

2. MENTAL MAGNITUDE: AWOLOWO' S ANTIDOTE TO POLITICAL VICES¹

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Abstract

Social and Political Philosophy is a second-order study in philosophy. It is a broad area of study that involves the examination and evaluation of all aspect of social life. It reflects on the nature of human community and government, and the relations between the collective and the individual. The objective of this paper was to examine Awolowo's antidote to social and political vices using his notion of mental magnitude as a guide. Awolowo is of the view that the applicability of socialism in any social system is dependent on the mental attitude of the individuals of that society that is translatable into economic, political, moral and scientific change. The analytic method was used. The notion of mental magnitude is not just a contribution to knowledge but a major contribution to social and political philosophy because of the universality of its principles in tackling the many vices associated with politics. The paper agrees with Awolowo's notion of mental magnitude and advocates the adoption of this theory by societies where the political space is riddled with corruption and moral bankruptcy.

Keywords: Political philosophy; Mental magnitude; Political vices; Reason; Mental attitude

Introduction

A society according to John and Ishaya (83) is a group of people involved in persistent social interactions, or a large social group sharing the same geographical territory and subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. The World Book Dictionary defines society as "a group of persons joined together by a common purpose or by a common interest; an organized aggregate of individuals who follow a given way of life" (1613). Among the features of a society is that it is a highly structured human organization created for large scale communal existence that provides protection, continuity, security and identity for its members. For example, there is the Nigerian society, American society, Congolese society and so on. These larger societies are usually made up of smaller societies based on family, village, ethnic or racial descent.

The society is made up of different components that include: population, culture, material products, social organization, and social institutions. These components may either diminish or promote social and political change or growth. For example, if the population is large, the chances of territorial security will be enhanced. Also, more people will usually result in more ideas, thereby encouraging healthy competition amongst members of the society but a larger population will also generate more problems that will create a need for more norms, laws

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and sanctions. Norms and laws in any rational society is made via the instrumentality of politics.

The World Book Dictionary (1613) defines politics as the management of human affairs. Politics can also be defined as the process of making decisions that apply to all members of a society. It can also refer to an organized control over a human community, particularly a state. It also refers to the study or practice of the distribution of power and resources within a given community. Politics is about power. How to grab power and exercise it over others. Different methods are deployed in politics including promoting or forcing one's own political views on people, negotiating with other political subjects, making laws, and exercising force - including warfare against adversaries. Politics can be exercised on a wide range of social levels, such as clans and tribes of traditional societies, including modern local governments systems, companies and institutions up to sovereign states, to the international level.

Social and Political Philosophy

Social and political philosophy is a second-order studies in philosophy that examine the principles that establish and justify societies and its politics. It determines the right and responsibilities of a society in relation to its own members; of the members in relation to each other and to society as a whole, and of a society in relation to other societies. As a branch of philosophy, social and political philosophy employs the critical tool of philosophy to investigate the central questions of philosophy as it affects humans and societies. The questions of; how should we live together as human beings? What values should we adopt so that we may best fulfill our destinies as individuals and as social beings? These questions are among the many kinds of related questions examined by the social and political philosopher.

Social and Political Philosophy is normative in nature. This means that it prescribes the norm or principles by which societies should operate. It is therefore, related to ethics. While ethics focuses on moral values of an individual's actions, social and political philosophy focuses on values related to groups of individuals or societies such as a community, country or political organization. Here, it asks questions such as what makes a good society and what makes a government legitimate? Issues such as justice, fairness, human rights and the responsibilities of government to citizens and citizens to government are examined by the social and political philosopher.

It should however be noted that there is a marked difference between Social and Political Philosophy and Political Science. Social and Political Philosophy is normative because it seeks to establish principles and ethos that may justify a particular form of state and how a state ought to be founded and governed. It also shows how individuals can have certain inalienable rights in a state. Political Science on the other hand is descriptive and empirical. This means that political science describes the way politics is, in reality. It deals with hard facts that are based on empirical evidence. It studies the origin, development and operation of political systems. It lays emphasis on how political power is obtained and utilized. Because of the normative nature of social and political philosophy, the Political Scientist is usually encouraged to study social and political philosophy in order to make sense of the subject matter of politics and its application for the advancement of human existence.

