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MONTESQUIEU'S DESPOTISM AND DESPOTIC CULTURE IN THE NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY: AN ADVOCACY FOR DEMOCRATIC LIBERTY

By

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ABSTRACT

In most climes, Democracy has been adjudged as the one form of socio-political system of leadership that provides an enabling environment for man to achieve all of his aspirations. If democracy is a government by the people, where the supreme power is vested and exercised by the people, does it not follow that their interest should come first? This dogma over time has failed its adherents on the grounds of certain impediments to the exercise of true freedom. Despotism is seen as one of these many factors that have impeded the flourishing of true Democracy. For Montesquieu, the rejection of despotism in democracy supposes an argument in favor of political liberty and then, freedom becomes the only medium with which the imposition of healthy checks on the despotic tendencies of Government officials is achieved. The question then arises, what necessitates despotism in democracy? For some, it is a political intervention against the unruly masses, while for others, it is a political attitude of interest or a Machiavellian tactic of governance in the interest of a leader. In all of these, despotism remains a wrong approach in Democracy; its tenets are antithetical to the principles of democratic practice. Its egoistic tendencies negate the altruistic spirit of true Democracy, and except despotism has changed its name from that cruel and unjust governance where absolute power and tyrant dictatorship reign, its implications to Democracy will remain a story for political history. This paper therefor advocates for political liberty and a stable democratic culture in Nigeria using the rule of law which stable democracies across the globe have adopted through deductions made from Montesquieu's political Philosophy.

KEYWORDS: Despotism, democracy, freedom, rule of law, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that democracy has been acclaimed to be the best system of government across the globe because of its principle of freedom. It has also been widely criticized by many writers to contain two nagging principles; namely, liberty and equality. The leprosy eating democracy in Nigeria does not only involve the abuse of these twin principles (liberty and equality), but also reflects unmistakably what John Odey said in his attempt to describe Nigeria's democratic situation: "it is the governors and ministers who are now earnestly

asking Obasanjo to continue to rule us without our consent”¹ a statement that denies the justice to the freedom which is the hall- mark of democracy.

Among the stable democracies in the world today namely; United States, France, Switzerland, Britain, Canada to mention but a few laid their foundation via ideas of political reconstruction of great political philosophers. Worthy to mention, is the idea that led to the entrenchment of the doctrine of separation of powers in their democratic dealings which Baron De Secondat Montesquieu played a vital role, as Alan Macfarlane writes: It was here that he saw illustrated, as it were in epitome and with all emphasis of glaring contrast, the virtues, the vices, the potentialities of good, the potentialities of evil, inherent in monarchy, in aristocracy, in the power of the people. It was here that he perceived and understood what liberty meant, intellectually, morally, politically, socially. He saw it in its ugliness, he saw it in its beauty.²

Montesquieu however, demonstrated that law is the basis of the State and not force, and that the government depends on the consent of the governed. His central pre-occupation was how to maintain liberty and avoid despotism. He was aware from his own experience that liberty was very fragile. In his words: Most of the European nations are still governed by the principles of morality. But from a long abuse of power or the fury of conquest, despotic sway should prevail to a certain degree, neither morals nor climate would be able to withstand its baleful influence: and then human nature would be exposed, for some time at least, even in this part of the world, if the insults with which she has abused in other three.³

The long abuse of power makes the maxim true that “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”⁴ Montesquieu warns that the human mind feels such an exquisite pleasure in the exercise of power, even those who are lovers of virtue are so excessively fond of themselves that there is no man so happy as not to still have reason to mistrust his honest intentions. He writes thus: The principle of democracy is corrupted not only when the spirit of equality is extinct, but likewise when they fall into a spirit of extreme equality, and when each citizen would fain be upon a level with those whom he has chosen to command him.⁵

Montesquieu’s doctrine of separation of powers as contained in his book titled *The Spirit of the Laws* will no doubt help to reduce if not wipe out the extreme individualism and the infusion of powers which of course is the major factor that has eaten deep into the Nigeria’s democratic process. Godfrey Onah agrees with this idea when he said that, “the so-called Nigeria democracy, is at best pluralistic dictatorships in which selfish and unscrupulous tyrants ride on the shoulders of the people in order to defend only their personal interests and those of their political cronies and clubs.”⁶ Section 14(29) declares also that “Sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through this constitution derived all its powers and authority.”⁷

DESPOTISM IN MONTESQUIEU’S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Montesquieu did not specifically write any book he titled despotism. In Montesquieu, Despotism is much more rather descriptive and inferred. He used despotism interchangeably as an oxymoron in his doctrine of separation of powers. However, in his book *The Spirit of the Laws*; Montesquieu articulated and exposed the many negativities of despotic practice within human socio-polity by examining despotisms in books 2-8, where he succinctly talked about the kinds of governments. Despotism according to Montesquieu is a form of government or state in which rule is exercised by one person alone, without constraints. It is a situation in government whereby a leader rises to be a god that he uses state power arbitrarily. For Montesquieu, this situation descriptively suggests the neglect to the rule of law, freedom and equality and on the

other hand, it is the use of force to suppress threats for total control by a leader which negates the practice of separation of powers.

Montesquieu describes the use of absolute power as total control without cognizance to freedom and rule of law which is denial of separation of powers to inferred despotism. Thus, the incessant reference to the abuse of the rule of law and separation of powers in democracy become his thought on despotism. He insists that the law must rule as lawlessness and lack of cohesion from the law will lead to the collapse of power, but maintains that leaders must respect the rule of law to avoid resistance and division; else it becomes true that "in a despotic state each house becomes a government"⁸. It is therefore worthy to note that when Montesquieu talked about despotism, he was descriptively inferring the following; the suppression of threats for total control, the presence of absolute authority, denial of individual freedom and equity, abuse of the rule of law and disregard for the separation of powers. The absence of these is despotism as their presence is democracy.

LIBERTY AND DESPOTISM

Montesquieu's central pre-occupation was how to maintain liberty and avoid despotism. He was aware from his own experience that liberty was very fragile; Louis XIV had come close to extinguishing it; the inquisition would do so if it could. Three quarters of the globe Montesquieu thought, suffered from absolutist regimes. Only in Europe had a certain degree of liberty arisen and been preserved. But even here, there was no reason why it should not be extinguished, as in the late history of Rome. His fears are well summarized in the following passage thus: Most of the European nations are still governed by the principles of morality. But if from a long abuse of power or the fury of conquest, despotic sway should prevail in a certain degree, neither morals nor climate would be able to withstand its baleful influence and then human nature would be exposed, for some time at least, even in this beautiful part of the world, to the insults with which she has been abused in the other three.⁹

The long abuse of power is recognized in the action maxim that 'power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' He warned that the human mind feels such an exquisite pleasure in the exercise of power; "even those who are lovers of virtue are so excessively fond of themselves that there is no man so as not still to have reason to mistrust his honest intentions."¹⁰ Thus, this stems from his idea of balance. Something which started as good, balanced and conducive to human happiness and liberty could easily be perverted and swing to a dangerous extreme. For instance, if there is no equality, democracy is impossible. He writes, "the principle of democracy is corrupted not only when the spirit of equality is extinct, but likewise when they fall into a spirit of extreme equality, and when each citizen would fain be upon a level with those whom he has chosen to command him."¹¹ Judith Shklar has emphasized Montesquieu's realization of the fragility of liberty. The period of balanced republican liberty, as in Rome, cannot last long. "The very qualities that make people prosperous and happy cannot survive in a wealthy and contented society. Nothing seems to fail like republican success."¹²

Montesquieu summarized this inevitable tendency from republic, through monarchy, to despotism, and how the equilibrium cannot be maintained: Most European governments are monarchical, or rather are called so; for I do know whether there ever was a government truly monarchical' at least they cannot have continued very long in their original purity. It is a state in which might is right, and which degenerates always into a despotism or a republic. Authority can never be equally divided between the people and the prince; it is too difficult to maintain an equilibrium; power must diminish on one side while it increases on the other; but the advantage

is usually with the prince as he commands the army.¹³ Control over the army became an increasing threat as technology developed. In particular, Montesquieu noted that the use of gunpowder had further tripped the balance towards despotism. "You know that since the invention of gunpowder no place is impregnable; that is to say that there is no longer upon the earth a refuge from injustice to violence."¹⁴

Liberty could also be lost in "the fury of the conquest". Obviously, he was aware of two sorts of risk. One was that a country which might have developed internal balance and wealth would be over-run by the fury of conquest by another. For him, the secret of liberty was first a separation of spheres-economy from policy, religion from policy, religion from economy, and society. This he argues would be reflected in and re-enforced at the government level by the separation and between legislative, executive, and judiciary. He argues thus: "what was needed was both separation and balance."¹⁵ To prevent abuse of power, it is necessary from the very nature of things that power should be a check to power. "A government may be so constituted as no man shall be compelled to do things to which the laws do not oblige him, nor force him to abstain from things which the law permits."¹⁶ For instance, there is no liberty if the judiciary power is not separated from the legislative and executive. Were it joined with legislative, "the life and liberty of the subject would be exposed to arbitrary control; for the executive power, the judge might behave with violence and oppression."¹⁷ Thus, it is apposite to note that the central and the primary objective of the celebrated masterpiece of Montesquieu *Spirit of the Laws* is that the independence of the courts of law more than any other institution separates moderate from despotic regime. The problem, of course, was to achieve such a balance or dynamic harmony from being lost. Montesquieu had noted the point in Roman history when the harmony of the three powers was lost. To this, he argues, things cannot stand still and the dynamic tension had to be maintained over time. "These three powers should naturally form a state of repose or inaction. But as there is a necessary movement in the course of human affairs, they are forced to move, but still in concert."¹⁸

How could the precarious balance be maintained? Montesquieu suggested that the secret lay in power of a number of intermediary bodies as Sorel summarizes thus: It is the nature of monarchy to be founded upon laws. The monarch is the sources of all powers, political and civil; but he exercises his power by means of channels through which his power flows. These are the intermediate, subordinate, and dependent powers, moderating the shifting and capricious will of a single person. The two foremost of these powers are the nobility and clergy; the third is a body of magistrates, serving as a repository for constitution laws, and reminding the prince of them when he seems to forget them. This hierarchy of rank is the necessary condition of monarchical government. If is destroyed, the inevitable tendency is toward either despotism or democracy.¹⁹

In terms of theory, there are a number of important contributions; the difficulties and precariousness of liberty, the relations of spheres and the tendency towards a rigid overlap of domains, yet the necessity of separation, political pluralism and liberty in order to create a virtuous spiral. Other important ideas include: the dangers associated with being conquered, Islands and liberty and the importance of the size of political units on the likelihood of despotism. Finally, there is his analysis of the system of checks and balances, of the role of common law and parliament, and of secondary powers, and in the maintenance of liberty once it had been achieved. Ultimately, Montesquieu saw the solution to the riddle in the accidental emergence of a balance of powers between Lords, Clergy Rulers and the people.

DEMOCRATIC FREEDOM AND CHECK AND BALANCES

It is said that: "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."²⁰ It is against this backdrop that Montesquieu in his book titled "The Spirit of the Laws", dealt with despotism and monarchical system of governance where an individual or group of individuals are entrusted with the government powers. He thus, in that book divided the government's powers among the three arms of government namely; legislature, executive and judiciary. This is the famous principle of separation of powers which is also known as "trias politica". To ensure the effectiveness of this principle is the application of checks and balances. He explains thus: "the principle of check and balances of power is essential to ensure that no arm of government dominates or monopolizes power."²¹ The legislature with the primary duty of enacting/making laws, the executive with its primary duty of executing the laws and the judiciary interpreting the laws made by the legislature. The essence thus, is to guide any despot that may try to arise in the state.

Montesquieu's conception of man was a very gloomy one; he saw man as exhibiting a general tendency towards evil. This tendency according to him manifests itself in selfishness, pride, envy and a craving for power. He thinks that even though man is a reasoning animal, his desires lead him into actions that are immoderate and selfish. This conviction applies in his description of the English people when he wrote that: "a people like this, being always in ferment, are more easily conducted by their passions than by reason, which never produced any great effect in the mind of man."²²

Montesquieu obviously saw the evils inherent in despotism and monarchical system and argued that no man alone can hold the power of the state and be so happy that he would not go to the extreme. "Even those who are lovers of virtue are so excessively fond of themselves that there is no man so as not still to have reason to mistrust his honest intentions."²³ It somewhat implies the rule of law and control of power respectively. In democracy or Republic as explained by Montesquieu, there are various arrangements which are used to prevent any person or group from becoming too powerful. The laws are not a respecter of any body as all are equal before the law. And it is to prevent this ugly incident from occurring that in stable democracies across the globe, powers are shared among the different arms and levels of government. In many countries, like the United States, there is Federal, State and provincial governments. Some powers are given only to the states, others to the Federal government, yet other powers are shared by both Federal and State governments. "In all democratic countries, government officials are subject to the law and are accountable to the people."²⁴ Nor Zattoo would say, "it is the springboard that consummates democracy."²⁵ For C.C. Mbaegbu, "the wheels of democracy are oiled by rule of law."²⁶ Democracy is said to be barren without separation of powers, rule of law and check and balances.

MONTESQUIEU'S DESPOTISM AND THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

The history of the country called "Nigeria" began in 1885, when the Europeans met in Berlin, Germany and agreed to divide the continent of Africa among them. Nigeria was part of the British colony. The country that is today known as Nigeria emerged after the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates, by the then Governor General Sir, Fredrick Lord Lugard. After several years of colonial rule, some patriotic nationalists quickened the struggle for independence. This dream of a sovereign state eventually came to birth on 1st October 1960. Subsequently, Nigeria was raised to the status of Republic in 1963. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was appointed President and Alhaji Tafawa Balewa became the Prime Minister.

However, Nigerians having been liberated from the shackles of colonialism expected the Balewa led administration to transform the country into a concrete and vibrant democratic nation. Unfortunately, this was a mirage, as it was the birth of tragedy in Nigeria's forge for a vibrant democracy. The administration was fraught with problems and weak management. Among the three political parties that were formed namely; National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was dominated by the Igbo, Action Group (AG) by the Yoruba and the Northern People's Congress (NPC) by the Hausa and Fulani. The Balewa led government focused on the problems of the Northern Nigeria and thus was ethnic based. Before the military coup of 1966, "there was a problem of tribalism which was reflected in the market of three political parties in the country at the time."²⁷

Thus, in 1979, the then military head of state Gen. Obasanjo constituted an assembly that drafted a new constitution in 1977, and entrenched the American Presidential system to avoid the problems that arose in the parliamentary system practiced in the First Republic. Political parties were formed, candidates nominated and Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) won the presidential election of 1979. Unfortunately, most of the key players of the First Republic found their way into some elective positions and not long after, conflict erupted in the country as all five political parties struggled for power. Corruption was in the high places. Shagari reacting to this, said; "though, there is corruption in Nigeria, but has not reach alarming proportion." Celestine Mbaegbu also reacted when he observed thus: "corruption among the government officials was the bane of this democratic governance and this led to another military incursion in governance in 1983 by Gen. Mohammadu Buhari."²⁸ The country went through agony in the hand of Goodluck's administration, evidently shown in the North Eastern part of the country where hundreds were killed by insurgents on weekly basis. March 28, 2015, another history was made as Nigerians had the opportunity once more to through their votes choose who their president would become. Consequent upon Goodluck's widely perceived mismanagement, Nigerians were not really happy with him as they massively voted against him, his power of incumbency notwithstanding. He had no option than to congratulate the winner of the March 2015 presidential election, Muhammadu Buhari who contested on the platform of All Progressives Congress (APC). Despite the fact that it was adjudged to be free and fair by the ECOWAS delegate observers, some academics and activists during a workshop "On the credibility and fairness of 2015 General.

Elections" in Edo State contented that the election were far from free and fair, that "even the under aged that were caught all over the whole place, the media did not do anything; it was not even in the agenda".²⁹ On the contrary, Eddy Erhagbe opined that "Nigerians were fed up with corruption, it was everywhere in the high places".³⁰ Be that as it may, 29th May, 2015, marked the 7th successful swearing in of another democratically elected president. On inauguration, Buhari promised to tackle the numerous challenges facing the country. He however, on this same day, reassured Nigerians that he would not discriminate but will only be committed to fulfilling his mission of good governance, "I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody."³¹

Unfortunately, he has virtually denied all his campaign promises, ranging from feeding of school children, millions of job opportunities, power and the Niger Delta issue has all been politicized, and obviously has shown though silently and subtly that he is a lover of religion and a tribalized leader evidenced by his appointments and the faceless Fulani herdsmen that has become monstrous, ravaging the country under his watch. These historical x-rays of democracy in Nigeria cannot but bear testimonies to despotic tendencies and utter corruption on the

leadership of this country. Thus, one can say succinctly that there is the despotism in the democracy of Nigeria.

DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA, DESPOTISM AND DESPOTIC TENDENCIES

History is replete with accounts of why and how Nigeria's attempt at self-governance with a hope to usher in a new dawn since independence in 1960 has failed. A people that have over one hundred and twenty million citizens, with different religions, languages, cultures, were lumped together as one country without due consultations from the people to be merged. They however, were to join hands to build an egalitarian and a despotic free Nigeria. Unfortunately, this was a tall dream that never came true as religious and ethnic groups and individuals battled for power in an undemocratic, despotic and unholy manner. Each despot, ethnic groups and individuals only think on how to grab the power of the state for their selfish purpose. "This fierce struggle and battle left Nigeria bruised, battered, naked, raped and shattered. The Nigerian state is like a battered and bruised elephant staggering toward an abyss with the ground crumbling under its feet."³² It is like a sheep led to the slaughter house, helpless and bereft of future and only God can deliver us from this mayhem.

The consequences of this despotic struggle for power among the ethnic groups are too numerous; the common features of democracy namely; separation of powers, check and balances, rule of law, and most inclusively the common good, are no longer considered, as people have lost hope in it. At present, governance has lost its human face, essence and it is now a conduit pipe through which the despots called leaders cut corners and steal as much as they can from the public treasury and still pretend. A country that would have joined other stable democracies across the globe is being sacrificed and celebrated on the altar of despotic, ethnic and selfish interests.

Now, from the foregoing, the questions are; what can be done so as to cure Nigeria of this ailment and preserve its past glory, the benefit of the present and the hope of the future? Has Montesquieu's political thought, especially his critique on use of despotism and despotic tendencies any remedy or cure to this problem? Thus, the answers to these questions are of course yes. "Nigeria though in a deplorable state, can still rise and attain the greatest height of her dream. Nigeria is not beyond change. But only needs to discover leaders who have will the ability and the vision."³³ Secondly, Montesquieu's thought on despotism used as an oxymoron to express his doctrine of separation of powers, as a check and balance and respect for the rule of law as x-rayed in *The Spirit of the Laws* has all it takes to cure Nigeria of this particular ailment of the arbitrary use of powers.

Montesquieu's insistence is that, for a state to achieve its purpose, essence and the aspirations of her people, the state's power are to be distributed among the three arms of government, else despotism will become the norm. It however, behooves on us as a nation to chart a new direction, by going back to the drawing board, revisit our history, as it is said, that he who does not know where rain starts beating him will never know where it will stop. We have to transcend our differences and work for one and a better Nigeria. Ethnic and individual tussle for power under any tactics notwithstanding should not over-ride the interest of the state.

Therefore, we should come together and resolve within ourselves like the people in the ideal state of Montesquieu (Republic) that their powers are shared and checkmated by the various arms of government. If we evolve a new Nigeria, it will help to preserve our ethnic identities as our togetherness does not in any way deny our ethnic identities. "Unity does not deny our differences but it recognizes and appreciates it, thus, accommodates them to the

satisfaction of all concerned.”³⁴ We need to discover a new means of nation re-direction where through the effective use of the doctrine of separation of powers and check and balances as x-rayed in Montesquieu’s work, to checkmate our leaders. We must note that the failure to do this will mean the ever presence of political and democratic restiveness, trans-regional agitations playing out as insurgency and political apathy. It is true that when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce men under absolute despotism, it is their right and their duty to throw off such government thus, when injustices become law, resistances become duty, a statement attributed to Thomas Jefferson.

These abuses and usurpations in democracy presents the basic features of despotism as general injustice in governance, the use of absolute authority, denial of individual freedom and equality, abuse of the rule of law, disregard for separation of powers and the almighty suppression of threats for total control which is the major feature of despotism. In his article, “Between the Despots in Power and the Despots in Waiting”, the political writer, consultant and analyst Chris Ngwodo says, Nigerian politicians are unwilling to curb the excessive powers of the executive because they want to wield such powers themselves. In a sense, Nigerian politics is a contest between despots in power and despots in waiting. What Frantz Fanon once said of the native is also true of Nigerian elites: “The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor.”³⁵

The PDP, in a statement by its National Publicity Secretary, Chief Olisa Metuh, alerted that the President Buhari-led regime has exhibited trappings of despotism, including ruling without a constitutional component of a cabinet, persistent abuse of power undermining of democratic institutions, invasion of state government and personal houses, injecting confusion into the judiciary and hounding of individuals perceived to be against its interests and thus said that “the Buhari’s regime of despotism is pushing Nigeria’s democracy on quick slide.”³⁶ There are also cases of celebrated suppression of threats for total control (despotism), under the pretense of suppressing insurrection. The above explications are clear indications of the existence of despotism and despotic tendencies in the democracy of Nigeria and as Montesquieu posits, it is the disregard of the rule of law and separation of powers that introduces despotism in governance.

The despotic tendencies and influences of the politicians which seem to have hindered the dividend of democracy ranges from the unwarranted social stratification through their use of convoy, siren, and security outfit protecting them why the people live in fear and dreadful situation of the herds men and Boko Haram insurgencies. Their privilege of office robs the common man his human integrity if not their fundamental human right some times. We have cases of corruption that are swept under the carpet because of some personal interest whereas some politicians perceived to be enemies are being harassed by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) under the pretence of fighting corruption. The raiding of the home of the Former Minister of State for Defence, Musiliu Obanikoro makes this clear when he said “I have never received any invitation from the EFCC over any issue up till date”³⁷. With all these, it is clear that Nigerian leaders have not offered the true dividends of democracy to Nigerian citizenry thus, Montesquieu’s rejection of despotism will be of help if his doctrine of separation of powers and rule of law that are so rich in content are strictly applied to the system of governance in Nigeria, as “It is the springboard that consummates democracy.”³⁸

In essence Montesquieu writes: It is true that in democracies the people seem to do what they want, but political liberty in no way consists in doing what one wants. In a state, that is, in a society where there are laws, liberty can consist only in having the power to do what one should

want to do and in no way being constrained to do what one should not want to do. One must put oneself in mind of what independence is and what liberty is. Liberty is the right to do everything that the laws permit; and if one citizen could do what they forbid, he would no longer have liberty because the others would likewise have the same power.³⁹

The first line of each paragraph of this his work reminds us that liberty is not a freedom to do whatever one wants; in other words, liberty is not independence. For him, the freedom and security of life and property of the citizens are inalienable rights of individuals in a state. He writes: The purpose or nature of government in general is the creation of security, or freedom from domination and from threat of death or attack by other men. The purpose of government is to use the power of the state to suppress the natural war among individuals. In this sense, it is the law that creates a zone of liberty because the law is not so much a limit to freedom as what makes it possible through creating security. Without law, one would not be free from the unjust and coercive interference of others and hence, one would have to live in a relationship of fear with the world.

Similarly, Nigerians need the power and the will to elect their leaders through their conscience without interference by any authority. Thus, elect good leaders who will be accountable to them. "It is beyond dispute, and indeed, the fundamental maxim of all political right, that people have set up chiefs to protect their liberty and not to enslave them."⁴⁰ These affirm the fact that Nigerians need real democrats who would govern them with character, wisdom, and proper implementations of the will of Nigerians after proper and wide consultations. To cap it all here, for the survival of democracy in Nigeria, those in the position of authority, should learn to abhor the spirit of despotism, greed, selfishness, individualism, cruelty, corruption and see themselves as servants and not masters. "The government is nothing but the executive agent of the general will."⁴¹ This, ipso facto shows that leaders are mere servants that are expected to implement the will of the state directed by the law and when it is not done, it amounts to a breach of contract which is revocable as Montesquieu would say: "... liberty implies doing that which the laws permits."⁴²

CONCLUSION

Despite the criticisms Montesquieu's doctrine in *The Spirit of the Law* has incurred, it is hard to dispute the serious impact it makes on political philosophy and thought. It contributed immensely to the foundation of modern democracy (separation of powers and rule of law) and revolution against despotic regimes. And his doctrines bring sharp focus to the fact that state's law is not a respecter of anybody no matter how highly placed. At least, if Nigeria adopts this in her democracy, she will be on a speedy and steady road to greatness. Nigeria can do this by standing up against any form of despotic tendency by a committed, proper and strict practice of the doctrine of separation of powers among the three arms of government and ensure full independence of the judiciary. To cap it all, Montesquieu brings to fore this doctrine to remind all governments of those human purposes, which the state can serve, and hitherto do to, alone can justify its existence.

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AN EVALUATION OF KAROL WOJTYLA'S NOTION OF FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY AND THE QUESTION OF INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The deliberation whether humans' actions are freely made or determined by forces or causes outside of our control has become a matter of heated debate in the world for a very long time and contrary positions taken by individuals. In *The Acting Person* and Wojtyla's later essays, freedom is properly understood as self-determination. Self-determination is the most suitable way of expressing how the person acts through himself to achieve a certain end. The key issue is how freedom can be conserved so that 'actus personae' do not slide into "what happens" or something the person passively undergoes. Wojtyla conceives freedom in terms of self-determination of one's action. He insists that Freewill is the ability of the human mind to choose a course of action or make a decision without being subject to restraints imposed by antecedent caused by necessity. In this work, we shall attempt to examine if a person is responsible for the action(s) s/he makes. We shall raise some critical questions in order to bring to limelight some fundamental (philosophical) issues underlining our affirmation or denial that; someone is responsible for his or her action. With the philosophical tools of expository, analysis and synthesis, the research will argue that Wojtyla's use of self-determination to drive home his argument, and the metaphysical undertone he has given to the freedom debate is quite commendable.

KEYWORDS: Action, Determinism, Freedom, Responsibility, Self-determination

INTRODUCTION

The notion of freedom does in fact affect most of our daily human behaviour, especially in situation where decisions have to be made between alternative courses of action. In the process, we do often find two opposing features. On the one hand, we experience the awareness of our own freedom, that is, of our personal ability to decide for ourselves without duress; in other words, to deliberate within our mind about what to do in a given situation. On the other hand, we also experience that in many cases what seemed to be a time of a free decision was

influenced or determined by various personal, social, economy or environmental factors. It therefore becomes obvious that we did not actually carry out our decisions freely.

The discourse on freedom has taken various turns and thoughts over the years. This is so because of the various understanding of the concept and the goal therein; and this has given rise to the classification of the discourse into; determinism, compatibilism, and incompatibilism. The determinist theorists argue that everything that happens is determined; hence, the cause could be god, or a force or the laws of nature/hereditary dispositions. This position could be problematic, because it precludes freewill, and so one's choices do not matter for it is predetermined. The compatibilists argue that it is true that an individual's action is determined, but it is free due to the fact that it came from his will; hence, freewill is compatible with determinism. The incompatibilists insist that freewill is not compatible with determinism; thus determinism will not allow an individual to cause his action as he wishes, and will not guarantee him the power to choose to act otherwise.

In *The Acting Person* and Wojtyla's later essays, freedom is properly understood as self-determination. Self-determination is the most suitable way of expressing how the person acts through herself to achieve a certain end. The key issue is how freedom can be conserved so that 'actus personae' do not slide into "what happens" or something the person passively undergoes.

The concept of human freedom is one of the most interesting threads of Karol Wojtyla's philosophy of the human person. This became apparent after 1978 in his activities and papal teachings. He is often called "the pope of freedom". He placed great emphasis on this foundation of human existence in his magisterial and pastoral teachings. He recognized the right of freedom as one of the most important human rights of which he was a tireless preacher. For Wojtyla, freedom consists not in doing what we like, but having the right to do what we ought. (Wojtyla, 106). Freedom is the root of the human person's goodness or badness.

Freedom is a capacity rooted deeply within the human dynamism, and inherent to the person. The freedom of the human person, as a characteristic that pertains according to nature, is a singular moment of the personal experience of the personal transcendence as subject and master of oneself. Freedom is innate to the human person according to nature, such that Wojtyla (87) even speaks of it in the metaphorical terms of "the instinct of freedom". Though freedom is not an ontological structure per se, it is rooted in the very core of the person, where it exists as the self-determination that is actualized through the intentionality of the will.

