Moral Disorientation and Nigeria's Vision 20-20-20: Illusions, Contradictions and the Case for Indigenous Values and Social Ethics

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Abstract

"Knowledge is power", according to Francis Bacon (1561-1626). This can be interpreted to mean that possessing knowledge, which Socrates equates with virtue, is fundamental to the acquisition and control of power which represents intellect, cognition, rationality, judgment etc. through the instrumentality of training whether formal or informal, that is, education. Educational system since the inception of Nigeria as a sovereign nation in the 1960's may have recorded phenomenal growth in terms of investment, infrastructure, qualitative man-power training. However, from the middle of the 1980's to date, there has been a systematic decline and plummet in the public education sector at all levels in terms of funding and production of high calibre man-power and research needed for the transformation and modernization of the country. Sadly, the successive governments, both military and civilian, have failed to muster any sincere commitment to the development of the sector. The current rot and decay in the public education is a by-product and manifestation of long years of neglect by the leadership, even when they proclaim during their inaugural addresses that education is a priority in their development agenda. President Goodluck Jonathan, appropriating aspects of late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's 7-point agenda, has at different fora repeatedly, claimed that education is top in his transformation agenda and vision 20-20-20 which in his wisdom, will see Nigeria becoming one of the 20 giant economies in the world by the year 2020, of course with excellent educational system. The first intent of this paper is to examine the current challenges besetting our educational system, most which are moral and physical infrastructure against the background of the vision. The second motive of the paper is to expose the Nigerian political environment and society to the service of salient positive values that are immanent in our traditional societies, which social ethics articulates for modern life. The paper concludes by saying that though ethics has universal application, yet its relativity to a particular culture cannot be suppressed.

Keywords: Morality, Social ethics, Leadership, Education, Culture

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Introduction

Education is the key to the socio-economic and political transformation of any society. Put differently, it is stated and perhaps correctly that the failure of any society depends on informed educated and skilled citizens who, while fulfilling their own goals of personal and professional development, contribute to the social, economic and the cultural development of their country and world at large. (Benneh, 2001:3). The primary task of education is to transmit the positive value of the society from generation to generation. This point is well stated by Obanya (1999:14) when he says that,

Since the primary function of education is enculturation all traditional societies sustained themselves through that form of education that seeks to inculcate social norms and mores in the young. The same type of education seeks to prepare each person for his or her future role in society. It inculcates the skills needed for survival in the immediate environment and mobilizes all available human energies and talents for holistic societal development.

The view expressed here are resonated in the National Policy on Education, which, according to Akinpelu (2005:107) is a comprehensive document which recommended an integrated package of policies, whose overall and ultimate effect would be the production of citizens with the right type of values and attitudes, as well as the skills and the capabilities for self and national survival - when it says that education in Nigeria is an instrument per "excellence" for effecting national development (FGN, 2004:iii). Seen from this perspective, both the government and missionary interventions in education under the colonial administration were impressively profound. In Nigeria then, there was a proliferation of schools and tertiary institutions due to the oil-boom of the 1970s. This boom in educational establishment in Nigeria, may Africa is captured by Obanya (1999:17) when he says:

Available evidence shows that the first two decades of independence witnessed some concerted effort to evolve genuine national systems in Education. At the level of policy, national consultations were held and national policy documents…. were produced…., free, compulsory primary education was even tried in some places… schools of all categories increased in numbers, in response to increased social demands and one can rightly talk of a school boom in Africa during the period.

The boom in education in Nigeria before and after independence, followed by oil-boom began to burst in the mid 1980's", according to Obanya because there was no clearly defined philosophy of education. Also, there was no accurate or realistic census figures on the basis of which adequate planning would be anchored. This is perhaps what Tekena N. Tamono (1989:5) intends when he says:

Although quite distressing it may be, honesty demands that people recognize the following aspects of Nigeria's predicament after decades of independence. How many primary schools, secondary schools, and post-secondary (tertiary) institutions there are in Nigeria, we do not know… with such week information-base, policy-makers, and planners, in particular, lack the essential raw materials they need for purposes of review and reform of the system of education in Nigeria.

