

A CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF AYN RAND'S POLITICAL THOUGHT TO THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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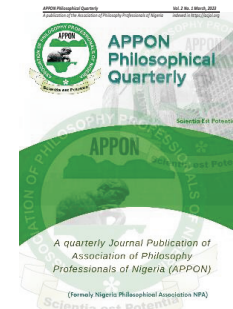
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Abstract

The problem of human nature brings to light the notion of human rights. The principle of human rights presupposes the principle of politics based on the objectivity of law. The objective of this paper is to ascertain why the discourse on man's rights is so complex and controversial among peoples in their democratic interaction; to understand why rights are so important to man in the democratic setting. This paper is aimed at establishing the philosophical importance of human rights in understanding the nature and concept of man; and to expose the subjectivity and relativity of rights in Ayn Rand's philosophy of rights. This paper adopts the analytical framework in dissecting Ayn Rand's philosophy of rights and its moral lessons for Nigeria. She argues that corruption and inflation as it currently affecting contemporary Nigerian society reflects on flagrant violation of the fundamental rights of Nigerians. For instance, the Buhari's administration has brought a lot of economic hardship to Nigerians. This paper, therefore, concludes that rights can only be consistently defined if we as humans adhere strictly to a definition that embraces all its necessary and sufficient criteria. The notion of rights originates from God Himself as the source of natural or private rights and it also originates from the Declaration of Universal Human Rights of 1948. The right of man is interwoven with the rights and duties of the state and the state is empowered by some form or element of force in order to guarantee social orderliness and social balance (stability). The notion of human rights and duties are enshrined by robust democratic values.

Keywords: Nigeria, Rights, Social Order, Democratic Values, Society

Introduction

According to Ayn Rand, in her work, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (1946), she argues that the problem we think we have in relation to the question to what is right solely lies in our inability to analyse the judgment of moral rights correctly. She posited that if we

have analysed the judgement of human rights, we must have solved the problem of rights. Human rights should reflect on the need for human flourishing. Considering her views in regard to the claim that human rights are inalienable there is no separate problem of rights from human nature. Rand considers two

sort of relation between man and democratic society. Rand thinks that the reason why some philosophers believe in a genuine problem of human rights is because of the failure of such philosophers to properly address the fundamental issues that involved in the problem of democracy in human society.

This paper is subdivided into six sections. Section one is the introductory remarks. Section two is anchored on Ayn Rand's notion of man's rights and its moral lessons for Nigerian society. Section three focuses on Ayn Rand's notion of the delusion of democracy and capitalism in contemporary Nigerian society. Section four discusses about political power and the problem of leadership structure in Nigeria from Ayn Rand's perspective. Section five reflects on the evaluation of Ayn Rand's philosophy of rights as it relates to contemporary Nigerian society while section six is anchored on the concluding considerations.

This paper, therefore, concludes that rights can only be consistently defined if we as humans adhere strictly to a definition that embraces all its necessary and sufficient criteria. The notion of rights originates from God Himself as the source of natural or private rights and it also originates from the Declaration of Universal Human Rights of 1948. The right of man is interwoven with the rights and duties of the state and the state is empowered by some form or element of force in order to guarantee social orderliness and social balance (stability). The notion of human rights and duties are enshrined by robust democratic values.

Rand's Concept of Man's Rights: A Moral Lesson for Nigeria

Philosophically, the normative concept of human rights can be defined within the ambits of democratic values. Democratic values are

not presumably determined simply by the socio-political existence of man or by the logic of legal morality alone but with reference to something further (as the human will or objective ideals of) the democratic state is concerned. Human rights are built on the normative assumption of everyone in a democratic interaction of rational persons.

Moreover, human rights are deeply rooted or based on the contractual agreement of reasonable persons. Human rights provide us with the reason to believe that rights are based on deliberate human actions and choices; and these rights are valuable, desirable or worthwhile from the epistemic viability of democratic setting. Democratic values are based on the normative possibility of reasonable agreement of human beings. Human rights are built on the ethico-epistemic reconstruction of socio-political order. It is, therefore, an ethico-epistemic truth that right is life. The notion of human rights drives home the creation of the problem of social order. Social order, according to philosophical explanation can be defined by the proclivity of conceived organization of rational persons. Social order has made man to understand that he must learn to submit to the assumed forces of the cosmic organization of human democratic society. Taking our minds back to the origin of rights and how it came to be sustained with social order is another elaborate explanation with brief throwback to the notion of rights. Our socio-political world requires the normative possibility of social order. As regards service to the democratic community, there is the need for the sustenance of social order required for human peaceful and harmonious coexistence. It is, however, quite unfortunate that, the contemporary Nigerian society has become disorganized due to the problem of corruption, social disorderliness, lawlessness and poor leadership structure.

