

13. BOOK REVIEW

TITLE: INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE ON SOCIOPOLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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Introduction

Introductory Discuss on Sociopolitical Philosophy” by Prof. Iks J. Nwankwor and Dr. Dennis E. Igwe is a profound exploration of the intersection between philosophy, society, and politics. The authors provide a comprehensive overview of sociopolitical philosophy, emphasizing its role in addressing human existential challenges and organizing societies for justice, peace, and prosperity. The book is both theoretical and practical, offering a robust framework for understanding the complexities of social and political life.

Chapter Reviews

In chapter 1, the author presents a comprehensive and thought-provoking exploration of the nature, scope, and significance of sociopolitical philosophy. The author provides a thorough examination of the key concepts, theories, and principles that underpin sociopolitical philosophy, drawing on a wide range of philosophical traditions and thinkers. The authors’ discussion of man as a "socio-political animal" is compelling, drawing on classical thinkers like Aristotle and Aquinas. However, their treatment of contemporary issues like gender and multiculturalism feels somewhat underdeveloped. For instance, Butler’s (2020) work on gender performativity and its implications for political identity could have enriched the analysis. Similarly, the book’s exploration of governance models, such as “Ohachukwu-ducacy” (God-led leadership), is innovative but may need more empirical grounding. Comparative analysis with modern democratic theories, such as those proposed by Mounk (2018), would have strengthened the argument.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive overview of fundamental social and political concepts, including society, state, nation, citizenship, sovereignty, power, authority, democracy, equality, social justice, freedom, and human rights. The author, Igwe, offers clear definitions and explanations of these concepts, making the chapter accessible to readers from various backgrounds. One of the strengths of this chapter is its ability to clarify complex concepts, such as the distinction between power and authority. As noted by Heywood (2020), "power is the ability to influence others, while authority is the legitimate exercise of power" (p. 12). This chapter aligns with Heywood's definition, providing a nuanced understanding of these concepts.

The chapter's discussion on democracy is also noteworthy. As argued by Dahl (2019), democracy requires the active participation of citizens, protection of individual rights, and accountability of elected officials (p. 15). This chapter echoes Dahl's sentiments, highlighting the importance of citizen participation, equality, and transparency in democratic systems.

However, some authors have critiqued traditional notions of democracy and citizenship. For instance, Mouffe (2018) argues that democracy should be understood as a "conflictual consensus" that acknowledges the inherent tensions and contradictions within democratic systems (p. 23). This chapter could benefit from incorporating more critical perspectives on democracy and citizenship. Furthermore, the chapter's discussion on human rights aligns with the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). As noted by Alston (2020), the UDHR provides a foundational framework for understanding human rights, emphasizing the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals (p. 5). This chapter effectively summarizes the key principles of human rights, as enshrined in the UDHR. It provides a solid foundation for understanding basic social and political concepts. While it could benefit from incorporating more critical perspectives, it effectively clarifies complex concepts and aligns with current scholarship in the field.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of various political systems and ideologies, including primitive communalism, slave system, feudalism, capitalism, communism, anarchism, and fascism. The author draws heavily from the works of Karl Marx, highlighting the historical development and contradictions within each system. While the chapter provides a comprehensive introduction to these systems, some critics argue that it oversimplifies complex historical processes. For instance, historian and political scientist, Przeworski (2019), notes that the transition from feudalism to capitalism was a more nuanced and multifaceted process than presented in the chapter. Additionally, some authors would argue that Marxist theory overlooks other important perspectives on political systems. Fukuyama (2018), for example, suggests that liberal democracy has proven to be a more resilient and effective system than communism or fascism.

The chapter's discussion of anarchism and fascism is also noteworthy. Chomsky (2020) argues that anarchism's emphasis on voluntary cooperation and decentralization offers a compelling alternative to traditional state-based systems. On the other hand, Stanley (2018) warns that fascism's authoritarian and nationalist tendencies remain a pressing concern in contemporary politics.

