the gravity of this situation, it is essential to first understand what values are and how they function within a society.

Value System: A Clarification

Values, within the realm of philosophy, fall under the study of axiology, which is concerned with the nature of values and value judgments. Axiology is further divided into two subfields: aesthetics, which deals with the principles of beauty and artistic expression, and ethics, which addresses the principles of right and wrong in human conduct. Ethical values are central to decision-making processes, guiding individuals and societies in determining not just what is, but what ought to be. In this sense, values represent a philosophy of "oughtness," providing a moral compass that directs human behavior towards what is considered desirable, admirable, and worth striving for. Values are not abstract concepts; they manifest in the desires, goals, and ideals that individuals and societies hold dear. Okpilike (2010) describes values as the principles or standards that inform one's judgment of what is valuable and important in life. Hill (2004) expands on this by defining values as the priorities that individuals and societies assign to certain beliefs, experiences, and objects in deciding how to live and what to cherish. In this way, values become the building blocks of a society's collective conscience, shaping its laws, institutions, and cultural practices. Gilbert and Hoepper (1996) categorize values into several distinct types: aesthetic values, which pertain to concepts such as beauty and symmetry; economic values, which relate to efficiency and productivity; intellectual values, which prioritize truth and clarity; political values, which emphasize justice and freedom; environmental values, which focus on ecological harmony and sustainability; and moral values, which concern right actions toward others, including respect, care, and integrity. These values are not isolated but are deeply interconnected, reflecting the complex and multifaceted nature of human societies. In essence, a value system is the framework of beliefs, standards, and principles that a society upholds as the basis for right and wrong conduct. It is fundamental to the functioning of any human society, shaping not only individual behavior but also the collective identity and purpose of the community. This value system is passed down from one generation to the next, evolving with the changing dynamics of the society while maintaining its core principles.

The Nigerian Value System: A Reflection

Given the fundamental role of values in shaping societal conduct and progress, the current state of the Nigerian value system raises significant concerns. The question then arises: What is the Nigerian value system today, and how does it reflect in the behaviours and attitudes of its people? In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a gradual decline in the adherence to values that once formed the bedrock of its society. This erosion of values is evident in various aspects of national life, from the pervasive corruption and lack of accountability to the growing disregard for communal well-being and national unity. The Nigerian value system,

which traditionally emphasized virtues such as respect for elders, communal solidarity, integrity, and hard work, appears to be giving way to a more individualistic and materialistic ethos. This shift has far-reaching implications for the nation's development, as the values that once united and guided the people now seem to be in flux, leading to a crisis of identity and purpose. In conclusion, the philosophical examination of the present Nigerian value system reveals a critical need for a re-evaluation and reaffirmation of the values that define the nation's identity and aspirations. Without a shared commitment to these values, Nigeria risks losing the very essence of what makes it a cohesive and vibrant society. The challenge, therefore, lies in rediscovering and reinvigorating the values that have historically served as the foundation for national unity and progress.

The Nigerian Traditional Values System

Every society has its own values system, which is a product of their culture; Nigeria is not an exemption. Nigeria as an entity has been sustained by some values over the years which were handed down from one generation to another. The values are not created by the gods nor are they the products of some divine revelations as in the Christian and Islamic ways of life. They are practical and pragmatic values which have come from the flux of Nigerian life both past and present, with emphasis on past experiences (Busia, 1972). Hence, before the advent of colonialism in Nigeria, Nigerians had their values. The Nigerian traditional values system as highlighted by Ella (1993) include respect for elders, chastity among women folk, dignity of labour, patriotism to one's community, courage and self reliance. According to Ella, Nigerians in the past era, among other things attach great importance to family name. Every Nigerian will work assiduously to promote his or her family name and do everything possible to avoid soiling the image of the family and it is the family that forms the base of every society. Children were taught and encouraged to respect their parents and elders, assist them in fetching water, firewood and other domestic chores. Any child who disrespects any of his or her elder irrespective of the gap in age or seniority is seriously punished by the community.