The concept of human rights has great moral lessons for contemporary Nigerian society. The rights of many Nigerians have been violated and distorted due to poor economic system and policy somersault of the Federal government of Nigeria. One of the great lessons Nigeria can learn from Ayn Rand's Philosophy of Rights is the fundamental issues of laws as means for the public good in Nigerian society. Laws in Nigeria have become the instrument of the Nigerian political state to perpetuate the evils of corruption and poverty in Nigeria. Poverty in Nigeria has become a norm and this harrowing experience of poverty by many Nigerians has resulted in the negative implication of some levels of meaninglessness of human existence by many Nigerians. More than one hundred and thirty million (130, 000 000) Nigerians are currently living in abject poverty due to poor economic implementation of this present Buhari's administration and corruption has distorted our public good or public order in Nigerian society. Accordingly, Murkherjee's and Ramaswamy's theoretical position best explain the contemporary Nigerian society. For these authors:

Corruption...meant licence, violence, great inequities, in a nation's wealth and power, lack of peace and justice, disorderly ambition, and growth, lawlessness, dishonesty, and contempt for religion. It means the subordination of public values to the private sphere/ and when the public sphere was used for furthering private aims and interest. Usually, societies that were corrupt excluded the common people from playing an

active role in government and political life.¹

Furthermore, this is a total negation of Ayn Rand's philosophy of rights. It is, therefore, germane to note that, lack of inalienable or fundamental (natural) and civic rights of the Nigerian peoples have drastically affected the psyche of many Nigerian peoples. Today, the Nigerian masses are suffering from abject poverty due to the problem of bad laws that are detrimental to the well-being of the Nigerian peoples. Many Nigerians are currently starving due to economic hardship. This form of economic hardship reveals a kind of economic determinism. Laws as an instrument of reason have become an avenue for protecting the interest of the rich in contemporary Nigerian society. The average Nigerian man has been badly chattered by harsh laws and policy framework that tend to protect the rich especially Nigerian politicians. The lives of many Nigerian peoples have been demeaned due to violation of their fundamental human rights. The Nigerian judicial system has been constrained due to the evils of corruption. Corruption in Nigeria has become a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society. Corruption in Nigeria has negative implication to Nigeria's quest for national development. The quest for national development in Nigeria has become a shamble. For Ayn Rand, society is doomed if the laws that are supposed to protect the Nigerian masses has suddenly turned around to protect the interest of the rich most especially the Nigerian politicians against the Nigerian peoples. Law remains not just an instrument for public good but it reflects on the need for the normative principle of social

¹. Murkherjee., Subrata., and Ramaswamy., Sushila., *A History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx*, Second Edition, (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India Private Limited, 2011), pp.157-158

order. For Mark Ungar, the biggest hindrance to shoring up law and order is often the incapacity of the state agencies charged with this task.² Law and social order are coterminous. In other words, both concepts are interrelated or interwoven in nature. Both concepts required objectivity. Law, for instance, reflects on the instantiation of objective morality or legal morality. In other words, the Nigerian society ought to be deeply rooted in the need for legal morality or "reconstructive self- evaluation". Nigeria has become a very complex country due to poor implementation of government policies and the emergence of deeply rooted corrupt practices among the Nigerian political leaders. Inflation seems to be one of the setbacks to human rights in Nigeria. Uncontrolled inflation in Nigeria is actually a violation of the fundamental rights of Nigerians. In Nigeria in recent years, prices of foods and general goods and services are skyrocketing. There has been over 100 per cent hike in key stable food prices since the assumption of office by the Buhari's administration. Nigeria's inflation rate stood at a single digit of 9.01 per cent when Buhari assumed office in 2015. But the figure rose to 15.68 per cent in 2016 and increased to 16.52 per cent in 2017. The figure, however, dropped to 12.09 per cent in 2018 and slowed down to 11.40 per cent in 2019. By 2020, it rose to 12.2 per cent and closed in 2021 at 16.95 per cent, the highest in three years. The current inflation rate as of May 2022, according to the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Consumer Price Index (CPI) and Inflation Report, is 17.71 per cent.

However, all these statistical analyses already given above showcased that the inability of

any government to control the prices of goods and services has violated the fundamental rights of its peoples.