WOJTYLA'S NOTION OF FREEDOM IN THE CONTEXT OF SELF-DETERMINATION AND WILL

Freedom is an integral principle of the will, thus called free will-is a synonym for the experience of objectivity actualizing one's own subject through will or self-determination. Freedom does not itself have ontological being, but is ordered toward something external to its proper subject, the subject of the human person. Freedom is never simply an unqualified freedom, but always freedom for value. Wojtyla explained that:

Human actions once performed do not vanish without trace: they leave their moral value, which constitutes an objective reality intrinsically cohesive with the person, and thus a reality also profoundly subjective. Being a person, man is somebody and being somebody, he may be either good or bad. (93)

Freedom is a capacity rooted deeply within the human dynamism, and inherent to the person. Freedom is natural to the human person, and an expression of the full and unique dignity

of the human person. Wojtyla apprehended self-determination as the key implication of authentically human acts of willing, for it indicates not only the experience of the willing subject's efficacy in the act, but precisely their experience of their own self as the subject of their willing.(Woelkers, 637). For Wojtyla, We may now identify freedom with self-determination, with the self-determination, we discover in the will as a constitutive element of the personal structure of the human person. Freedom thus manifests itself as connected will the will... The freedom appropriate to the human being, the person's freedom resulting from the will, exhibits itself as identical with self-determination. (Wojtyla, 115)

The human person uses his will, realizing self-determination being the perpetrator of an act, making a fundamental act of self-determination. The human person dynamizes as a person through freedom and its manifestation is the power of the will. The human person transcends his subjectivity in intentionality crossing the border between subjectivity and objectivity. The transcendence of person is an act is achieved through self-determination. In Wojtyla's thought:

The transcendence we are now considering is the fruit of self-determination; the person transcends his structural boundaries through the capacity to exercise freedom; of being free in the process of acting and not only in the intentional direction of willing toward an external object. Transcendence as an essential of the person can be best characterized by comparing the dynamism of the person with the dynamism of nature. (119)

The choice of a specific value determines the human person himself, who becomes good or bad through his choice. The human person decides not only about his actions, but also about himself in the aspect of the most important quality (Stachewicz, 156). Self-determination is becoming a human person as a human person. It is only in the act of transcending oneself in accordance with the truth about the moral good that the human person is most fully himself, that he is most fully a person. This process of self-fulfillment and all that it entails reveals the human person to be a potential and not a fully actual being. This fulfillment cannot be actualized outside of a moral context for to act contrary to the good amounts to non-fulfillment; fulfillment is only reached through moral good acts.(Savage,45)

Self-determination is a feature of the human person that is built upon the more fundamental attributes of self-governance. Self-possession which Wojtyla alternatively defined as self-ownership, is assumed in self-governance, and constitutes the necessary ground for self-determination. Self-governance concerns the reality that every person "actually exercises the specific power over himself which nobody else can exercise or execute"(Woelkers, 636). Freedom is not a power of the soul, or alternatively a characteristic of the human faculty, that opens to limitless possibility. Freedom is not something that one possesses, but rather one's self-possession is indicated by means of freedom as expressed through acts.

The self-transcendence of the person occurs in a moment of decision in which his freedom is exercised in accordance with the intrinsic orientation of the will toward the truth about the good; it is constituted by his dependence upon himself for the dynamization of his own subject, which he initiates in an act of self-determination by which he becomes either good or bad; "it presupposes a reference to the existence of the concrete ego and the person's capacity for self-possession and self-governance"(Savage, 44). Freedom is an integral principle of the will, thus called free will-is a synonym for the experience of objectivity actualizing one's own subject through will or self-determination.

Freedom does not rise from the merely natural activations that, in other animals are coordinated by instinct, but depends on the self-consciousness, or self-experience of the ego. This is the meaning of the person's transcendence in action (Santos, 18). Self-determination is the essence of human freedom. In the acts of self-determination, the nature of the human person is revealed, indicating that man controls himself and exercises this fundamental power towards himself, which no one can exercise for him. Freedom is an attribute of the will of man, it is an effect of dependence on one's own self (Stachewicz, 155).

Any act of self-determination presupposes that the person possesses and governs himself. For only the things that are man's actual possession can be determined by him. They can be determined only by the one who actually possesses them. This self-possession makes possible self-governance, which reflects the complexity of the structural whole of the person; the person is both the one who governs and the governed.

RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ACTS OF WILL

The concept of responsibility is crucial to freedom in Wojtyla's philosophy. Responsibility is the essential surrender of will to truth that seems finally to account for the person's transcendence in action, ultimately for reason operating within the depths of the human conscience. Responsibility is primarily expressed in choices for the others. There is a parallel relationship between freedom and this ascendancy to his own dynamism. Responsibility directs the human person, as a responsibility, both of which bear a distinct manner of expression and experience by the subject. (Wojtyla, 306). The foundation of the experience of responsibility resides in the recognition of the other as a human person. Responsibility flows from the personal experience of efficacy, the inner experience of oneself as the efficient cause of one's own actions. The concept of intentionality of consciousness; has an undertone of human responsibility. This is in two phases, responsibility as being responsible as well as taking credit for one's action. Having established that our consciousness is always intending, it presupposes that whatever we do is definitely purposeful and as such this calls for a kind of careful examination of our actions since our existence also presupposes the existence of others, the-being-with-other is therefore one who chooses for himself and as well for others. Freedom and responsibility are the concerns not only of philosophers; they are everybody's concerns. Because of human freedom and responsibility, people are always concerned with what is right and what is wrong. People contemplate on the right thing to do, and what is the bad thing to avoid. The purpose of all these considerations is the desire to live a well-lived life. Human beings do not just want to live their lives; they want to live life well, as the saying goes: a well-lived life is a happy life.

The only way to achieve freedom is to overcome this state of immediacy and dependence in order to determine ourselves in relation to the goods we choose, rather than allow ourselves to be determined or directed by them. Hence Wojtyla's insistence upon emotional detachment and objective independence over these objects (and their presentation) so that we can evaluate them according to the horizon of the truth about the good. Such detachment need not amount to cool aloofness, however, for when the emotions align with reason our perception and choice of the true good can be intensified by deep emotional feelings.

Free choice is an appetitive faculty by which man can choose good or evil without constraint. The role of reason in free choice for Wojtyla cannot be compromised. The will is not just a faculty; it is also a rational tendency. In normal circumstances, the human person must always through judgement select his good and then what means to attain to it before he will begin to exercise its function. For Amaku, "free will which is the act of the will resides radically

and firstly in reason” (174). If one is to make moral judgments, he must back them up with valid reasons. Although some people rely on feelings and emotions as basis on moral judgment, such is not acceptable, because emotions or feelings are usually biased, irrational or are just products of one’s prejudice, and social and cultural conditioning. If one wants to discover the truth, he must try to let his feelings and emotions be guided by reason. It is this search for moral wisdom that has led moral philosophers to investigate and study different topics and issues on morality. Freedom is a distinguishing capacity of the human person as a rational being. If human actions were rigidly determined, it would be unfair holding people responsible for their actions, and punishing and blaming them, because of their performances.

It is important to state that Wojtyla are serious advocates of human freedom. He strongly defends the freedom of the will and opposes determinism. Freedom of the will according to Wojtyla “is a necessary presupposition of morality” (307). If the will were not free, how could we account for moral responsibility of our action? Determinism according to Wojtyla is “by denying human freedom removes the basis of morality” (307). We must therefore hold that the will is free and that human actions are free actions. In a similar manner, Wojtyla expressed the fact that individuals express themselves through their freedom.

The most complete insight into the essence of man is to see the act, experience of the act and its phenomenological description and hermeneutic explanation-a person reveals himself in a special way of philosophical analysis in an act. In an act of man, his personal agency Wojtyla noticed his phenomenon of his conscious activity, which reveals the truth about the human person. The human person becomes, after all, morally good or bad through his acts and in his acts. Becoming human is shaped by his acts. And here we discover the moment of freedom, one of the inalienable elements of the structure of becoming human, of his agency. Freedom is not only about action itself but about good or moral evil. Freedom is revealed to us in an experience that Wojtyla describes “I can- I don’t have to”(154). This is not only the content of consciousness, but also a manifestation of dynamism proper to the human person. Freedom allows us to understand more fully the reality of the human person as a dynamic, acting Subject (Stachewicz, 154). Only in the area in which I act am I responsible for my actions, so the moral moment is included. Freedom entails responsibility. We are responsible for our actions. Hence, whatever we do, whether the consequences of our actions are good or bad, we should not blame others. We can influence the freedom of others by not respecting their freedom; we are to blame ourselves if we do not respect the other’s freedom. Yet, we live with others and for others. Thus, man is not only responsible for himself but also for others, and not only for others but also for the whole world as well.

FREEDOM, RESPONSIBILITY AND THE QUESTION OF INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY IN AFRICA

The theme of freedom is at the heart of Wojtyla’s philosophy. Wojtyla did not talk of the freedom of the will as we find in classical philosophy. Freedom is not the property of the will but the very nature of the being of man (Omogbe, 45). Human freedom is the structure of man’s being and a basic condition of human existence. One of the fundamental questions which I would like to ask here is that can there be an absolute autonomy for the individual within the society?. It is important to state that the ideas put forward by the different scholars were either affirming an absolute autonomy for the individual or suggesting a relative autonomy and, in an extreme opinion, no autonomy for the individual. But in my own view, individual’s action can either be autonomous or heteronomous.

For Africans, community is very important and vital to what happens in one's life. Without the community there is no individual and without the individual there is no community (Ferdinand, 21). Hence I will reject Wojtyla's conception of autonomy and affirm the African understanding of autonomy which is summarized as the individual's freedom of action in and with the community. One of the central questions I will like to ask here is that, to what extent does the communal decision affect the individual autonomy which will not be jeopardizing the freedom of the person? Is there actually anything like individual moral autonomy when we talk of communitarianism? It is important to state that the above questions have come up as a result of the occidental concept of a person which differs from the African concept that is relational.

It is worthy to note that within the African world view, the person acts within the framework and dictates of the community. If it is so that one must always succumb to the community way without question, the antagonists of communitarian system would have a strong argument that it is against the individual's autonomy. For John Mbiti:

Since the morals of each society are imbedded in its customs, traditions, rituals, beliefs and practices, people assimilate them as they grow up and become participant members of their community and society. These are community morals, and everyone who is a member of the community must participate in its moral welfare. Whoever constantly or deliberately breaks his community morals eventually finds the community pushing him in return (178).

In like manner, Obiechina opined:

Of necessity, the hold which the community has over the individual cannot be so constructive that the expression of his individuality is completely frustrated; the individual cannot be so individualistic in his outlook that he regards his interest as entirely independent of those of the community within which he lives (176).

Traditional Africans were not egoists, they had the interest of the community at heart because they knew that the individual needed the community and the community needed the individual in order for them to achieve their aspirations. When we talk of a community being a good community, it is because the individual there are good and vice versa. Therefore, in normal circumstances, community decisions are made in the interest of the individual and not to suppress his autonomy and freedom. It is important to state here that African communitarian system has its own flaws but as far as moral autonomy of the individual is concerned, the community is the basis. It is on the community moral life and ethics that the individual builds.

A typical example is a situation where there is a discussion in a community and the individual in the end has to obey the community determination even though he was not convinced of that decision. From the western point of view, that is equal to violation of the person's human freedom. This is because for them nobody is allowed to intervene in another person's right that would force him to act against his will. Of course this thinking could be agreed upon if one sees a person as being an isolated individual who has nothing to do with the community. But if we think in a communitarian way, then we can see that such conclusion does not work and does not result in the breach of the individual's freedom (Ferdinand, 175). In a communitarian set-up, individuals know their boundaries which are the limit of their autonomy.

Individual within the African society does not see his autonomy as a totalitarian one. In fact, where one's autonomy stops, is where another's starts.

It is pertinent to note that an African person knows that to develop sufficiently, he/she cannot do without the community. Individual actions and thinking are highly influenced by the community in which he or she lives. It is important therefore to state that individual loses some of his autonomy whenever he/she engages the community. For Bujo:

Individual development does not take place in an asymmetrical way but based on mutuality. It also includes a giving back of what one has received from the community. In concrete terms, there is Interdependency which is based on the fact that all members have the task of mutually increasing the life force. Everybody's behaviour and ethical action have consequences for the whole community; the good contributes to the increase of life, while evil destroys or at least reduces life(cited in Bebezet, 182)

It is important to state that there is a continuous interaction between the individual and the community. It is not possible for the individual to be free if the community is not free or exist. According to Bujo cited in Benezet, "freedom is not for the person alone but for all and when all are free then the individual is also free"(180). Individual autonomy is the community autonomy. As Habermas will put it "inter-subjectivity in autonomy means that the free unfolding of individual autonomy depends on the freedom of others(cited in Ferdinand, 181)

It could be said that if the decision of the community influences individual decision, it does not mean trampling on individual's autonomy, but helping the individual to be integrated in the community. Therefore, in African society, there is no absolute autonomy for the individual, but autonomy with the community. According to Pantaleon Iroegbu:

Individual autonomy is not absolute but relative; limited, but nevertheless real. This means that there are certain constraints which the community imposes on the individual. Autonomy does not rule out all constraints. It is not anomie. These constraints include certain moral conventions and cultural traditions of the community as well as the shared values and goals of the community as such (51-52)

Egbunu Fidelis opined that it is an abomination for a person to do things alone just for his or her own personal interest within the community. For him, among the Igala people, "*Udama ch' Ukpahiu*" (Unity is Strength). For him, individualism is a taboo in the Igala community. For Egbunu, in the traditional Igala community, nobody lived alone and died alone, nobody sorrowed alone and nobody rejoiced alone (10). It can be said that if there is no cordial relationship between the community and the individual, they will be an obstruction in the life force flowing from the ancestors which strengthens the community.

It is important to state that Rousseau in his "Social Contract" emphasized the importance of the community along with the need to protect individual freedom. A community was created for the benefit of the individual and Rousseau attempted to reconcile the two claims; that of the community with that of the individual, the claims of authority with those of liberty. A community that was constituted by all consenting individuals voluntarily submitting to the general will was the solution to his paradox that though persons were born free, yet they were in chains. There was a moral transformation in the individual once a community was created. This is because, having

voluntarily created it, the community was seen as furthering the individual moral autonomy(Rousseau, cited in Subrata and Sushila, 224). Freedom, for Rousseau, was moral self-determination or the ability of the individual to exercise his autonomy. Rousseau believed that submission to the General Will attenuated freedom (cited in Subrata and Sushila, 224). Rousseau opined that:

The sovereign cannot impose on the subjects any fetters that are of no use to the community. It cannot even will to do so, for under the law of reason nothing takes place without a cause... The commitments that bind us to the body politic are obligatory only because they are mutual, and their nature us such that in fulfilling them one cannot work for someone else without also working for oneself. Why is the general will always right, and why do all constantly want the happiness of each of them, if not because everyone applies the word each to himself and thinks of himself as he votes for all (168).

It is important to state that an individual should not been seen as a slave to his/her community. The individual should be given the right to question some certain decision of the community for the betterment of the community. Individual autonomy in the African community is not like Kant's categorical imperative which sees the human person as an end in itself but an autonomy that is situated in the community.

EVALUATION OF WOJTYLA'S NOTION OF FREEDOM

The question of human freedom and a derivative problem regarding free will has become a critical point of philosophical analysis, especially since the time of St. Augustine. It is commonly believed that the human person is free, that he makes use of his freedom the way he likes and is therefore held morally responsible for whatever he does. Freedom has been one of the fundamental issues of philosophy, developed in ontological and metaphysical contexts on the one hand, and existential and ethical on the other hand.

Freedom is the root of the person's goodness or badness. As Wojtyla rightly observed: When we search deep into the integral structure of moral conduct and becoming, into the integral structure of man's becoming actions, morally good or bad that freedom manifests itself most appropriately (99).It is important to state that the human person possesses the freedom to choose to become good or bad; in this consist a special feature of her contingency as a person. Freedom can be misused and its proper use is finally the role of conscience. In the light of self-determination, conscience becomes the subjective norm of morality. For Deborah Savage "it is conscience that allows the subject to distinguish the element of moral good in action and the sense of duty that accompanies this apprehension"(45). Conscience is not only cognitive, in its complete manifestation; its function is to relate the truth as it has been made known to human actions.

The self-transcendence of the person occurs in a moment of decision in which his freedom is exercised in accordance with the intrinsic orientation of the will toward the truth about the good; it is constituted by his dependence upon himself for the dynamization of his own subject, which he initiates in an act of self-determination by which he becomes either good or bad; "it presupposes a reference to the existence of the concrete ego and the person's capacity for self-possession and self-governance"(Savage, 44).

In his book *The Illusion of Conscious Will*, Daniel Wegner, held that old idea that freewill is just an illusion. This is far-fetched from the position of Wojtyla who prizes high the idea of deep freewill, not compatible with determinism. He says that the idea of will that is conscious, is a clue that possibly, the perception of will is a link in a kind of connectivity that leads to an act, but might not be that also. Hence it might be an act that is orchestrated by prior psychological activities. However, he claims that his position does not imply a support for determinism (Daniel Cited in Okechukwu, 6).

Richard Double, in his book *The Non-Reality of Free Will* contended against Wojtyla that there exists no ethical responsibility and no freedom/freewill. To bring in his mission, he writes that the issue of ethical responsibility and freedom are just subjectively employed, but are not feasible outside the sphere of language. The discourse about them cannot bring about real answers, and so, no freewill, coupled with the idea of ethical responsibility. He argues that for libertarians to be realistic, they need to prove how such a power to choose otherwise can be feasible. (cited in Okechukwu, 6)

A hard incompatibilist theorist, Derk Pereboom, in his book *Living Without Freewill*, posits that the idea of ethical responsibility and freewill is never compatible with determinism. Paradoxically, he argues that he does not concur to the veracity of determinism; however, he insists that there exists no idea of freedom and nothing like ethical responsibility. He contends that he does not also see that determinism is compatible with freewill, same with the determinacy inherent in the explications of quantum mechanics (Derk, 140).

Galen Strawson in his work, *Freedom and Belief*, develops a basic argument which goes to prove that freewill and moral responsibility do not exist. Making his case against freewill he observes that there is nothing like freewill. He writes that most individuals hope that what they believe is thus determined and as such think about how things appear. He does not in any way sustain that determinism is factual or not, but against the position of Wojtyla who insisted that an individual cannot be ethically responsible, and no one can cause oneself. Hence, for one to be morally responsible for one's action, one has to be the cause of itself, at least in certain vital mental respects (Galen, 135).

CONCLUSION

Human freedom is another aspect of Wojtyla's philosophy of the human person. Freedom for him is not a property of the will but the very structure of the being of the human person. Nor do he make any attempt to prove the reality of human freedom. Wojtyla saw human freedom as the structure of man's being and a basic condition of human existence. He maintained that one does not acquire freedom since it is identical with human existence and not separated from it. Wojtyla described human being as something that is oriented towards a value. Freedom therefore is a feature of human life. The Will is free and that humans have free choice and free decision. It is through the resolutions that are free that an individual moves himself to act. However, he Freedom does not automatically entail that what is deemed free be the foremost cause of itself, just as a thing's becoming the cause of another does not necessitate that it be the first cause of that other.

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THE SPONTANEOUS MORPHOGENESIS OF THINGS IN AFRICA: THE BUSH SOUL IN ANNAAN COSMOLOGY

By

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ABSTRACT

The Anaañs of Akwa Ibom State of Southern Nigeria are people of a broad religious inclination. In a sense, they are credulous in nature. They see the finger of the Creator (Whatever name it's called) in everything, even in political arena. From that angle and in a certain sense, they are pantheists. Natural phenomena therefore are alive with the imprint and energy of their Maker. This paper is a phenomenological exposé of the Anaañ belief in the creative evolution in living organisms by means of the life energy flowing through their veins from the Creator. Such impetus (Soul) is more pronounced in man, who is the pinnacle of creation. Such a belief exerts multiple influences on the daily life of individuals and of the society, leaving an indelible trademark on the comportment of the Anaañ nationals.

INTRODUCTION

It was the French philosopher, Henri Bergson, who coined the term *Élan vital* in his celebrated work *Évolution créatrice (Creative Evolution)*, published in 1907. In that work, Henri envisaged issues concerned with the self-organization of things within the structure of their "vital impetus" in their self-actualization. *Élan vital* was postulated as an explanation for the evolution, personal growth, self-fulfillment of every living organism within the spectrum of its blossoming, thriving, flourishing, maturity, progress and well-being and the development of its popularity.

From Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89lan_vital August 2024. For Bergson, this morphogenesis in things is associated with consciousness, that is, with intuitive perception of experience and the flow of inner time. (Atkinson 2024:227). The Anaañ cosmology displays close resemblance with this Bergsonian vitalism invested in things. These vital forces, according to the Anaañs, are the imprint of the Creator in things and therefore are considered not banal, but sacred. Anaañ nationals, therefore, do not take these environmental or ontological life-giving forces for granted, as a lot in their lives, well-being here on earth and in the thereafter depends on them.

THE ÉLAN VITAL

This is a philosophical theory, emphasizing flux, becoming and novelty in living things. The theory unfolds a morphology in which a free resurgence of intelligence impregnates organisms and are made manifest in their thriving and blossoming. This theory was espoused by Henry Berson in the early 20th century as a reaction against the biological deterministic explanations that were mechanistic or teleological which viewed evolution as conditioned by predominant forces or futuristic objectives. Bergson based his theory on the distinction between matter and the *élan vital*, or life force, the progress of which he saw as a

line continually bifurcating or diverging from its course. The evolution of matter is orderly and geometric; disorder, however, with free and unpredictable creativity, is the effect of life force on its material surroundings. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bifurcating>

For Bergson, this impulse of life was a generative principle immanent in all organisms and was responsible for their evolution. According to Prem Rawat, the vital impetus can equally refer to a subjective well-being, understood as “a combination of factors such as health, social or economic success, pleasure, self-fulfillment, and harmony with oneself and others.” fr.wikipedia.org. This definition envisages all that involves life-generating phenomena, growth and determination. It is the element which keeps us in touch with our rhythm of life, the vitalism of our existence. As defined by Didier Julia, *Élan vital* is “Vital force”, a creative trend of life, which develops through organisms, ensures the continuity of the species, and generates the evolution of beings. When the force sublimates, it can trigger creative outbursts that are at the origin of great spiritual and moral creations and of mysticism itself” Didier (1984: 79). This passage captures the essence of the “*élan vital*” as a driving force behind life's continuity and evolution, which can lead to bursts of creativity and profound transformations when sublimated. Precursors of the *Élan Vital* distantly anticipating this theory of Bergson can be found in the pre-Christian Stoic philosopher Posidonius who postulated a “vital force” emanated by the sun to all living creatures on the Earth's surface. The concept of *élan vital* is also similar to Baruch Spinoza's concept of the *Conatus* as well as Arthur Schopenhauer's concept of the will-to-live.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%3%89lan-vital>

ANNAÑ COSMOLOGY

The ontology of Annañ is not a stranger to a type of eco-phenomenology which is a perception attempting to create an alternative self-world or human-nature relationship. This involves human beings coordinating their concrete existence by perceiving their interconnectedness with nature in their everydayness. This co-existentialism with nature is environment friendly, often resulting in Ecotheology and Religious Ethics. What is envisaged in this paper, concerns principally human existence in one of the tripartite realms of life called “The Lower Ether”. That is the life of humans on the planet earth. (Cf. Umoh: 2023). Every entity, is a testimony of the “imprint” of the Creator, loaded within it. It deploys this “armor” throughout its existence on earth such that there is a perpetual flow of life energy (like the charging source of an electric current) from the Creator to all its earthly creatures. This synergy signifying the flow of vital power and germinal life, is considered already at work in every organism from birth. In Annañ culture, the very first cry of a baby at birth is a clear and indubitable indication of the active presence of this endemic vitality in humans. This phenomenon is what renders the concept of animism meaningfully credible in Annañ ontology. As Binebai et al 2018 avers:

The term ‘animism’ comes from the Latin word ‘anima’, which means “soul” or “breath.” As such, it refers to that which empowers or gives life to something. It follows, then, that animism is the religion that sees the physical world as interpenetrated by spiritual forces – both personal and impersonal – to the extent that objects carry spiritual significance and events have spiritual causes.” (278)

According to Ladislav Segy (1952:19) Animism is a belief in personalized supernatural beings, such as ancestors, ghosts, souls etc. This belief stipulates that both animated and inanimate objects possess vitality and are endowed with souls. In his turn, Idiong (2002: 73) affirms that animism is the origin of totemism in Annang: “This explains why Annang people and other Ibibio people “worshipped” totems such as squirrels, tortoise,

rats, dogs, snakes, birds etc. This belief in animism was very strong in Annang hence power was invested in the created objects such as masks, statues, fetishes and the like and used for sacrifice to ward off supramundane forces". The Anaañ nation sees the countenance of its Creator and it reads it in all events of nature in and through Nature. It reads the expression of the emotion and temperament of the Almighty and His allies: the ancestors, the spirits and the deities through natural events. Phenomena of Nature (especially the mighty ones) such as heavy downpour, lightning, earthquakes, cyclones and other devastating forces of Nature, are religiously interpreted as revealing the sentiments of the Almighty Creator. Empirically, the surging of the sea, the energy displayed in and through Nature, the powers evident in thunderstorms, volcanic eruptions and even the efficacy of medications manufactured from nature's resources, the beauty of the evening landscape and horizon, are all convincing evidence of this vitality. They attest that the Sacred is continuously at work in the universe and in all his creatures. There is evolution in everything and in all organisms. In nature, this evolution becomes indubitable in its varieties, beauty, changes, genesis, growth, maturity and death. Prompted by this outlook, Ephraim Essien et al (2013: 167) describe Anaañ metaphysics as pantheistic:

In Annang thought, there is no clear-cut distinction between God and nature. Though there is a distinctive name for God in Annang, *Awasi*, yet when it comes to causation, God shares the same name with nature, *Abot*. This gives a clue to God as the causal agent of the Annang Universe. In terms of this rapprochement in the Annang conception of causation, the Annang are not far from pantheism. This is quite understandable due to their deep sense of religion, where they see God everywhere yet without a temple, which they believe would confine him. Hence the name "*Awasi Ibom*", the Unlimited/Infinite God. Annang metaphysics is a pantheistic ontology.

This rejoins the cosmological arguments of Medieval Philosophy for the existence of God, which emphasize the divine eternal presence in its creature. Awak and Mboho, both Anaañ nationals, detect this animating vital impetus even in the traditional African political system. According to them, the government of the traditional African societies anchored on the possession and control of the "life energy" or vitality of a given community. This can be interpreted as the conglomeration of all the vital forces inherent in things and in the people of the community religiously vested in their leaders:

The vital force of a community is the source of vitality of such a community as a corporate body as well as the ultimate source of vitality of its individual members. It is essentially a spiritual (non-physical) force, which can exert its influence on both physical and non-physical nature. The rules by which people determine that a given person or person is legitimately in possession of the vital force of a political community differ. However, once a person(s) is deemed to be in proper possession of the vital force of a political unit, the basis of limiting this power from below (that is, by those it is supposed to govern) ceases to exist. This is because those below derive their vital force from above and cannot limit. In other words, they have no power (vitality) over and above that which the ruler controls, with which to control him/her. (Awak, Mboho 2023:212).

These Anaañ nationals both agree that this power or authoritative force has something of the divine, because: "To check the abuse of power built around the authoritarian principle, Africans relied largely on gods, spirits (especially ancestral spirits) and other spiritual forces upon which the vital force of the political unit ultimately depended. Consequently, abuse of

power was checked by taboos that surrounded an office, fear of incurring the wrath of a patron deity (deities) or spirit that protects and oversees the welfare of a group or an individual” (Awak et Als. 2023:213).