Truthfulness and honesty were prized very high. Love and promotion for family and family name, filial piety, honour and respect for parents and elders, respect for hard work, truthfulness and honesty, overwhelming respect for the sanctity of human life, hospitality, strong respect for leadership and authority and belief in God, Allah or the Supreme Being were the Nigerian traditional values system (Nwabuisi, 2000). Indecent acts such as stealing, dishonesty and moral laxity were abhorrent to Nigerians of old. In each community, strict laws guided the people against infringing on any of these highly held values. Nigerians had great respect for the sanctity of life. Human life was held in a very great esteem. A violation of human life in any way was considered the greatest crime anyone could commit. Life to a traditional Nigerian was the greatest gift from God and therefore should not be interfered with by anyone (Nwabuisi, 2000). The Nigerian society places premium on the mutual respect and regard for each other's life. It was also abominable to spill blood unless during the period of war. Hence, Africans' prize life above every other thing. The land and certain deities were regarded as sacred. Libations and prayers were made to them for human protection and property, long life, favourable weather conditions, peace, prosperity and bounty harvest.

Rendering help to persons in need was encouraged by Nigerians of old without expecting any form of reward. Taking good care of visitors and strangers is a striking feature

of the Nigerian values. It is expected that people should be hospitable to visitors and strangers alike as no one knows the compound of his in-laws. It was alleged that in some Nigerian societies like the ancient Tiv culture (an ethnic group in North central part of Nigeria), they showed affection to their male visitors by asking their wives to keep them warm at night. This aspect of the culture has been jettisoned. All these are the Nigerian traditional values that Nigerians admire, cherish and placed worth upon. They are fundamental and are held at high esteem by every Nigerians before the pervading influence of the white man on Nigerians. The Nigerians, imperceptibly, slowly and progressively imbibed the white man's total way of life. The influencing effect of the Western values on those of Nigeria is such that it is almost impossible to indicate or show where Nigerian values ends and where the Western values starts. Thus, if one cannot indicate or show where Nigerian values ends and where the Western values starts as a result of value generation and diffusion, the question therefore is: what then is the present Nigerian values system?

The Present Nigerian Values System

Nigeria like many other countries in the world has always been at the receiving end of the western norms and values. The negative aspects of these western norms and values are now something that is witnessed in the lives of many Nigerians. The positive impacts are things that nobody wants to emulate while the negative impact of it has spread its tentacles to every nook and cranny of the Nigerian communities thus, influencing and changing the cultures and values of many tribes and ethnic groups in the country. The debased values of most Nigerians presently, according to Nwabuisi (2000), include keeping African time, jealous and witch hunting of colleagues, excessive quest for material possession, and apparent worship of money, unpatriotism, egocentrism, tribalism, ethnocentrism and ethnicity. Nigeria is presently in the doldrums because of improper placement of values. The spirit of communalism, hospitality and human relations which were parts of the Nigerian value systems have been shattered as a result of greed, individualistic life as well as their perception about Christianity. Regrettably, individuals of the same kindred and community who would have enjoyed communal life with others are now against each other because of their greed, individualistic life and perception regarding Christianity. Their fanatical intolerance is more manifested against non-Christians. They hardly tolerate or intermingle with others who they see as unbelievers to avoid any contamination. Some of them do not even belong to the community associations and other meetings. They justify their stand with the biblical injunction "Be not equally yoked together with unbelievers" (II Corinthians 6: 14). The practice of these extremists has adversely affected the spirit of love, tolerance and care for one another, which Nigerians were known for.