Ayn Rand's Delusion of Democracy and Capitalism in contemporary Nigerian Society

Democracy in contemporary Nigerian society has become a delusion. For Mark Ungar, the examination of the state's functioning also raises the need to reassess the extent to which democratic processes and principles are upheld. Accountability remains one of the cornerstones of democratic government. The accountability of state institutions to constitutional standards is a basic foundation in democracy's consolidation after authoritarianism.³ Moreover, the promotion of individual rights has been a fundamental problem in Nigeria. The emergence of international capitalistic system and lack of democratic commitment to the Nigerian peoples reveals the fact that the Nigerian peoples have been exploited by some greedy politicians for their individual egoistic calculation and selfish interest or aggrandizement. Exploitation in contemporary Nigerian society is real. However, the indispensable foundation of international capitalism and its relation to man's freedom, rights and its goals to our intellectual world has been problematic due to man's selfish human nature and corruption. For Murkherjee and Ramawasmy:

The individual human nature was wicked, selfish, and egoistic. He was fundamentally weak, ungrateful, exhibitionist, artificial, anxious to avoid danger and excessively desirous of gain. Lacking in honesty and

². Ungar., Mark., Democracy, Law and Order in Latin American Research Review, (January, 2009): 236

³. Ibid., 242

justice, he was ready to act in a manner that was detrimental to the democratic community. It was only under compulsion or when there was personal gain that an individual was ready to be good. Being essentially anti-social, anarchical, selfish, greedy and sensual, the individual would readily forgive the murder of his father, but never the seizure of his property.⁴

However, apart from the egoistic calculation of the individual human nature, he recognizes the importance of order provided by a stable, lawful political community consisting of public spirited and virtuous citizens. Such an arrangement fulfilled the human need of being admired, respected and remembered.⁵ Ayn Rand's conceptual clarification of man's rights and notion of capitalism reveals that capitalism has its positive implication to contemporary Nigerian society. Ayn Rand's theoretical reconstruction is deeply rooted in the philosophy of individualism and rational self-interest. Thomas Paine's theoretical position is quite apt to contemporary Nigerian society. He argues that the rights of men are so fundamental and remains one of the fundamentals or indicators of assessing any good government. One of the objectives of good government is by ensuring the common good of the Nigerian peoples in the state. For Dario Composta, the content of the common

good is this: the state itself conserves order and promotes progress.⁶ It is, therefore, germane that the Nigerian state ought to ensure the normative possibility of the common good and national security. The Nigerian peoples should have rights to security, property and freedom of speech and expression. For Mel Thompson, the rights that are set out in the declaration remain familiar: people are to be considered innocent until proven guilty; authority resides with the whole state and not with factions; people have the right to security, property and freedom of speech.⁷ It is, however, germane to assert that the rights and duties of the individual is deeply rooted in the state which derives from a strictly contractual association.⁸ But it is so unfortunate that the Nigerian political leaders have failed to recognize this strictly contractual association or reasonable agreement they have entered with the Nigerian peoples. For Friday Ndubuisi, man, in his search for peace, has put himself in a chain, by creating an artificial man called leviathan. Man, therefore, becomes a party to the creation of an artificial claim called civil laws. The liberty of a subject should not be enforced to the detriment of (the security of) the state.⁹ Thomas Hobbes' conception of the state makes the political power of the state too absolute and by neglecting the freedom of the individuals in the state. The power and authority of the state as exemplified by Thomas Hobbes has made the contemporary Nigerian state to relegate the fundamental

⁴. Murkherjee., Subrata., and Ramaswamy., Sushila., *A History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx*, p. 156

⁵. Ibid., p.157

⁶. Composta., Dario., *Moral Philosophy and Social Ethics*, (Rome: Urban University Press, 2013), p.162

⁷. Thomson., Mel., *Teach Yourself Political Philosophy*, (New York: McGraw Hill Companies, 2008), p.126

⁸. Chinonye., Bassey., *Political Theory*, (Lagos: Premum Publishers, 2007), p.222

⁹. Ndubuisi., Friday., *Man and State*, (Lagos: Logomedia Publications, 2008), pp.83-84

rights of the Nigerian peoples to the background. The problem of Nigerian society is not caused by democracy and capitalism because both concepts have their own good sides. Capitalism brings about fair competition. For Burr and Goldinger, capitalism is an economic system in which ideally the important decisions of what should be produced and how it should be distributed are determined by individuals making their own separate decisions of how to spend their time and money.¹⁰

Political Power and the Problem of Leadership Structure in Nigeria: A Randian Perspective