The lack of adequate theoretical base or policy formwork conspired to worsen the problems of education in Nigeria. Some of these problems include inter alia, "poor funding or resource allocation, lack of relevance, poor access, degeneration in quality' over politicization and unnecessary government interference. The greatest challenge facing contemporary Nigerian education is the problem of funding and infrastructure deficits. The issue of poor funding of education in Nigeria, especially tertiary education has become a recurrent decimal such that no government whether at the federal or state level has demonstrated any strong commitment to funding the education sector. This point is well taken by J.A. Akinpelu (2005:215) when he says:

The funding of tertiary education, especially the university sector, presents another set of problems. There has been under funding of the federal universities, and also of the state institutions. The reasons for this are difficult to comprehend: it cannot be simply because of their sheer number – otherwise, one would find difficult to explain the establishment of new ones…

A corollary or inevitable consequence of inadequate funding and poor facilities in Nigerian education is the issue of brain-drain of well tested academics who have defected to the countries in Europe, America and the Middle East in search of greener pastures and better working environment for teaching, learning and research.

Highlights of MDGs and Vision 20-20-20

No doubt a lot has been written on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) and Vision 20-20-20 either expressing optimism or pessimism on the feasibility of the development agenda meeting its forget, such that any elaborate treatment of it here will amount to flogging a dead horse. However, for our purpose in this paper, it can be stated that MDGs and Vision 20-20-20 are developmental strategy initiated to stimulate investment and channel resources to programmes that would usher improvement in some critical sectors of the nation's economy like education and health by the United Nations and Nigeria respectively. The intentions of UN initiative on MDGs, which was launched in the year 2000, is that all the 189 member states (including Nigeria) should be committed to the objectives of MDGs, by the year 2015. These include

1. Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieving universal primary education
3. Promoting gender equality and empowering women.
4. Reducing child mortality rates
5. Improving maternal health
6. Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensuring environmental sustainability
8. Developing a global partnership for development

In order to accelerate the implementation and consequent realization of these goals, the group of 8 industrialized countries promised to inject funds in the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and African Development Bank (AfDB) to assist in off-setting and/or canceling over 50 billion dollars debt owed by Heavily Indebted Poor Countries. Sadly, a review of the progress by UN in 2010 showed abysmal poor performance by some countries like Nigeria, while others, like Ghana achieved modest progress.

Whether it is appropriate to say that the Vision 20-20-20 launched in Nigeria in 2009 is a complementary development option to the MDGs or an alternative is still a moot point. In a nutshell Vision 20-20-20 is a necessary part of the "Transformation Agenda" of the President Goodluck Jonathan Administration, which he envisioned as "economic development blueprint intended to provide the direction for the country's growth and development" and thereby launch Nigeria "onto a path of sustained and rapid socio-economic development and place the country in the bracket of top 20 largest economies of the world by 2020". The aspiration of the government is that there would be a massive improvement in education and health sectors, among others. But barely six years to the target year, there has not been any appreciable progress made in education, health, energy, security etc. To be sure, both education and health sectors are encumbered by dilapidated infrastructural facilities and poor funding, leading to incessant industrial crisis by the staff as we witness now where all the public universities in Nigeria have been closed for several months due to lecturers' strike.

Defining Ethics and Morality

Ethics, like philosophy, is susceptible of many definitions. Many scholars have provided different meanings and senses of the term since its usage among the ancient Greeks. So it will amount to an uphill task to attempt to achieve a consensual definition of the word, that is definition that is non-controversial. This is not strange in philosophy because philosophers thrive more on conceptual clarifications of the terms in use than giving a one shot definition like a lexicographer would do when the question; what is ethics is asked, normally to two things easily come to mind. First, a demand for conceptual clarifications of the term and second, a clarification of the nexus or connection between ethics and morality. The link between ethics and morality is so intricate such that scholars are using them as equivalent or synonymous. The word ethics has etymological root in the Greek, 'ethos', which presupposes 'the customs and conventions of a given community (Bennaars, 1993:15). Another definition which is not too dissimilar to the one above is to say that "ethics stands for the study of morality in all its forms; it is primarily an academic exercise, an intellectual pursuit, a process of inquiry and reflection (ibid).