THE ANNAÑ MORPHOLOGY: THE THEORY OF ENSOULMENT

It was Aristotle that propounded the doctrine of animation of the human entities at birth. A longer period was required for the female fetus than for the male before such could transit from a purely vegetal and purely material stage to become a person. The concept of assignment of souls is pre-eminent in Anaañ ontology. This is why ethnographers and early missionaries christened them animists, though derogatively interpreted, as those who assign souls even to inanimate objects which they worship. By the Anaañ slant of thought, it goes that every living creature has a life engine operational in it; otherwise, it would not be alive. By this billet, they were truly animists because following Binebai, animism is the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and as such human beings must discover what life forms and forces are influencing them so as to determine future action and to maneuver their power. (2018: 278) www.joracuniport.com

Anaañ, as a nation attaches a good deal of importance to the soul, *Ukpoñ*. This is because, for anything to happen in existence, one must be alive. Like in the philosophy of Spinoza, the entire universe is alive. The well-being of the soul entails the buoyancy of the integral organism and any harm done to the soul has repercussions on the life and in fact on the whole integrality of the human being in question. All these concern humans more than any other organism. Blum (2007:211) asserts

The debate during the Renaissance over the immortality of the soul encompassed epistemology, metaphysics, and theology. The metaphysical question was whether there is something spiritual that gives life to human beings, such that they are endowed with an ontological status superior to animals and a lasting reality. If this is true, then there is a human soul that transcends the perishable body. But a problem arises: what is the evidence for this, and what does it mean for man to be essentially spiritual? If one were to deny the need for any ontological difference between beasts and men - and that would entail abolishing the principle of life or soul as something distinct from body - then the fact of consciousness and truth over and beyond particular beings demands explanation.

The theory of the human soul in Anaañ cosmology is a complex, nay an enigmatic one; such that modern scholars must ransack their brains in attempts to read meaning into the nebulous belief of their forebears in this regard. A lot of the intricacies concerning this phenomenon are auto generated and self-imposed by the modern Anaañ thinkers themselves, who plunge deep into the logic of the status quo; something that neither occurred to nor bothered their traditional Anaañ forebears. This benefit of the doubt on the part of the latter was due to their level of enlightenment and academic metamorphosis. Moreover, with their oral tradition, they never left anything in writing.

The human soul is variedly called in Anaañ language. For some it is the ghost. That is the implication, even in the English expression: “He has given up the ghost”, meaning “He is dead” or the soul is gone or he has let go his soul – *ajak ukpoñ*. In empirical terms, he has stopped breathing. Intrinsically, this will associate the soul with the life breath, called *Inwuek*. This term is like the “Ruah Yahweh” in Hebrew which refers to the breath of life, in a living person. This breath of life in the Scriptures, particularly in the Genesis creation story, is what vitalizes the human body, made from the mud of the earth. It is portrayed as the principle

responsible for the animation of the human entity. This principle becomes so obvious at death when an individual is said to have breathed his last: *A-adop Inwuek* or in Efik language: “*Odop ibifik*”: The breath is silenced or quietened and *Oduok ibifik*: the vitalizing force has been spilled out or poured away. In other words, the power of vitality is gone. We will return to this during our discussion on immortality of soul.

For others, the soul is equated with the mind, maybe as the stimulus which renders this thinking faculty active. The dead do not think, as much as we know. Still in some other designations, the soul and the spirit are confusedly equated, perhaps because they are both the invisible part of man. Essien and Umotong (2013: 174) envisage the issue thus according to their Annang anthropology: “I coined this term ‘psychosomapneumatism’ to describe a tripartite composition of the human personality (mind, body and spirit) as conceived in Annang philosophy. Psychosomapneumatism is Annang notion of human nature. By this term, I mean that the human being is composed of *ukpong* (soul), *ikpohidem* (body) and *ekpo* (spirit)”.

However, in Annang vocabulary, a spirit is equally called *Ekpo*, which means a ghost. It is from here that we get the appellation *Awio Ekpo*, the netherworld or the land of the dead (of the Spirits or of the ghosts). By extension, the term *Ekpo* masquerade designates the ghost or the spirit of departed ancestors (Cf. Umoh 2014, *The Beautiful, Ugly Masquerade*). From the above we will see that the “bush soul” which is one of the major points of reference in this paper, is properly translated *ukpong*, while the designatory suffix, *ikot* (bush) is added to it, for specification. Logically, this will automatically evoke the existence of another soul, that is perhaps not of the bush. The latter will be alluded to in the process of exploring the doctrine of the bush soul and the immortal soul.

THE BUSH SOUL

Cognitively, Annang people were realists, and they still are even till date. The abstract makes little or no sense to them and therefore must find its bearing in the concrete. It must be realized in real life. Like a high-tension wire, it must be stepped down; the abstract should find its footing in concrete reality. Things that do not affect the Annang nationals in the here and now practically in their concrete existence and maybe in the hereafter, are not relevant to them and should not merit their attention. As Maurice Blondel, a French philosopher expressed this tendency otherwise: “Whatever does not concern my destiny does not exist for me”. Hence, spiritual realities must get materialized, even virtually, in and through the concrete. This is because life in Annang nation is characterized by “Relationship”-Relationship between the good and the evil, the material and the immaterial, the virtuous and the vicious. To live is to relate and to live well is to relate well - with oneself, with one’s neighbour, including the environment and with the spiritual world. Moreover, this paradigm must not and cannot afford to exclude the Supreme Being, the Creator of all realities. Complementarity is the essence of authentic moral life.

However, this authentic ethical living was not always guaranteed, as far as every human conduct was concerned. This is because there were and there are still wicked people among us in every society. Such enemies were in abundance everywhere, hunting and menacing the just and the innocent very often without provocation and reasonable cause. Their whole existence, according to Annang belief, was to provoke illness, misery and if possible, death among the population. The belief in the great abundance of such destructive elements in society could not but colour the people’s existential philosophy, perception of life and worldview. Such was at the origin of the phenomenon of the bush soul. This vulnerable life-giving principle in man could be destroyed at whim by enemies. Due to the menace of enemies, this life-giving impulse, the soul, becomes the most enviable substance in man. Paradoxically, but consequentially, it must be hidden away far from the body which it

animates for fear of possible attacks. We must recall here, our point of view in another publication, *Journal of Religion and Society* - Umoh (2012), upholding that for the Anaañ and other Africans, “Death is not Natural”. In Anaañ land, people do not die; they are killed by enemies, no matter the age. And the fastest way to eliminate any victim, is an attack on his “vital impulse”. Once that is achieved, the deal is done. As the belief goes, the human soul, the vital elan, is perpetually in the body to give life to it. This is very paradoxical, but that is the belief: the generator of life can be hunted down. Once the life-giving element in man is cut off, then life is dead. The Anaañs did not seem to be aware of the existence of the immortal soul or if they were, they were not preoccupied with it since it could not prevent the most dreaded of evil: the death of the mortal body. This explains now the origin of the belief in the Bush Soul.

According to Annang traditional religion man has two souls – the mortal and the immortal. Many people may be surprised by the above assertion, and their surprise seems understandable. A *prima facie*, the Annangs seem to portray man as having just a single soul. But the contrary is the case. The reason is that they always thought about, were preoccupied about, anxious about, and worried about the security of the mortal and therefore the very vulnerable soul since nothing could affect the immortal one.” (108)

To cement this fact of a double soul, at the peak of a fierce quarrel, one would hear exchange of curses referring to both souls: “*Adiok unọ k’ukpoñ ikọt; adiok unọ ke adoro-abot*” – “May you be cursed through your bush soul; may you be cursed in the world”.

For want of a better expression, the belief in the bush soul can manageably be termed THE THEORY OF SOUL AFFILIATION or SOUL DUPLICATION. Ontologically, for the Anaañ, man has two souls: the bodily soul and the bush soul. The bodily soul, which man carries along with him all through his concrete earthly existence, is the life engine or the impulse of life that animates integrally the human entity in all his endeavours. This is his *élan vital*. It inhabits the human body. This soul is immortal and therefore not within the grasp of the enemy. On the other hand, the bush soul, *Ukpong ikọt*, is an “imaginary being” of this bodily soul which lies hidden in non-human organism of Nature: such as animals, trees, rivers and seas. *Ukpong ikọt* may be better described as the duplicated life wire, hidden away from the body in the safety of non-human creatures. The very core of this doctrine therefore hangs around the security over-consciousness of the Anaañ nationals. They do not take the threats of the enemies (both real and imaginative) for granted, for as Anaañ proverb upholds: “Life is not a yam seedling” – “*Ugwom ideghe mfut-edia*”. Once gone, it is gone; with no duplicate to be purchased. No Anaañ indigene would doubt the existence of the bush soul. They are always ready to buttress their arguments with millions of examples. Therefore, the doctrine of the bush soul flows from the exaggerated instinct of self-preservation. The bushes and the woods, they would say, are overwhelmingly inundated with the animating spirits of people that use such as their refuge. Mother Nature: the woods, brooks and streams, provides a powerful stronghold where the souls of the citizens of the community are hidden away, shielded from the glutton attacks of ill-wishers. Everybody has his/her soul in nature, mostly in the wood. An Anaañ adage captures this succinctly: “*A-akpoomọ ñgwup-ikọt ade agwo-agwo!*” – The entire bushy vegetation is “human invaded”. Or as another adage maintains: “*Aka ikọt ekwuọọñ kama ikwua, ke ideghe ekwuọọñ- ekwuọọñ aluñ ikọt*” – “When you venture into the bush in search of snails (a sluggish, harmless, toothless creature) be well armed with your machet because the bush is inhabited not only by snails. Yes, the bush is the territory of multiple and uncountable spirits, some of which are ferocious and dangerous. The bush souls, which are the duplicates of the bodily life impulse, are hidden away in Nature for

safety for fear of the menaces and hostilities of community enemies. The animals hosting the souls would do their utmost best to protect their inhabitants, come sun, come rain.

In line with this, one of the strictest rules for hunters during their expedition forbids hunters from being called by their names. This is for fear of the spirits inhabiting the hunted animals, knowing who was responsible for the hazards befalling them. Even at the very point of advancing into the forest, hunters would stop and pray. They would chant songs and make incantations, throwing handfuls of sand into the bush while declaring: “Things of the bush, as we enter, may you please rush out and by the time we will be heading out, kindly hurry back into your territory”. This is to usher out spirit-harbours animals before the expedition begins and thereby ward off their anger. This was also a respect for the environment and its creatures, as such constituted a plea and a supplication to the bush spirits. Such an approach was to prove that their venture was not an invasion of their territory, but rather a means of sourcing for their livelihood.

The *Nkwa-Uwia* tree is an important point of interest here. This tree, known for its mysterious character, is used for the carving of masks for typically unique masquerades of infernal behaviour among the people of Anaañ. Anaañ belief has it that the tree provides a habitat for many phenomenal spirits. Hence masquerades carrying such masks are not held responsible for the upheavals they carry out during their outings, for the wearers are believed to be possessed by the spirits in the wood.

When we were kids many stories surrounding the phenomenal nature of the ‘nku-uwia’ tree were told and such stories about ghosts would send shivers running down our spines. People reportedly heard conversations emanating from the ‘nku-uwia’ tree in the middle of the night or sometimes on rainy, cloudy days in solitary places. Others reportedly heard the tree mourning aloud profusely a night prior to its being mowed down. Umoh (2015:76)

Before the felling of ‘nku-uwia’ tree, traditional priests were consulted to offer sacrifices for the spirits to be displaced from the tree, pleading with them that the inconvenience was for the honour of the ancestors who were to be honoured by the masquerades. The actual felling of the tree witnessed the outpouring of a reddish liquid interpreted as blood of some inhabitants of the truck. That wood would be left to sit for several weeks to allow the spirits to leave for an alternative camp. This was interpreted as an utter respect for the spirits using such an environment as habitat. Hence, the environment is considered man’s closest neighbour. (*AfricanArts27: (4,1994):4853; 95academic.csuohio.edu/curnowk/curnok/html/akpan.html*)

Ordinary people are not aware of the habitat of the other person’s soul. Even some individuals may live and die without knowing what their bush souls are. Yet nobody in Anaañ land would doubt the veracity of the doctrine of the bush soul. To know where one’s soul is sheltered, spiritual experts must be consulted, and they were bound by the law of their profession not to endanger people’s lives by disclosing the habitat of other people’s souls. Everyone is always conscious of and anxious about this fact, as it is a matter of life and death. Only diviners and traditional medicine men can tell in which entities the human second souls are hidden, and they would only tell this to the owners in case of extreme necessity. Diviners were also believed to possess the ability to alter the harbours of people’s souls to safer ones. This is called *ukpugho ukpoñ* – the migration of the soul, the alteration of the soul’s refuge or specifically the exchange of the soul’s abode. However, the spontaneous behaviours and comportment of individuals, such as the likes and dislikes, the manner of eating, the erratic or moody character and the general attitude of one’s day to day life would often raise suspicions about “the beasts” believed to be hiding the life wire of such and such a person; the habitat where his spirit is kept away for safety.

Apart from the behaviour, it is attested that even the physiological appearance, temperament, body scent or countenance may convincingly constitute a source of growing

hypothesis of one's bush soul. Some individuals are lions or leopards by soul affiliation while others are monkeys or antelopes or even tigers. The expression that one often hears in Anaañ is "*adyk ekpe*" – "He is initiated into a lion, or literary, he has entered into a lion". In such a case ontologically, the lion would be his "being-sake". Individuals would frown at such a supposition, because that could endanger their earthly existence. Determining the conditions that mark the suitability of individuals for such "a habitat" as a bush soul, instead of another, is beyond the scope of this research. This may not even depend on the will of the individual. Consequently, one does not choose one's bush soul.

Rebecca Allen, an American internationally acclaimed artist, in her interactive artworks that explore the role of the human presence in a virtual world inhabited by artificial life, through her painting, has this poignant explanatory affirmation to make with regards to "The Bush Soul":

In West Africa, there's a belief that a person has more than one soul and that there's a type of soul called the bush soul that dwells within a wild animal of the bush. In this work a person's "soul" enters a virtual world (a virtual bush) that is alive and responsive. The world's inhabitants are brought to life through programs that define their behaviours and desires. <https://www.rebeccaallen.com/projects/bush-soul-number-3>

In Rebecca's artwork, a person's soul, represented as a sphere of pulsing energy, penetrates a virtual world which in response comes alive. The inhabitants of the world are equally animated by means of programs which define their behaviours and desires. Through her artistic imagination, complex social environments can come out of the interaction of simple behaviours. The computer-generated characters, artificial lifeforms, can be endowed with "feelings" towards any object in the world. These feelings controls a character's movements and impact its reactions.

A force-feedback joystick provides both navigation and tactile sensations. It serves as a connection between your physical body and virtual soul. Through the joystick one can feel the "energy" of the environment as vibrations emanate from certain creatures and significant places in the virtual world. As you explore the environment you may inhabit the body of certain artificial life forms. Your soul may also be expelled from a creature's body if the creature so desires or through the push of a button. <https://www.rebeccaallen.com/projects/bush-soul-number-3>

Even though Allens was strongly influenced by the input of computer games, which falls within her area of specialization - digital arts - she has successfully illustrated the issue of the bush soul by reading the minds of some traditional African communities where such belief obtains and bringing such to life through her paintings. She has explored the phenomenon of physicality and virtuality, reality and illusion, the body and the mind, and what is entailed to be human, as technology redefines our sense of reality and identity. Her artwork unveiled a lot in behavioral psychology and psychiatry, which the soul in African belief is all about. In many African cultures, this belief is at the origin of totemism: individual and collective. Such animals become sacred, and the religious ethical rules apply in their favour.

The issue of the bush soul in Anaañ resembles the animating breath, the Soul of the world, especially in the Christian Stoic, Plotinus.

For the Stoics, the universe is a great organism where everything is in ‘sympathy’ (sympath  ), which maintains its coherence through a tension(tonos), and is animated by a material breath, the Soul of the world, which diversifies into the individualized souls of living beings (animals and humans). This Soul of the world and its unifying tonos could be identified with Bergson’s   lan vital... In the first centuries of our era, when Platonic and Stoic traditions mingled with Eastern mysticisms, we find in Plotinus and the Neoplatonists the conception of the cosmos as a great living organism animated by the Soul of the world emanated from the absolute One. <https://doi.org/10.4000/11zox>

From the many attempted decoding by modern scholars of the traditional doctrine of the human soul, it has become obvious that the human person has two souls according to Anaa   belief. This assertion may be shrouded in interpolation or misinterpretation, as critics may reasonably observe. However, this seems to be the only way out of a looming illogicality of contrary views. This may generate a lot of controversies.

THE DEATH OF LIFE

Under this heading, we will discuss the mortal and the immortal souls. According to Paul Richard Blum, Renaissance Philosophy poses various questions about the immortality of the soul. He opines:

The metaphysical question was whether there is something spiritual that gives life to human beings, such that they are endowed with an ontological status superior to animals and a lasting reality. If this is true, then there is a human soul that transcends the perishable body. But a problem arises: what is the evidence for this, and what does it mean for man to be essentially spiritual?”

Immortality of soul is a topical and critical issue in many philosophical, theological, religious and cultural traditions since the onset of scholarship. Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle were of the view that the soul preexisted the body and will continue to exist after physical death, whereas materialist thinkers “believe that consciousness and the soul are products of physical processes and cease to exist after death”. During the Medieval and Renaissance, the immortality of soul was a hot topic of debate in metaphysics, epistemology and theology. <http://www.cambridgeorg/core/booksca...>

However, according to the Anaa  s, the human soul is mortal, because death is an undeniable phenomenon and the Anaa   are realists. The principle that generates life in humans can die and in fact, does die with the body, otherwise man would live forever. That is the very paradox that gave rise to the concept of the Bush Soul and reincarnation in Anaa   cosmology.

REINCARNATION

The doctrine of reincarnation is what gives credence to the proposal of the second, immortal soul according to Anaa   belief. The end of this tenet is to promote the eternal existence of the ancestral spirit. This is an issue of African metaphysics, which according to Umotong (2014) raises questions about the problem of the science of the soul. This borders upon the interpretation of life, the nature of the soul, the relationship between the spirit, soul and body, the aim of human life and the destiny of the soul. (Umotong 2014:1).

In Africa, the ancestors although conceptualized as spirits and therefore divine, are inseparably associated with the corporeal forms

which they had before their departure at death to the ancestral world. Once the aged have lived and died well, once the families have performed the required funeral rites that is expected to assist the spirit of the ancestor to arrive the ancestral world, the soul of the ancestor comes back to this world to live a fresh or another life by being reborn or reincarnated in the immediate or extended family that they belonged to in their past life.” (Umotong 2014: 1).

Udoetok (2002), as quoted in Umotong, figures reincarnation as the doctrine that a person’s life and earthly existence does not end with the death of his physical body. Instead, something in the individual, namely the soul, lives on in some form of disembodied existence and sooner or later comes back to life on this earth in another body. By implication, this means taking on flesh or body again for as many times as an individual soul may either wish or be forced to come back to earth Transmigration of souls viewed as the successive animation of different human bodies by one human soul implies that at death, a person’s soul takes up a new body and return to earth to live again through the newborn baby (Umotong 2014:2).

CRITICAL EVALUATION

After exploring the morphogenesis of organisms in this paper, our itinerary has taken us far and wide different subjects in Anaañ cosmology. We have perused the belief in the vital impetus, the bush soul, the immortal soul, the reincarnation and the safety domicile in Mother Earth. It is useless to ask whether I, the writer, believe or accept such doctrines or not, since our approach in this paper is purely phenomenological. By this we mean that this approach of phenomenology allows the subject to unfold itself freely and succinctly concerning what it is. Phenomenology permits the doctrine of the bush soul, for instance, to tell the public what it stands for, without bias or prejudice. It is only after this self-unfoldment that such will be critically analyzed, examined and scrutinized.

We have fathomed that the doctrine of the bush soul, emanating from the élan vital, is an expression of an inherent anxiety of the people, who live in perpetual fear of death, resulting from real or imaginary attacks of enemies supposed to be overflowing the entire human society. The pangs of death and their torturous grief of separation among family members are at the origin of this fruit of imagination, the bush soul. By this statement I imply that the bush soul is not real. My statement is that of a scholar, seeing the doctrine critically and not of an Anaañ believer. The thought of the bush soul is an instinct of self-preservation personified. This “supposed organism” is simply the shadow of the immortal soul that is enshrined in all humans, animating them. Scholars can bear me out that the expression “Ukpong”, in Anaañ language also means “shadow”. This is for instance the “ombre” of sun rays on any subject. From here, that effect of the sun is far from the real object. *Ukpõñ Ikõt* is engendered by the fear of the unknown, especially death, that surround the Anaañ “bon homme” and it is therefore not an organism per se. The Bush Soul is what we may characterize in philosophy as, the “fiction of the mind” of the Anaañ populace. However, all said and done, the belief cannot be ignored or brushed aside because of its import, its impacts and its meticulous influences on the daily lives of the people. Such a belief colours their world view and is expressed in their daily existence and prayers. Traditional Anaañs would go to any length to challenge such “unorthodox view” as expressed above. We can only uphold this view because of our scholarly exploration of the subject. It is only by our stance that tremendous contradiction emanating from “The death of life” can be avoided. Another important discovery from the doctrine of the bush soul is the environment friendliness of the Anaañ nationals. The bush, the wood, the groves and the entire nature represent Mother Earth

and that is the safest habitat to secure the protection of one's "life anchor", the soul. Since the bodily soul was always in the body to keep it alive, there was a need "to keep it secure; to keep it away" for safety in the environment. Nature, which is the most cordial, most intimate and the closest neighbour of man, provides the fortress for the élan vital.

CONCLUSION

Now that the concrete existence of the Bush Soul has been dismantled, it having been proved to be the "Fear instinct incarnate" of the Anaañ man, the Elan vital can only find its counterpart in the Anaañ bodily soul which is immortal. Otherwise, one must ask "how can the animating mechanism die? Or can one explain the death of life? Traditional Anaañ nationals are not preoccupied with all these intricacies of the immortal soul, since it cannot die and very unfortunately cannot prevent the bodily death of the organism, which is the handiwork of enemies and the worst calamity that can befall man.

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CORRUPTION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS: NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

Corruption constitutes a persistent structural problem undermining governance effectiveness, public accountability, and socio-economic development in Nigeria. Despite extensive public sector reforms since the return to democratic rule in 1999, corruption continues to manifest in public procurement, fiscal management, electoral processes, and resource governance. Institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) were established to combat corruption, yet accountability outcomes remain inconsistent. The central problem addressed in this study is the limited transformative impact of anti-corruption and public sector reforms despite significant institutional and legislative interventions. This article critically examined the structural drivers of corruption in Nigeria, assess the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms, and evaluate the extent to which public sector reforms have strengthened governance outcomes. The study was grounded in Principal-Agent Theory and Public Choice Theory, which collectively illuminate the political economy foundations of corruption. Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative, analytical approach, relying on secondary data sources including scholarly literature, policy documents, audit reports, and documented reform outcomes. The study contributed to knowledge by integrating political economy analysis with reform evaluation, demonstrating that technocratic reforms alone are insufficient without deeper institutional autonomy, judicial strengthening, and restructuring of incentive systems within Nigeria's rentier state framework. The study recommended that achieving durable accountability and meaningful public sector reform outcomes in Nigeria requires a comprehensive governance framework that integrates effective enforcement of laws, institutional independence, economic diversification, and active citizen engagement in public affairs

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The problem of corruption in Nigeria is neither episodic nor merely administrative; it is historically embedded within the political evolution of the Nigerian state. At independence in 1960, the new state inherited a colonial administrative structure characterized by centralised authority and limited participatory accountability. Early post-independence politics quickly became entangled with patronage distribution, regional competition, and electoral manipulation, culminating in the 1966 military intervention. The long periods of military rule that followed weakened institutional checks and concentrated decision-making power within executive hierarchies, thereby reducing transparency and public oversight.

The discovery and commercialization of crude oil in the 1970s fundamentally transformed Nigeria's fiscal architecture. Oil revenues displaced taxation as the primary

source of state income, producing a rentier political economy. As scholars such as Ross (2012) argue, rentier states often exhibit weakened accountability because governments derive revenue from natural resources rather than direct taxation of citizens. In Nigeria, this dynamic diminished the fiscal social contract and incentivized intense political competition for access to oil rents. The result was the consolidation of neopatrimonial networks in which formal bureaucratic institutions coexisted with informal patron-client relationships.

With the restoration of democratic governance in 1999, successive administrations initiated ambitious anti-corruption and public sector reform programs. The creation of the EFCC and ICPC under President Olusegun Obasanjo signaled institutional recognition of corruption as a systemic threat. Legislative measures such as the Fiscal Responsibility Act (2007) and the Public Procurement Act (2007) aimed to institutionalise fiscal discipline and transparency. Furthermore, public financial management reforms supported by institutions such as the World Bank introduced digital systems intended to reduce discretion and leakages. Although Nigeria has enacted comprehensive public financial management reforms and established multiple oversight institutions (including the Office of the Auditor-General, the Public Accounts Committees of the National Assembly, and anti-corruption agencies) corruption perceptions and documented leakages in public expenditure persist. Budget padding, procurement irregularities, abandoned projects, and revenue leakages in the oil sector illustrate systemic weaknesses in accountability enforcement. The persistence of these challenges suggests that corruption in Nigeria is not merely a function of weak laws or inadequate technical systems but is rooted in deeper structural and collective action dynamics that constrain institutional effectiveness.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

- i. What structural and political economy factors sustain corruption in Nigeria despite extensive reform initiatives?
- ii. To what extent have anti-corruption agencies and public financial management reforms strengthened accountability and governance outcomes?
- iii. To what extent have public sector reforms contributed to measurable improvements in accountability and overall governance performance?

1.3 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this article are

- i. To critically examine how structural and political economy factors sustain corruption in Nigeria's public sector.
- ii. To assess the effectiveness of key accountability institutions and mechanisms established since 1999.
- iii. To evaluate the extent to which public sector reforms have strengthened governance outcomes.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on public sector reforms, corruption and accountability in Nigeria within the fourth republic, which is the democratic period from 1999 to the present. The temporal scope is justified by the institutional and legislative transformations that followed Nigeria's return to civilian rule, including the establishment of key anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), as well as major public financial management and procurement reforms.

Substantively, the study examines corruption as a structural governance challenge, assesses the effectiveness of accountability institutions, and evaluates the impact of public sector reforms on transparency and governance outcomes. It is limited to federal-level institutions and nationally implemented reforms, while drawing illustrative references from subnational experiences where relevant.

Methodologically, the study relies on qualitative analysis of secondary data sources, including scholarly literature, policy documents, audit reports, and institutional performance records. The study does not undertake primary empirical fieldwork or quantitative econometric modelling but instead provides an analytical and theoretical evaluation grounded in political economy perspectives.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Perspectives

Corruption, in classical public administration literature, is defined as the abuse of entrusted public power for private gain (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016). However, contemporary scholarship extends this definition to encompass systemic and structural dimensions. Political corruption involves manipulation of laws, policies, and institutions for partisan or personal advantage. Administrative corruption manifests in bribery, procurement manipulation, and payroll fraud. State capture refers to private interests shaping regulatory or legislative processes to secure preferential benefits.

In the Nigerian context, corruption is frequently embedded within neopatrimonial structures, where personal loyalty and ethnic balancing coexist with formal bureaucratic norms (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997). This duality complicates reform efforts because legal-rational rules are often subordinated to informal networks.

Accountability is similarly multidimensional. Bovens (2007) conceptualizes accountability as a relationship characterized by answerability, justification, and enforceability. In Nigeria, political accountability is exercised through periodic elections, yet electoral integrity challenges undermine its effectiveness. Administrative accountability relies on civil service codes and audit systems, while legal accountability depends on judicial independence and prosecutorial efficiency. Social accountability, facilitated by civil society and media, has expanded with digital technology but remains constrained by intimidation and limited access to information.

Public sector reform in Nigeria reflects evolving paradigms in public administration. Early reforms were influenced by New Public Management principles emphasizing efficiency and privatization (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017). More recent reforms incorporate digital governance and open government initiatives aimed at enhancing transparency. However, reform diffusion without contextual adaptation risks superficial compliance rather than substantive transformation.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 Principal-Agent Theory (PAT)

Principal-Agent Theory (PAT) has emerged as one of the most influential analytical frameworks in economics, political science, and public administration for understanding delegation, accountability, and governance failure. At its core, the theory examines relationships in which one actor, the principal, delegates authority or responsibility to another actor, the agent, to perform tasks on the principal's behalf. The fundamental problem addressed by the theory concerns how principals can ensure that agents act in accordance with their interests when agents possess greater information about their actions and may

pursue objectives that diverge from those of the principal. This tension between delegation and control lies at the heart of modern governance systems and explains why agency theory has become central to the study of bureaucratic behavior, institutional accountability, and corruption.

The intellectual origins of Principal–Agent Theory can be traced to neoclassical economics and contract theory, particularly the work of Jensen and Meckling (1976), who conceptualized the firm as a nexus of contracts between owners and managers. In their analysis, shareholders act as principals who delegate decision-making authority to managers, who function as agents. Because managers may pursue personal interests such as compensation, prestige, or job security rather than maximizing shareholder value, agency costs arise. These costs include monitoring expenditures by the principal, bonding expenditures by the agent, and residual losses resulting from divergent behavior. Earlier contributions by Arrow (1963) and later by Ross (1973) formalized the economic theory of agency by emphasizing the central role of uncertainty and information asymmetry in contractual relationships. These foundational works established the analytical structure that would later be extended to public governance and political institutions.