Nonetheless, the idea of rights is one of the central issues in our humanity. The meaningfulness of man's life and his quest for a comprehensive conception of the good will ever remain relevant as far as our humanity is concerned. Rights as it implies is concerned and applied to man's everyday social and political existence. The promotion of the rights of the Nigerian man reflects a clear indication of the need for a well-ordered and civilized society. In other words, any democratic society that violates the fundamental (natural) rights of man such as Nigerian society is concerned is said to be an uncivilized and a disorganized society. Our contemporary Nigerian society could be regarded as a disorganized society due to the flagrant disregards of human rights, human dignity and lack of political accountability. Accordingly, Mark Ungar asserts that accountability has a long-term effectiveness. Most definitions of accountability comprise two elements: the first is explanation, transparency and answerability (the power to

know what is happening and why), and the second is judgment and sanction (the ability to punish those who violate the laws).¹¹ Moreover, leadership requires accountability. Nigerian officials who violate the laws are not usually punished due to corruption and lack of democratic accountability by the Nigerian state. Today's contemporary Nigerian society has been characterized by kidnappings, armed robbery, banditry, killings, economic crises caused by inflation, corruption, poor economic policies and poor leadership structure. Rights in all its ramifications, is fundamental and inalienable for the Nigerian peoples. Rights should serve as a guide to us as Nigerian peoples. Right is identified with human nature. Rights are simply defined by moral ethics and ethical sensitivity of a people. It provides and protects us as Nigerians in our existential and socio-political existence. The source of man's natural rights is evolved by an epistemological illumination of politics as the form and substance of the common good. The philosophical explanation of Ayn Rand's notion of rights has great contemporary relevance to our Nigerian society. Man is defined by his cultural, social, politico-existential relationship with other human beings in their democratic interaction with others. The Randian tradition conceived rights as the conformity of man with his democratic community. The Randian perspective as it affects our contemporary Nigerian society shows the fundamental solutions as regards to some abominable or barbaric acts inflicted or affected by the culture of man's injustice to man. Ayn Rand's Philosophy of Rights is realistic and pragmatic. Pragmatism is a philosophy that stresses the intimate relationship between

¹⁰. Burr., John., and Goldinger., Milton., *Philosophy and Contemporary Issues*, Ninth Edition, (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India Private Limited, 2008), p.518

¹¹. Ungar., Mark., *Democracy, Law and Order*, p.243

thought and action. A true right is defined as one that will effectively guide action in the long run.¹² However, this paper showcases the need to understand the concept of rights from the Randian perspectives and its moral lessons to contemporary Nigerian society. Human rights are predicated on the principle of politics based on laws. For Osemwegie and Osawaru, freedom is one of the commonest terms used in everyday speech, subject to widely different interpretations. The real meaning of this term is so porous, that there is little interpretation that it seems to resist, but so complex, that it's easily misinterpreted.¹³ Freedom remains one of the lowest common denominators of individual rights.

Evaluation

Ayn Rand's philosophy of rights reveals the universal principle of rights and morality. The universal principle of right was basically an application of the universal principle of morality, as outlined in the Kantian categorical imperative; it is the domain of law, and thus to the arena of politics. The Kantian categorical imperative reflects on the objective morality of rights. Since it was morally necessary to realize external freedom of others; and that a person could be compelled by others to carry out his duty of entering civil society.¹⁴ Human rights are built on the facts that sovereignty resides with the peoples. For Murkherjee and Ramaswamy:

Sovereignty resided or originated
in the people which ought to

possess legislative power. Freedom implied inalienable rights of men. In a state of nature, the war of all against all may prevail, but in a state where men live under law it would be different. Men are free, equal and self-dependent derived from the idea of freedom. All persons are free; and they must be equal and the freedom of all persons was absolute and could only be universally and equally restricted by law. Each free person must also be self-dependent.¹⁵

Accordingly, Murkherjee and Ramaswamy further heightened their theoretical position that the idea of freedom entailed individual's autonomy, as an individual he had the power to exercise his will independently, unhindered by improper constraint. The individual thus became the starting point of his enquiry into politics.¹⁶ The utilitarian conception of politics should allow persons to attain happiness in their own way. Rand and Kant would agree that persons should not be used as means to an end. The sovereign state would have to make such laws and act in such a manner so that its subjects would not try to destroy the state and to overthrow the system of laws. For this purpose men must be treated as ends and not as means. Here lies a paradox of political freedom. Human rights are safeguarded by the objective dimension of law. Law was the

¹². Lawhead., Williams., *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, Second Edition, (USA: Wadsworth Group Limited, 2002), p.577.

¹³. Osemwegie., Wesley., and Osawaru., Christopher., *Freedom and Determinism in Peter Omonzejele, Anthony Asekhauno and George Ukagba (ed.), The Substance of Ethics and Morality*, (Benin City: Justice Jeco Printing & Publishing Global, 2017), p.94

¹⁴. Murkherjee.,Subrata., and Ramaswamy., Sushila., *A History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx*, (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India Private Limited, 2011), p.270.