A growing trend now in Nigeria that is almost becoming a norm is the way many Nigerians dress. The dressing pattern in Nigeria has radically changed especially at the Southern parts due to value diffusion. Traditionally, it was anti-Nigerian for women to wear trousers or long pants in the past (Iffih, 1998:102). For many Nigerians, "to dress decently is a choice". But the fact remains that before the pre-colonial era, Nigerians have different dress attires that have always been the embodiment of Nigerian traditional value and culture system, dress attires that are very beautiful and have provoked the envy of many Westerners. Presently, the way many Nigerians dress often make one to wonder about the moral scruple of

such individuals. This is most common with a number of Nigerian women. A fleeting look at the way some women dress in the society reveals the level of indecency being displayed. More worrisome is the trend of exposing the (erogenous zones) of the body in the name of fashion. Another erosion of Nigerian values is lack of patriotism. This has evoked a lot of devastating ethical crises in Nigeria. Most Nigerians no longer put Nigeria first. A Nigerian in the public office first thinks of himself and what he stands to gain, not what he should contribute for the cause of national unity and progress (Onwuka, Onwuka and Mbaji, 2012). As expressed by Dike (1999), the immediate state of Nigerian society is such that is enamoured with eroded value systems which breeds poor governance, incompetence, impunity and lack of accountability, gross inequality, and disenfranchisement of a significant number of its citizenry from any meaningful pursuits. This promotes poor reward system, lack of ethical standards, greed and wanton corruption.

There are many unresolved problems in Nigeria, but the issue of the upsurge of corruption is worrisome; and the damage it has done to the polity is inestimable. According to Dike (2001), the menace of corruption leads to slow movement of files in offices; police extortion at the tollgates and slow traffics on the highways, port congestion, ghost workers syndrome, election irregularities and others. Corrupt practices among Nigerians are perhaps; the only reason why nothing seems to be working out the way it should and it viciously sabotages whatever efforts Nigeria is making towards her development. This situation is such that patriotic Nigerians are worried about what happened to the spirit of love, tolerance and care for one another, which Nigerians were known for. Greed for money and material things has worsened the social ills in Nigerian society. Everybody wants to get rich without any useful means of getting income. Armed robbery, kidnapping and militancy are the order of the day. Sophisticated weapons are used to disarm the security and facilitate loot. A new dimension of the get-rich syndrome is in the use of information technology to defraud people. Cybercrime is an institutionalized crime involving different age groups mostly youth. The get-rich syndrome has further been entrenched into the social system by the quest for titles. The more titles you have, the more you command respect in society. Chieftaincy titles, religious titles and even academic titles show one's class. The effect of materialism on the educational sector erodes the standard enshrined in education. Malpractices in examination are encouraged. Subsequently, mediocrity as against merit is institutionalized. Materialism affects people's judgment and belief of what is morally right or wrong. The dignity in labour, hard work, chastity, respect for human life, among others has been altered over time. Consequently, things have gone so astray that one cannot but be in conformity that Nigeria is in dire need of value re-orientation.

A Clarion Call for Values Re-Orientation in Nigeria

A clarion call is an urgent or inspiring appeal to people to do something. The notion of clarion call for value re-orientation evokes the sense of departure from the established norms. It connotes the existence of anomalies or aberrations in a social order or system, which needs to be addressed or arrested to avoid further deterioration and decay within a given society. Re-orientation can be viewed as the act of being informed so that certain fundamental principles or tenets, which have been violated or breached, can be re-inculcated or restored in the individuals within the society. The question now is: at what point was there a departure

from the Nigerian traditional value system that led to value degeneration and to the need for value re-orientation? The answer may look quite simple, but it may not be so. For Emeh (2007), Nigerians have long ago rejected their traditional values and regarded them as primitive and accepted the growing capitalist culture and values with its intense individualism and competitiveness. This is the scenario in Nigeria today that informed the need for clarion call for value re-orientation.

Nigerian value system as it stands at the moment is faulty and there can be no meaningful progress until this is revisited. No matter the amount of reforms undertaken by the government, Nigeria will never be great until value reorientation is vigorously pursued. Nigerians worship money, the value we place on the life of fellow citizens is low and that informs our choices as a nation. Since money appears the greatest thing in life among Nigerians, they embezzle public funds and resort to theft. Equally, killing and assassinating fellow citizens at the slightest provocation is prevalent because there is little or no value placed on human life. Value re-orientation is the hallmark of any meaningful development. Any nation that would indeed be great must be established upon enduring national values that binds every individual in the corporate entity. National culture must be revisited as it influences national character and image. Corruption is referred as the bane of development in Nigeria but a good number of Nigerians often forget that corruption does not exist by itself. What Nigeria seems to lack as a nation is a proper system of values and nothing else.