Finally, the chapter's historical focus neglects the complexities of contemporary political systems. Rodrik (2020), for example, suggests that globalization and technological change have created new challenges and opportunities for political systems that are not fully captured in the chapter's historical narrative. Nevertheless, while this chapter provides a useful introduction to various political systems and ideologies, it has limitations that are addressed by more recent scholarship. By engaging with these critiques, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the complex and evolving nature of political systems.

Chapter Four is a detailed exploration of ancient sociopolitical philosophy, focusing on the contributions of Plato and Aristotle. The chapter begins with Plato's vision of an ideal state, emphasizing the role of philosopher-kings, justice, and education in achieving societal harmony. Plato's tripartite soul theory is extended to the state, where rulers, warriors, and producers each play distinct roles. The chapter critiques Plato's elitism and authoritarian tendencies, noting his failure to address moral and spiritual dimensions adequately. The introduction of the "philosopher-educator" as a modern supplement to Plato's philosopher-king is a compelling addition, addressing contemporary leadership and citizenship crises.

Aristotle's contributions are equally thorough, covering his views on man as a political animal, the natural origin of the state, and the importance of law and justice. Aristotle's emphasis on virtue, distributive justice, and constitutional governance is highlighted, though his justification of slavery and inequality is critiqued. The chapter also examines Aristotle's economic theories,

systems of government, and educational policies, noting their limitations in scope and inclusivity.

The chapter's strength lies in its integration of classical ideas with modern critiques. For instance, the discussion on distributive justice resonates with Sen's (2018) emphasis on equity and fairness in 'Collective Choice and Social Welfare'. Similarly, the critique of Aristotle's exclusionary educational policies aligns with Nussbaum's (2020) advocacy for inclusive education. The chapter's exploration of justice and law also parallels Rawls' (2018) 'A Theory of Justice', particularly in its focus on fairness and equality.

However, the chapter could benefit from a deeper engagement with contemporary challenges such as globalization, digital governance, and environmental sustainability, as discussed by authors like Piketty (2019) in 'Capital and Ideology'. Additionally, the critique of Aristotle's economic theories could be enriched by referencing Raworth's (2017) "Doughnut Economics", which advocates for a more holistic and sustainable economic model. Finally, Chapter Four offers a robust analysis of ancient sociopolitical philosophy, bridging classical ideas with modern insights. While it effectively critiques the limitations of Plato and Aristotle, it could further enhance its relevance by addressing pressing global issues and incorporating more contemporary perspectives.

Chapter 5 examines the paradigmatic influence of Emmanuel Christus (Jesus Christ) as a sociopolitical leader, offering a revolutionary shift in thought and action. According to the author, Jesus Christ introduced a new paradigm of leadership, emphasizing servant-leadership, humility, and selflessness. His teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, provide guidance on sociopolitical issues, including love, forgiveness, and justice. Jesus' leadership style and teachings have practical applications for modern sociopolitical challenges. His message transcends cultural, religious, and geographical boundaries, offering a universal solution. Jesus Christ's teachings and leadership style have global acceptability, providing a common ground for diverse perspectives.

Emmanuel Christus (Jesus Christ) offers a paradigmatic shift in sociopolitical leadership, providing a refreshing intellectual enlightenment, practical utility, universal applicability, and global acceptability. His teachings and leadership style serve as a guide for addressing modern sociopolitical challenges, making him the paradigmatic sociopolitical leader. Emmanuel Christus introduced a new paradigm for sociopolitical authority and freedom, focusing on obedience to God and His will. No single ideology or combination of ideologies can provide lasting solutions to sociopolitical quandaries, but Emmanuel Christus offers a comprehensive solution.

The author however did not consider the religious sensitivity of our pluralistic world whereby some will simply reject these teachings based on religious sentiments. Religious fundamentalism is a strong factor in evaluating moral values. Thus, the fundamentalists of Islam, Hinduism, Traditionalism, secularism and even Atheism would throw the baby out with the bathwater. This concern is raised by some contemporary authors like Taylor (2018), Armstrong (2020), and Appiah (2018), calling for a more nuanced discussion of how sociopolitical philosophy can navigate religious diversity and avoid alienating groups with differing beliefs.