The application of Principal–Agent Theory to public administration expanded significantly during the late twentieth century. Moe (1984) adapted the theory to political institutions, arguing that democratic governance consists of complex chains of delegation. Citizens delegate authority to elected representatives, who in turn delegate authority to ministers, bureaucrats, regulatory agencies, and contractors. Each layer of delegation introduces new agency risks and increases informational distance between the original principal (the citizenry) and the final implementing agent. McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast (1987) further demonstrated how legislatures design administrative procedures to control bureaucratic discretion, effectively creating “fire alarm” and “police patrol” oversight mechanisms. In this framework, accountability institutions such as audits, legislative hearings, judicial review, and transparency requirements function as monitoring devices to reduce agency costs.

Within corruption studies, Principal–Agent Theory gained prominence through the work of Klitgaard (1988), who operationalized agency dynamics into a simplified formula: corruption equals monopoly plus discretion minus accountability. Although stylized, this formulation captures the structural logic of agency problems in public governance. When public officials possess monopoly control over valuable resources, enjoy wide discretion in decision-making, and face weak accountability mechanisms, the expected benefits of corrupt behavior may outweigh the expected costs. Corruption thus becomes a rational response to institutional incentives rather than merely a moral failing. This perspective shifted anti-corruption discourse from normative condemnation to structural reform, emphasizing the importance of institutional design in shaping behavior.

In developing democracies, agency problems are frequently exacerbated by structural conditions such as rentier economies, weak institutional capacity, and limited fiscal dependence on taxation. Ross (2012) argues that in oil-dependent states, governments derive substantial revenue from natural resource rents rather than from citizens’ taxes. This fiscal independence reduces the need for governments to cultivate broad-based accountability. From an agency perspective, the principal’s leverage diminishes when the agent does not rely on the principal for financial sustenance. The erosion of the fiscal social contract thus weakens democratic oversight and intensifies agency risks. In such contexts, corruption may become systemic rather than episodic, embedded within political settlements and elite coalitions.

Principal–Agent Theory explains corruption in terms of the relationship between principals (citizens and political leaders) and agents (public officials and bureaucrats). In

Nigeria's Fourth Republic, citizens entrust public officials with the responsibility of managing public resources and implementing policies. However, due to information asymmetry, weak monitoring systems, and limited enforcement mechanisms, these agents often pursue personal interests rather than public welfare. This situation creates opportunities for corruption, such as embezzlement, bribery, and misuse of public funds. Consequently, accountability institutions and public sector reforms; such as strengthening anti-corruption agencies, improving auditing mechanisms, and enhancing transparency, are designed to reduce the principal-agent gap by increasing oversight, sanctions, and performance monitoring.

2.2.2. Public Choice Theory

Public Choice Theory represents one of the most influential intellectual movements in modern political economy and public administration. Emerging primarily from the work of James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock in the mid-twentieth century, Public Choice Theory applies economic reasoning to political decision-making processes. Rather than assuming that political actors are benevolent guardians of the public interest, the theory posits that individuals in the public sector (politicians, bureaucrats, voters, and interest groups) are rational actors motivated by self-interest, utility maximization, and strategic behavior (Buchanan and Tullock, 1962). By extending the assumptions of rational choice economics into the realm of governance, Public Choice Theory fundamentally challenges idealized conceptions of the state and provides a powerful framework for analyzing corruption, accountability deficits, and reform dynamics, particularly in developing democracies such as Nigeria.

The intellectual foundations of Public Choice Theory were laid in Buchanan and Tullock's seminal work, *The Calculus of Consent*, which conceptualized political processes as systems of exchange analogous to markets (Buchanan and Tullock, 1962). In their formulation, collective decisions emerge from the aggregation of individual preferences under institutional rules. Political actors are not assumed to pursue the public good inherently; rather, they respond to incentives, constraints, and opportunities within institutional structures. This analytical shift reoriented public administration scholarship by rejecting the traditional assumption of administrative neutrality and public-spiritedness. Instead, it recognized that politicians seek re-election, bureaucrats seek budget maximization and career advancement, and interest groups seek regulatory advantages.

One of the central contributions of Public Choice Theory to governance analysis is its emphasis on rent-seeking behavior. Building upon the work of Krueger (1974) and Tullock (1967), the theory explains how political actors manipulate public policy to generate economic rents, benefits that exceed normal market returns, through regulatory controls, subsidies, monopolies, and discretionary allocation of resources. Rent-seeking does not create new wealth; rather, it redistributes existing wealth toward politically connected actors. In contexts where state authority controls valuable resources, such as oil revenues, procurement contracts, or licensing regimes, political competition often centers on capturing these rents. Nigeria's political economy, heavily dependent on oil revenues, exemplifies the conditions under which rent-seeking becomes institutionalized. The centralization of oil wealth at the federal level generates intense competition for political office because control over public office translates directly into access to distributive rents.

The theory further emphasizes the problem of concentrated benefits and diffuse costs in political decision-making. Policies that generate significant benefits for small, organized interest groups while imposing dispersed costs on the broader population are likely to be adopted because beneficiaries possess strong incentives to lobby, whereas the general public lacks motivation to mobilize against minor individual losses (Olson, 1965). This dynamic

explains why subsidy regimes, inflated procurement contracts, and regulatory privileges persist even when they undermine overall welfare. In Nigeria, fuel subsidy arrangements historically generated substantial rents for importers and politically connected intermediaries while imposing broad fiscal burdens on the national budget. The persistence of such policies can be understood not as administrative oversight but as the outcome of rational political bargaining among self-interested actors.

Public Choice Theory also illuminates accountability challenges in democratic systems. Traditional democratic theory assumes that elections function as mechanisms for disciplining poor performance. However, Public Choice scholars argue that rational ignorance limits the effectiveness of electoral accountability. Because the probability of any single vote determining an electoral outcome is extremely small, citizens may have limited incentives to acquire detailed information about policy performance (Downs, 1957). As a result, voters may rely on heuristics, identity affiliations, or patronage considerations rather than rigorous policy evaluation. In Nigeria's heterogeneous society, ethnic, regional, and partisan loyalties may influence voting behavior more strongly than assessments of administrative integrity. This weakens the disciplining effect of elections and allows corrupt actors to retain political support.

The implications of Public Choice Theory for public sector reform are both diagnostic and prescriptive. Diagnostically, the theory suggests that reform failure often arises because reforms threaten entrenched interests. Anti-corruption agencies, procurement transparency systems, and fiscal responsibility laws may disrupt established rent distribution networks. Actors benefiting from existing arrangements may therefore resist or undermine reform implementation. This resistance may not always be overt; it can manifest through bureaucratic delay, selective enforcement, or political interference. Reform success thus depends not only on technical design but also on the alignment of incentives among political elites.

Prescriptively, Public Choice Theory advocates institutional arrangements that constrain discretionary authority and reduce opportunities for rent extraction. Constitutional rules, separation of powers, transparency requirements, and competitive markets are mechanisms designed to limit arbitrary decision-making and align private incentives with public welfare (Buchanan, 1980). In Nigeria, reforms such as the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Public Procurement Act can be interpreted as attempts to institutionalize rule-based governance and limit discretion in fiscal and contractual decisions. Similarly, digital public financial management systems reduce information asymmetry and restrict opportunities for manipulation by automating processes and creating audit trails.

In the Nigerian context, integrating Public Choice insights with institutional reform strategies is essential. Anti-corruption initiatives must address the incentive structures that make corruption politically rational. Strengthening political finance regulations, reducing campaign costs, enhancing transparency in party funding, and limiting discretionary control over public contracts are necessary steps toward altering the cost-benefit calculus facing public officials. Moreover, economic diversification that reduces dependence on oil revenues would increase reliance on taxation, thereby strengthening the accountability relationship between citizens and government. Within the administrative environment, this theory helps explain practices such as rent-seeking, patronage politics, and policy manipulation for private gain. It highlights how political elites, bureaucrats, and interest groups may exploit public institutions to maximize personal benefits, thereby undermining accountability and effective governance. From this perspective, corruption during Nigeria's Fourth Republic can be understood as a consequence of institutional incentives that allow individuals in positions of authority to prioritize private gains over public service.

3.0 STRUCTURAL AND POLITICAL ECONOMY DRIVERS OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

Corruption in Nigeria is best understood not merely as a moral failing or administrative weakness but as a structurally embedded feature of its political economy. The structural and political economy drivers of corruption in Nigeria shall be discussed from the following point of views:

- i. Since independence and particularly following the oil boom of the 1970s, Nigeria's economic structure has been characterized by heavy dependence on petroleum revenues. This rentier configuration has profoundly shaped state–society relations, weakening fiscal accountability and fostering distributive politics. In rent-dependent systems, governments rely less on taxation and more on externally generated resource rents, thereby reducing the incentive to cultivate reciprocal accountability relationships with citizens. Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian (2013) argue that oil dependence in Nigeria has undermined institutional development by encouraging rent-seeking and weakening incentives for prudent macroeconomic management. Because access to oil revenues is centralized within the state, political competition intensifies around control of public office as a gateway to wealth accumulation. The rentier state structure intersects with elite patronage networks that reinforce corruption as a political survival strategy. Political actors frequently distribute state resources to maintain loyalty among supporters, financiers, and regional power brokers. This clientelistic logic transforms public office into a mechanism for patronage allocation rather than public service delivery. Watts (2004) contends that oil wealth in Nigeria has entrenched a system of “petro-politics” in which resource control and rent distribution are central to governance. In such contexts, corruption becomes systemic rather than episodic, embedded in the institutional fabric of political competition. Public Choice Theory provides insight into this dynamic by emphasizing that political actors respond rationally to incentive structures that reward rent extraction (Buchanan and Tullock, 1962). Where institutional constraints are weak and enforcement uncertain, public officials maximize personal or factional gain, often at the expense of public interest.
- ii. Institutional fragility further sustains corruption. Although Nigeria has enacted numerous legal and administrative reforms, enforcement mechanisms remain inconsistent. Oversight institutions often face political interference, limited autonomy, and inadequate funding. Principal–Agent Theory highlights how corruption emerges when agents (public officials) exploit information asymmetries and weak monitoring systems to pursue private interests (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016). In Nigeria, citizens as principals frequently lack access to timely and reliable information regarding public expenditure, procurement processes, and revenue management. Even when irregularities are exposed, sanctions are inconsistently applied, reducing the credibility of deterrence mechanisms. Judicial delays, plea bargains, and selective prosecution contribute to perceptions of impunity, reinforcing corrupt incentives.
- iii. Corruption in Nigeria is also sustained by collective action constraints. Persson, Rothstein, and Teorell (2013) argue that in contexts of systemic corruption, individuals comply with corrupt practices because they believe others will do the same. When corruption becomes normalized, integrity is perceived as costly and potentially self-defeating. In Nigeria, widespread perceptions of corruption across political and administrative institutions reduce public trust and weaken collective commitment to accountability norms. Citizens may engage in informal payments or clientelistic exchanges because they perceive the system as inherently compromised.

This dynamic perpetuates a self-reinforcing cycle in which expectations of corruption undermine reform effectiveness.

- iv. Electoral financing and the high cost of political competition represent additional structural drivers. Campaign financing in Nigeria is expensive, and political parties often lack transparent funding mechanisms. As a result, candidates frequently rely on private financiers or personal wealth, creating incentives to recoup investments once in office. This dynamic strengthens the nexus between political office and resource extraction. Scholars have noted that weak regulation of party financing and limited enforcement of electoral spending limits exacerbate corruption risks (Joseph, 1987). Political offices thus become investment opportunities, reinforcing rent-seeking behavior.
- v. Ethno-regional balancing and federal character principles, though designed to promote inclusivity, have also produced unintended consequences within Nigeria's federal structure. The allocation of public offices along ethnic and regional lines can reinforce patronage expectations and weaken meritocratic recruitment. While intended to manage diversity, these arrangements sometimes entrench distributive politics and elite bargaining. The competition for federal allocations among states further intensifies rent-seeking incentives, particularly in a system where subnational governments rely heavily on centrally distributed oil revenues.
- vi. Administrative capacity deficits compound these political economy challenges. Weak record-keeping systems, inadequate procurement oversight, and insufficient audit follow-through create opportunities for diversion of public funds. Although reforms such as the Treasury Single Account and digital payroll systems have reduced specific leakages, corruption adapts to institutional changes. Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) emphasize that anti-corruption reforms must alter underlying incentive structures; otherwise, corrupt networks evolve in response to new controls. In Nigeria, reforms often improve formal compliance but struggle to disrupt entrenched patronage systems.
- vii. The socio-economic context also plays a significant role in fanning Nigeria's corruption status. High levels of poverty and unemployment increase vulnerability to clientelistic exchanges and petty corruption. When access to public services is mediated through informal payments or political connections, corruption becomes intertwined with survival strategies. Mauro (1995) demonstrates that corruption negatively affects investment and economic growth, thereby perpetuating underdevelopment and reinforcing the very conditions that enable corrupt exchanges. In Nigeria, this cyclical relationship between corruption and underdevelopment further complicates reform efforts.

Ultimately, corruption in Nigeria is sustained by an interaction of rentier state dependence, elite patronage networks, institutional fragility, collective action constraints, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. It is not simply the absence of laws or agencies that perpetuates corruption but the structural incentives embedded within political and economic arrangements. Addressing corruption therefore requires more than technocratic reforms; it demands restructuring incentive systems, strengthening institutional autonomy, enhancing judicial credibility, and fostering societal norms that reject impunity. Without confronting these structural and political economy drivers, anti-corruption efforts risk remaining incremental rather than transformative.

4.0 EFFECTIVENESS OF ACCOUNTABILITY INSTITUTIONS AND MECHANISMS

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has established and strengthened multiple institutions designed to promote transparency, enforce compliance with public financial regulations, and combat corruption. While these institutions reflect a formal commitment to accountability, their effectiveness has been mixed, shaped by political, institutional, and structural constraints.

- i. The EFCC was established in 2003 to investigate and prosecute financial crimes, including money laundering, advance fee fraud, embezzlement, and other forms of economic sabotage. It has recorded notable achievements, including high-profile prosecutions, asset recovery initiatives, and collaboration with international partners in tracking illicit financial flows. These efforts have enhanced Nigeria's global engagement in anti-money laundering regimes and improved formal enforcement visibility. However, scholars and civil society organizations have raised concerns regarding selective prosecution, executive influence, and uneven enforcement patterns (Human Rights Watch, 2011). When anti-corruption enforcement appears politically motivated or disproportionately targeted at opposition figures, institutional credibility suffers. The perception of partiality undermines deterrence and weakens public trust, both of which are essential for effective accountability systems.
- ii. The ICPC, established in 2000, complements the EFCC by focusing on corruption prevention, system reviews, and prosecution of public sector misconduct. Its mandate includes public education, investigation of corrupt practices, and institutional reforms aimed at reducing opportunities for corruption. Despite these responsibilities, the ICPC has faced capacity limitations, inadequate funding, and legal bottlenecks that constrain its operational effectiveness. Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) argue that anti-corruption agencies require strong institutional autonomy, secure tenure for leadership, and insulation from political interference to function optimally. In Nigeria, leadership changes within these agencies have at times coincided with shifts in political priorities, reinforcing concerns about executive control.
- iii. Legislative oversight represents another crucial accountability mechanism. The National Assembly exercises oversight through committee hearings, budget scrutiny, and the review of audit reports. Public Accounts Committees are constitutionally empowered to examine public expenditure and ensure compliance with appropriation laws. However, oversight effectiveness is often limited by partisan bargaining, limited technical capacity, and political patronage networks. Audit reports frequently identify financial irregularities, yet enforcement actions are inconsistently pursued. Without timely sanctions, audit processes risk becoming procedural formalities rather than substantive accountability tools.
- iv. The Office of the Auditor-General plays a critical role in examining government accounts and reporting financial mismanagement. While audit findings provide valuable documentation of irregularities, implementation of recommendations remains weak. Institutional fragmentation and limited coordination between audit bodies, prosecutorial agencies, and the judiciary impede follow-through. This enforcement gap aligns with Principal-Agent Theory, which emphasizes that monitoring mechanisms must be complemented by credible sanctions to alter behavior (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016). In Nigeria, the gap between detection and punishment often diminishes the deterrent effect of oversight mechanisms.
- v. Judicial effectiveness is central to accountability outcomes. Although Nigeria's judiciary is constitutionally independent, challenges such as case backlogs, procedural delays, and allegations of judicial corruption weaken enforcement credibility. High-

profile corruption cases often experience prolonged litigation, plea bargains, or overturned convictions on appeal. Such outcomes reduce the perceived costs of corruption and reinforce impunity. Persson, Rothstein, and Teorell (2013) suggest that when citizens perceive enforcement institutions as compromised, collective commitment to anti-corruption norms erodes, further undermining institutional effectiveness.

- vi. Public financial management reforms have introduced technological mechanisms to strengthen accountability. The Treasury Single Account (TSA) consolidated government revenues into a centralized account, reducing opportunities for discretionary spending and enhancing cash management transparency. Similarly, the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) has reduced ghost worker fraud and improved payroll integrity. These reforms demonstrate the potential of digital systems to limit certain forms of financial mismanagement (Eme et al., 2015). However, technological solutions cannot fully address structural incentive distortions or political interference. Corruption networks may adapt to new controls, shifting from overt embezzlement to more sophisticated procurement manipulation or regulatory capture.
- vii. Civil society organizations and the media also function as informal accountability mechanisms. Investigative journalism and advocacy groups have exposed corruption scandals and mobilized public scrutiny. Transparency initiatives, including open budgeting platforms and freedom of information requests, have improved access to public data. Nonetheless, media intimidation, limited protection for whistleblowers, and political pressure constrain the impact of these mechanisms. Effective accountability requires not only formal institutions but also a supportive civic environment that protects dissent and investigative oversight.

For accountability institutions to achieve transformative impact, reforms must strengthen prosecutorial independence, enhance judicial efficiency, protect oversight bodies from political interference, and foster societal norms that reject impunity. Without these complementary measures, accountability mechanisms risk functioning as symbolic institutions rather than engines of systemic governance reform.

5.0 PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS AND GOVERNANCE OUTCOMES

Public sector reforms in Nigeria have constituted a central pillar of governance restructuring since the return to democratic rule in 1999. These reforms were introduced in response to decades of military rule, fiscal mismanagement, bureaucratic inefficiency, and systemic corruption that weakened institutional credibility and undermined development outcomes. Successive civilian administrations have pursued administrative, fiscal, and anti-corruption reforms aimed at enhancing transparency, strengthening accountability, and improving service delivery. Despite these initiatives, governance outcomes have remained uneven, reflecting the complex interaction between technocratic reforms and deeper political economy constraints.

- i. Early reform efforts in the Fourth Republic focused on macroeconomic stabilization, civil service restructuring, and public financial management modernization. Under the broader framework of economic reform, initiatives were introduced to improve budget credibility, rationalize public expenditure, and align fiscal policy with development priorities. Okonjo-Iweala and Osafo-Kwaako (2007) observe that reforms implemented during the mid-2000s strengthened debt management, enhanced fiscal transparency, and improved macroeconomic indicators. These achievements included the establishment of fiscal rules, debt relief negotiations, and greater

- disclosure of revenue flows. However, while macroeconomic management improved, institutional capacity and enforcement mechanisms remained fragile.
- ii. A major dimension of public sector reform has involved public financial management innovations designed to curb leakages and enhance transparency. The introduction of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) consolidated government revenues into a unified account structure, thereby reducing fragmentation and discretionary control over public funds. By centralizing receipts and payments, the TSA improved cash management and limited opportunities for extra-budgetary spending (Eme et al., 2015). Similarly, the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) was implemented to eliminate ghost workers and improve payroll integrity across ministries, departments, and agencies. These digital reforms represent important procedural improvements that have enhanced transparency and reduced specific forms of financial malpractice.
 - iii. Procurement reform has also been central to governance restructuring. The Public Procurement Act (2007) institutionalized competitive bidding processes, established the Bureau of Public Procurement, and standardized contracting procedures. These measures sought to reduce contract inflation, favoritism, and opaque tendering practices that historically characterized Nigeria's procurement system. While procurement processes have become more formalized, enforcement gaps and political interference continue to limit the full realization of reform objectives. Studies indicate that procurement manipulation has evolved in response to regulatory changes, demonstrating that legal frameworks alone cannot eliminate entrenched patronage systems (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016).
 - iv. Civil service reform represents another critical component of Nigeria's public sector transformation. Initiatives aimed at professionalizing the bureaucracy, monetizing fringe benefits, and introducing performance management systems were designed to enhance efficiency and reduce corruption incentives. However, implementation challenges, resistance from entrenched interests, and limited performance evaluation capacity have constrained outcomes. The persistence of bureaucratic red tape and institutional inertia suggests that structural and cultural factors continue to shape administrative behavior.
 - v. Anti-corruption reforms have complemented broader public sector restructuring. The establishment of specialized institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission signaled a formal commitment to combating corruption. These agencies have secured convictions and recovered assets, contributing to the visibility of anti-corruption enforcement. Nevertheless, concerns regarding selective prosecution, judicial delays, and political interference have limited their transformative impact (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The effectiveness of public sector reforms is closely tied to the credibility of enforcement institutions; without consistent sanctions, reforms risk being perceived as symbolic rather than substantive.

Governance outcomes, as reflected in international indicators, demonstrate incremental rather than transformative progress. Although Nigeria has improved certain aspects of fiscal reporting and macroeconomic management, corruption perceptions remain high, and public trust in institutions remains fragile (Transparency International, 2023). Persistent challenges in infrastructure delivery, public service provision, and budget implementation indicate that formal reforms have not fully translated into substantive improvements in governance quality. This gap between reform adoption and governance

outcomes reflects the importance of political commitment, institutional autonomy, and normative change.

Political economy analysis suggests that public sector reforms often confront entrenched patronage networks that adapt to institutional changes. Collective Action Theory posits that where corruption is systemic, individual compliance with reform norms may be perceived as irrational if others continue to engage in corrupt practices (Persson, Rothstein, and Teorell, 2013). In Nigeria, reform sustainability depends not only on institutional design but also on shifting societal expectations and strengthening enforcement credibility. Without altering the incentive structures that link political competition to resource control, reforms may produce procedural compliance without substantive transformation.

Public sector reforms in Nigeria have introduced important innovations in fiscal management, procurement regulation, civil service restructuring, and anti-corruption enforcement. These reforms have improved procedural transparency, enhanced macroeconomic management, and reduced certain forms of financial leakage. However, governance outcomes remain uneven due to structural political economy constraints, weak enforcement mechanisms, and entrenched patronage systems. Sustainable transformation requires deeper institutional autonomy, strengthened judicial effectiveness, and restructuring of incentive systems within Nigeria's rentier framework. Only through such comprehensive recalibration can public sector reforms achieve durable improvements in governance outcomes.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Corruption in Nigeria represents a structurally embedded governance challenge shaped by rentier state dynamics, elite patronage networks, institutional fragility, and collective action constraints. Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, significant public sector reforms have been introduced to enhance accountability, improve fiscal management, and combat financial crimes. Institutions such as the EFCC and ICPC, alongside public financial management innovations and procurement reforms, reflect important strides toward transparency. Nevertheless, governance outcomes remain uneven due to enforcement inconsistencies, political interference, judicial weaknesses, and persistent incentive distortions.

The analysis demonstrates that technocratic reforms alone cannot produce transformative change. Effective accountability requires institutional autonomy, credible judicial enforcement, restructured political financing systems, and strengthened civic engagement. Without addressing the deeper structural and political economy foundations of corruption, reforms risk remaining incremental rather than systemic. Sustainable governance transformation in Nigeria depends on aligning institutional design with incentive restructuring and normative change. Only through a comprehensive approach that integrates enforcement, institutional independence, economic diversification, and citizen participation can Nigeria achieve durable accountability and meaningful public sector reform outcomes.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the persistent challenges of corruption, accountability and uneven governance outcomes in Nigeria requires reforms that move beyond procedural compliance toward structural transformation. The study recommends the following:

- i. **Strengthening Institutional Autonomy**

Anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission must be insulated from executive interference through secure tenure for leadership, transparent appointment processes, and guaranteed financial independence. Institutional credibility depends not only on

statutory mandates but also on consistent enforcement free from partisan considerations. Ensuring prosecutorial independence and safeguarding these agencies from political retaliation would significantly enhance deterrence and public trust.

ii. **Judicial Independency**

Delays in adjudication, inconsistent rulings, and allegations of judicial compromise undermine enforcement outcomes. Specialized anti-corruption courts, procedural reforms to expedite trials, and enhanced judicial training in financial crimes can strengthen the integrity of prosecution processes. Without credible and timely sanctions, monitoring mechanisms lose effectiveness. A justice system that operates transparently and independently would reinforce institutional accountability across all branches of government.

iii. **Public financial management reforms should be deepened and consolidated**

While initiatives such as the Treasury Single Account and digital payroll systems have improved fiscal transparency, these mechanisms require continuous oversight, technological upgrades, and independent auditing to prevent adaptation by corrupt networks. Strengthening the capacity of the Office of the Auditor-General and ensuring mandatory implementation of audit recommendations would bridge the gap between detection and enforcement. In addition, procurement systems must incorporate real-time transparency platforms that allow civil society and media oversight of contract awards and budget implementation.

iv. **Diversification of Nigeria's Economy**

Diversifying the economic base beyond oil dependence would recalibrate the fiscal relationship between the state and citizens. Expanding the tax base and strengthening revenue administration would enhance accountability pressures by increasing citizen demand for transparent resource management. Reducing reliance on petroleum rents addresses one of the structural drivers of corruption identified in Nigeria's political economy (Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian, 2013). Long-term reform sustainability depends on reshaping the incentive environment in which public officials operate.

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**VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY IN THE AGE OF MISINFORMATION: ERNEST SOSA'S
PERSPECTIVE ON FAKE NEWS IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

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ABSTRACT

The spread of fake news on social media has triggered a crisis of epistemic trust in which misinformation, deepfakes, and algorithm-driven content systematically outpace users' ability to verify truth. This essay, extracted from the dissertation *Virtue Epistemology in the Age of Misinformation: Ernest Sosa's Perspective on Fake News in Social Media*, examines the problem through the lens of Ernest Sosa's virtue epistemology and argues that the crisis is fundamentally one of intellectual character rather than technology alone. Employing analytic, critical, and expository methods, the study explicates Sosa's bi-level theory of animal and reflective knowledge and his AAA framework of accuracy, adroitness, and aptness to diagnose why falsehoods go viral online. It contends that most social media sharing remains at the level of animal knowledge beliefs accurate by chance but lacking second-order awareness of their source and reliability thereby creating what this research terms "Viral Aptness Deficit." As a contribution to knowledge, the study proposes "Reflective Virality" as a remedial virtue: the Sosaian habit of pausing to achieve reflective awareness of a post's epistemic seat and reliability before sharing. The essay concludes that rebuilding digital trust requires cultivating epistemic virtues and demonstrates the contemporary relevance of Sosa's virtue epistemology for media ethics, education, and platform design in an age of misinformation.

KEYWORDS: Virtue Epistemology, Reflective Knowledge, Animal Knowledge, Fake News, Misinformation, Social Media, AAA Framework.

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has inaugurated an unprecedented epistemic crisis, one that is both global in reach and profoundly personal in its consequences. The proliferation of social media platforms Facebook, Twitter (now X), YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp, and their numerous derivatives has fundamentally altered the architecture of how human beings receive, process, evaluate, and transmit information. Never before in the history of human civilisation has the boundary between knowledge and ignorance, between verified fact and manufactured fiction, been so blurred, so contested, and so consequential. Within this turbulent epistemic landscape, the phenomenon of fake news a term denoting deliberately fabricated, distorted, or misleading information designed to deceive readers and achieve political, commercial, or ideological ends has emerged as one of the defining challenges of contemporary society. The question of how individuals, institutions, and entire communities can navigate this landscape without surrendering to epistemic vice has become a matter of urgent philosophical inquiry.

It is within this context that virtue epistemology, a branch of epistemology that shifts the analytical focus from the justification of propositions to the intellectual character of the knowing subject, becomes not merely relevant but indispensable. Virtue epistemology, broadly conceived, holds that the proper locus of epistemic evaluation is not simply the belief itself or the logical relationship between evidence and conclusion, but rather the cognitive agent who forms beliefs. The virtuous epistemic agent is one who exercises intellectual humility, open-mindedness, thoroughness, intellectual courage, and what Ernest Sosa the pre-eminent contemporary virtue epistemologist calls "reflective competence" in the process of belief formation. As Sosa argues in his landmark work *A Virtue Epistemology*: Knowledge requires not merely that one get things right but that one get them right through the exercise of intellectual virtue (Sosa 3). This claim, deceptively simple in its formulation, carries enormous implications for the age of fake news.