Similarly, Stewart and Blocker (1982:176) define ethics or moral philosophy "as that area of philosophy which investigates the principles governing human actions in terms of their goodness, badness, rightness and wrongness". According to them, "it is concerned with discovering the principles that should govern human conduct and with the investigation of the normative issues involving value judgments'. Again, some other scholars make a distinction between two sciences, apparently to elucidate and characterize the focus and subject matter of ethics. These two sciences are positive and normative. According to them, particularly William Lillie (1955:1-5), the former like botany and psychology describe objects or phenomena as we observe them with our eyes and other sense-organs or introspection as in the case of mental processes like desiring and willing, while the latter, even though do not deal directly with observed facts, but nonetheless deal with the standards or rules or norms or criteria by which we judge certain objects and these normative sciences include ethics, aesthetics and logic. On the basis of the above, ethics is defined as the normative science of the conduct of human beings living in societies (ibid, 2).

The ascription of the term sciences' is intended by these scholars to underscore the fact that whereas positive sciences engage in descriptive analysis based on empirically observable phenomena or facts, the normative sciences prescribe what "ought to be". Another term that needs clarification is human conduct or action. In ordinary English usage, we describe human and non-human action or things as good or bad. For example, we often say, 'good water', 'bad water, 'good character', bad character'. In the context of our study here, the last two pairs are applicable because "calling an action or conduct right or good simply means that it leads to a result which is good and elicits our approbation, and conversely saying that an action is wrong or bad means that we disapprove of the action, disapprobation. Again, implicit in any assessment of moral actions is the provision for alternatives, volition, choice, responsibility, freedom etc. The presence of these features makes it untenable to ascribe moral to animals or inanimate objects, at best, we can use the term amoral.

We now turn attention to the meaning of morality. As we stated earlier that ethics, as a critical branch of philosophy, is concerned with the systematic study of the morality of human action. In other words, ethics is the theoretical or academic inquiry or reflection into the morality of human actions and behaviours. The question now is: what is morality? This question, though a philosophical one is not a question that demands a straight forward answer like we notice in the discipline of physics. The pessimism expressed here is well taken by Rober P. Burns when he says;

…how [can] one who wishes to give an account of morality in our age proceed. Must he accept the unavailability of the old foundations, and then start over, providing a new understanding of morals and politics either by refounding morality in the contemporary selection of terms or abandoning foundations altogether?... (2007:15).

The difficulties encountered in the definition of morality should not make us to despair or be taken as suggesting that it (morality) cannot be defined. For we can borrow a cue from Emmett Barcalow (1994:2) who seems to enjoin us that one possible way to define morality is to ask what makes a thing a moral issue? Understandably, this approach as suggested by Barcalow, has the beauty of assisting us to decipher issues that can genuinely be classified as moral and others that can pass as precepts or even etiquette. The awareness of the improper ascription of moral sense to every object may have compelled W.D Hudson (1970:1-12) to distinguish between a moralist and moral philosopher. According to him, "a moralist is someone who uses moral language in what may be called a first-order way. That is the moralist engages in reflection, argument or discussion about what is morally right or wrong, good or evil. He (moralist) talks about what people do". A moral philosopher, he submits, is someone who engages in what may be called second-order discourse'. Here, the moral philosopher, as apposed to the moralist, raises critical and conceptual issues bordering on the language of morals, and what ought to be.

Having made this initial remark, the time is apposite to state that morality is "originally derived from the Latin word, mor or mores', which means the customs and conventions of, any social group or community. Bennaars (1993:13) conceived morality to be "any set of norms or standards that define, guide and regulate good or acceptable behavior among human beings living together in society". The key points here are society and human beings. Morality in the context of this definition becomes what society prescribes as worthy of approval. Also to be "moral in this sense means to live or act in accordance with the customs (morals) of a particular community, ethnic, or religious group". What is implied here is that morality precedes ethics. In other words, ethics is parasitic on morality. That is to say that morality serves as a raw material for ethics to work on. Another concrete exemplification of this to say that since a human being is born into a society, into a culture, his first encounter with morality is in that environment, where he is told what to do and what not to do or refrain from.