Social and Political Philosophers

The list of social and political philosophers is inexhaustible but the hard fact is that each political philosopher has the passion to devise a political theory that will bring about societies that are conducive for human existence. Among the notable ones are Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacque Rousseau, Niccolò Machiavelli, John Stuart Mill,

Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and so on. The focus of this paper however, shall be the comparative consideration of the political philosophies of Obafemi Awolowo against that of Plato, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke. Obafemi Awolowo, like Plato, worked to develop the human mind through education because only through education, as agreed by all political philosophers, can leaders be trained and nurtured to be rational enough to understand what is best for their people. For Awolowo, the best way to solve societal problems is to reconfigure the mental attitude of the people that make up the society through education.

Plato

Plato's social and political philosophy is contained in two of his major works – *The Republic* and *The Laws*. Plato believes that the state is a natural institution because it reflects the structure of human nature. In *The Republic*, Plato asserts that societies have class structure that is divided into three – the appetite, the spirit and the reason. These three structures are in line with the structure of the human soul.

1. The appetitive part – This consists of the productive part of the structure. It is made up of workers such as labourers, carpenters, plumbers, masons, merchants, farmers, ranchers and so on. They work for the sustenance of the society.
2. The spirit part – This consists of the protective part of the structure. They are the warriors or guardians of the society. They include the adventurous, strong and brave members of a society. They are mostly found in the armed forces of the society. They protect the society from internal and external aggression.
3. The reason part – This consists of the rational part of the structure. It is made up of the rulers of a society or what Plato calls the philosopher kings. They are the intelligent, rational and self-controlled members of a society. These are the ones most suited for leadership positions and to make decisions for a society (Stumpf, 63)

Plato is of the view that the ruler of the state should be one who has the peculiar abilities to fulfill that function. For him, the ruler should be one who has been fully educated, one that understands the difference between the visible world and the intelligible world, between the realm of opinion and the realm of knowledge, between appearance and reality; these are the qualities of the philosopher king. According to Plato, until philosophers become kings, human existence will continue to be in jeopardy. Plato's analysis of the structure of society and its philosopher king seem to assume and expect too much from those that occupy or seek to occupy political positions in the society. He assumes that so long as each person sticks to his/her naturally assigned role, then the society will grow perfectly since no one will deviate from their natural role. But this is not the case in political engineering where people tend to deviate from their supposedly natural roles to roles they were not fitted by nature to occupy. These deviations are the major causes of negative vices in the society.

Thomas Hobbes

Thomas Hobbes is considered to be one of the founders of modern political philosophy. He is famous for his work – *The Leviathan* published in 1652. This is the book in which he articulated his political philosophy and expounded the formulation of his own version of the social contract theory. A social contract is an agreement between the people and their government about what each side should provide for the other, especially security and welfare by the government and obedience to authority by the people. Hobbes begins by describing what life would be like without a government – a condition he calls 'the state of nature' (Stumpf 231).

In the state of nature everyone will have a right or license to everything in the world. Anyone can get anything he desires irrespective of who owns it. This kind of life would lead to what Hobbes calls “war of all against all”. In such a condition according to him, “there would be no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently, no culture of the earth; no navigation ... no arts; no letters; no society; and worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. In such states, there is fear of sudden death and lack of things necessary for existence and the ability to obtain them” (Stumpf 231). So, to avoid this kind of life, people agreed to enter into a social contract and to establish a civil society. They surrendered some of their rights to a sovereign authority for the sake of protection. Power exercised by this sovereign cannot be resisted by any single individual because the sovereign’s power is derived from the collectivity of the people. The individuals are thus the authors of any decision taken by the Sovereign. In Hobbes’ civil society, there is no separation of powers; the Sovereign must control civil, military, judicial and ecclesiastical powers. Many authors and political theorists disagreed with Hobbes’ idea of the state of nature including John Locke and Obafemi Awolowo.