Ernest Sosa is widely acknowledged as one of the founding architects of contemporary virtue epistemology. His intellectual project spans over five decades and has generated one of the most sophisticated and rigorously developed frameworks for understanding the nature of knowledge in the history of analytic philosophy. Sosa's central contribution lies in his distinction between what he calls "animal knowledge" knowledge that results from the reliable functioning of one's cognitive faculties without higher-order reflection and "reflective knowledge" knowledge that involves an agent's capacity to situate her beliefs within a broader, reflective understanding of her own epistemic situation. In his influential *Reflective Knowledge* (2009), Sosa elaborates: "The reflective knower does not merely succeed cognitively; she understands why she succeeds, and this understanding is itself a cognitive achievement of the highest order" (Sosa 135). The relationship between epistemology and media is not new. Philosophers have long been interested in questions of testimony how we come to know things through the reports of others and in the conditions under which such testimonial knowledge is legitimate. Classical epistemologists such as John Locke worried about the reliability of second-hand reports, and David Hume, in his celebrated essay "Of Miracles," argued that the testimony of others should always be weighed against background probabilities and the track record of the testifier. However, the digital revolution has transformed the epistemic stakes of these questions beyond anything the classical philosophers could have envisioned. In the pre-digital era, the dissemination of false information was constrained by physical limitations the cost of printing, the reach of broadcasting, the gatekeeping function of editorial oversight. Today, a single piece of fabricated content can reach millions of people within hours, travelling across WhatsApp

groups, Facebook timelines, Twitter threads, and YouTube recommendation algorithms with a velocity and reach that no traditional falsehood could achieve.

The consequences of this transformation are not merely academic. Studies conducted during the 2016 United States presidential election revealed that false news stories were shared on Facebook more frequently than factual reporting from established news organisations (Allcott and Gentzkow 212). Research by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism has consistently shown that a significant proportion of social media users in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America report encountering misinformation on a near-daily basis. The COVID-19 pandemic provided perhaps the starkest illustration of the real-world consequences of epistemic failure at scale: the World Health Organisation declared not merely a pandemic but an "infodemic" a simultaneous outbreak of misinformation that caused people to reject vaccines, consume dangerous remedies, and defy public health measures with fatal consequences (Tangcharoensathien et al. 462).

The Nigerian and broader African context gives these considerations additional urgency and specificity. Social media penetration across sub-Saharan Africa has grown exponentially in the past decade, with Nigeria alone boasting over 33 million active social media users as of 2023 a figure that continues to rise. Political misinformation, ethnic propaganda, religious incitement, and health misinformation have all been documented as serious problems across the continent, with documented links to electoral violence, communal conflict, and preventable disease. Otto Dennis, reflecting on Nigeria's foundational commitments, observes that the country faces a "fundamental principle for national corporate survival and socioeconomic and political development" that must be pursued through responsible engagement with information platforms, including "social media, newspapers, magazine etc." (Dennis 660) This insight anchors the philosophical analysis of this essay within a concrete socio-political reality: the crisis of misinformation is inseparable from the broader challenge of sustaining a just and cohesive society.

Moses Udoh, whose philosophical inquiries examine the foundations of knowledge and the limits of human reasoning, points to the dangers of epistemic carelessness by showing that fallacies errors in reasoning and argument are not merely logical failures but reflections of defective cognitive character. Udoh observes that such errors represent "false beliefs" that systematically distort communal understanding (Udoh, "Fallacies" 95). The relevance of this insight to the culture of fake news is immediate: the propagation of misinformation on social media is, at its core, the industrialisation of fallacious reasoning at a scale that the classical logicians could not have imagined. When millions of social media users share unverified content, they engage in a collective epistemic act that Udoh's account of fallacious reasoning helps to characterise: they produce and amplify conclusions that have not been validly derived from adequate evidence, and in doing so they corrupt the epistemic commons on which democratic deliberation depends.

This essay proceeds in five movements. The first explicates Sosa's bi-level virtue epistemology and its core conceptual apparatus the AAA structure, the distinction between animal and reflective knowledge, and the account of intellectual virtues and vices. The second applies this framework systematically to the phenomenon of fake news and social media misinformation, developing the concept of Viral Aptness Deficit. The third offers a sustained critical engagement with Sosa's framework, identifying its limitations and the challenges it faces when applied to the digital environment. The fourth articulates the original contribution of this essay: the concept of Reflective Virality as a cultivable epistemic virtue that represents the

Sosaian remedy for Viral Aptness Deficit. The fifth concludes by framing the epistemic reconstruction of the digital public sphere as, fundamentally, a task of intellectual character formation.

VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY IN THE AGE OF MISINFORMATION: ERNEST SOSA'S FRAMEWORK

A Brief Intellectual Biography of Ernest Sosa

Ernest Sosa was born in Cuba in 1940 and received his undergraduate education at the University of Havana before emigrating to the United States, where he completed his doctoral studies in philosophy at the University of Miami. He held teaching positions at Brown University for the majority of his career before transitioning to Rutgers University, where he serves as Board of Governors Professor of Philosophy one of the most distinguished chairs in North American analytic philosophy. Over more than six decades, Sosa has shaped the direction of debates within analytic epistemology, particularly on questions of knowledge, justification, and intellectual virtue (sosa 12).

Sosa's intellectual development can be understood in three broad phases. In the first phase, spanning roughly the late 1960s through the 1980s, Sosa engaged primarily with foundationalist and coherentist theories of justification. His landmark 1980 paper "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge" argued that neither foundationalism nor coherentism alone could adequately account for the structure of knowledge, and proposed that epistemology should focus on the reliable faculties or "intellectual virtues" of the epistemic agent as the primary locus of epistemic evaluation. This move was revolutionary: it shifted attention from the logical structure of belief systems to the character and competences of the knower, laying the groundwork for what would become virtue epistemology as a distinct research programme (Luciano 12).

The second phase of Sosa's intellectual development, centred on the late 1980s and 1990s, marks his decisive turn towards virtue epistemology as the organising framework for his epistemological thinking. The third and most fully developed phase, from the early 2000s to the present, is represented by *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, Volume I (2007), *Reflective Knowledge: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, Volume II (2009), and *Judgment and Agency* (2015) the mature and fully elaborated form of Sosa's epistemological system that this essay applies to the phenomenon of fake news and misinformation on social media.

Sosa's Bi-Level Virtue Epistemology

The foundation of Ernest Sosa's epistemological system is a distinction between two fundamental levels of knowledge: animal knowledge and reflective knowledge. This distinction is not merely taxonomic but normative it tracks two fundamentally different kinds of epistemic achievement. Animal knowledge, in Sosa's account, is the most basic form of knowledge. In Quassim Cassam's book titled *Vices of the mind; From the intellectual to the political*, he argued that It is the kind of knowledge attributed to creatures who form true beliefs through reliable faculties without any requirement of reflective awareness of those faculties or their reliability. Human beings achieve animal knowledge constantly in their everyday cognitive lives (Jason 222).

. When a person sees that it is raining, or hears that their name is being called, they form beliefs through reliable faculties without any accompanying second-order awareness of the reliability of those faculties.

Reflective knowledge, by contrast, requires an additional dimension of epistemic achievement. It requires not only that the belief be apt in the animal sense accurate as a result of competence but that the agent also possess, from a reflective perspective, a satisfactory understanding of why and how their belief is reliable. The reflective knower does not merely form true beliefs through reliable faculties; they also know, from a second-order perspective, that their faculties are reliable, that the conditions under which they are operating are appropriate for the exercise of those faculties, and that their belief falls within a domain where their competence can be trusted. As Sosa articulates it, "Animal knowledge is knowledge attributable to the animal's competence in some domain, even if the animal has no idea of this. Reflective knowledge adds the requirement that the believer know, from a wider perspective, that his animal belief falls within a reliable field of competence" (Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology* 23).

When applied to the social media environment, this bi-level framework reveals a structural asymmetry of considerable diagnostic importance. The architecture of social media platforms is excellently designed to support and reward first-order epistemic processes accessing information, forming beliefs, sharing content while being profoundly hostile to second-order reflective processes evaluating the reliability of sources, assessing the conditions under which beliefs are formed, achieving a coherent understanding of one's own epistemic situation online. The result is an epistemic ecosystem that is well-designed to produce animal knowledge at scale while systematically impeding the development and exercise of reflective knowledge. This asymmetry is, in essence, what this essay terms Viral Aptness Defici (Hunt 312).

Furthermore, Sosa's bi-level framework allows us to understand why the problem of fake news on social media is resistant to straightforward technological solutions. Proposals to combat misinformation through algorithmic fact-checking, content moderation, or warning labels address only the first-order level of epistemic evaluation: they attempt to improve the accuracy of the information environment without addressing the second-order reflective capacities of the epistemic agents who inhabit it (Fillippo 121). Genuine remediation requires the cultivation of what Sosa's framework identifies as reflective knowledge the second-order epistemic capacity to understand, evaluate, and endorse (or withhold endorsement from) one's own belief-forming processes in the online environment.

The AAA Structure: Accuracy, Adroitness, and Aptness

The theoretical core of Sosa's virtue epistemology is what he calls the AAA structure: the view that any excellent epistemic performance must be analysed in terms of three interrelated normative dimensions accuracy, adroitness, and aptness. These three conditions form a hierarchically integrated structure in which each subsequent condition presupposes and adds to the preceding one.

Accuracy, the first element, refers simply to the truth of the belief in question. A belief is accurate when it correctly represents the way things are. Accuracy is a necessary condition for knowledge a false belief cannot constitute knowledge, however well it is supported by available evidence but it is not sufficient (James 13). A belief can be accurate by accident, coincidence, or luck without thereby constituting knowledge. In the social media context, accuracy is the condition most directly at stake in discussions of fake news: a fake news story is paradigmatically inaccurate. But Sosa's framework reveals that accuracy alone is epistemically

insufficient, because even when a shared social media post happens to be accurate, the epistemic quality of the sharing is deficient if the accuracy is accidental rather than the result of epistemic competence.

Adroitness, the second element, refers to the skill or competence with which a cognitive performance is executed. A belief-forming process is adroit when it manifests a genuine epistemic competence of the agent a stable, reliable, and appropriately exercised capacity to form true beliefs in the relevant domain. Adroitness is what distinguishes knowledge from lucky true belief: the person who accurately infers the time from a stopped clock is not adroit, because their accurate belief does not manifest a genuine competence for telling time. In the social media context, the absence of adroitness is endemic (Silva 33). Social media users typically form beliefs about the accuracy of shared content based on superficial markers the emotional resonance of the headline, the endorsement of network contacts, the apparent authority of the source's visual presentation rather than through the exercise of genuine epistemic competences such as source evaluation, corroboration, and critical analysis.

Aptness, the third and most important element of the AAA structure, is the condition that integrates accuracy and adroitness. A belief is apt when it is accurate because it is adroit when the truth of the belief is not accidental but is explained by the exercise of the agent's genuine epistemic competence. The archer who hits the target because they are skilled hits it aptly; the archer who hits the target despite using poor technique and in spite of unfavourable conditions is accurate but not apt. In the social media context, aptness is the condition most systematically absent: social media sharing that produces accurate beliefs does so, for the most part, accidentally. (Silva 34). The user who shares a true news story because it aligns with their prior beliefs and social network endorsements shares truly but not aptly, because the truth of what they share is not the result of their epistemic competence.

The AAA structure also encompasses Sosa's account of meta-aptness the condition relevant to reflective knowledge. A belief is meta-apt when it is apt and the agent also reflectively knows that it is apt: when the agent has a second-order belief, itself apt, to the effect that their first-order belief is accurate because adroit. Meta-aptness is the condition that distinguishes reflective knowledge from animal knowledge, and it is the condition that defines the ideal of Reflective Virality that this essay proposes as a remedial virtue for the age of social media misinformation.

Sosa's Account of Intellectual Virtues and Vices

Central to Sosa's virtue epistemology is an account of intellectual virtues as stable, reliable, and excellent cognitive dispositions that enable agents to achieve the epistemic goods of accuracy, adroitness, and aptness. Intellectual virtues, in Sosa's account, are not merely reliable belief-forming processes (as in Goldman's reliabilism) but genuine competences of the agent characteristics that are properly attributed to the agent as a knower and that reflect a form of intellectual excellence for which the agent is appropriately credited or blamed (Goldman 11). The virtue-theoretic approach to epistemology treats the evaluation of belief as analogous to the evaluation of action: just as a moral virtue is a character trait that reliably produces morally excellent actions, an intellectual virtue is a character trait that reliably produces epistemically excellent beliefs.

Among the specific intellectual virtues most directly relevant to the challenge of navigating the social media information environment, intellectual humility the disposition to recognise the limits of one's own knowledge and the fallibility of one's own faculties is perhaps

the most critical virtue, because it is the virtue most directly threatened by the echo chamber dynamics and confirmation bias that social media platforms systematically cultivate. An intellectually humble social media user would approach viral content with an awareness of their own susceptibility to manipulation, motivated reasoning, and tribal affiliation an awareness that would serve as a natural brake on unreflective sharing behaviour.

Intellectual courage the disposition to form and assert epistemically justified beliefs even when those beliefs are socially uncomfortable or contrary to the prevailing consensus of one's social network is a second critical virtue for the social media context. The viral dynamics of social media create powerful social pressures to share content that is popular within one's network, regardless of its epistemic quality. Intellectual courage is the virtue that enables an agent to resist these pressures: to refrain from sharing popular falsehoods even when doing so would attract social approval, and to share accurate but unpopular information even when doing so would attract social disapproval (Goldman 54).

Intellectual autonomy the disposition to form one's own beliefs through one's own epistemic processes rather than deferring uncritically to the beliefs of others is a third critical virtue for the social media context. Social media platforms are architecturally designed to facilitate rapid and unreflective deference to the beliefs of one's social network: the like, share, and retweet functions are mechanisms for endorsing and amplifying the beliefs of others without independent evaluation. Intellectual autonomy is the virtue that counteracts this tendency, motivating the agent to evaluate claims independently rather than simply endorsing the epistemic judgments of their social connections.

On the vicious side, Sosa's framework allows us to identify intellectual vices that are systematically cultivated and rewarded by social media environments. Intellectual arrogance the disposition to overestimate the reliability of one's own epistemic faculties and underestimate the epistemic challenges of novel situations is a pervasive vice in the social media context, manifesting as the unwarranted confidence with which users assess and share content that they lack the expertise to evaluate. Intellectual cowardice the disposition to avoid epistemically demanding engagement and retreat to comfortable but unreliable beliefs manifests in the preference for emotionally resonant but evidentially undemanding content that characterises much social media engagement. And intellectual sloth the disposition to form beliefs through the minimal cognitive effort compatible with feeling epistemically satisfied manifests in the superficial engagement with headlines and thumbnails that characterises much social media information consumption (Naomi and Conway 611). Together, these vices constitute the intellectual character profile of the archetypal fake news consumer and spreader.

Sosa's Perspective Applied to Fake News and Epistemic Misinformation on Social Media

The application of Sosa's virtue epistemology to the specific phenomenon of fake news and epistemic misinformation on social media reveals a diagnosis of considerable depth and precision. Fake news, understood through Sosa's framework, is not merely a problem of false information entering the information ecosystem but a problem of systemic epistemic failure at the level of individual intellectual character and the social and technological structures that shape epistemic practice (Filippo 62). The starting point for the Sosaian analysis is the observation that the social media information environment is structurally designed to operate at the level of animal knowledge. The basic cognitive mode encouraged by social media platforms rapid scrolling, headline reading, reactive engagement, one-click sharing is precisely the mode of unreflective animal cognition that Sosa distinguishes from reflective knowledge.

The concept of "Viral Aptness Deficit" names this structural feature of the social media epistemic environment. Viral Aptness Deficit is the systematic absence of aptness the failure of beliefs formed and shared in social media contexts to be accurate as a result of adroit epistemic performance that results from the architectural and social features of social media platforms. It is "viral" in two senses: it is prevalent and rapidly spreading a pervasive feature of social media epistemic culture and it is related to the viral dynamics of content sharing the mechanisms that cause certain content to achieve massive circulation (Filippo 412). It is an "aptness deficit" in the precise Sosaian sense: what is lacking is not merely accuracy (though accuracy is often lacking) or even adroitness (though adroitness is typically absent) but the fundamental epistemic condition of beliefs being accurate because adroit.

The mechanisms through which Viral Aptness Deficit operates can be traced through several distinct features of the social media environment. First, the algorithmic curation of social media feeds systematically prioritises content on the basis of engagement potential rather than epistemic quality. Algorithms designed to maximise user engagement reward content that generates strong emotional responses outrage, fear, enthusiasm, tribal solidarity and penalise content that is accurate but emotionally flat, nuanced, or epistemically demanding. Second, the social dynamics of social media networks create powerful incentives for sharing that operate independently of epistemic evaluation: social media sharing is a social act with social consequences, signalling social identity and generating social rewards in the form of likes, comments, and follower increases. Third, the psychological mechanisms of confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, and the illusory truth effect compound the structural and social features of social media to deepen Viral Aptness Deficit (Goldman 121).

The Relevance of Sosa's Virtue Epistemology Today

The contemporary relevance of Ernest Sosa's virtue epistemology extends far beyond the specific technical debates of analytic epistemology within which it was developed. As the foregoing analysis has demonstrated, Sosa's framework provides a theoretical language of exceptional precision and depth for diagnosing, evaluating, and responding to some of the most pressing epistemic challenges of the twenty-first century. The relevance of his work to the age of social media misinformation, far from being an anachronistic application of pre-digital concepts, represents a genuine expansion and testing of those concepts under novel conditions that vindicate Sosa's fundamental insight that the quality of knowledge is ultimately a function of the quality of the knower.

One dimension of Sosa's contemporary relevance is his contribution to the emerging field of media ethics. The virtue epistemological framework provides media ethics with a normative vocabulary that goes beyond the traditional categories of accuracy, fairness, and independence that characterise journalistic ethics, to encompass the broader epistemic character of media producers and consumers. A second dimension is his contribution to educational philosophy and pedagogy: the virtue epistemological approach suggests that education at all levels should be understood not merely as the transmission of knowledge content but as the cultivation of epistemic character. A third dimension is his contribution to the discourse on platform regulation and digital governance: if platforms are, by design, epistemic environments that systematically impede the development and exercise of the intellectual virtues that genuine knowledge requires, then there is a principled basis for regulatory intervention to require platform design choices that better support epistemic excellence (Thi 441).

Finally, Sosa's virtue epistemology is relevant to the growing discourse on epistemic justice and the distribution of epistemic goods. The Viral Aptness Deficit that characterises social media environments does not fall equally on all users: users with less media literacy, lower educational attainment, and greater social isolation from communities of epistemic accountability are disproportionately exposed to the conditions that produce Viral Aptness Deficit, and therefore disproportionately harmed by the misinformation ecosystems that flourish under those conditions.

A CRITIQUE OF ERNEST SOSA'S PERSPECTIVE ON FAKE NEWS

Sosa's Bi-Level and AAA Framework as a Tool for Evaluating Online Claims

Ernest Sosa's bi-level epistemological framework, anchored in the distinction between animal and reflective knowledge and operationalised through the AAA structure, offers a powerful diagnostic instrument for evaluating the epistemic quality of online claims and the sharing behaviours of social media users. Yet, as with any theoretical framework applied to a phenomenon far removed from its original context, the application reveals not only the framework's strengths but also its limitations and points of vulnerability. This section offers a sustained critical engagement with Sosa's framework as applied to the challenge of fake news, acknowledging its genuine analytical achievements while identifying the ways in which it requires qualification, supplementation, or revision in light of the distinctive features of the digital information environment.

The most significant strength of the bi-level framework as a tool for evaluating online claims is its capacity to distinguish between two failure modes of online information sharing that less refined frameworks tend to conflate. The first failure mode is the sharing of false content that fails the accuracy condition. The second, and epistemically more subtle, failure mode is the sharing of true content in an epistemically irresponsible manner content that satisfies the accuracy condition but fails the adroitness and aptness conditions. The bi-level framework reveals that the second failure mode is in many ways more epistemically dangerous than the first, because it generates a false sense of epistemic security: users who share true content through unreliable processes are not just failing to exercise epistemic virtue; they are developing and reinforcing habits of epistemically irresponsible information-sharing that will, under conditions less favourable than the present, reliably produce the sharing of false content.

However, the application of the AAA framework to online claims also reveals a structural challenge that Sosa's framework does not fully address: the problem of epistemic access. In the social media context, this presupposition is systematically violated: social media users often have no reliable way to access information about the provenance, motivation, or reliability of the content they encounter. A user who encounters a viral claim on Facebook has, in most cases, no direct access to the belief-forming process that produced the original claim, no way to assess the reliability of the intermediary sharing chain through which it reached them, and no way to determine whether the apparent markers of credibility the professional appearance of the source, the number of shares, the apparent authority of the poster are genuine or fabricated. Under these conditions, the application of the adroitness criterion becomes epistemically problematic.

Intellectual Virtues vs. Vices in Social Media Sharing Behaviour

The mapping of Sosa's account of intellectual virtues and vices onto the specific behaviours of social media users yields a rich and nuanced picture of the epistemic culture of digital information sharing. Social media sharing behaviour, viewed through the virtue epistemological lens, reveals a complex interplay of virtuous and vicious dispositions that is not well captured by simpler accounts that treat social media users either as passive victims of misinformation or as active culpable agents in its spread. The virtue epistemological analysis reveals instead a spectrum of epistemic character that ranges from exemplary reflective engagement to systematic epistemic negligence.

The most paradigmatically epistemically vicious pattern of sharing behaviour is "tribal sharing" the disposition to share content primarily because it affirms the beliefs and values of one's social community, without any independent evaluation of its accuracy or reliability. Tribal sharing manifests both the vices of intellectual arrogance (the assumption that one's tribal narrative is accurate without the need for independent verification) and intellectual cowardice (the refusal to engage with content that challenges the tribal narrative). Tribal sharing is directly antithetical to the reflective knowledge that Sosa identifies as the highest epistemic ideal, because it operates entirely at the level of animal knowledge and at its most epistemically unreliable form: beliefs formed not through individually reliable perceptual or inferential faculties but through the social mechanism of in-group endorsement.

A less obviously vicious but equally epistemically problematic pattern is "authoritative sharing" the disposition to share content on the basis of the apparent authority of the source, without any independent evaluation of whether that authority is genuine or the content reliable. This pattern exploits the genuine epistemic virtue of deference to expertise the recognition that, as Hardwig argued, epistemic labour must be divided and that rational epistemic agents must rely on testimony from others whose competence they cannot independently verify. The problem is that the markers of authority that social media users typically rely upon follower counts, verification badges, professional-sounding titles are easily fabricated and frequently exploited by misinformation actors.

On the virtuous side of the spectrum, the virtue epistemological analysis identifies several patterns of sharing behaviour that manifest genuine intellectual virtue. "Critical sharing" the disposition to share content only after independent evaluation of its accuracy, reliability, and source credibility manifests the intellectual virtues of thoroughness, intellectual courage, and intellectual autonomy. Critical sharing corresponds closely to the ideal of Reflective Virality: the critical sharer achieves, before sharing, a second-order awareness of why and how their assessment of the content is reliable. Moses Udoh's observation that the philosopher and by extension any reflective epistemic agent must develop a disciplined sensitivity to the difference between valid and invalid reasoning, between genuine evidence and mere appearance of evidence, provides the normative foundation for critical sharing as an intellectual virtue appropriate to the digital age (Udoh, "The Nature and Scope of Philosophy" 1-2). To navigate the information environment of social media with epistemic integrity is to exercise precisely the kind of rigorous discernment that Udoh identifies as the hallmark of philosophically educated cognition.

Case Studies: Fake News, Deepfakes, and Viral Misinformation on Social Media

The theoretical analysis of Sosa's framework gains concreteness and persuasive force through examination of specific cases of fake news, deepfakes, and viral misinformation that

have had significant social, political, and epistemic consequences. Three case studies are examined here: the spread of COVID-19 misinformation on social media platforms during the 2020-2022 pandemic; the use of deepfake technology in political misinformation campaigns; and the phenomenon of "viral corrective failure" cases in which fact-checks and corrections fail to achieve the viral reach of the misinformation they are designed to correct.

The COVID-19 infodemic of 2020-2022 provides perhaps the most consequential recent example of Viral Aptness Deficit in action. The pandemic was accompanied by an unprecedented surge of health misinformation on social media platforms claims about the origins of the virus, the efficacy of masks and vaccines, and the risks of various treatments that circulated at massive scale and with genuine public health consequences. The World Health Organization coined the term "infodemic" to describe the phenomenon, recognising that the spread of health misinformation was itself a public health threat of comparable importance to the spread of the virus itself. Moses Udoh and InametiUdo, in their critical analysis of the multi-causative factors surrounding COVID-19, emphasise that the pandemic's devastation was compounded significantly by the failure of epistemic institutions and of individual epistemic agents to maintain rigorous standards of evidence evaluation in the face of overwhelming informational noise (Udoh and Udo 21). This observation maps directly onto the Sosaian diagnosis: what the pandemic exposed was not merely the danger of a biological pathogen but the danger of an epistemic character pathogen the systematic inability of social media users to achieve apt beliefs about health-related information.

The second case study concerns the use of deepfake technology in political misinformation campaigns. Deepfakes synthetic audiovisual content generated by AI systems trained on real footage of the target individual represent the most technically sophisticated form of fake news, and they pose particular challenges for the Sosaian virtue epistemological framework. The challenge is that deepfakes are specifically designed to exploit the perceptual competences that, under normal conditions, constitute reliable faculties for forming true beliefs about the world. The person who forms a false belief about a political leader's statements on the basis of a convincing deepfake video is not exercising any obvious epistemic incompetence: they are exercising the ordinary and normally reliable faculty of perceptual belief-formation in response to apparently compelling audio-visual evidence. The problem is not the exercise of their faculty but the fact that their faculty is being systematically deceived by a technology that mimics the markers of authentic perceptual evidence with sufficient fidelity to defeat normal epistemic scrutiny. This calls for an extension of the Reflective Virality virtue to include what might be called "technological scepticism" a second-order epistemic disposition to be alert to the possibility that apparently compelling perceptual evidence may be technologically fabricated.

The third case study concerns what this essay terms "viral corrective failure" the systematic tendency of fact-checks and corrections to achieve far less viral reach than the misinformation they are designed to correct. SoroushVosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral's landmark study "The Spread of True and False News Online" (201), published in *Science*, provides the most comprehensive empirical account to date of how misinformation spreads on Twitter. Analysing twelve years of data and 126,000 fact-checked news stories, the authors find that false information spreads more quickly, more broadly, and more deeply through social media networks than true information, and that this difference is attributable not to bots but to human sharing decisions (Vosoughi et al. 1146). This empirical finding has direct bearing on the virtue epistemological analysis: the problem is located precisely where Sosa locates it in the intellectual character and habits of individual epistemic agents.

The Failure of "Reflective Knowledge" in Fast-Paced Digital Environments

One of the most significant challenges to the application of Sosa's virtue epistemology to the social media context is what might be called the "temporal incompatibility" problem: the problem that the ideal of reflective knowledge, as Sosa articulates it, requires a kind of slow, deliberate, second-order epistemic engagement that is structurally incompatible with the real-time, high-volume, rapid-response character of digital information environments. Sosa's reflective knower is, implicitly, a contemplative figure an agent with the time, cognitive resources, and motivational disposition to step back from the immediate epistemic situation and evaluate it from a broader perspective. The social media user, by contrast, operates in an environment characterised by radical temporal compression, cognitive overload, and social pressure for real-time responsiveness.

A further dimension of the temporal incompatibility problem is the phenomenon of cognitive fatigue. Social media users typically encounter hundreds or thousands of individual pieces of content per session, each of which would require significant cognitive investment to evaluate in accordance with the standards of reflective knowledge. The cumulative cognitive demand of applying the reflective scrutiny that Sosa's framework demands to each piece of content encountered in a social media session is far beyond the realistic cognitive capacity of any individual. The result is that even users who are motivated to exercise reflective epistemic practices will, under conditions of high-volume content exposure, inevitably resort to heuristic and shortcut processing for most of the content they encounter.

