

THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP: AN IGWEBUIKE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Auguste Comte and Karl Marx had regarded the philosophical enterprise as that which belongs to a stage in the development of the human mind; a stage that comes after religion and before science. This obviously affects the allocation of fundamental role to philosophy especially as it concerns contemporary issues like political leadership. In the face of these conceptions of philosophy, the question looming at the horizon of this paper is: has philosophy any value within the parameters of political leadership? This paper, therefore, began with an articulation of the concepts: philosophy and leadership. To guarantee a systematic approach, the paper adopted Bertrand Russell's theory on the value of philosophy, Plato's theory of the philosopher King and the Igwebuike theoretical framework around which this paper was weaved. The historical, systematic and thematic methods of inquiry were employed. The paper discovered that philosophy had, and still has a fundamental contribution to make in any sincere effort towards improving on the quality of political leadership.

Keywords: Political Leadership, Philosophy, Plato, Bertrand Russell

Introduction

Auguste Comte holds that the human mind develops through three stages, namely, the religious stage, the metaphysical stage and the scientific stage¹. He refers to the religious level as the primitive stage in the development of the human mind; the metaphysical stage as one where the human person tends to offer metaphysical explanations to reality; and the scientific stage as the glorious point where the mind offers scientific explanations to reality². By this, he relegated philosophy to the background of mere obscurantism. Karl Marx had maintained that civilization has moved from the theological, through the

¹ Kanu I. A., *A hermeneutic approach to African traditional religion, theology and philosophy*. Nigeria: Augustinian Publications, 2015; Kanu, I. A., *African philosophy: An ontologico-existential hermeneutic approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Nigeria: Augustinian Publications, 2015.

² Copleston, F., *A history of philosophy*. London: Search, 1975, p. 114

philosophical to the scientific stage of civilization³. This evolution of civilization, he compares to a movement from darkness to light.

In the 1960's, a group of Nigerians, filled with nationalist fervor, gathered in New York to decide on what will characterize the new state⁴. They argued that the new nation must be built on science and should embark on massive industrialization. During the 1960s, university students made a distinction between those in the sciences and those in the arts. Those in the sciences were regarded as future leaders while those in the arts were seen as 'talkative' and their discipline as 'watery arts'. While those in the former category were regarded as bourgeoisie progressives, those in the later were regarded as the bourgeoisie conservatives⁵. To the latter category belonged philosophy and philosophers, and there was, therefore, no room for them in the new state.

In the face of these conceptions of the philosophical enterprise, the question looming at the horizon of this paper is: has philosophy any value within the parameters of political leadership? As a 'talkative' discipline, as a 'watery arts', as that which belongs to the preliminary stage in the development of the human mind and personality, what can it contribute to political leadership in our contemporary times? To address these questions, this paper begins with an understanding of the concepts of philosophy and leadership. It relied on the theoretical frameworks of Bertrand Russell on the value of philosophy, Plato on the philosopher King and the *Igwebuike* theory of complementarity. The historical, systematic and thematic methods of inquiry were employed. This notwithstanding, what is philosophy? What is leadership?

Conceptual Framework: Philosophy and Leadership

Two major concepts will be clarified because of the central place that they occupy in this work. The concepts include: philosophy and leadership.

a. Philosophy

Philosophy has resisted every definitional attempt⁶. However, literally, the term "philosophy" in Greek means, "love of wisdom". It involves the pursuit of wisdom,

³ Feuer, L., Writings of Karl Marx and Engels. New York: Doubleday, 1959, p. 200

⁴ Kalu, O., Religion as a factor in national development. In E. C. Amucheazi (Ed.). Readings in Social Sciences: Issues in National Development (pp. 307-320). Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1980, p. 307

⁵ Kalu, O., Religion as a factor in national development. In E. C. Amucheazi (Ed.). Readings in Social Sciences: Issues in National Development (pp. 307-320). Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1980, p. 307

⁶ MacDonald, G., *Role of philosophy in national development*. Retrieved from June 24th

2019. <https://www.britannica.com>. p. 65; Hyginus C. E., Relevance of philosophy to politics and leadership in Nigeria. *Tropical Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 1. 43-56. 2019, p. 44.

knowledge and truth⁷. In a broad sense, philosophy is an activity people undertake when they seek to understand fundamental truths about themselves, the world in which they live, and their relationships to the world and to each other.