John Locke

In the Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy, Tuckness Alex asserts that in his work, *Two Treatise of Government*, John Locke defended the claim that men are by nature free and equal against claims that God had made all people naturally subject to a monarch. He argued that people have rights, such as the right to life, liberty and property. For him these rights have a foundation independent of the laws of any particular society. Like Hobbes, John Locke began his political theory with a description of the state of nature. But according to Stumpf, Locke’s description is different from that of Hobbes. For Locke, the state of nature is not the same as Hobbes’ ‘war of all against all’. Rather, the state of nature is ‘a state where men live together according to reason, without a common superior on earth with authority to judge between them’. From this definition, it can be deduced that the state of nature is different from a political society where a legitimate government exist, and from a state of war, where men fail to abide by the laws of reason. Locke assumed that even in the state of nature people were able to know the moral law. He said that reason, which for him is the moral law, teaches all mankind who will consult it, that being all equal and independent; no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions. The moral law according to him is the positive recognition of each person’s value by virtue of his or her status as a creature of God (Stumpf 272). From Locke’s perspective, reason should be the guiding principle through which everyone in a given society should act. The application of reason in the consideration of every issue will greatly diminish vices that escalate into disillusionment, loneliness, nastiness and ‘war of all against all’. Reasoning is a mental activity that involves the action of thinking about something in a logical and sensible way. It is the process of thinking about something in order to make a decision that will be beneficial to one and acceptable to other people. Obafemi Awolowo is an advocate for the application of reasoning in politics. He decries the vices that poor reasoning is unleashing in developed and especially, developing countries in the Global South.

Obafemi Awolowo

Obafemi Awolowo was among the African nationalists that fought against European colonization of African nations in the 19th and 20th centuries. A Nigerian from the Western region of the country, Awolowo was politically conscious and active that he won election in 1954 to lead his region as Premier before Nigeria’s independence in October 1960. As noted by Ishaya (1) in *The Dictionary of African Philosophy*, “as the Premier of the Western region,

Awolowo improved the education, social services and agricultural practices of the region". Awolowo was not just a nationalist and politician; he was equally engaged in philosophical and intellectual activism. He published several works including the 'People's Republic' where he espoused his philosophies including his notion of man, the society and mental magnitude.

Awolowo believes that a proper knowledge of man and the competent application of the principles which must govern his physical nature, mental development and spiritual self-realization are indispensable to any efforts at promoting and guaranteeing his general well-being. Awolowo disagreed with Hobbes' social contract theory that posits that man began his journey in the society from the state of nature which was the pre-social era where men pursued only selfish interests. For Hobbes, in this state, men were brutal, nasty and solitary and life was short. But for Awolowo, man's ignorance and condition may have been nasty, brutish and short, but definitely not solitary. This is because according to him, man has always been a social being that has always been a member of the human social family (Makinde 78). Like Plato, Awolowo is a dualist who believes that man is made up of mind and body – the spiritual and the physical (Awolowo, in Ogoma 161). And for him, all elements in the physical and spiritual realms are assumed to exist mainly for the good of man. But it will take the development of man's mental capacity to enjoy this goodness.

Awolowo's Notion of Mental Magnitude

Mental magnitude is a philosophical theory of mind and body developed by Awolowo with the supposition that the mental is superior to the physical elements of a person and therefore, should take control over the emotions, desires and actions of man. In other words, mental magnitude rests on the premise that the mental, that is, reasoning is superior to the physical elements of a person. It is hinged on the notion that reflective thinking is superior to emotional reflexes. As a philosophy, mental magnitude lays emphasis on man as a potential genius and the instrument of social, economic, political, and scientific change. To actualize his potentials, man must cultivate his mental faculty if he must be an instrument of change. Among the necessary factors in cultivating the mental faculty is in training the mind through education. Education for Awolowo is a tool for development of both man and society. In other words, education is necessary for the development of mental magnitude and for human existence.

Awolowo believes that any society or a given system of government in whatever country has one purpose: the attainment of egalitarianism by which practical meaning is given to human existence, individually or collectively. Thus, the purpose of effective governance and a just society must be the aspiration of those who desire to lead and they in turn must be ruled by reason rather than appetite. They must be mentally equipped because a leader without a sound and disciplined mind cannot properly pilot the ship of state to success. The point is that for a leader to make a success of the difficult job of leading a state, he/she "should possess comprehensive mental magnitude and spiritual depth" (Awolowo 158). In other words, a leader who possesses mental magnitude and spiritual depth is one capable of self-control; this is because Awolowo believes that for one to be master of others, one must first be a master of him / herself. In his words:

Men of affairs and wisdom everywhere are unanimous in the view that only those who are masters of themselves become masters of others. Indeed, Aristotle has said it with the authority of one of the greatest and wisest men that ever lived; let him that would move the world, first move himself (158).