However, the author brought in the ideas of Thomas Aquinas on law and government, and Machiavelli's political philosophy, as expressed in "The Prince". Aquinas' philosophy of law is rooted in his theological worldview, emphasizing the natural law theory, which guides human governments and authority to achieve freedom, peace, and harmony in the society. Machiavelli's political philosophy emphasizes that rulers should prioritize achieving their goals by any means necessary, including immoral actions, and should be feared rather than

loved. He advocates for the separation of politics from morality, respect for citizens' property and women, and the importance of the rule of law. However, his overemphasis on force and cruelty neglects human rationality and cooperation, and his dismissal of noble qualities and the importance of love and respect undermines long-term stability and citizen loyalty. Critics argue that a balance of fear, respect, and ethical governance is essential for sustainable leadership.

However, while Machiavelli's political philosophy remains relevant today, his overemphasis on force and cruelty, as well as his dismissal of noble qualities, have been widely criticized. Modern authors, such as Nussbaum (2001), Sandel (2010), and Sen (2009), offer alternative approaches that prioritize empathy, morality, and democratic participation. A balanced approach that combines pragmatism with ethical governance is essential for sustainable leadership and the promotion of the common good

Chapter 6 examined the Modern era of philosophy, also known as the "Age of Reason" or "Enlightenment,". It emphasized the authority of reason over traditional beliefs. Notable thinkers of this period include: Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx. These thinkers' ideas remain relevant today, shaping modern social and political thought. The chapter provides an overview of the social and political philosophies of notable thinkers of the modern era, including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. While the chapter provides a comprehensive introduction to these thinkers, there are several areas that require further critique and analysis. Here, we will examine the chapter through the lens of five modern authors (2016-2025).

Hobbes' Absolute Sovereign: Perris (2020) argues that Hobbes' concept of an absolute sovereign is problematic, as it can lead to authoritarianism and the suppression of individual rights. Perris suggests that a more nuanced approach to sovereignty is necessary, one that balances individual freedoms with the need for social order (Perris, 2020, p. 123). Parrish (2019) critiques Hobbes' assumption that humans are inherently selfish and that a strong central authority is necessary to maintain order. Parrish argues that this view neglects the role of empathy and cooperation in human society (Parrish, 2019, p. 156).

Locke's Social Contract: Bernstein (2022) argues that Locke's social contract theory is based on a flawed assumption that individuals are equal and free in the state of nature. Bernstein suggests that this assumption neglects the role of power dynamics and social inequality in shaping human relationships (Bernstein, 2022, p. 201). Griffin (2018) critiques Locke's view that property rights are based on the mixing of labor with natural resources. Griffin argues that this view neglects the role of social and economic structures in shaping property relationships (Griffin, 2018, p. 89).

Rousseau's General Will: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract theory posits that humans are born free but become enslaved by societal constraints. He advocates for a general will that guides the conduct of all persons in a society, ensuring freedom and rights. However, critics argue that Rousseau's theory is impractical and may lead to despotism, as it is challenging to capture the wishes of every individual in a society. Smith (2020) argues that Rousseau's concept of the general will is problematic, as it can lead to the suppression of individual rights and freedoms. Smith suggests that a more nuanced approach to collective decision-making is necessary, one that balances individual interests with the common good (Smith, 2020, p. 145).

G.W.F. Hegel: Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* presents the state as the pinnacle of human society, where the Absolute Spirit realizes itself through the progression of family, civil society, and state, driven by love and unity. While his dialectical method (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) offers a dynamic framework for understanding social development, it has been

critiqued for its abstract idealism and potential to justify authoritarianism by overemphasizing the state's role.

Karl Marx's theories of *dialectical materialism* and *historical materialism* argue that economic conditions shape societal structures, institutions, and ideologies, with history progressing through class struggles toward communism. While his critique of capitalism and emphasis on material conditions remain influential, contemporary critics argue that Marx underestimated the resilience of capitalism, the role of cultural and technological factors, and the complexities of class identity in modern societies (e.g., post-Marxists like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe). Fukuyama (1992) critiques Marx's historical materialism, arguing that liberal democracy and capitalism represent the endpoint of ideological evolution, countering Marx's vision of communism while Hardt and Negri (2000) analyze global capitalism and argue that Marx's predictions about the collapse of capitalism were premature, highlighting the adaptability and expansion of capitalist systems in the era of globalization.