Philosophy typically consider questions that are, in some sense, broader and/or more fundamental than other inquirers' questions⁸. Philosophy involves the following⁹:

- ✧ questions of how one should live (ethics); what sorts of things exist and what are their essential natures (metaphysics); what counts as genuine knowledge (epistemology); and what are the correct principles of reasoning (logic);
- ✧ the nature, causes, or principles of reality, knowledge, or values, based on logical reasoning rather than empirical methods;
- ✧ the ultimate nature of existence;
- ✧ the rational and critical inquiry into basic principles.

Philosophy as a universal phenomenon (love of wisdom) and as an academic discipline are relevant to political leadership.

b. Leadership

Leadership simply defined is an act of leading a group of people or an organization. It involves a set of behaviours used by a person to help those led to align their collective direction, to execute strategic plans or achieve set goals, which can lead to measurable outcomes. From the perspectives of different authorities on leadership, it involves quality of the behaviour of the individual to guide people¹⁰; harnessing of differences to achieve organizational objectives¹¹ and influencing others to work willingly together on related tasks.¹²

⁷Berkeley, George. 2003 [1710]. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. Mineola, NY: Dover Philosophical Classics, p. 1710; Blackburn, Simon. 1999. *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy*. Oxford, UK and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, p. 1.

⁸Olivelle, Patrick (tr. and ed.). 1998. *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*. New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, p. 4.

⁹What is Philosophy? In THE BASICS OF PHILOSOPHY. https://www.philosophybasics.com/general_what.html, 2023

¹⁰Chester I. Bernard, cited in Truptimayee, R., What is leadership? <https://www.economicsdiscussion.net/management/leadership/what-is-leadership/32116>, 2022.

¹¹Keith Davis, cited in Truptimayee, R., What is leadership? <https://www.economicsdiscussion.net/management/leadership/what-is-leadership/32116>, 2022.

¹²George R. Terry, cited in Truptimayee, R., What is leadership? <https://www.economicsdiscussion.net/management/leadership/what-is-leadership/32116>, 2022.

The leader has the responsibility of setting goals and achieving the vision of the group, organizing and aligning people, taking initiatives, making policies, building people, connecting with diverse people, communicating, strategizing, motivating, innovating, etc.¹³.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that would be employed for the understanding of the role of philosophy in political leadership will be those of Bertrand Russell, Plato and Igwebuikwe philosophy.

a. Bertrand Russell: The Theory on the Value of Philosophy

Such perspectives as have been seen, which understands philosophy as that which belongs to the pre-scientific age in the development of the human mind, and, therefore, not worthy of consultation in modern discourse, made Bertrand Russell to write his work on *The Value of Philosophy*. To go beyond this kind of mindset which considers philosophy as a discipline which concerns herself with “useless trifling, hair-splitting distinctions, and controversies”¹⁴, he holds that there is need to first understand the value of philosophy, given that: “many men, under the influence of science or of practical affairs, are inclined to doubt whether philosophy is anything better than innocent but useless trifling, hair-splitting distinctions, and controversies on matters concerning which knowledge is impossible”¹⁵.

The understanding of life and the human reality is not limited to the parameters of science and practicalities. Russell describes the enterprise of philosophy as belonging to the realm of the mind.

If all men were well off, if poverty and disease had been reduced to their lowest possible point, there would still remain much to be done to produce a valuable society; and even in the existing world the goods of the mind are at least as important as the goods of the body. It is exclusively among the goods of the mind that the value of philosophy is to be found; and only those who are not indifferent to these goods can be persuaded that the study of philosophy is not a waste of time¹⁶.

¹³Editorial Team, Leadership roles. <https://in.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/leadership-roles>, 17th August 2022.

¹⁴B. Russell, *The Value of Philosophy*. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/sanjacinto-philosophy/chapter/bertrand-russell-the-value-of-philosophy>

¹⁵B. Russell, *The Value of Philosophy*. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/sanjacinto-philosophy/chapter/bertrand-russell-the-value-of-philosophy>

¹⁶B. Russell, *The Value of Philosophy*. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/sanjacinto-philosophy/chapter/bertrand-russell-the-value-of-philosophy>

He argues that the creation of a valuable society goes beyond the reduction of poverty and disease; there is the good of the mind, which philosophy provides.

The perspective of Bertrand Russell restores the dignity of philosophy and opens the aperture for the valuing philosophy among other disciplines, which is necessary for this discourse. The quality of leadership is dependent on the quality of the mind of the leader, and it is the good of the mind that philosophy provides for.

b. Plato: The Rationalist Theory of Philosopher King

Plato (428/7-348/7) would remain in the history of philosophy, as one of the greatest political thinkers that ever existed. This is evident in his *Republic, Book V*; he attempted to respond to questions bothering on justice and laid the foundations of Greek political theory. Plato gives a place of pre-eminence to the philosopher ruler whom he refers to as the Philosopher King. It is the Philosopher King who has the responsibility of promoting the interest of the entire community or the state, preserving the lives of his subjects and transforming them as human beings rather than acquiring power for self-prestige¹⁷.