Conclusion

In conclusion, no society can truly achieve its goals if its values are left vulnerable to the whims of individual circumstances, situations, or the passage of time. The Nigerian value system, once a sturdy foundation for the nation's identity and progress, has undergone significant changes. While change is an inevitable part of any society's evolution, it often brings resistance, especially when it challenges deeply held traditions and norms. The increasing influence and adoption of certain Western values have raised concerns among many Nigerians, as these changes sometimes clash with the country's indigenous values and cultural heritage. The erosion of core values raises a critical question: What becomes of a society when its foundational principles are compromised? If the very elements that hold a society together begin to disintegrate, the future of that society becomes uncertain and precarious. To borrow a proverb, "when the wood insects gather sticks, they must carry them on their own heads." This saying underscores the idea that the consequences of neglecting or undermining societal values ultimately fall upon the society itself. However, as a rational thinker and educator, I would rather conclude with another thought-provoking adage: "A fool who eats until he is sick must fast until he is healthy." This highlights the necessity of corrective action when a society's value system has been compromised. The current state of Nigerian values should not be viewed as a cause for despair but as a call to action. This philosophical oration should not be seen as a magical solution for value re-orientation in Nigeria, nor as a mere academic exercise. Instead, it should be recognized as a clarion call for all Nigerians government officials, leaders, educators, students, and citizens alike to work together in harmony to reclaim and reinforce the values that have historically underpinned the nation's success. It is imperative to resist and reject negative influences, such as the excessive pursuit of material wealth, the idolization of money, indecent behavior, lack of patriotism,

egocentrism, tribalism, and other divisive forces. As Plato wisely noted, there cannot be a perfect state without perfect individuals. Therefore, the renewal of the Nigerian value system requires a collective effort to foster virtues that promote the common good, unity, and national progress. Only through this shared commitment can Nigeria hope to build a stronger, more resilient society that is true to its cultural heritage while embracing positive change.

Suggestions

Given the critical importance of restoring and strengthening the Nigerian value system, a multifaceted approach is essential. The following suggestions outline practical steps to address the erosion of values and promote a more cohesive and ethical society:

1. **Strengthen Cultural Education:** Integrate comprehensive cultural education programs within the school curriculum to instill traditional Nigerian values in students from an early age. By emphasizing respect for heritage and cultural identity, younger generations can develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for the values that have long been the bedrock of Nigerian society.
2. **Promote Ethical Leadership:** Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping societal values. It is crucial to promote value-based leadership at all levels of government and within communities. Training programs for leaders should focus on integrity, accountability, and service to the community, ensuring that leaders embody and champion the core values that contribute to national unity and progress.
3. **Launch Nationwide Media Campaigns:** The media has a powerful influence on public perception and behavior. Launching comprehensive media campaigns that highlight positive Nigerian values while challenging the adoption of detrimental foreign influences can help reorient the national psyche. These campaigns should utilize various platforms, including social media, to reach a wide and diverse audience.
4. **Encourage Community Participation:** Communities are the foundation of societal values. Encouraging active participation in community-based initiatives that focus on value reorientation can foster a sense of collective responsibility. Such initiatives might include forums, workshops, and cultural events designed to engage citizens in meaningful discussions about values and ethics.
5. **Implement Value-Oriented Legislation:** To reinforce the importance of values within society, there must be supportive legislation and policy measures. This could include laws that regulate media content to prevent the spread of harmful influences, as well as policies that promote civic education, ethical behavior, and patriotism. Legislative action is essential to creating an environment where positive values are protected and promoted.
6. **Foster Collaborative Efforts:** The task of value reorientation requires the combined efforts of various stakeholders, including the government, educational institutions, religious bodies, and civil society organizations. By fostering collaboration among these groups, a unified and sustained effort can be made to restore and reinforce the values that are essential for the well-being and progress of Nigerian society.

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