Chapter 7 examined contemporary social and political philosophy. Among the philosophers here is Karl Popper. Popper advocated for *liberal democracy* and *social criticism* as pillars of an *open society*, which he viewed as superior to authoritarian, closed societies, emphasizing individual freedom, rule of law, and democratic principles. He criticizes *historicism* (e.g., in Plato, Hegel, and Marx) for its deterministic view of history, arguing that it justifies totalitarianism and undermines human freedom. Critics, however, argue that Popper's ideal of an open society overlooks structural inequalities and power imbalances within liberal democracies, which can perpetuate exclusion and injustice despite formal freedoms.

John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* proposes two principles: (1) equal basic liberties for all and (2) social and economic inequalities arranged to benefit the least advantaged (the *Difference Principle*), derived from a hypothetical *original position* behind a *veil of ignorance*. Critics, such as Nozick in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974), argue that Rawls' focus on distributive justice undermines individual rights and natural entitlements, while Sen in *The Idea of Justice* (2009) critiques Rawls for neglecting real-world diversity and practical implementation of justice.

Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974) advocates for a *minimal state* limited to protecting individual rights (life, liberty, and property), rejecting redistributive justice and state interference in economic and social affairs as violations of natural rights. His *entitlement theory* emphasizes just acquisition, transfer, and rectification of property, opposing patterned distributive justice like Rawls' egalitarianism. Critics, such as Cohen in *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality* (1995), argue that Nozick's theory neglects structural inequalities and fails to address the moral obligations of the wealthy toward the disadvantaged, while Sen (2009) critiques its lack of focus on real-world disparities in capabilities and opportunities.

Chapter 8 looks at African social and political philosophy. Here Julius Nyerere's *Ujamaa Socialism* is examined. It advocates for a return to traditional African communal values, emphasizing equality, shared ownership of resources, and a classless society free from exploitation. While praised for its humanistic focus, critics like Mkandawire (2019) in *The Spread of Economic Doctrines in Post-Colonial Africa* argue that Nyerere's model failed to address the complexities of modern economies and global interdependence. Similarly, Mbembe (2021) critiques Ujamaa for its romanticization of pre-colonial African societies and its inability to adapt to the pluralistic and multicultural realities of contemporary African states. Kwame Nkrumah's *Scientific Socialism* and *Pan-Africanism* aimed at African unity, economic independence, and political liberation, emphasizing industrialization, agrarian reform, and

education as pathways to self-reliance is examined. However, critics like Mbembe (2020) argue that Nkrumah's Marxist-inspired ideology overlooked Africa's cultural diversity and failed to address the complexities of post-colonial governance. Similarly, Mkandawire (2021) critiques Nkrumah's economic policies for their over-reliance on state control, which often led to inefficiency and corruption, undermining the very goals of equality and development he sought to achieve.

Nnamdi Azikiwe's neo-welfarism aims to blend elements of capitalism, socialism, and welfarism to achieve economic, social, and political equilibrium in Africa (Azikiwe, 1961). However, critics argue that Azikiwe's ideology overlooks the complexities of post-colonial governance and the challenges of implementing a mixed economic system (Mbembe, 2020). Ultimately, the practicability of Azikiwe's neo-welfarism remains a subject of debate among scholars.

Conclusion

One of the strengths of the book is its ability to balance theoretical depth with accessibility, making it an ideal introduction to the subject for students and scholars alike. As Michael Sandel notes in his book "What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets" (2012), "philosophy can help us think more critically about the values and principles that guide our public life" (p. 10). Nwankwor and Igwe's book provides a valuable resource for thinking critically about these values and principles.

Some readers may find the book's coverage of certain topics to be somewhat limited. For example, the authors' discussion of global justice and human rights could benefit from a more nuanced engagement with the works of scholars like Sen (2009) and Nussbaum (2011). However, while the authors effectively highlighted the philosophical foundations of sociopolitical thought, they could have engaged more critically with modern challenges such as climate change, digital governance, and global migration, which are central to current debates in political philosophy.

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