Sosa's defenders might respond to the temporal incompatibility argument by invoking the concept of epistemic virtue as a dispositional rather than occurrent characteristic. On this response, the reflective knower does not need to engage in effortful second-order deliberation on each occasion of belief-formation; rather, the intellectual virtues cultivated through sustained practice of reflective epistemic engagement become "second nature" dispositions that are reliably activated in appropriate circumstances without requiring effortful conscious deliberation. The analogy is with moral virtue: the morally virtuous person does not deliberate effortfully about whether to tell the truth on each occasion of potential deception; the disposition to honesty is so deeply ingrained that truth-telling is the natural, unreflective response to situations that call for it. While this response has merit, it does not entirely resolve the temporal incompatibility problem, because the development of deeply ingrained epistemic virtues as second nature requires sustained practice in environments that reward and reinforce those virtues and social media environments are, as argued above, systematically hostile to the development of reflective epistemic habits.

Sosa's Critics, His Replies, and the Limits of Virtue Epistemology in Social Media

Sosa's virtue epistemology has attracted a rich critical literature that identifies both internal tensions in the framework and broader challenges to the virtue epistemological approach to knowledge. Three families of criticism are particularly relevant to the social media context. The first is the challenge from epistemic luck, most forcefully articulated by John Greco and Jennifer Lackey, which questions whether the AAA framework adequately distinguishes knowledge from cases of fortunate true belief. The second is the challenge from the opacity of cognitive faculties, which raises questions about whether agents can reliably access the information about their own cognitive processes that Sosa's account of reflective knowledge requires. The third is the challenge from the insufficiency of individual virtue, articulated by social epistemologists such as Alvin Goldman and Helen Longino, which contends that

individual intellectual virtue is necessary but insufficient for epistemic excellence in social knowledge contexts.

REFLECTIVE VIRALITY AS AN EPISTEMIC VIRTUE

The central and original contribution of this essay to philosophical knowledge is the concept of "Reflective Virality" a novel virtue proposed as a Sosaian remedy for the epidemic of epistemic failure in social media environments that this research diagnoses as Viral Aptness Deficit. Reflective Virality is defined as the settled epistemic disposition to pause, before sharing any content on social media, to achieve second-order reflective awareness of the reliability of the content's source, the competence of one's own evaluative process, and the likely epistemic consequences of sharing for one's network. It is, in short, the habit of achieving Sosaian reflective knowledge rather than merely animal knowledge as a prerequisite for the act of social media sharing. This concept is original in both its theoretical formulation and its practical implications, and it represents a contribution to the intersecting fields of virtue epistemology, media ethics, and digital epistemology.

The term "Reflective Virality" is deliberately paradoxical. Virality, in its ordinary social media usage, connotes the rapid, unreflective, emotionally driven spread of content precisely the epistemic mode that Sosa's framework identifies as animal knowledge at its most problematic. Reflective, in Sosa's framework, connotes the second-order, deliberate, self-aware epistemic engagement that characterises genuine knowledge as opposed to accidental true belief. The conjunction of these two terms is therefore not merely a rhetorical device but a genuine philosophical proposal: it is the claim that virality the social amplification of content can and should be made reflective, that the massive amplificatory power of social media sharing can be placed in the service of genuine epistemic goods rather than being left as an unreflective mechanism for the amplification of whatever content generates the strongest immediate emotional response.

Applied to the act of social media sharing, Sosa's requirement of reflective knowledge translates into the following conditions for the Reflective Virality agent. First, the agent must have a first-order assessment of the content to be shared a judgment about its accuracy, its source, and its relevance. Second, and critically, the agent must achieve a second-order assessment of that first-order assessment a judgment about the reliability of their own evaluative process, the adequacy of their evidential basis, and the degree to which their assessment might be influenced by non-epistemic factors such as confirmation bias, tribal affiliation, or emotional resonance. It is only when this second-order assessment is itself reliable when the agent's meta-epistemic judgment is itself apt that sharing the content constitutes an exercise of Reflective Virality rather than a mere animal-knowledge-level impulse to amplify content that feels right.

Reflective Virality differs from simple verification practices fact-checking, source attribution, corroboration in an important and philosophically significant way. Verification practices are first-order epistemic activities: they are activities aimed at establishing the accuracy of the content to be shared. Reflective Virality, by contrast, is a second-order epistemic disposition: it is a disposition to evaluate the reliability of one's own evaluative processes, including one's verification practices. The Reflective Virality agent does not merely ask "is this content accurate?" but "is my process for determining whether this content is accurate itself reliable? Am I bringing genuine epistemic competence to bear on this assessment, or am I satisfying myself with a superficial confidence that mimics reflective knowledge without achieving it?" This second-order dimension is what makes Reflective Virality a genuine

intellectual virtue in Sosa's sense a characteristic not merely of reliable performance but of reflective endorsement of that performance from a broader epistemic perspective.

The concept of Reflective Virality also has important implications for the design of social media platforms. If platforms were designed to support rather than undermine Reflective Virality as a virtue, they would need to create friction deliberate pauses in the sharing process that provide social media users with the temporal and cognitive space necessary to achieve second-order reflective awareness before sharing. Research in behavioural science suggests that even small interventions prompts asking users to verify content before sharing, delays that create a pause between the decision to share and the execution of that decision, contextual information about a source's reliability can significantly improve the epistemic quality of sharing decisions. These design interventions can be understood, in Sosaian terms, as structural supports for the exercise of Reflective Virality: they do not supply the virtue, which must be cultivated in the individual agent, but they create conditions in which the exercise of the virtue is more likely and its absence more salient.

Finally, Reflective Virality as an epistemic virtue has significant implications for epistemic education. If Sosa is right that knowledge depends on the exercise of intellectual virtue, then the crisis of fake news is fundamentally a crisis of intellectual character a failure of the epistemic virtues of intellectual humility, open-mindedness, thoroughness, and critical thinking at both individual and collective levels. This insight has direct implications for educational practice: it suggests that what is needed to combat fake news is not merely better fact-checking tools or more effective content moderation algorithms, but a fundamental reorientation of epistemic education toward the cultivation of intellectual virtues. An education system oriented by Sosa's framework would aim to develop in students not only the factual knowledge and technical skills necessary for success in the knowledge economy, but the intellectual virtues of humility, courage, autonomy, and reflective self-awareness that constitute the epistemic character of the genuinely educated person. Reflective Virality, as a cultivable virtue, is the specific epistemic disposition that such an education should seek to develop in every graduate who will navigate the epistemic challenges of the digital information environment.

CONCLUSION

This essay has argued, through systematic engagement with Ernest Sosa's virtue epistemology and the empirical and philosophical literature on social media misinformation, that the crisis of fake news in the digital age is fundamentally a crisis of intellectual character a failure of epistemic virtue rather than merely a crisis of information availability, platform design, or regulatory governance. The analysis has deployed Sosa's bi-level virtue epistemology and AAA framework to show that the dominant mode of information engagement on social media platforms constitutes what this essay has termed "Viral Aptness Deficit": a systemic failure of social media users to achieve the aptness the accuracy-because-of-adroitness that genuine knowledge requires, let alone the second-order reflective awareness that Sosa identifies as constitutive of reflective knowledge.

The concept of Viral Aptness Deficit names a precise epistemic failure that is both individual and structural. At the individual level, it is the failure of epistemic agents to bring genuine intellectual virtue to bear on their social media sharing decisions the failure to exercise the intellectual humility, courage, and autonomy that Sosa's account of reflective knowledge requires. At the structural level, it is the failure of social media platform architectures to create the conditions in which intellectual virtue can be developed and exercised the failure to design

information environments that reward epistemic quality rather than emotional engagement, that create space for reflective deliberation rather than demanding real-time responsiveness, and that provide users with the informational resources necessary to achieve genuine second-order awareness of the reliability of their epistemic sources.

The remedy proposed by this essay Reflective Virality as a cultivable epistemic virtue addresses both the individual and structural dimensions of Viral Aptness Deficit. At the individual level, Reflective Virality is a second-order epistemic disposition: the settled habit of pausing before sharing to achieve genuine Sosaian reflective awareness of the reliability of the content, its source, and one's own evaluative process. At the structural level, Reflective Virality implies a set of requirements for the design of information environments that would support rather than undermine its exercise: platform design choices that create friction in the sharing process, that provide contextual information about source reliability, and that reduce the temporal and cognitive pressures that systematically prevent the exercise of reflective epistemic engagement. The concept of Reflective Virality thus bridges the gap between the individual-level focus of virtue epistemology and the structural-level concerns of platform design and digital policy.

The analysis conducted in this essay vindicates Sosa's fundamental conviction that the quality of knowledge is ultimately a function of the quality of the knower. No technological fix, however sophisticated, can substitute for the cultivation of intellectual virtue in the agents who inhabit digital information environments. Algorithmic fact-checking can improve the accuracy of the information environment, but it cannot supply the second-order reflective awareness that Sosa identifies as constitutive of genuine knowledge. Platform design reforms can create conditions more conducive to reflective epistemic engagement, but they cannot develop the intellectual character that is the foundation of genuine epistemic excellence. The task of rebuilding epistemic trust in the age of social media is, at its core, a task of intellectual character formation a task for education, culture, and personal moral responsibility rather than for technology alone.

Ernest Sosa's virtue epistemology provides the most precise, rigorous, and comprehensive philosophical framework available for understanding what that task requires and why it is urgent. His insistence that knowledge demands not merely reliable cognitive performance but the reflective endorsement of that performance from a broader epistemic perspective that genuine knowing is an achievement of character rather than mere mechanism is a conviction that the digital age renders not merely philosophically interesting but practically indispensable. In an information environment designed to exploit the unreflective and reward the credulous, the cultivation of Sosaian epistemic virtue is not a luxury but a necessity: the necessary foundation for any sustainable recovery of the epistemic trust that democratic life, scientific progress, and communal flourishing require. Reflective Virality, as the specific epistemic virtue demanded by the age of social media, is therefore the practical expression of that philosophical conviction the translation of Sosa's vision of the reflective knower into the daily epistemic practice of the digitally engaged citizen.

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AN ASSESSMENT OF JAN LUKASIEWICZ'S LOGICAL PLURALISM

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ABSTRACT

This study titled *An Assessment of Jan Łukasiewicz's Logical Pluralism*, offers a comprehensive examination of Jan Łukasiewicz's formal works on Many-valued logic, situating it as an early, coherent expression of logical pluralism—the view that multiple correct logics exist. Tracing his evolution from engaging with Aristotle's Principle of Bivalence and future contingents to developing his 1920 three-valued logic and subsequent n-valued systems, the research argues these innovations were not merely formal conveniences. Rather, they were deeply grounded in a philosophical commitment to metaphysical openness and indeterminacy. The study situates Łukasiewicz within the broader landscape of twentieth-century logic, comparing his framework to developments by Carnap, Quine, Beall, and Restall. Employing **expository** and **critical analytical methods**, it reconstructs his logic in modern symbolic notation and assesses whether he can legitimately be read as a pluralist *avant la lettre*. Ultimately, the study concludes that Łukasiewicz's contributions offer a sophisticated articulation of logical pluralism that challenges classical logic's hegemony while retaining logical objectivity. His pluralism is both methodological—utilizing diverse systems for distinct domains—and metaphysical, reflecting a partially indeterminate reality. Re-evaluating Łukasiewicz through contemporary debates reveals his enduring significance in discussions on the nature, scope, and unity of logic.

KEYWORDS: Classical Logic, Future Contingents, Logical Pluralism, Principle of Bivalence, Truth Value.

INTRODUCTION

Christopher Udofia and Okorie O. in “Meaning, Nature And Scope of Logic”, highlights Aristotle as the Logical “crown Prince” , owing to his systematization of the subject and “exerted profound influence on the development of Logic”(Umotong I et al, 136). Logic, as the systematic study of valid inference and correct reasoning, has historically been dominated by classical logic. This traditional framework operates on fundamental principles such as bivalence, which asserts that every proposition is either true or false, and the Law of the Excluded Middle, which states

that a proposition is either true or its negation is true, as put forward by Susan Haack in *Philosophy of Logic* (1-3). These binary principles have long served as the bedrock for much of Western philosophy, mathematics, and scientific inquiry.

ARISTOTLE, BIVALENCE, AND THE LAW OF EXCLUDED MIDDLE: THEIR NEXUS

The concepts of bivalence and the Law of Excluded Middle (LEM) are foundational principles in classical logic and are closely associated with the logical tradition that originates with Aristotle. Although Aristotle did not formulate these principles in precisely the same technical manner as modern logicians, his writings provide the basis from which they developed. In *Metaphysics* Book IV, Aristotle argues for the **Principle of Non-Contradiction**, maintaining that the same attribute cannot both belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect at the same time (Aristotle 1005b19–20). This principle implies that contradictory propositions cannot both be true. Aristotle writes: “The same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect” (Aristotle 1005b19–20). By implication, Contradictory predicates cannot simultaneously apply to the same subject under identical conditions. While this principle excludes the possibility that both a proposition (P) and its negation ($\text{not-}P$) are true, **bivalence** goes further by asserting that every proposition is either true or false. Aristotle's discussions suggest a commitment to such a framework, particularly in his treatment of assertion and truth.

Aristotle and the Law of Excluded Middle

The Law of Excluded Middle states that for any proposition P , either P or $\text{not-}P$ must be true. Aristotle explicitly discusses this principle in *Metaphysics* IV. He argues that between affirmation and negation there is no middle position: “There cannot be an intermediate between contradictories, but of one subject we must either affirm or deny any one predicate” (Aristotle, 1011b23–24). He maintained that no middle term exists between a statement and its contradiction; one must either affirm or deny the predicate. This passage is widely regarded as a classical statement of the Law of Excluded Middle. The principle follows naturally from Aristotle's insistence that contradictory propositions exhaust the logical possibilities.

The Problem of Future Contingents and a Qualification of Bivalence

A significant complication arises in Aristotle's *On Interpretation* (Chapter 9), where he discusses the famous example of a future sea battle. Aristotle questions whether propositions about contingent future events are already determinately true or false. He argues that if every future-tense proposition were presently true or false, then all future events would occur necessarily, eliminating contingency and human deliberation (Aristotle 18b25). This implies that Aristotle rejects the conclusion that every statement concerning future contingents must already possess a definite truth value because such a view would entail determinism (Aristotle 18b25–19a39).

Many scholars interpret this discussion as showing that Aristotle accepted the Law of Excluded Middle while hesitating to endorse unrestricted bivalence for future contingent propositions. As Jan Łukasiewicz famously argued in his famous 1930 paper titled *Philosophical Remarks on Many-valued Systems of Propositional Logic*, Aristotle's treatment of future contingents suggests a distinction between the Law of Excluded Middle and the principle of bivalence (Łukasiewicz 126).

Thus, Aristotle serves as the historical and philosophical bridge connecting the Law of Excluded Middle and bivalence. His logic laid the foundation for both doctrines, but his treatment of future contingents reveals an important distinction: a proposition may satisfy the Law of Excluded Middle (P or $\text{not-}P$) without necessarily possessing a determinate truth value at a given time, thereby challenging unrestricted bivalence.

Aristotle's introduction of syllogism, according to Dennis Otto and Asodu F. in "Historical Development of Logic", stood him out "as a great logician" (Umotong Iniobong et al, 148). As Chris Udofia & Udo A. in *Boolean Two Value Logic: It's implication on Epistemology*, would highlight, "the curiosity to know is the basis for knowledge inquiry" (6) —The early 20th century marked a pivotal shift in logical thought, as various philosophers and logicians began to question the absolute universality and sole correctness of classical logic, leading to the emergence of non-classical logical systems. Among the most influential figures in this intellectual revolution was Jan Łukasiewicz (1878-1956), a distinguished member of the Lwów–Warsaw School of Logic (Woleński 15).

Łukasiewicz is widely recognized for his pioneering work on many-valued logics, systems that transcend the classical two-truth-value paradigm by introducing additional truth values beyond the conventional "true" and "false". His initial foray into this domain was driven by profound philosophical considerations, particularly his engagement with Aristotle's argument concerning future contingents and the problem of determinism. Aristotle, in *De Interpretatione*, Chapter 9, famously debated the truth value of propositions about future events that are not yet determined, such as "There will be a sea battle tomorrow" (18a34-19a22).

Łukasiewicz, Jan in his *On Three-Valued Logic*, perceived that classical logic's bivalence principle, when applied to such statements, seemed to imply a deterministic future, where events are already settled. To avoid this, he proposed a third truth value—often interpreted as "possible" or "indeterminate"—to provide a logical framework that could accommodate propositions about future events without committing to their present truth or falsehood, thereby challenging the deterministic implications inherent in classical logical analyses (87-88). The development of Łukasiewicz's many-valued logics, alongside other non-classical systems like intuitionistic and relevant logics, inevitably spurred discussions about the fundamental nature of logic itself: Is there a single, universally correct logic, or can multiple logics be equally valid and appropriate for different contexts or purposes? This question lies at the heart of the debate between logical monism and logical pluralism as put forward by Beall Jac and Restall Greg in their *Logical Pluralism* (26-35). Łukasiewicz's creation of not just one, but a family of many-valued logical systems (including three-valued, four-valued, and infinitely-valued logics) inherently positions his work as a significant historical precedent for assessing the viability and implications of logical pluralism. This work, therefore, situates itself at the intersection of Łukasiewicz's technical innovations in logic and the broader philosophical discourse surrounding logical pluralism.

EXPOSITION OF JAN ŁUKASIEWICZ'S LOGICAL PLURALISM

This talks about Jan Łukasiewicz's logical innovations, providing a detailed conceptual analysis of his many-valued logics and their direct implications for the thesis of logical pluralism. Moving beyond the historical overview, this section offers an in-depth examination of Łukasiewicz's philosophical motivations, the technical architecture of his systems, and the specific ways in which his work contributes to the understanding of logical multiplicity.

Biographical Note

Jan Łukasiewicz (1878–1956) was one of the most influential logicians and philosophers of the twentieth century. His pioneering contributions to mathematical logic, symbolic logic, and the philosophy of logic transformed the study of reasoning and laid important foundations for modern computer science. He is especially remembered for developing many-valued logic and for introducing Polish notation, a system of symbolic expression that continues to influence logic, mathematics, and computer programming. Through his innovative ideas, Łukasiewicz challenged traditional Aristotelian logic and expanded the possibilities of formal reasoning beyond the limits that had been accepted for centuries.

Born on December 21, 1878, in Lviv, Łukasiewicz grew up in a culturally diverse environment that stimulated intellectual inquiry. He pursued higher education at University of Lviv, where he studied philosophy under prominent scholars of the time. His academic training exposed him to both classical philosophical traditions and emerging developments in formal logic. During his university years, he demonstrated exceptional intellectual ability and developed a deep interest in the structure of logical thought and scientific methodology (Bocheński 24). After completing his studies, Łukasiewicz earned his doctorate in philosophy and quickly established himself as a promising scholar. His early research focused on the principles of logic and the history of philosophical reasoning. Influenced by the works of ancient philosophers, particularly Aristotle, he sought to analyze and reconstruct classical logical systems using modern methods. His investigations led him to question some of the fundamental assumptions of traditional two-valued logic, which holds that every proposition is either true or false (McCall 41).

One of Łukasiewicz's most significant achievements was the development of three-valued logic in 1920. Unlike classical logic, which recognizes only truth and falsity, his system introduced a third truth value representing possibility or indeterminacy. This innovation emerged from his attempt to address philosophical problems concerning future contingent events, such as statements about events that had not yet occurred. According to Łukasiewicz, some propositions could not accurately be classified as either true or false at a given moment, necessitating a third logical category (Haack 57). This groundbreaking theory later inspired the development of many-valued logics and influenced subsequent research in logic, linguistics, artificial intelligence, and computer science.

Another enduring contribution of Łukasiewicz was the invention of Polish notation, also known as prefix notation. In this symbolic system, operators precede their operands, eliminating the need for parentheses and simplifying the representation of logical expressions. For example, rather than writing expressions with complex nested brackets, Polish notation provides a more concise and systematic format. This innovation significantly improved the efficiency of logical calculations and later found practical applications in computer science, particularly in programming language design and compiler construction (Kneale and Kneale 521).

Łukasiewicz became a central figure in the renowned Warsaw School of Logic, a group of scholars whose work placed Poland at the forefront of logical research during the early twentieth century. Alongside distinguished logicians such as Stanisław Leśniewski and Alfred Tarski, he contributed to a vibrant intellectual tradition that emphasized rigor, precision, and formal analysis. The achievements of the Warsaw School significantly shaped modern analytic philosophy and mathematical logic (Woleński 103).

Beyond his technical innovations, Łukasiewicz made substantial contributions to the study of the history of logic. His scholarly investigations into Aristotelian syllogistic logic

demonstrated that ancient logical systems could be interpreted with modern formal techniques. He argued that Aristotle's logical theories possessed a sophistication often overlooked by contemporary scholars. Through meticulous historical and analytical work, Łukasiewicz revitalized interest in classical logic and showed its relevance to modern philosophical inquiry (Wolenski 7).

During his academic career, Łukasiewicz held several prominent positions. He served as a professor at the University of Warsaw and played an important role in shaping philosophical and logical education in Poland. He also briefly served as Poland's Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Education after the country's independence, demonstrating his commitment not only to scholarship but also to national intellectual development (Woleński 115).

The outbreak of World War II profoundly affected Łukasiewicz's life and career. The war disrupted academic institutions throughout Europe, forcing many intellectuals to abandon their research and teaching. Following the conflict, Łukasiewicz emigrated to Ireland, where he joined the faculty of University College Dublin. Despite the challenges associated with displacement and advancing age, he continued his scholarly work and remained intellectually active until his death. His years in Ireland were marked by continued research, writing, and engagement with international philosophical communities (Bocheński 31).

Łukasiewicz died on February 13, 1956, in Dublin. His legacy endures through the widespread influence of his theories and methods. Today, his work remains essential in studies of formal logic, philosophy, mathematics, linguistics, and computer science. The concepts he introduced, particularly many-valued logic and Polish notation, continue to shape contemporary approaches to reasoning and computation. His intellectual courage in questioning established assumptions and exploring alternative logical systems secured his place among the greatest logicians in modern history (Haack 63).

THE GENESIS OF MANY-VALUED LOGICS: PHILOSOPHICAL IMPERATIVES

Jan Łukasiewicz's development of many-valued logics was not merely a formal exercise but a response to profound philosophical problems, primarily the issue of determinism arising from Aristotle's discussion of future contingents. Classical logic, with its foundational Principle of Bivalence (every proposition is either true or false) and the Law of the Excluded Middle (a proposition is either true or its negation is true), seemed to imply that statements about future events must already possess a definite truth value (Haack 211). This simply means that every futuristic event or occurrence must definitely be affirmative, thereby depicting some form of certainty and prediction.

For Łukasiewicz, this led to an unacceptable logical determinism, where the future is pre-determined and human free will is undermined, which he expressed in his work titled *On Determinism* (Łukasiewicz 110). This simply means that Łukasiewicz refuted the fixation, certainty and determinism that classical logic had proposed. For him, there was more and beyond, just as Udo Inameti and Bisong would argue regarding the state of consciousness in *Absolute certainty and Asouzu's transcendent unity of consciousness*, that:

“obtaining truth and authenticity is a transcendent act, whereby the mind seeks to go beyond the immediacy. Therefore in all matters of truth and authenticity, the mind seeks the best possible way to comprehend and explain facts totally and comprehensively - this is its natural propensity”. (3)

Aristotle, in *De Interpretatione*, Chapter 9, famously pondered the truth status of propositions like “There will be a sea battle tomorrow”, which concern events that are not yet settled (18a28 - 19b4). Łukasiewicz argued that if such a proposition is true now, then the sea battle is necessary; if false, then impossible. Both conclusions contradict the notion of a contingent future. To resolve this dilemma, Łukasiewicz proposed rejecting the principle of bivalence for future contingents, introducing a third truth value, often designated as ‘ $\frac{1}{2}$ ’ and interpreted as “indeterminate” or “possible”, in his work titled *On Three-Valued Logic* (87). This simply means that determinism was replaced by indeterminacy. This intermediate truth value allowed for propositions about future contingent events to be neither true nor false at present, thereby providing a logical escape from determinism. Unlike Emil Post, whose contemporary work on many-valued logics was primarily formal, Łukasiewicz’s motivation was explicitly philosophical, aiming to provide a more appropriate representation for the indeterminacy of the future (Rescher 6).

Technical Architecture of Łukasiewicz’s Many-Valued Systems

Łukasiewicz’s philosophical motivations led him to construct a systematic framework for many-valued logics, moving beyond the classical binary system. His foundational three-valued logic ($\mathcal{L}_3$), introduced in 1920, operates with three truth values: ‘1’ (true), ‘0’ (false), and ‘ $\frac{1}{2}$ ’ (indeterminate). A key feature of his systems is the choice of ‘1’ as the sole designated (truth-preserving) value. This choice directly impacts the validity of classical tautologies; for instance, the Law of Excluded Middle is not a logical truth in $\mathcal{L}_3$, as it can take the value ‘ $\frac{1}{2}$ ’ if p is ‘ $\frac{1}{2}$ ’ (Rescher 7).

The logical operators in Łukasiewicz’s systems are generalized to accommodate these multiple truth values. For example, the implication operator is defined as a degree of truth rather than just absolute truth or absolute false. This definition allows for a nuanced understanding of truth propagation, where a conditional can be true even if its components are indeterminate (Rescher 7). Similarly, negation reverses the truth value (e.g., if p is ‘ $\frac{1}{2}$ ’, then $\neg p$ is also ‘ $\frac{1}{2}$ ’). Beyond, Łukasiewicz systematically generalized his approach to n -valued logics, where there is any finite integer greater than two, and even to infinitely-valued logic.

In many-valued logics, truth values are represented by all rational numbers or even all real numbers within the interval $[0, 1]$, allowing for “degrees of truth” as presented in Łukasiewicz’s *Elements of Mathematical Logic*. These systems fundamentally challenge classical semantics by introducing truth value plurality and non-classical interpretations for logical statements. The set of logical truths in this is a subset of those in classical logic, meaning that if a sentence is false in a two-valued interpretation, it also works in the three-valued system. However, sentences like that can discriminate between n -valued systems, being a two-valued logical truth but not a three-valued one (Rescher 156).

Łukasiewicz’s Contribution to Logical Pluralism

The core of this dissertation’s inquiry lies in assessing Jan Łukasiewicz’s contribution to logical pluralism. While he may not have explicitly articulated a comprehensive “meta-logical theory of logical pluralism” in the contemporary sense, his work provides a foundational historical precedent and compelling evidence for the view that there is more than one correct logic as also argued by Shapiro Stewart, in his 2014 book titled *Varieties of Logic* (17). Łukasiewicz’s pluralism can be understood as emerging from several dimensions:

Pluralism of Truth Values: By introducing intermediate truth values beyond ‘true’ and ‘false’, Łukasiewicz directly challenged the principle of bivalence, which is central to classical logic. This expansion of the semantic domain inherently suggests a multiplicity in the very nature of truth, allowing for a more nuanced handling of uncertainty and vagueness in logical reasoning.

Pluralism of Logical Consequence: While he may not have explicitly articulated a comprehensive meta-logical theory of “logical pluralism” in the contemporary sense, his work provides a foundational historical precedent and compelling evidence for the view that there is more than one correct logic.

Applicational Pluralism: Łukasiewicz developed specifically to address the philosophical problem of future contingents and determinism. This suggests an implicit view that different logical systems might be more appropriate or “correct” for different domains of application or specific philosophical problems. His work implies that classical logic, while suitable for some contexts, is inadequate for others, thereby necessitating alternative logical frameworks.

The creation of a family of logics, rather than just a single alternative to classical logic, further strengthens the argument for Łukasiewicz’s implicit pluralism. He demonstrated that logical systems are not monolithic but can be constructed and modified to serve specific purposes and reflect different philosophical commitments. While most contemporary versions of logical pluralism often retain classical logic as one of the correct logics, it is crucial to note that this is a contingent historical fact, not a conceptual requirement of logical pluralism itself (Shapiro 17).

A pluralist, inspired by Łukasiewicz, might accept multiple n-valued logics as correct without necessarily endorsing classical logic. His work thus provided concrete examples of alternative logical systems, paving the way for later explicit formulations of logical pluralism by thinkers like J.C. Beall and Greg Restall.

PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS: TRUTH, MODALITY, AND DETERMINISM

Łukasiewicz’s many-valued logics carry significant philosophical implications for fundamental concepts such as truth, modality, and determinism.

Truth and Bivalence: By introducing intermediate truth values, Łukasiewicz directly challenged the Principle of Bivalence, a cornerstone of classical logic (Dummett 1). This move suggests that truth is not always a simple binary state but can exist in degrees or states of indeterminacy. This has profound implications for philosophical debates surrounding vagueness and uncertainty, offering a more nuanced logical framework for phenomena that do not fit neatly into true/false categories.