Plato uses the ‘craft analogy’, drawing on the allegory of the ship as an example of a state led by men ignorant of political navigation, who: don’t understand that a true captain must pay attention to the seasons of the year, the sky, the stars, the winds, and all that pertains to his craft, if he’s really to be the ruler of a ship¹⁸.

Plato got the idea of the Philosopher King from Socrates his Master. When Glaucon inquired, Socrates defined the philosopher as one who loved wisdom¹⁹, had passion for knowledge, curious to learn and loved truth contrary to common men who are blind as they have “no true knowledge of reality, and no clear standard of perfection in their mind to which they can turn”²⁰. Discussing the problem of the state, which include injustice, corruption, etc., Socrates traces the problem to the fact that philosophers were not given the opportunity to rule. Thus, his idea of an ideal state was connected to his idea of the Philosopher King, whom he considered equipped with the knowledge, intellect and

¹⁷Shiya Shilin, *Platos Theory of Philosopher King*. STUDO.COM <https://www.studocu.com/in/document/university-of-delhi/classical-political-philosophy/platos-theory-of-philosopher-king/10573687>, 2021.

¹⁸Plato, *The Republic*. Trans. Lee, Desmond; Intro. Lane, Melissa. London; Penguin Classics, 2007, p. 204.

¹⁹Nichols, Mary P., “The Republic’s Two Alternatives: philosopher kings and Socrates”, *Political Theory*, vol. 12, no. 2, May 1984, Pages 254

²⁰Plato, *The Republic*. Trans. Lee, Desmond; Intro. Lane, Melissa. London; Penguin Classics, 2007, p. 205

training to govern²¹. He understood the philosopher as one who has a good character, calmness of spirit, public spirited, wise, sound mind, truthfulness, high-mindedness, discipline, courage, honest, forthright, and undaunted by death, devoid of emotional ties and economic considerations²².

In Plato, philosophy and politics were considered safe for each other. The reason for this association was the need to avoid tyranny and caprice, and also to ensure the common good of the people. This is achievable through the Philosopher King who alone can make laws that are in accordance with his vision of Good. The Idea of Good in Plato is the highest form of knowledge comparable to the sun, which illuminates all intelligence and knowable things²³. In fact, with the presence of the Philosopher King, he considers the state a divine institution that is worthy of emulation given that philosophers have “capacity to grasp the eternal and immutable”²⁴.

At the base of Plato’s proposal, is that leadership involves taking decisions and making judgments, and should therefore be left to experts²⁵, in this case, Philosophers.

c. Igwebuike Theory of Complementarity

Igwebuike is a unifying concept on African philosophy, especially, that aspect concerning the human person’s conception of the universe. It is an explanatory theory or principle that interprets the puzzle of our complex relationships and underpins the epistemological manifestations of the human person’s universe²⁶.

²¹Giulia Matassa, Plato’s Argument for Rule by Philosopher Kings. <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/04/17/should-philosophers-rule>

²²Shiya Shilin, *Platos Theory of Philosopher King*. STUDO.COM <https://www.studocu.com/in/document/university-of-delhi/classical-political-philosophy/platos-theory-of-philosopher-king/10573687>, 2021.

²³Shiya Shilin, *Platos Theory of Philosopher King*. STUDO.COM <https://www.studocu.com/in/document/university-of-delhi/classical-political-philosophy/platos-theory-of-philosopher-king/10573687>, 2021.

²⁴Plato, *The Republic*. Trans. Lee, Desmond; Intro. Lane, Melissa. London; Penguin Classics, 2007, p. 204.

²⁵Wolff Jonathan, *An introduction to political philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2006. p. 67

²⁶Kanu I. A., *Igwebuike: An Operative Condition Of African Philosophy, Religion And Culture- Towards a Thermodynamic Transformative Ontology*. An Inaugural Lecture Presented at Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State. Autograde: Abuja, p. 8; Kanu I. A., *Igwebuikeconomics: Towards an inclusive economy for economic development*. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 3. No. 6.2017, 113-140; Kanu I. A., Sources of Igwebuike philosophy. *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations*. 9. 1. 2017, pp. 1-23; Kanu, A. I., *Igwebuike as a trend in African philosophy*. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 2. 1. 2016, 97-101; Kanu, A. I., *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African philosophy of inclusive leadership*. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and*

Equipped with an integrated systematic framework, Igwebuike strives beyond all forms of particularities, peculiarities, paradoxes and contradictions and espouses the path of complementation/complementarity. In this way, showing how realities can relate to one another in a mutually harmonized non-absolutistic mode. Igwebuike therefore, explores methods and principles for the mediation, coalescing and comprehension of the different units of reality: ideal and real, universal and particular, progressive and conservative, necessary and contingent, transcendent and immanent, essential and inessential and other units of reality within the same framework. It treats all units, fragments or components of reality, no matter how minute as units and combinations, or missing links that are necessary for the conceptualization of reality as a whole²⁷.