This point is elaborated by Chukwuemeka Ekei (2001:55) when he says;

…"what every child seems to learn first is 'Do this, and do not do that',… he learns first, and foremost that he ought not to tell lies, or to steal fish, before he is taught why he should not do them. So, even in his earliest infancy, the child has accumulated what is 'good' to do, and what is bad to avoid. At that stage, the child is said to have mastered the mores or morality of his environment.

Like philosophy, ethics serves as a second-order conceptual activity at the service of morality, which is a first-order activity.

The relationship between ethics and morality is a symbiotic one, because the former is the theoretical dimension of the latter. To be sure, Joseph Omoregbe (1993:5) describes the relationship between ethic and morality as similar to the relationship between logic and thinking or the relationship between theology and religion. For him;

Ever before we started studying ethics, we already have a sense of morality and we already make moral judgments even without reflecting explicitly on the principles underlying our moral judgments… Hence morality is the basis of ethics, that latter is the explicit reflection on, and the systematic study of the former.

So the ethicist draws for his analysis the norms or morality already immanent in his society.

Justifying Moral Judgments

Earlier in the essay, we stated that ethics is about the right and wrong, good and bad (evil) in human conduct. Indeed, moral philosophers are concerned about what is morally right or morally wrong. This kind of judgment is referred to as judgments of obligation because they express what someone ought or ought not to do' (duty). Another variant of this is called judgments of value, which broadly express those things we think are of value or importance to us. Here a decision is made whether object is intrinsic or extrinsic. Now, since, ethics focuses on 'ought statements as opposed to merely 'is statements, although the question of 'ought and Is' is a contentious issue since David Hume and others, it *ipso facto* aims at the ideal or morally perfect world'.

(Marion Steininger et al. 1984:6-10). A survey of some moral propositions or statements will include; "abortion is morally wrong" "world peace is good"; "murder is wrong", "everyone ought always to tell the truth". Of course when someone makes these statements, they are vulnerable to attack or challenge. Your critic would want to know why do you say that abortion is wrong or that world peace is good. What is insinuated by the critic is a demand for justification, or some evidence to support the moral belief that has been expressed. Here, someone can go on to defend his claim that "murder is wrong" by saying that his belief is anchored on the "principle of the sanctity of human life". This principle seems to satisfy the requirements of providing justification for the moral claim, which include for example, human life is sacred', murder desecrates human lifes, so murder is morally unjustifiable. However, we are still at the mercy of our critic-inquirer because he might ask what about killing in self-defence? With this deposition by the critic-inquirer, we may be forced to either modify or abandon the principle and search for another theoretical anchor sheath like, "maximize human happiness". This point is well taken by Marion Steininger et al. 1984:8) why they say;

…fundamental ethical principles may be viewed as self-evident propositions that commend themselves to our reason, or as assumptions we make as basic commitments… No matter what the grounds we have for accepting particular ethical principles, they are the highest court of appeal available and lie in one for or another at the heart of all moral reasoning.

Based on the above, we can take a cue from Joseph Omoregbe (1998:104-115) when he asks; why must I be moral? Why must I live a moral life? He gave a six point answer which include;

a. Because God has commanded you to do so.
b. Because you want to be happy.
c. Because you are a social being and a member of society.
d. Because you are a rational being.
e. Because it is the path to happiness.
f. Because of the law of nemesis.

Now out of these six justifying reasons, c and d stand out. What is implied in both is the sociality (community) and rationality of the human person.

What is Social Ethics?