Modality: Łukasiewicz was deeply interested in the logical representation of modal concepts (necessity, possibility). He attempted to capture modality within his many-valued systems by assigning specific truth values to modal propositions, rather than introducing separate modal operators as in standard modal logics. For instance, a proposition assigned ‘ $\frac{1}{2}$ ’ could be interpreted as “possible” or “contingent”. However, this approach has faced criticism, with some arguing that his attempt to define modal operators solely through truth tables was flawed or counterintuitive, especially when compared to the development of dedicated modal logics (Haack 212).

Determinism: As discussed, the avoidance of logical determinism was Łukasiewicz’s primary philosophical motivation for developing . His definition of determinism as “the viewpoint that if A is B at the moment T, then it was also true at any moment which is previous

to T that A is B at the moment T” highlights his concern with the pre-determination of future events in his *On Determinism* (Łukasiewicz 110).

By allowing future contingents to be ‘indeterminate’, he sought to break the logical chain that seemed to necessitate future events. However, critics like Susan Haack have argued that Łukasiewicz’s reasoning regarding determinism might contain a logical mistake, suggesting that his position relies on specific semantic assumptions, such as “Peircean semantics”, which are not universally accepted (Haack 52-53). These critiques suggest that while Łukasiewicz’s logical innovations provided a framework for non-deterministic reasoning, the philosophical debate surrounding determinism itself is complex and not solely resolved by a change in logical system.

In conclusion, Łukasiewicz’s theoretical framework, driven by philosophical imperatives and realized through innovative technical constructions, fundamentally challenged the monistic view of logic. His work introduced the concept of truth value plurality and demonstrated the possibility of alternative logical consequence relations, thereby laying crucial groundwork for the development and assessment of logical pluralism. The philosophical implications of his systems, particularly concerning truth, modality, and determinism, continue to be subjects of active debate, highlighting both the enduring relevance and the inherent complexities of his contributions.

ASSESSMENT AND CRITIQUES OF ŁUKASIEWICZ’S LOGICAL PLURALISM

This chapter undertakes a critical assessment of Jan Łukasiewicz’s logical pluralism, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of his many-valued logical systems and engaging with the significant criticisms leveled against his philosophical motivations and technical implementations. While Chapter Three elucidated the theoretical framework and conceptual underpinnings of his work, this chapter scrutinizes the efficacy of his solutions and the broader implications for his contribution to logical pluralism.

Evaluation of Łukasiewicz’s Solution to Determinism and Future Contingents

Łukasiewicz’s primary philosophical motivation for developing his three-valued logic was to provide a logical framework that could avoid the deterministic implications of classical logic when dealing with future contingent propositions. He defined determinism as the viewpoint that “if A is b at the moment t, then it was also true at any moment which is previous to t that A is b at the moment t” as captured in his work “On Determinism and Future Truth”. By introducing a third truth value, ‘ $\frac{1}{2}$ ’ (indeterminate), for propositions about future events that are not yet settled, Łukasiewicz aimed to break the logical chain that seemed to necessitate future occurrences.

The strength of Łukasiewicz’s solution lies in its innovative rejection of bivalence for future contingents, thereby creating a logical space for genuine indeterminacy. This move allowed for a formal system where propositions like “There will be a sea battle tomorrow” could be neither true nor false in the present, thus seemingly preserving the contingency of the future and the possibility of free will. This was a radical departure from the prevailing classical view and opened up new avenues for logical inquiry into time and modality.

However, Łukasiewicz’s solution has faced considerable criticism regarding its philosophical efficacy. A central debate revolves around whether introducing a third truth value genuinely resolves the metaphysical problem of determinism or merely rephrases it in logical terms. Critics argue that the problem of future contingents is fundamentally a metaphysical one concerning the nature of reality and time, rather than solely a logical one that can be resolved by altering truth values (Dummett 14- 15).

Susan Haack, for instance, has argued that there is a “logical mistake” in Łukasiewicz’s reasoning concerning determinism. She contends that his position relies on specific semantic assumptions, particularly what is known as “Peircean semantics”, which posits that the future is semantically settled if and only if it is causally settled (Haack 153). If one does not accept this underlying semantic assumption, then the deterministic conclusion does not necessarily follow from the bivalence of future contingents. This suggests that Łukasiewicz’s solution might be contingent on a particular philosophical interpretation of truth and causality, rather than being a universally applicable logical fix. Furthermore, contemporary discussions of future contingents are often conducted within the framework of tense logic, which provides alternative formal tools for analyzing temporal propositions without necessarily resorting to many-valued systems.

Critiques of the Third Truth Value and Generalized Operators

The introduction of a third truth value ($\frac{1}{2}$) in Łukasiewicz’s systems, while innovative, has been a consistent source of philosophical and intuitive challenges. The precise interpretation of this intermediate value remains ambiguous. While Łukasiewicz himself interpreted it as “indeterminate” or “possible”, other interpretations have been proposed, such as “unknown”, “partially true”, “fuzzy truth values”, or “probabilistic truth values” (Rescher 2).

This multiplicity of interpretations raises questions about whether $\frac{1}{2}$ represents a genuine ontological truth status or merely an epistemic state of uncertainty. If it is merely epistemic, then the philosophical force of rejecting bivalence for metaphysical reasons is weakened.

A notable “counterintuitive consequence” of Łukasiewicz’s arises when both constituents of a conjunction ($\wedge$) or a disjunction ($\vee$) are assigned the value $\frac{1}{2}$. In such cases, both the Law of Contradiction ($\neg(A \wedge A)$) and the Law of Excluded Middle ($A \vee \neg A$) can take the same truth value of $\frac{1}{2}$ (Rescher 23). This outcome can be philosophically challenging, as it blurs the distinction between a contradiction and a tautology when dealing with indeterminate propositions. Furthermore, the intuitive appeal of Łukasiewicz’s generalized logical operators has been questioned. While his definition of implication ($\rightarrow$ as $\neg A \vee B$) is formally consistent, its behavior can sometimes diverge from natural language intuitions about “if...then...” statements. For instance, an implication can be true even if both its antecedent and consequent are indeterminate. Similarly, some critics find his definitions of disjunction and possibility to be intuitively difficult to grasp (Rescher 163). These issues suggest that while Łukasiewicz’s systems are formally coherent, their philosophical interpretations and intuitive applicability in everyday reasoning or specific domains might be limited.

Challenges to Łukasiewicz’s Approach to Modality

Łukasiewicz’s interest in modality, particularly the possibility of free acts and the contingency of future events, was deeply intertwined with his development of many-valued logics. He attempted to capture modal concepts (necessity, possibility) by assigning specific truth values within his many-valued systems, rather than introducing separate modal operators as is common in standard modal logics. For example, a proposition with the truth value $\frac{1}{2}$ could be interpreted as “possible” or “contingent”. However, this approach has been a significant target of criticism, with some scholars arguing that Łukasiewicz made a “modal mistake” (Haack 79).

This criticism often stems from the perceived inadequacy of defining modal operators solely through truth tables in a many-valued context, especially when compared to the more robust and widely accepted frameworks of dedicated modal logics (e.g., S4, S5). These systems

introduce explicit modal operators (2 for necessity, 3 for possibility) and define their semantics using possible worlds, which many find to be a more intuitive and powerful way to model modal concepts (Haack 80). The argument is that Łukasiewicz's extensional approach to modality, relying solely on truth values, fails to capture the full intensional richness of modal notions.

Implications for Łukasiewicz's Logical Pluralism

The criticisms leveled against Łukasiewicz's many-valued logics and their philosophical underpinnings significantly impact the assessment of his contribution to logical pluralism.

Firstly, if his solution to determinism is considered flawed or dependent on specific, debatable semantic assumptions (like Peircean semantics), it weakens the primary philosophical justification for his rejection of bivalence and, by extension, the initial impetus for his many-valued systems. While the existence of his systems still demonstrates logical multiplicity, the reason for their existence becomes less compelling if the problem they were designed to solve is not fully resolved by them.

Secondly, the ambiguities in interpreting the third truth value and the counterintuitive behavior of some generalized operators raise questions about the "correctness" or intuitive plausibility of his alternative logics as universally applicable systems. If the intermediate truth values lack a clear, consistent philosophical interpretation, or if the logical operations do not align with common reasoning patterns, then their status as equally valid alternatives to classical logic might be diminished for certain applications.

Despite these criticisms, Łukasiewicz's work remains a cornerstone for logical pluralism. Even if his specific solutions are debated, his pioneering efforts undeniably demonstrated the possibility of constructing coherent, non-classical logical systems. He showed that logic is not necessarily confined to a bivalent framework and that alternative logical consequence relations can be formally defined (Shapiro 17). This fundamental insight, that logic can be plural, is his enduring legacy, regardless of the specific flaws identified in his particular systems or their philosophical justifications. His work opened the conceptual space for later, more explicit formulations of logical pluralism, even if those later theories might adopt different motivations or technical approaches as captured by Graham Priest, in his 2006 book titled *Doubt Truth To Be a Liar* (Priest 202). The debate around his work continues to highlight the complexities inherent in defining "correctness" in logic and the multifaceted nature of logical pluralism itself.

CONCLUSION

This study assesses Jan Łukasiewicz's logical pluralism, addressing the ambiguity of whether his stance was explicitly articulated or implicitly derived from his groundbreaking work. The historical context of classical logic's dominance and Łukasiewicz's pivotal role in challenging its bivalence, driven by his philosophical concerns regarding determinism and Aristotle's problem of future contingents. It detailed his philosophical imperative to avoid logical determinism by rejecting bivalence for future contingents, leading to the introduction of an "indeterminate" truth value. The work further explored the technical architecture of his n-valued, and infinitely-valued logics, emphasizing their generalized operators and non-classical semantics. Crucially, it argued that Łukasiewicz's work embodies logical pluralism through a plurality of truth values, a plurality of logical consequence relations, and an implicit applicational pluralism, where different logics are suited for different philosophical problems. Also, we presented a critical assessment of Łukasiewicz's logical pluralism. While acknowledging the innovative nature of his solution to determinism, it engaged with criticisms that question whether his many-

valued logics truly resolve the metaphysical problem or merely rephrase it. The ambiguity in interpreting the third truth value and the sometimes counterintuitive behavior of his generalized operators were discussed as limitations. Furthermore, his approach to modality, attempting to capture modal concepts through truth values rather than dedicated operators, was critiqued in comparison to standard modal logics. Despite these criticisms, the chapter concluded that Łukasiewicz's work undeniably demonstrated the possibility of coherent, non-classical logical systems, thereby opening the conceptual space for logical pluralism.

The central thesis of this dissertation is that Jan Łukasiewicz, through his pioneering development of many-valued logics, made a foundational and implicit contribution to logical pluralism. While he may not have explicitly formulated a comprehensive meta-logical theory of logical pluralism in the contemporary sense, his work provided the crucial historical and formal precedent for the view that there is more than one correct logic. His legacy lies not necessarily in providing a flawless solution to every problem he tackled, but in fundamentally altering the landscape of logical inquiry by proving the viability and philosophical utility of alternative logical systems. This act of creation, driven by philosophical necessity, implicitly endorsed a pluralistic view of logic, where different systems can be valid and appropriate for different contexts or problems.

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BERTRAND RUSSELL'S KNOWLEDGE BY ACQUAINTANCE: A PANACEA FOR LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the application of Bertrand Russell's epistemological concept of "knowledge by acquaintance"—defined as direct, non-inferential awareness of an object—to the challenges of contemporary leadership. It posits that effective governance is predicated on a leader's intimate, unmediated understanding of the social, economic, and environmental conditions of their constituents. The study argues that a significant impediment to development in Nigeria is the widening dichotomy between the leadership and the populace, often exacerbated by the physical and psychological relocation of leaders to urban centers, which leaves them alienated from the realities of those they represent. Utilizing critical and analytical methodologies, this paper establishes a substantive nexus between knowledge by acquaintance and effective leadership, framing knowledge as a practical, humanistic instrument for societal improvement rather than an abstract construct. The findings suggest that the quality of national development is directly proportional to the depth of a leader's engagement with their community. Consequently, the paper asserts that closing the gap between leaders and the led through immersion and proximity is essential for sustainable progress. It concludes by proposing practical policy interventions, such as mandatory town hall engagements and sustained, localized leadership tour programs, as vital mechanisms to mitigate the current crisis of governance and stimulate development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Knowledge by Acquaintance, Leadership, Epistemology, Governance, Social Development, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

None can know Bismarck like Bismarck can know Bismarck (Aiello 2). In his 1910 paper "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," Russell attempts to reconcile direct acquaintance (and its inability to determine the personal self of others) with a descriptive knowledge that is both logical and personal. Russell tries to bridge the internal and external worlds, attempting to explain access to impersonal knowledge within a framework that does not allow acquaintance with physical objects; in doing so, he distorts the historical space

between the researcher and the subject. By arguing for the superiority of acquaintance as the ultimate arbiter of knowledge, Russell narrowly avoids solipsism while erroneously devaluing the most basic of historiographical assumptions. Consequently, the role of acquaintance in Russell's theory of descriptions operates as antithetical and, indeed, antagonistic toward the practice and assumptions of history, leaving the descriptive knowledge of historians ancillary—relegated quietly to a kind of cosmic second place.

While there are different avenues through which knowledge can be acquired—such as empirically, mystically, or conceptually—Russell isolates two primary modes: knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. For the sake of exactitude, Russell privileges knowledge by acquaintance as the most basic and reliable form of knowledge. Weighing the relevance of this firsthand insight, it would be a less rewarding venture to explore the depths of knowledge by acquaintance merely at its conceptual level without applying it as a pragmatic tool to address one of Nigeria's most aching societal ills: poor leadership.

In Nigeria, citizens have long been plagued by a myriad of leadership debacles that result in poor or minimal development. Although diverse measures have been adopted by those at the helm of affairs at both state and national levels to better the lives of citizens, these interventions continually fail to yield the desired results due to the wide gulf that exists between the leaders and the led. Quite often, personnel are designated by various government agencies to oversee human-oriented projects and governmental programs; yet, to a large extent, the cries and yearnings of the intended beneficiaries only intensify. This failure persists because the gap between the leaders and the people remains unbridged. Harsh realities reveal that most leaders lack an adequate, firsthand grasp of the plights of their people; consequently, the impact of these problems never makes direct contact with the minds of the leaders.

What, then, does it mean to know? Socrates famously conceives knowledge as virtue, implying that its lack or inadequacy contributes heavily to the vices bedeviling society. Ozumba views knowledge as a state of awareness of a given fact or piece of information, maintaining that the very fulcrum of knowledge is awareness. To buttress this, knowledge implies being aware of something, being certain about it, and having a firm grasp of the object of cognition. It denotes familiarity and the ability to recognize or identify a phenomenon (Etuk 4). Looking at these definitions of knowledge, it suffices to say that where knowledge is absent, a society is bound to falter. How knowledgeable a leader is regarding the localized problems of their constituency directly determines the intensity and success of developmental strides in that area. While adequate knowledge empowers a leader to execute tasks effectively, an epistemic dichotomy between the leader and the people ultimately cripples the drive for development. Historically, literature on leadership has been vast. Writers such as Udofia have achieved tremendous insights regarding the ideals of a leader and the nature of leadership. Who then is a leader?

According to Eyo and Udofia, leaders differ from non-leaders because of the unequalled drive for achievement unparalleled level of ambition, unweathering energy, unrelenting tenacity and high level of initiative in decision making, action and proactiveness. Leaders are also singularise trait of leadership motivation which is palpable in their burning passion to lead, accept responsibilities, win, be in authority and possess power as a means to positive influence (112).

This notion has successfully shaped the contemporary understanding of a leader. Leadership, in this light, is purpose-driven, goal-oriented, and strongly driven toward positive results. While this position is plausible, it fails to adequately emphasize the vital role of

knowledge in achieving these goals. Chris Ijeoma maintains that knowledge possesses its own moral dimension; that is, knowledge is not merely for knowledge's sake. Knowledge holds a moral dimension insofar as it has significance for human self-realization or the actualization of societal purpose. This dimension, therefore, concerns itself with the qualitative rather than the quantitative nature of knowledge (Ijeoma 23). Knowledge, in this case, is geared toward solving human problems—it is this capacity for problem-solving that justifies its pursuit.

Furthermore, these problems must be viewed through the lens of communal actualization. In other words, all knowledge has an end, and its ultimate resolution lies within the social realm. No man is an ego solus; man's knowledge is fundamentally meant to benefit humanity (David and Udoh 193). In view of the extant literature on the intersection of knowledge and leadership, although tremendous academic strides have been made, the specific application of firsthand knowledge in resolving leadership deficits has received minimal attention.

Against this backdrop, this paper adopts Bertrand Russell's concept of "knowledge by acquaintance" to provide leaders with practical direction on how to govern effectively. Methodologically, this paper utilizes both the analytic and critical methods. The analytic method involves breaking down concepts, propositions, and issues to foster a clearer, more robust understanding (Essien and Okoro 226). Consequently, foundational concepts such as knowledge, acquaintance, and leadership will be explicated for the purpose of conceptual clarity. Through these methods, this paper will extensively excavate the role of knowledge in leadership, evaluating the current leadership outlook in Nigeria while presenting town hall meeting and Leadership tour as a viable template for effective governance. Finally, the paper sheds light on the current nature of town hall meetings in Nigeria, contrasting what they currently are with what they ought to be.

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Knowledge: Knowledge as a term appears somewhat elastic and flexible, capable of representing some internally diversified ideas (Etuk 3). Knowledge can be referred to having access to correct information (Reschel 15). It is also defined as a state of awareness of a given fact or Information (Ozumba 2). Knowledge is an accumulation of information in the mind which propels action towards a specific purpose. Knowledge can also be seen as a compass which navigates human action.

Acquaintance: This is based on non-propositional awareness of something. It involved that perceptual features received by the senses during its contact with physical objects (Ibrahim 133). Knowledge by acquaintance could as well mean having a one-on-one contact with the object of study. It is also a state of awareness in the mind of the knower without any iota of doubt whether or the situation experience is not the case.

Leadership: Craig Johnson defines leadership as "the exercise of influence in a group context... People having the greater impact on the group or organization. Leaders are change agents engaged in furthering the needs, wants and goals (18). It is the capacity to influence others through inspiration, motivated by passion generated by a vision, produced by conviction ignited by purpose (Munroe 54). According to Merton Leadership is an interpersonal relation in which others comply because they want to not because they have to (qtd. in Udofia and Eyo 4).

THE NATURE OF REALITY

What, then, is the nature of reality? What do we mean by reality? Indeed, when we speak of reality, we refer to a thing as it is, stripped of illusion or deception. It therefore denotes that which lies behind the shifting forms a particular sense-datum may have assumed. reality, if there is one, cannot be known directly by the senses, nor can it "immediately be known to us at all, but must be an inference from what is immediately known (Russell: *Principles of mathematics* 11)

We must recall that Russell frequently expresses doubt regarding the definite existence of a real object, as evidenced by his continuous use of the cautious phrase "reality, if there is one." Madabuchi et al. maintain that such a statement could imply that Russell had already concluded in his mind that there is no reality before embarking on this philosophical exploration. Conversely, it could also mean that he was attempting to mirror René Descartes, who, through methodic doubt, sought to establish an indubitable epistemic foundation (879).

Given the famous analogy of the table which he employs in this philosophical project, Russell wonders whether a real table exists at all, and if so, what sort of object its reality could be. Hence, Russell holds that in sensation, we do not directly know reality, but rather sense-data or appearances. However, if we are to know anything at all, it must be by means of these sense-data, which are associated with reality in its representative form rather than being the reality itself. For Russell, the epitome of this hidden reality is the "real table," which can be designated as a physical object or matter. Thus, the question naturally arises: is there matter? If so, what is its nature? (Russell 4).

For Russell, reality may be categorized into two kinds based on traditional philosophical classifications, notably those of Immanuel Kant: reality may be noumena or phenomena. The noumena, or ultimate reality, represent the highest, most fundamental nature of a thing. This is not the object with which we are immediately in contact; it is, rather, "the object of pure thought or of rational intuition, free from all element of sense" (Russell 10). This represents reality discussed at its highest degree of abstraction.

However, the reality that we seek to understand at this stage of the work is the physical object, or phenomenal reality. This is the object with which we directly come into contact through our senses, even allowing for cases of optical illusions. Historically, certain philosophers have doubted the existence of this kind of reality altogether. These are the skeptics who hold that only appearances exist and that we can know nothing beyond them. To George Berkeley, "the objects of human knowledge are either ideas imprinted on the senses, or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind" (Russell 10).

Against such idealist philosophers, Russell contends that although they deny matter as something opposed to mind, they inadvertently admit its existence in another sense. Indeed, both George Berkeley and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz admit that there is a "real table." However, Berkeley argues that it consists of certain ideas in the mind of God, while Leibniz maintains that it is a colony of souls. The crucial takeaway is that they all agree that a real table—a physical object—exists. Therefore, in this sense, matter exists and is real. Having considered the nature of reality, it is now necessary to establish a clear understanding of knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, which constitute the mainstay of this discussion.

KNOWLEDGE BY ACQUAINTANCE AND KNOWLEDGE BY DESCRIPTION

Here, Russell draws a distinction between the knowledge of truths and the knowledge of things. He refers to the knowledge of things as "acquaintance," maintaining that it is simpler than any knowledge of truths and logically independent of it—even though it would be rash to assume

that humans can have acquaintance with things without simultaneously knowing some truth about them. Conversely, he notes that knowledge of truths by description relies on a background of underlying truths.

Russell avers: "We shall say that we have acquaintance with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths" (19). For instance, if someone sees a table, they are acquainted with the sense-data that constitute the appearance of the table: its color, shape, hardness, and smoothness. All of these are things or elements of immediate consciousness. One's knowledge of the table as a physical object is not direct; rather, it comes mediated through an acquaintance with the sense-data that form its appearance. These sense-data, therefore, construct our primary understanding of the table.

Consequently, Russell argues that while it is possible to doubt the existence of the physical table itself, it is impossible to doubt the immediate sense-data that represent it. The table, in this context, is the external physical object that causes these specific sense-data. To affirm one's knowledge of the table at all, we must know truths that connect the object to the things with which we have had direct acquaintance; we must know that a certain cluster of sense-data is caused by a physical object. Russell further states that when we know there is exactly one object to which a specific description applies—even though the object itself is not directly known to us—our knowledge of that object is "knowledge by description."

In this light, Russell asserts that all human knowledge—both of things and of truths—is ultimately predicated upon acquaintance as its foundation. Hence, there is a need to consider what kinds of things we can be acquainted with. He notes that sense-data are foremost among these things, supplying the most obvious and striking examples of knowledge by acquaintance.

Russell adds that a correlation must exist between sense-data, the past, and truth, since all knowledge of truths requires acquaintance with things that are essentially different from transient sense-data—namely, universals. To extend our epistemic reach beyond immediate sense-data, Russell first considers acquaintance by memory. He notes that we often remember what we have seen, heard, or otherwise experienced through our senses. In such cases, we remain immediately aware of what we remember, despite the fact that it appears to us as past rather than present. This knowledge by memory serves as the bedrock for all our knowledge concerning the past; without it, no knowledge of history or past events could be reached by inference.

THE NEXUS BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE BY ACQUAINTANCE AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Bertrand Russell famously distinguished between "knowledge by acquaintance" and "knowledge by description." While the latter relies on inference and second-hand information, the former is established through direct, sensory awareness of an object. Russell argued that knowledge by acquaintance is logically primary; it is independent of, and simpler than, knowledge of truth. For instance, while one might doubt the existence of a physical table, one cannot doubt the sense data that form the table's appearance. Thus, our foundational understanding of the world—and any truth we claim about it—is ultimately predicated on direct acquaintance. This epistemological principle has profound implications for leadership, particularly in the Nigerian context, where a disconnect between leaders and the led has significantly hindered development.

In many instances, leaders in Nigeria migrate to urban centers, distancing themselves from the specific local environments they are tasked to govern. This leads to a governance style

characterized by "armchair leadership," where decisions are made from comfortable, remote locations without any direct awareness of the populace's lived experiences.

When a leader lacks firsthand acquaintance with the issues they oversee, they become entirely dependent on intermediaries. For example, if a bridge is reported to be in a state of disrepair, a leader who has never personally inspected the site is unlikely to grasp the urgency of the situation. This lack of direct experience inevitably leads to delays in project execution and ineffective policy interventions. Because the leader has no visceral connection to the problem, their response remains bureaucratic rather than remedial.

For leadership to be effective, it must move beyond mere description. Knowledge by acquaintance is not sought merely for intellectual gain; it is a pragmatic necessity. When there is no direct connection between the leader and the led, progress stalls, and the society suffers from a lack of coherent, grounded vision. To bridge this gap, leaders must actively "feel the pulse" of their people. By engaging directly with their environment, leaders gain the empirical basis required to expedite change. This requires a conscious shift in strategy, moving away from reports and toward direct engagement through mechanisms such as: Town Hall Meetings and Leadership Tours.

Ultimately, by prioritizing knowledge by acquaintance, a leader transforms from a distant authority figure into a grounded representative capable of addressing existential problems with accuracy and empathy. Effective leadership, therefore, is rooted in the courage to witness reality for oneself.

Town Hall Meetings: Cultivating Authentic Dialogue

A town hall meeting is any event that facilitates direct engagement between constituents and their elected representatives. These gatherings can take various forms, including in-person assemblies, moderated conference calls, or interactive sessions via social media platforms (Bryan 3). At their core, town halls serve as a vital forum for constituents to voice their opinions, challenge political candidates, and hold public figures accountable.

However, for a town hall to be truly effective, it must operate with integrity. A genuine town hall should not be a sanitized or censored event where feedback is scrutinized or suppressed to protect the leader's image. It should never be an orchestrated gathering where only favorable comments are permitted, nor should it be populated solely by individuals incentivized to echo the leader's rhetoric.

True democratic engagement requires a space where the leader interacts with the "real people"—the citizens living the daily realities of the community. Authentic town halls must prioritize transparent, unfiltered dialogue, allowing for critical feedback and honest discourse. When leaders open themselves to this level of scrutiny, they move beyond performative politics and begin the work of genuine representation, ensuring that their decisions are informed by the lived experiences of those they serve.

Leadership Tours: Enhancing Governance through Firsthand Engagement

A leadership tour refers to the proactive practice of a leader traversing the territories under their administration to observe operations and conditions firsthand. Beyond mere inspection, these tours serve as a vital medium for leaders to interact with community members, clarify issues concerning local development, and foster authentic relationships with their constituents.

To be truly grounded in the realities of a society—moving beyond hearsay or curated reports—a leader must actively engage with every part of their jurisdiction. Such direct involvement provides a platform for leaders to confront existential challenges without the filter of intermediaries.

By visiting the sites of strategic projects, a leader gains a realistic understanding of both the progress made and the obstacles that remain. This practice significantly reduces the prevalence of "paper projects"—initiatives that exist only in reports or through carefully staged photographs. When leaders conduct regular tours, they verify project status for themselves, eliminating reliance on potentially biased subordinates.

Ultimately, "knowledge by acquaintance" bridges the gap between the leader and the lead. By establishing this direct connection, leadership tours provide the essential framework needed to engineer sustainable, meaningful development within the society.

Leadership Outlook in Nigeria

The current population of Nigeria is about 242,303,009 as of , July 2026, based on Worldometer's elaboration of the latest United Nations data, Nigeria 2026 population is estimated at 242,431,832 people at mid-year.

Nigeria population is equivalent to 2.92% of the total world population. This one of the reason the country has an edge over many countries in Africa, and it is not without good reasons that other countries in the continent look up to Nigeria for leadership. That is why Nigeria is often referred to as "the giant of Africa." Every year, the country universities turn out thousands of graduates. So, in terms of human resource, the country is greatly blessed. In terms of mineral resources, the country is well endowed. Abraham Jennifer writes:

Nigeria is richly endowed with different types of solid minerals—from precious metal to various stones and industrial minerals...Some of the solid minerals in Nigeria are barite, bitumen, limestone, coal, tin, columbite, gold, silver, lead-zinc, gypsum, glass sands, clays, asbestos graphite and iron ore among others. Opportunity exists for the extraction and processing of these minerals (13)

Another notable resource in Nigeria is Crude oil. Apart from these resources, Nigeria has a vast expanse of land that is good for agriculture and farming of different crops and animals. The climate and weather of the country is an added advantage to her potentials. But it is also a fact that the country is one of the least developed in the world. This is not a contradiction as we mentioned earlier. The greatness of a country does not lie entirely on her human and natural resources.