Within the context of this discourse, the Igwebuike African indigenous theory helps us to understand that although philosophy and political leadership enjoy forms of peculiarities and particularities, they can relate with one another in a mutually harmonized none-absolutistic mode. It is in this sense that philosophy is considered a missing link of political leadership, and serves as that which completes or complements political leadership.

Philosophy and Political Leadership

This section of the paper identifies areas where philosophy can contribute towards quality political leadership. These areas include: problem solving capacity, critical thinking, communication, analysis, progress, evaluation.

a. Philosophy Builds Problem-Solving Capacity

Philosophy helps a leader to build the capacity to solve problems through the analysis of circumstances, propositions, concepts, personalities, questions and problems in such a manner that the mind is able to extract what is essential from the variations available and then articulate ideas in such a unifying fashion. This is in favour of the leader's general

Humanities. Vol. 3 No 7. 2016, pp. 165-183; Kanu, A. I., *Igwebuike* as a trend in African philosophy. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 2. 1. 2016, 97-101.

²⁷Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuike* as an Igbo-African hermeneutics of globalisation. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 2 No.1. 2016, pp. 61-66.; Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuike* as the consummate foundation of African Bioethical principles. *An African journal of Arts and Humanities* Vol.2 No1 June, 2016, pp.23-40; Kanu, I. A., *Igwebuike* as an expressive modality of being in African ontology. *Journal of Environmental and Construction Management*. 6. 3. 2016, pp.12-21; Kanu, I. A., African traditional folktales as an integrated classroom. *Sub-Saharan African Journal of Contemporary Education Research*. Vol.3 No. 6. 2016, pp. 107-118

cognitive ability; the ability to process and pull together disparate bits of information²⁸. Alexander Leivesley writes that “Philosophy... encourages us to think critically about the world”²⁹. Christine Tiefensee adds that: “These skills of rigorous analysis, sound argument and critical examination are the bread-and-butter of philosophy: no subject trains our ability for consistent, systematic thought better than philosophy”³⁰.

Philosophy originally emerged as a way to solve challenges in the form of big questions. According to TIS, “...because philosophy teaches techniques like observation, intuition, and logic, using critical thinking and effective research, you can break problems down to their essence and test solutions”³¹. All these flow from the critical examination of the grounds of our convictions, prejudices and beliefs.

b. Philosophy Builds Capacity for Critical Thinking:

The dedication of philosophers to exploring thought process helps the capacity for critical thinking:

When you adopt a philosophical mindset and learn to analyze statements and ideas with a critical eye, you become a better thinker. You’re able to tell when an idea is worth your time or if it’s relying on something that’s inherently weak and unsound³².

What philosophy contributes to the services provided by a political leader is that it helps the leader in his or her ability to imagine, debate, clarify, etc., the nature of the good life, to discover what really is true and good, and to distinguish it from what merely appears so³³.

²⁸ T. L. Friedman, How to Get a Job At Google. *New York Times*, February 22, 2014; *Forbes* on March 4, 2014; *Wall Street Journal* on March 31, 2014.

²⁹ A. Leivesley cited in Joanna Hughes, *Four Reasons why philosophy is as relevant as ever*. Keystone Bachelors Studies. <https://www.bachelorstudies.com/article/four-reasons-why-philosophy-is-as-relevant-as-ever>. November 16, 2018

³⁰ C. Tiefensee cited in Joanna Hughes, *Four Reasons why philosophy is as relevant as ever*. Keystone Bachelors Studies. <https://www.bachelorstudies.com/article/four-reasons-why-philosophy-is-as-relevant-as-ever>. November 16, 2018

³¹ TIS, *Ten reasons why philosophy is important*. <https://theimportantsite.com/10-reasons-why-philosophy-is-important/> 2 February 2022

³² TIS, *Ten reasons why philosophy is important*. <https://theimportantsite.com/10-reasons-why-philosophy-is-important/> 2 February 2022

³³ The Most Important Reason to study philosophy. <http://blogs.lmu.edu/philosophy/the-most-important-reason-to-study-philosophy/the-most-important-reason-to-study-philosophy>

c. Philosophy Builds Expressive Skills:

As a result of the philosopher's encounter with varieties of perspectives and arguments, and with great orators of various ages, philosophy helps to build his or her communication skills. Thus, philosophy "helps one to express what is distinctive of one's view; enhances one's ability to explain difficult materials; and helps to eliminate ambiguities and vagueness from one's writing and speech"³⁴.