Within the disciplines of arts and humanities, including the sciences, it is not uncommon to come across such stapples as social philosophy, social epistemology, social ethics, social sciences, social medicine, socio-linguistics etc. While it may not be correct to say that these disciplines are weary and fatigued of their traditional mandate of academic pursuit, it is proper to say that they, in fact, are fulfilling their core tasks, which were not as emphasized as they are now. After all, Aristotle, an ancient philosopher had stated that "man is a social animal'. In our times, Oluremi Ayodele-Bamisaiye (2009:14) in her University Lecture titled what is man, that we should educate him?" let us to understand that', <u>as what</u>, man would be seen as a substance, existent, instinct reduction, organism, and so on. And <u>as who</u>, man would be seen as rational, social, ethical, and so on'. No doubt, what Aristotle and Bamisaiye are alluding to here is the incorporateness of man in society. The conduct or behaviour of human beings, which ethics is concerned with is not only "conduct or behavior done in a society, but conduct that affects some other member or members of the society. A reference to society here enables us not to loss sight of the fact that "if it were not for his social background, a human being would not be a real human being capable of right and wrong actions". What is intended here is clearly stated by Aristotle by saying; "He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god". (1280b:10).

It is a herculean task to define social ethics in a few words. This is because the issues that come under its crucible or ambit are many and varied. As we stated elsewhere in the essay, ethics or moral philosophy is a social phenomenon "since it involves the evaluation of the consequences of our actions for other people' (Harry Shofield, 1972:241) and vice versa. Every society evolves some moral rules with which it hopes to achieve stability and social order. Admittedly, sciences, with its pretensions of value-neutrality, may seem to have evolved ways of addressing and tackling societal problems, like population, disease, poverty, urbanization etc. But there still remains a quantum of moral imperatives that are excluded from their central focus. This gap in knowledge is to be filled by social ethics. Thus, social ethics is defined as dealing with "issues of social order-good, right, and ought in the organization of human communities and the shaping of social policies. Its subject-matter centers on moral rightness and goodness in the shaping of human society". (Winter, 1968:6).

Some topical issues that will come under social ethics include, justice, equality, education, prejudice, race, sex, gender, abortion, animals, environment, poverty, pornography, family and digital technology, affirmative action etc.

The Social and Humanistic Matrix of Traditional African Society

Any treatment of African conception of person and society cannot, on pain of oversimplification, afford not to make due reference to what now seems to be a common place claim. The claim is that African society is life affirming and stresses a sense of community and values as the fulcrum upon which "African social life" is based. This assertion appears to have brought to the door steps of Africans a debate that has been going on for sometime in the Western political circles. This debate has centered on the individual and communitarian perspectives of the person. Needless to rehash the issues here since they have been over-flogged. What is important to us in this essay is that African scholars and theorists have appropriated the template provided by the discourse in the West and deployed it to the understanding of African man and his world.

African philosophers and scholars that have contributed to this debate cannot be said to maintain a unified view, for there are disparate opinions. However, whatever differences in their views, they all seem to subscribe to the precedent /supremacy of the community over the individual, although others hold a contrary view. For the first group, the premise of their argument is provided by John Mbiti's expression in a somewhat syllogistic manner that, "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am" (1969:108). This statement expresses for this group the importance the African attaches to the community. And community is defined by Kwame Gyekye (2002:35-36) "as a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds… who share common values, interest, and goals. In the social context of the community, each member acknowledges the existence of common values, obligations, etc. Again, Mbiti argues that,

In traditional life, the individual cannot and does not exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. The community must therefore, make, create or produce the individual, for the individual depends on the corporate group. (106).

Similarly, Ifeanyi Menkili (1979:157-158) expressed the view that;

…the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories. And this primacy is meant to apply not only ontologically, but also epistemic accessibility. It is in rootedness in an ongoing human community that the individual comes to see himself as man.

The attachment of the individual to the community, not to self or solitary life, provides some life support and insurance against any unexpected mishap. In joy or sorrow, the community is with you and the practice of mutual aid, cooperation, and interdependence guarantees individual's well-being" and those of the community. This is expressed in Igbo proverb as;

aka nri kwa aka ekpe, aka ekpe a kwa aka nri (the right hand washes the left hand and the left hand washes the right hand).