For Makinde (175) the cultivation of mental magnitude means for Awolowo the cultivation of self-discipline of the highest order. Self-discipline is the tool by which mental magnitude exhibits itself by way of curbing greed, bribery, corruption, all appetitive desires and negative

emotions. Awolowo believes that it is a settled opinion that the tyranny of the flesh is the worst of all tyrannies known to man and that only those that have subdued this tyranny can successfully lead others out of the bondage of ignorance, poverty and disease. According to Awolowo: “the regime of mental magnitude is cultivated when we are sexually continent, abstemious in food, abstain from alcoholic beverage and tobacco and completely vanquish the emotion of greed and fear” (158).

The point to note here is that Awolowo’s idea of mental magnitude significantly aligns with Plato’s class structure of the society that consists of the appetitive, the spirited and the rational parts. While Plato sees these divisions as working towards the growth of society in general, with each structure maintaining its area of comparative advantage, Awolowo does not see the need for a division amongst these classes, rather the classes are one and the same if and only if there is that deliberate effort to cultivate what nature has already made available in every soul through reason. Mental magnitude is therefore the ability of people to cultivate and develop their ability to know and to do the right things always; not for gain, but because it is the right thing to do at that particular point in time and space in order to be free from self-guilt or societal opprobrium.

In the ‘People’s Republic’, Awolowo further makes the point that under the regime of mental magnitude, man is free from negative emotions of anger, hate, fear, envy or jealousy, selfishness or greed, indulgence in the wrong types of food and drinks and in ostentatious consumption and excessive or immoral craving for sex. For him, in this regime, one conquers what Kant calls ‘the tyranny of the flesh’ and become free (230). The tyranny of the flesh was the problem with Hobbes’ notion of the state of nature where selfishness, hate and other negative vices were the order of the day; John Locke had however disagreed with Hobbes’ positing rather that the state of nature was a state where reason prevailed. Mental magnitude is the victory of Locke’s reason over Hobbes’ negative vices and Kant’s tyranny of the flesh.

Mental Magnitude as Antidote to Political Vices

It was Lord Acton in a letter to Bishop Mandell in 1887 that averred that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. According to Lord Acton:

Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority.

Political power comes with an influence and effect on the bearer that in most cases turn former democrats to tyrants; blinds the eyes to natural cause of justice and becomes a threat to ordinary citizens. Because of its many vices, politics is often seen as a dirty game that should be left in the hands of those ready to play dirty. But should this be the case? The point is that politics that is exercised without reason will definitely result in vices that will be detrimental to the collective good of a society and also to the individual. For example, Chinua Achebe in his *Trouble with Nigeria* averred that leadership is responsible for the many ills plaguing Nigeria. According to him; “The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmark of leadership” (1). Following the same line of reasoning, Ozumba, Okafor, and Udom, argues that “the problem with Nigeria is the lack of learned and enlightened men at the helm of affairs” (22). For them, “Nigeria has suffered a great set back due to the ignorance of our leaders in the game of politics”. The deduction from Achebe and Ozumba et al is that the mental magnitude of political leadership in Nigeria is low and therefore has brought about the underdevelopment bedeviling the Nigerian nation. It should however be acknowledged that ignorance comes from

lack of available knowledge or the deliberate refusal to be schooled in one's ignorance. Are Nigerian leaders refusing to be mentally enlightened?

In his bid to enlighten the Athenian society of his time, Socrates came up with the notion that the 'unexamined life is not worth living' and 'man know thy self'. The concern of Socrates was to arouse the mental activity of his society to critically examine issues before making political or personal decisions. This is because according to Ibrahim and Ishaya, "the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make or build depends precisely on the quality of our thinking. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and in quality of life" (62). Mental magnitude is Awolowo's antidote to the myriad of vices such as corruption, fraud, embezzlement, injustice and lies associated with politics in developing societies. Mental magnitude encourages political leaders to always make deliberate effort to subject their actions and words to critical scrutiny before making decisions that are supposed to be for the good of everyone in the society.

Conclusion

Social and political philosophy is a broad area of study that involves the examination and evaluation of all aspect of social life; we have however limited our analysis in this paper to the evaluation of aspects of Plato, Hobbes, and Locke's political philosophy in contradistinction to the contributions of Obafemi Awolowo and his notion of mental magnitude to social and political philosophy. The paper agrees with Awolowo that societies develops when reason is elevated above emotion. Thus, the notion of mental magnitude is not just a contribution to knowledge but a major contribution to social and political philosophy because of the universality of its principles. The paper aligns with the doctrines of mental magnitude and recommends its adoption by societies where the political space is riddled with corruption, fraud, political embezzlement of public fund and moral bankruptcy.

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