Philosophy helps a political leader to build his or her persuasive powers through sound reasoning, critical thinking, well-constructed prose, maturity of judgment and an enlightened consciousness, which are an indispensable capacity in the political sphere³⁵.

d. Philosophy Helps in Formulating Ideas and Problems

A fundamental element needed in political leadership is the ability to formulate ideas and to put problems in manageable forms. A political leader who fails in this would have failed politically.

Philosophical thinking strongly emphasizes clear formulation of ideas and problems, selection of relevant data, and objective methods for assessing ideas and proposals. Philosophers regularly build on both the successes and failures of their predecessors³⁶.

The advantage that the philosopher has is that by his/her training, "... can get information and organize it... They can generate ideas on many different sorts of problems. They can formulate and solve problems. They can elicit hidden assumptions and articulate overlooked alternatives. They can summarize complicated materials without undue simplification... They can distinguish subtle differences without overlooking similarities"³⁷. This capacity to organize, interpret and use information is at the base of innovation and creativity, which are indispensable for political leadership.

e. Philosophy as a Catalyst for Change and Progress

A cursory glance reveals that major political, religious and cultural changes (French revolution 1789-1799, Haitian revolution 1791-1804, American revolution 1775-1783) in the history of humanity began as a result of the influence of one philosophical position or the other. They were mostly borne out of intellectual debates that have their roots in

³⁴ *Why study philosophy?* <https://www.unk.edu/academics/philosophy/why-study-philosophy.php>

³⁵ *Why study philosophy?* <https://www.unk.edu/academics/philosophy/why-study-philosophy.php>

³⁶ James Madison University, *Why study Philosophy?* <https://www.jmu.edu/philrel/why-study-philosophy/why-study-philosophy.shtml>

³⁷ James Madison University, *Why study Philosophy?* <https://www.jmu.edu/philrel/why-study-philosophy/why-study-philosophy.shtml>

philosophy. It consistently reminds the world to take a more profound look at what it does and how it does it and how better they could be done.

Philosophy turns the mind to the consideration of the most basic questions concerning reality, human existence, and God; it opens the philosopher to a world of possibilities for understanding the world and our place in it³⁸. Many nations are stagnated, and in need of a change and progress. In the absence of philosophy, the nation is denied of critical minds that can bring about this change and progress, which is the purpose for political leadership.

f. Philosophy and the Capacity for the Evaluation of Belief

A good number of the challenges that nations have had, politically, and otherwise, bother on religious belief. What philosophy does to a person of a particular faith is that it helps you to question your faith or what you believe. It helps a person to take a closer look at worldviews and thus have a better understanding of his or her religious worldview. This is the kind of evaluation that questions all forms of fundamentalism that destroy the political society. Bertrand Russell holds that:

The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the co-operation or consent of his deliberate reason... Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom³⁹.

Several problems have arisen within the political space because many leaders still possess minds that are not broad, critical, and still have their thoughts under the tyranny of customs and beliefs.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that philosophy is relevant for political leadership on several grounds:

- a. First, because philosophy is the love of wisdom, which is necessary for political leadership, and the management of the political society.

³⁸The Most Important Reason to study philosophy. <http://blogs.lmu.edu/philosophy/the-most-important-reason-to-study-philosophy/the-most-important-reason-to-study-philosophy>

³⁹B. Russell, *The Value of Philosophy*. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/sanjacinto-philosophy/chapter/bertrand-russell-the-value-of-philosophy>

- b. Second, there is a strong connection between philosophy and political leadership expressed in the parallel between a well-ordered mind and well-ordered society⁴⁰.
- c. Third, the philosopher has an equipmentality: with wisdom, knowledge, etc., he or she can push back against bad fortune and create a happy human society. This capacity gives value to political leadership.
- d. Fourth, leadership is not an innate reality; this understanding provides the basis for the interaction of philosophy and political leadership. While political leadership provides a *locus* or *locale* for the *habitus* of philosophy, philosophy adorns political leadership with excellence and other qualities for service.

If there is any place where philosophy has a greater relevance in the contemporary society, it is within the parameters of political leadership.

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