Yet another Igbo proverb expresses the corporate existence of the Africans as opposed to solitary life thus;

egbe bere ugo bere nke si ibe ya ebela nku kwaa ya (let the kite as well as the eagle perch, whoever says that one should not perch, let his wings break).

Eventhough, the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria are republican in orientation as they, until lately, did not endorse a monolithic traditional ruleship as we find in other parts of the country, he is, according to Theophilus Okere (2004:216) "a man defined by his community understanding his identity in and through his community and realizing his fulfillment within it". A representative sampling of African philosophers and scholars who hold this view include; John Mbiti, Ifeanyi Menkiti, Kwame Gyekye, Segun Gbadegesin, Theophilus Okere, Raphael Made, L.S. Sernghor, Olatunji Oyeshile, among others. The second group that argue for the primacy of the individual to the community frown at the attempt by the communitarians to subsume the individual to the collectivity, which apart from denying his autonomy, also negates his rationality as a human species. However, this does not constitute any big challenges to the traditional African societies.

For the conception of individual autonomy and freedom is not to be understood in a very narrow sense as we find in the existentialists who view freedom in a metaphysical and ethical dimension alone. For the Africana, (Yoruba), according to Oyeshile, (2007:292).

Individual freedom provide an adequate ground for the resolution of conflicting values because they recognize that conflict is an inherent aspect of human life… in confronting them, the individual focuses on his relative and relational existence. He also employs his rationality and strives to be of good character, knowing that if he has all the riches in the world [and] yet lacks character, he would not be accepted by society and God.

Though this view is not as popular as the earlier one, yet it has some advocates, namely; D.N. Kaphagawami, J.K. Kigongo, Ananyo Basu, S. Ogungbemi, among others.

Based on the foregoing, it is proper to state that the kind of ethics pursued in African societies is a <u>social ethics,</u> since Africans emphasize a strong commitment to community, interdependence, mutual aid, reciprocity, solidarity. Conversely, they reject individualistic moral values such as <u>ethical egoism</u>. The justification for a pursuit of social ethics, according to Kwame Gyekye, is based on their belief that;

A person is by nature a social being oriented toward others in a community of persons. Community life directly involves a person in social and moral roles, responsibilities, obligations, and commitments that must be fulfilled. Thus, social life prescribes a social morality and beyond that an ethic weighted on responsibility… (2002:63-64).

Having argued that within the context of African communal world, there is a preponderance of commitment to the promotion of the well-being of the members of the community, it is appropriate to examine Nigerian educational system, however sketchily, to show to what extent it promotes the social orientation of African morality.

Juxtaposing Social Morality with Educational Goals

Education in Nigeria is on the concurrent list, which means that the three tiers of government viz. Federal, State and Local Government have to actively support and commit a substantial sum of their annual budget to education. In fact the UNESCO (United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization) recommends at least 26% of a country's annual budget to education. In Nigeria, the government intends to use educational system as an instrument for achieving some of the national objectives. These include,

i.   a free and democratic society.
ii. a just and egalitarian society
iii. a great and dynamic economy
iv. a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (FGN, 2004:1).

Thus government expects that teaching at all levels of education shall be oriented toward imparting these values,

i.   respect for the worth and dignity of the individual
ii. faith in man's ability to make rational decisions
iii. moral and spiritual principle in inter-personal and human relations
iv. shared responsibility for common good of society
v.   promotion of the physical emotional and psychological development of all children, and
vi. acquisition of competencies (FGN:3)

No doubt these goals are lofty and laudable, but in terms of implementation, the Nigerian government has performed abysmally. Educational institutions are in a dilapidated condition, and funding (about 8%) is a far cry from the minimum recommendation of UNESCO. Understandably, in a country, like Nigeria, where corruption is given a free reign, the people will be denied the opportunity to benefit from quality education, and be globally competitive solution – good governance.

Conclusion

For Nigeria to emancipate itself from the cycle of underdevelopment and become a global player among the comity of nations as it is envisioned, then there a must be a strong commitment to revamping the educational sector because education is the key for social and technological transformation.

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