¹⁵. Ibid., pp.270-271

¹⁶. Ibid., p.271

command of the sovereign. Individuals must be equal before the law that regulates their rights.¹⁷ However, every subject participated in all legislation as a fellow legislator and the ruler when legislating ought to respect the rights of his subjects. This solution ensured freedom and security for all in a democratic state. Political freedom, then, was independence from coercion by another will. If freedom was the first principal right of a citizen in a state, equality is the second.¹⁸ One fundamental issues with rights is that political equality is tantamount to an economic equality in any democratic interaction.

However, Rand and Kant shared many things in common in terms of the right to own property. According to Murkherjee and Ramaswamy, Kant granted the right of person to own property. For effective political participation economic independence was required. The third principal right, independence required that each citizen ought to have a right to participate in the government through the right of vote. The three rights of freedom, equality and self-determination show that in a properly organized state, men could find security and justice.¹⁹

Furthermore, man's fundamental human right was deeply rooted in the contractual agreement of reasonable persons. The social contract was purely based on reason; a collectively universal will. The social contract was a practical idea of reason; a state that ought to be established in accordance with the principle of rights...human personality was immensely valuable. Society is composed of

individuals with rational self-interest. For Murkherjee and Ramaswamy:

Society, itself, is composed of autonomous self- possessed individuals; each having inalienable rights including the important right to pursue happiness in one's own manner. Natural rights are innate or private rights while civil rights are acquired or public rights. Rand and Kant shared certain things in common in terms of the supremacy of the state. Kant regarded the state as developing and extending individual's natural rights. Right to freedom was the only one and true natural and innate right. Freedom presupposes the principle of equality. The principle of equality recognized that the laws of the state were applicable on all its members.²⁰

Human rights are grounded in the normative condition of law. Laws were viewed as those conditions under which the will of one individual could be united with that of other according to a general law of freedom. As far as human rights are concerned, self-determination was the principle of all morality.²¹ Human rights and self-determination as the principle of all morality reveals the political state as an arena of democratic order.²² Human rights are deeply rooted in politics. According to Albert Eistein, cited by Neuman Russell, politics needs

^{17.} Op. cit.,

^{18.} Ibid., p. 272

^{19.} Ibid., pp.271-272

^{20.} Ibid., pp.272-273

^{21.} Ibid., p.273

^{22.} Ibid., p.274

psychology. Politics is more difficult than physics. The paradox of mass politics is the gap between the expectation of an informed citizenry put forward by democratic theory and the discomfoting reality revealed by systematic survey interviewing.²³ For Francis Ogunmodede, a characteristic phenomenon of the modern nation-state worldwide is the awareness of human freedom and rights, be they civil, political, economic, religious, social, and cultural etc.²⁴ Human rights are not absolute but bespeaks of the possibility of liberty or freedom. Liberty or freedom is, on the one hand, the removal of the restrictions that obstruct the full development of the person.²⁵ Ayn Rand argues that in a situation whereby the law that supposed to protect you now turned around to protect the interest of the rich in society such a society is doomed.²⁶ The law has now become the instrument of the Nigerian democratic state to perpetually exploit or subjugate the Nigerian masses politically, economically, socially, culturally, psychologically and ideationally.

Conclusion

Rights can only be consistently defined if we as humans adhere strictly to a definition that embraces all its necessary and sufficient criteria. The notion of rights originates from God Himself as the source of natural or private rights and it also originates from the Declaration of Universal Human Rights of 1948. The right of man is interwoven with the

rights and duties of the state and the state is empowered by some form or element of force in order to guarantee social orderliness and social balance (stability). The notion of human rights and duties are enshrined by robust democratic values. Finally, Ayn Rand's philosophy of rights is a defense of individualism and rational self-interest of individuals in the political state.

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²³. Russell., Neuman., "The Paradox of Mass Politics, Knowledge and Opinion in the American Electorate" in Neil Kressel (ed.) *Political Psychology: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1993), pp.252-256

²⁴. Ogunmodede., Francis., *Governance and Human Rights in the Ancient Egyptian States* in Martin Asiegbu and Joseph Agbakoba (eds.), *Philosophy and Praxis in Africa*, A Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Nigerian Philosophy Association Held at the University of Benin, Benin May, 20-21, (Ibadan: Hope Publication, 2004), p.81

²⁵. Iroegbu., Pantaleon., *Kpim of Personality: Treatises on the Human Person*, (Owerri: Eustel Publications, 2000), p.120

²⁶. Rand., Ayn., *Atlas Shrugged*, (USA: The Random House, 1957), pp.22-23

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