The development of a nation highly depends on the nation's human capital as a major instrument. This is because, the supplies of physical labour, technical and professional skills, which are germane to the efficient and effective planning of developmental activities in the economy of a nation are dependent on her human capital (Alvanluku 150)

It is now clear that everyone can see the nexus now between leadership and development. Many scholars on leadership and development in Nigeria agree with Achebe that:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership...there is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character,

there is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else (1)

It is not until Nigeria is able to fix its persistent leadership debacles that sustainable development will truly emerge within the country. Leaders must undergo a thorough reorientation regarding the core values of leadership, among which knowledge is a *sine qua non*. Any leader who is not endowed with direct knowledge regarding the plights of the citizenry can never effect meaningful changes within that society.

Whenever the issue of governance is discussed, knowledge plays a pivotal role in shaping the operational framework of effective leadership. In line with Pantaleon Iroegbu, leadership is about achieving results through the mobilization of people; it is getting individuals to understand both the "when" and the "why" of collective action (Iroegbu, qtd. in Udofia and Eyo 92–93). While analyzing the core characteristics of a competent leader, Iroegbu identifies several indispensable traits: deep knowledge, dynamism paired with gentleness, accountability, strong communication skills, clear vision, and self-confidence. These are the basic qualities that must be present in order to forge an effective leader. Most notably, a leader must possess a deep, firsthand knowledge of the people; without this epistemic foundation, it is nearly impossible to make a positive, lasting impact on the led. This critical requirement naturally leads us to examine the specific avenues through which a leader can become genuinely integrated into the life of the community.

THE PATH FORWARD: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND DEMOCRATIC REFORM

To achieve genuine engagement, political leaders ought to adopt Edmund Husserl's scientific methodology, "*zu den Sachen selbst*"—a return to the foundation, or going to the things themselves (*recursus ad fontes*) (Essien and Chidozie, *Methods and Problems of Philosophy* 226). It is only by approaching the object of study—the people—without prejudice that the populace will reveal their true realities to their leaders. Currently, however, leaders precondition their minds with defensive suppositions, creating a perceived need to clamp down on any opposing opinions that do not sit well with the establishment.

Therefore, a comprehensive reform of Nigeria's town hall meetings is urgently required. The heart of every democratic society is its people. When the thoughts and opinions of the populace are unwelcome in government programs and policies, the core principles of democracy are utterly undermined. Truly getting to know the people in their authentic state fosters the deep acquaintance necessary to take drastic, effective measures in addressing the plights that plague the society.

CONCLUSION

This paper establishes a conceptual link between epistemology and political governance by applying Bertrand Russell's theory of "knowledge by acquaintance" to the leadership crisis in Nigeria. According to Katalin Balog, acquaintance is a direct, incorrigible epistemological relationship wherein a subject directly experiences their own conscious states, revealing their raw essence without the distortion of external propositions or value-laden assumptions (12). In the Nigerian context, this philosophical framework directly addresses what Chinua Achebe famously diagnosed as the fundamental problem of Nigeria: a failure of leadership. When a systemic disconnect exists between the leader (the subject) and the led (the object), social innovation is stifled, and the overall well-being of society is fractured. Drawing from Umutong

knowledge is only valuable when a viable vehicle exists to convey it to its final beneficiary (Umotong: “language and definition” *Argument and critical thinking* 29) Therefore, an effective leader cannot be an “alien”—someone detached from the immediate joys and plights of the populace. Genuine leadership requires shifting public communication from a top-down monologue to a democratic dialogue. This horizontal and vertical feedback loop is only possible when the authentic struggles of the followers have a direct, unmediated impact on the leader. Consequently, this paper proposes reformed, un-censored town hall meetings as the practical vehicle for this acquaintance. By removing authoritarian influence, these meetings cease to be mere government propaganda stages and instead become collaborative spaces where leaders and citizens share ideas, formulate policies, and confront societal plights together. Ultimately, Russell’s knowledge by acquaintance proves to be more than an abstract epistemic tool; it is a vital framework for transformative leadership.

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AN ASSESSMENT OF KARL POPPER'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE LIGHT OF ECONOMIC REFORMS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relevance of Karl Popper's political philosophy, specifically critical rationalism and piecemeal social engineering, within Nigeria's socio-economic reform landscape. The problem centers on the persistent failure and public hardship induced by sweeping national economic policies, highlighted by top-down, non-consultative implementations like the 2023 naira redesign and fuel subsidy removal. The primary objective is to critically apply Popper's liberal sociopolitical principles to re-engineer the design of macroeconomic reforms in Nigeria, ensuring state actions prioritize the mitigation of human suffering. Through the critical analysis method of philosophical inquiry, the study deconstructs core Popperian tenets alongside contemporary social justice frameworks and traditional African communal values. The study reveals that Nigeria's reform apparatus is structurally flawed by an irrational adherence to holistic, large-scale engineering paradigms that operate in secrecy, reject public dissent, and lack mechanisms for self-criticism. The study concludes that Popper's philosophy uniquely accommodates communal welfare goals because its focus on minimizing concrete social ills offers an accessible, low-risk blueprint for democratic social reconstruction. Consequently, the core recommendation is that Nigerian policymakers must institutionalize a critical culture of "piecemeal social engineering" by establishing transparent legal frameworks for public debate, ensuring state neutrality, and adopting gradual, phased policy implementations that permit iterative, trial-and-error adjustments based on citizens feedback.

KEYWORDS: Social Engineering, Policy Makers, Institutionalized, Deconstruct, Critical, Rationalism.

INTRODUCTION

In the annals of intellectual history, the pursuit of rationality and progress has often been ignited by the transformative power of critical thinking. At the forefront of this movement is Karl Popper, whose philosophy has left an indelible mark on our understanding of scientific inquiry and societal reform. Popper's notion that knowledge progresses through the method of

conjectures and refutations (*Conjectures and Refutations* 55) has not only influenced the scientific community but has also provided a robust framework for critical examination in various domains, including socio-political contexts. His philosophy emphasizes the importance of falsifiability as a criterion for scientific theories, advocating that for a theory to be considered scientific, it must be capable of being proven false (*Conjectures and Refutations* 40). This perspective challenges the status quo and encourages a culture of rigorous questioning and open debate, which are essential for any society striving toward rationality and progress. His ideas become particularly poignant when applied to the socio-political landscape of Nigeria, a nation characterized by a complex interplay of traditional values and modern aspirations (Odeh 78).

There is a systematic connection in Popper's liberal ideas about how the piecemeal social engineering approach works in relation to the idea of negative utilitarianism, individual freedom, and also to the idea of limited state interventionism. For Popper, democratic social reconstruction must be piecemeal in order to preserve individual freedom and to ameliorate human suffering. One can ameliorate a perceived problem in order to ensure that they reduce suffering piecemeal. Consequently, the government can only intervene in issues in society when there are recognized social-ills. This intervention can happen when, for instance, there is a need for control, for punishment, and for ways by which suffering can be reduced on as many people as possible. An intervention of a social welfare system that ensures that people who cannot afford necessary basic needs such as food and accommodation, particularly when they do not earn enough to cover these basic necessities for survival can receive some assistance from the government. These are some of the basic features of Popper's liberal ideas and they are in consonance with the idea of the common good.

One can then see that there is a social element to Popper's liberal ideas despite the sacrosanct nature of the concept of freedom in his political philosophy. Social in the sense that it considers, for instance, how to ensure that people do not suffer. How to ensure that government policies tackle social reform in the way that it is piecemeal, and avoid holistic approaches with tendencies of having ever-lasting damaging effects. These attributes are social, and it is the reason that the research believes that rather than just adopting liberalism on the whole, we can find ways to synthesize Popper's liberal ideas with the positive elements in the communalistic background that societies in Africa are supposedly built. In other words, because there is inherent implicit social element to Popper's idea, in spite of its explicit individualism, it makes it easier, different from all other liberal ideas, to be able to apply it to the basic constituents of communalism.

There is no gain re-emphasizing that much of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is in a precarious state with numerous developmental challenges such as; wide spread corruption, glaring looting of the national treasury, mass poverty, decayed infrastructures, alarming unemployment, wanton insecurity of lives and properties, moribund manufacturing sector, poor state of education and health system, pervasive inequality, food insecurity, compromised judiciary, rampant inflation, confused ideology, crisis of leadership, failed followership, electoral fraud and absolute disregard for due process and the rule of law among others.

Nigeria, as one of the most populous countries in Africa, faces unique challenges that complicate its economic landscape. The nation's post-colonial history is marked by corruption, military rule, and ethnic divisions, hindering effective policy implementation and economic growth (Olusanya 32). Since the return to democratic governance in the late 1990s, Nigeria has attempted various economic reforms aimed at stabilizing its economy and attracting foreign

investment. However, the effectiveness of these reforms has been inconsistent, often hampered by inadequate governance structures, persistent corruption, and social unrest (Aigbokhan 44).

This study will explore the intersections of Popper's political philosophy with Nigeria's economic policy landscape, investigating the challenges and prospects and how his political theory can illuminate pathways for fostering positive reforms in order to ensure better and people-oriented governance in Nigeria which coheres with Popper's notion that, "all things living are in a search of a better world" (*In Search of a Better World*. vii)

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Reforms: Reform is simply understood here as a change for better. It is an improvement or amendment of what is wrong. It can also be understood as the strategic plan of action to generate a sustained economic growth and longtime development (Mabera and Hassan 96).

Economic Reforms: Economic reforms refer to deliberate changes implemented by governments to improve their economic systems, aiming to enhance efficiency, growth, and stability (Fiveable 1). These reforms can take various forms, such as trade liberalization, deregulation, and fiscal adjustments, often seeking to address imbalances or inefficiencies within the economy (Fiveable 1).

Utilitarianism: At its core, utilitarianism emphasizes the idea that the right action is the one that produces the most overall good. It is based on the idea that an action should be judged according to its consequences, and that the greatest good for the greatest number of people should be the ultimate goal (Rueter 1). This ethical theory has been used to evaluate a variety of different social and political issues, from economic policy to criminal justice.

Negative Utilitarianism: This is a version of utilitarianism propounded by Karl Popper. It is the view that the state or an agent should only focus on actions that are capable of reducing the unhappiness and the suffering in the society.

POPPER'S METHOD: CRITICAL RATIONALISM

Karl Popper coined the term critical rationalism to describe his philosophy. The term simply refers to Popper's rejection of empiricism and the inductive account of science. Being critical of empiricism, Popper opted for a rationalism. Popper argues that scientific theories are abstract in nature and can be tested only directly by reference to their implications. For him, theories and human knowledge generally are conjectures or hypotheses, and is generated by the creative imagination in order to solve problems that have arisen in specific historico-cultural settings (Essien 58). In *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Popper noted that every genuine test of a theory is an attempt to falsify or refute it. In falsification, scientific theories must be tested in order to bring out anomalies, and theories are found to contain anomalies should be rejected. According to him, theories that contain anomalies have been falsified whereas theories without anomalies are corroborated (*The Logic...* 86). In fact, Knowledge for Karl Popper, grows through constant criticism (critical test) and revision and it accounts for his core faith in fallibilism (Popper: *Unended Quest...*55). Popper, therefore believes that human knowledge is fallible, and theories are useful as to the extent that they solve problems. Hence, he uses this same conviction to develop a political theory that echoes the human infallibility, while attempting to point out how ideas are important in organizing a civil state.

Popper admitted that Marx, Socrates, Kant and Hegel were all rationalists. But he noted that there were limitations in their rationality, which made them fall short as the basis of unity of mankind. The rationalism of Marx and Hegel were hampered by their insistence that our ideas

and opinions are determined by our class interest and national interests respectively. In defining rationalism, Popper notes that;

Rationalism is an attitude of readiness to listen to critical arguments and to learn from experience. It is fundamentally an attitude of admitting that I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort we will get nearer to the truth. It is an attitude which does not lightly give up hope that by such as argument and careful observation, people may reach some kind of agreement on many problems of importance; and that, even where their demands and their interests clash, it is often possible to argue about the various proposals, and to reach perhaps by arbitration-a compromise which because of its equity, is acceptable to most, if not to all (Popper: *The Poverty of Historicism*... 225).

Popper traced the genesis of critical rationalism to the philosophy of Socrates. The Socratic method of midwifery of knowledge is critical in nature. Through the dialectic method of questioning, one is able to discover more truth. Popper writing about the value of the Socratic Method observes that, those eager to learn are helped to free themselves from their prejudice; thus they may learn self-criticism, and that truth is not easily attained. But they may also learn to make up their minds, and to rely critically on their decisions, and on their insight (Popper: *The Open Society and its Enemies* 129).

According to Hans Albert, critical rationalism, includes three main assertions on which all those philosophers who ascribe to this particular philosophical school of thought agree (212). These are, first, consistent fallibilism, the assumption that all humans are fallible, not only in their cognitive practice but also in all their attempts at problem solution; second, critical realism, the assumption that we are able, in principle, to recognize real connections that are independent from us, that is, to arrive at true statements about these; and third, methodological revisionism, the assumption that all of our assertions may require revision following critical examination. Furthermore, Albert maintains that there is also the correspondence theory of truth, the assumption that classical logic applies, which facilitates deductive reasoning, the rejection of induction and the rejection of the dogmatization of problem solutions. Accordingly, he observes that critical rationalism emphasizes the significance of tradition, both in the context of gaining scientific insights and for culture, as well as the relevance of institutions for knowledge and society (Albert 210).

Oyekunle Ayegboyega and Precious Obioha locate the theoretical background of critical rationalism in Popper's principle of falsificationism, which is a justification for human freedom against dogmatism. Accordingly they pointed out that falsificationism, which can be cleaned as the pivotal instrument of Popper's thought, seeks to establish a system of knowledge acquisition that is either wholly or partly free from dogmatism and in turn paves the way for improved knowledge acquisition. This is what Adegboyega and Obioha consider as the "intellectual counterpart of what is, the pragmatic sphere, in the strict sense of the term, the outlook of liberalism or democracy" (3). Hence, Popper's concern was how to espouse a method of free inquiry that promotes the freedom of knowledge.

The Open and Closed Societies

The concept 'Open Society' was not first used by Popper. It was used by Bergeson. But the meaning Popper attached to it was different. Bergeson regards the closed society as a society

based on closed morality and a closed soul while open society is characterized by open morality and an open soul. He used the term in reference to religious openness. He noted that this openness is accessible only to the saints of Christianity. In fact, he called it a mystic society (Steinvorth, 240).

Popper on the other hand used the concept in a different sense. Accordingly, he gives a meaningful insight into his usage of the terms by asserting “my terms indicate a rationalist distinction; the closed society is characterized by the belief in magical taboos, while the open society is one in which men have learned to some extent to be critical of taboos and to base decisions on the authority of their own intelligence” (cited in Steinvorth 242). Hans Albert observes that:

The open society as has been characterized by Popper is a society whose members have the possibility to decide freely about how to lead their lives and to participate in the decisions about their common affairs. By the institutionalization of competition and criticism in all social realms, such societies are in a condition to find new solutions for problems of all kinds, to analyse and to discuss these solutions, and to come to reforms (7).

From the above, we can infer that an open society is founded on the principle of rationality and critical principles. It is a society where men’s lives are not ruled by taboos and instincts but by reason. It is therefore a society that offers a wide range of opportunity to the rational and critical input of its citizens without limitations. In such society, citizens have unfettered opportunity to critically express their convictions on virtually every issue. Just as science makes progress through the overthrow or modification of theories through refutation, society makes progress as well through the same principle. The more tolerant a society is to opposing views, the more open such a society is.

According to Popper’s classification of closed societies, the situation of tribal societies and the situation where people are closely knit together by blood ties and customs became a manifest example. The societal norm, customs and taboos are the major moderating factor in determining human conduct and life patterns. What basically makes this type of society closed is the fact that the lives of men are controlled by either a force or authority outside him. Decisions and attitudes are not products of personal convictions. It can be the authority of the gods or the collective morality of the community. A closed society Popper contends, resembles a herd in being a semi-organic unit whose members are held together by semi-biological ties – kingship, living together, sharing common efforts, common dangers, common joys and common distress (Popper: *The Open Society*...2). This type of society appears to provide mutual harmony and brotherhood which is actually absent in modern societies. But it fails to provide the needed intellectual freedom needed for men to exercise their mental and philosophical abilities. This is because the society reasons for everyone through established customs, norms and values.

Popper observes that the breakdown of the tribal society is an advance towards the open society. He notes that tribal exclusiveness and self-sufficiency could only be superseded by some form of imperialism (Popper: *The Open Society*...173). He therefore contends that Athenian imperialism was an advance towards the open society. This is because by opening up to other nations, the bonds of tribal exclusiveness were destroyed. Popper had to draw the distinction between closed and open society from the policy of Sparta and Athens. The Spartan policy according to Popper, were based on the following; (a) Shut out all foreign influences which might endanger tribal taboos (b) shut out all equalitarian, democratic and individualistic ideologies (c) be independent of trade (d) uphold the differentiation between your tribe and

others and do not mix with inferiors (f) dominate and enslave your neighbours (g) the city should not become too large (Popper 184). It is in this respect that Popper appraises the Athenian imperialism as being liberal.

The Enemies of the Open Society

Popper maintains that there are three deep philosophical predispositions which underpins Plato's defense of the closed society and, indeed, subsequent defenses of the closed society during the next two-and-a-half millennia (Gorton 1). He calls these ideas the enemies of the open society. These ideas are *holism*, *essentialism* and *historicism*.

Holism may be defined as the view that adequate understanding of certain kinds of entities requires understanding them as a whole. This is often held to be true for biological and social systems, for example, an organism, an ecosystem, an economy, or a culture. A corollary that is typically held to follow from this view is that such entities have properties that cannot be reduced to the entities' constituent parts. For instance, some philosophers argue that human consciousness is an emergent phenomenon whose properties cannot be explained solely by the properties of the physical components (nerve cells, neurotransmitters, and so forth) that comprise the human brain. Similarly, those who advocate a holistic approach to social inquiry argue that social entities cannot be reduced to the properties of the individuals that comprise them. That is, they reject methodological individualism and support methodological holism, as Popper called it.

Popper argues that Plato's *holism* is reflected in his view that the city, the Greek *polis*, was prior to and, in a sense, more real than the individuals who resided in it. For Plato "(o) only a stable whole, the permanent collective, has reality, not the passing individuals" (*Open Society Vol. 1*, 80). This view in turn implied that the city has real needs that supersede those of individuals and was thus the source of Plato's ethical collectivism. According to Popper, Plato believed that a just society required individuals to sacrifice their needs to the interests of the state. "Justice for [Plato]," he wrote, "is nothing but health, unity and stability of the collective body" (*Open Society*, vol. I...106).

Popper saw this as profoundly dangerous. In fact, he said, the view that some collective social entity, be it, for example, a city, a state, society, a nation, or a race—has needs that are prior and superior to the needs of actual living persons is a central ethical tenet of all totalitarian systems, whether ancient or modern. Nazis, for instance, emphasized the needs of the Aryan race to justify their brutal policies, whereas communists in the Soviet Union spoke of class aims and interests as the motor of history to which the individual must bend. The needs of the race or class superseded the needs of individuals. In contrast, Popper held, members of an open society see the state and other social institutions as human designed, subject to rational scrutiny, and always serving the interests of individuals, and never the other way around.

Another dangerous enemy of the open society that Popper identifies is a position that he termed "methodological essentialism." For him, adherents of this view claim "that it is the task of pure knowledge or 'science' to discover and to describe the true nature of things, i.e., their hidden reality or essence" (Popper: *Open Society Vol. 1*...31). Plato's theory of the Forms exemplified this approach. According to Plato, understanding of any kind of thing, for example, a bed, a triangle, a human being, or a city, requires understanding what Plato called its Form. The Forms are timeless, unchanging and perfect exemplars of sensible things found in our world. Coming to understand a Form, Plato believed, requires rational examination of its essence. Such understanding is governed by a kind of intuition rather than empirical inquiry.

On Democracy

By democracy, Popper does not mean ‘the rule of the majority’ or ‘the rule of the people’ (Oyigo 64). He observes that “although ‘the people’ may influence the actions of their rulers by the threat of dismissal, they never rule themselves in any concrete practical sense” (cited in Oyigo 64). He also believes that the election of governments by majority of the governed leads to what he calls the paradox of democracy

For him, therefore, democracy does not consist in the rule of anyone in particular but in ‘institutional control’ of those who hold office by those who do not hold office. Accordingly, his democracy should be understood as a characteristic or form of power—institutions or institutions of management, defined in terms of the institutional control over governors, including their dismissal and replacement, which is exerted by those whom they govern. This is well captured by his contention that;

By a democracy I do not mean something as vague as ‘the rule of the people’ or the ‘rule of the majority’, but a set of institutions (among them especially general elections i.e the right of the people to dismiss their government) which permit public control of the rulers and the dismissal by the ruled, and which make it possible for the ruled to obtain reforms without using violence, even against the will of the rulers (Popper: *The Open society and its enemies* 10).

From this definition, he gives the standard by which one should judge the democratic nature of a political system as the degree of adequacy allowed for the expression of the will of the people; that is, the extent to which the people are involved in decision making processes. Indeed, unlike earlier democratic theorists like Locke, Mill etc. Who saw the problem of democracy as being the control of government by the people, Popper sees it as being how to give institutional expression to the will of the people; that is, how to make the will of the people explicit in real and concrete terms. For Popper, democracy is, by definition, which type of government by which the rulers can be dismissed by the ruled. Tyranny is the type of government in which the ruled cannot get rid of their rulers without bloodshed (Popper: *The Open Society and its enemies* 124). Popper's main political proposal is to avoid and resist tyranny. Tyranny is evil since it violates the humanitarian theory of justice. Democracy is good since it allows those affected by injustice the opportunity to remove the rulers who perpetrate it.

Popper's view of democracy is radical and uncompromising. It leaves the decision when to dismiss the rulers absolutely and categorically in the hands of the ruled. According to him, “a consistent democratic constitution should exclude only one type of change in the legal system, namely a change which would endanger its democratic character” (161). He stresses the importance of building institutions to protect against bad rulers.

Utopian Social Engineering

The utopian social engineering is a political policy advanced in the closed society as a means of attaining set goals through a well thought out blueprint (Denis and Udofia 393). Popper considers utopian social engineering as one of the enemies of the open society and a very regressive approach towards politics (Corvi 52). In other words, utopianism is the attempt at reconstructing or reforming the society as a whole (Denis and Udofia 394). This approach is, for Popper, dangerous because dictatorial and totalitarian principles are inevitable for the full

implementation of political blueprints. Wilkie (64) explains that blue print politics refers to the practice that political reforms must follow a preconceived model of society.

Piecemeal Social Engineering

Piecemeal social engineering is a theory of social governance propounded by Karl Popper as a criticism of historicism and a pathway to social and political reforms (Avery 26). It is the application of scientific thought to solving social problems just as an engineer would use technical know-how to solve problems of science or technology (Umotong 114). For Popper, therefore, piecemeal social engineering is a process of attaining social development by addressing societal issues critically in bits and stages (Denis and Udofia 394).

The word piecemeal denotes actions done or released in small proportions or quantity. It can also refer to stage by stage, bit by bit and gradually. The opposite of piecemeal is whole or holistic. It is not out of place to note here that the central pursuit of Popper's political thought is to set out the principles of piecemeal social engineering as the most realistic political alternative for mankind. Piecemeal Social Engineering can be defined as a process of social development which entails tackling societal problems critically and reflectively in small steps and stages.

The piecemeal social engineer adopts a means of searching for, and fighting against the most urgent evils, of society, rather than searching for and fighting for, it's ultimate good. (Popper, *The Open Society* 159). Popper insists that the piecemeal method is an approach which is methodologically sound. He contends that the politician who adopts this method may not have a blueprint in mind, and may not hope that mankind will one day realize an ideal state and achieve happiness (*The Open Society* 59). The piecemeal social engineer adopts or tackles issues and problems on piecemeal basis rather than an elaborate plan of projection to attain an ideal state. So rather than approach political problems by trying to eradicate all ills at once, piecemeal social engineering favours handling them in bits.

The following highlights can be made of the piecemeal social engineer. Firstly, he does not believe in redesigning the entire society as a whole. He rather approaches it through small adjustments with the aim of always improving upon them. Secondly, the piecemeal engineer is aware we learn only from our mistakes and success. He is a learner and do not possess any sense of having arrived. He understands that much of what he ought to know will unveil itself at the level of social practice. So he proceeds step by step, cross checking the progress made with the expected or desired result. Thirdly, he avoids embarking on reforms that are complex and capable of leading him into a dead end. Fourthly, he does all within his power to ensure that the reform do not create additional suffering on the masses.

MACROECONOMIC STABILIZATION IN NIGERIA

Fuel Subsidy Reform

Introduced on the current administration's Inauguration Day, this reform targeted fiscal imbalances by reducing subsidy expenditure, which made up approximately 20% of government expenditure in 2022, amounting to an average annual spend of up to NGN 3.36 trillion. The primary goal was to free up fiscal resources for infrastructure and social investment (Great for Growth 9) Additionally, the reform aimed to curtail widespread corrupt practices, such as inflated claims and payments to ghost marketers.

Foreign Exchange (FX) Market Unification

The CBN unified the official and parallel market exchange rates to eliminate the 60% differential observed in 2022. Prior to this reform, the FX market had operated a dual system, with official CBN rates coexisting alongside parallel market rates, often referred to as ‘black market’ rates. The significant disparity between these two systems often led to unequal access to FX for certain individuals and companies, creating inefficiencies, enhanced liquidity risks and implications for FDI inflows. The unification reform was implemented to address these issues by establishing a market-driven, single exchange rate system, enhancing liquidity and promoting greater stability in the Nigerian FX market (CBN 2)

Removal of Foreign Exchange (FX) Restrictions

The CBN removed FX restrictions on 43 import lines, which were initially imposed in 2015 to curb FX demand for locally producible goods and conserve foreign reserves. However, these restrictions led to increased activity in the parallel market, which resulted in a surplus demand for FX, higher parallel market rates and ultimately, price increases for essential goods. To mitigate these issues, the reform was therefore introduced to further enable the market-driven exchange rate system by enhancing price stability, improving FX liquidity and limiting distortions (CBN 24).

MPR Increases

The CBN significantly increased the MPR in response to escalating inflationary pressures. In February 2024, the inflation rate was 31.7%, continuing its upward trend. By August 2024, inflation had surged to 32.15%. In response, the CBN’s Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) adjusted the MPR, raising it from 18.5% in February to 27.25% by the end of September. This decision aimed to improve price stability and ultimately rein in inflation while addressing Nigeria’s complex economic landscape, including high public debt, exchange rate volatility and supply-side constraints (MPC 54; World Bank 220).

Electricity Tariff Review

The Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) reviewed and increased electricity tariffs for Band A customers from NGN 66 per kWh to NGN 225 per kWh.^{12,13} This review aimed to attract investments to the power sector, which stood at USD 58.9 billion at the time, and ultimately improve the power supply. Previously, the sector saw limited development due to low investment stemming from non-cost-reflective tariffs.

Additionally, the sector had accumulated a debt of over NGN 3 trillion owed to power companies over the last decade due to the lack of cost-reflective pricing.¹⁴ The April reform introduced cost-reflective tariffs to attract investment, enhance electricity supply and reduce the financial burden on the government, specifically by lowering the subsidy by NGN 1.1 trillion for 2024 (Nairametrics 1; Budget 40).

New Tax Regime

A new tax regime was proposed to increase the tax revenue contribution to GDP, which stood at approximately 10.86% in 2023. The country currently has 60 official and 200 unofficial taxes and experiences low revenue accountability. The reform aimed to enhance revenue generation by expanding the tax base and simplifying the tax processes (Fitch Solutions 1)

FUEL SUBSIDY AND ITS REMOVAL: A POPPERIAN ASSESSMENT

Subsidies, while defined in various ways, fundamentally represent state-sponsored interventions designed to artificially lower the cost of specific commodities to provide economic relief to consumers. Beyond direct consumer support, subsidies function as fiscal mechanisms intended to promote specific economic activities or achieve strategic social objectives. As Julien observes, subsidies are structural measures that foster long-term economic stability, enabling the state to absorb shocks during recessions or unforeseen global crises(20)

The Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, the fuel subsidy regime was institutionalized via the Price Control Act of 1977 to shield citizens from the volatility of the international oil market. Without such intervention, the domestic economy remains vulnerable to global price fluctuations, which can trigger uncontrollable inflation and severe macroeconomic instability. In Nigeria, these subsidies have historically centered on Premium Motor Spirit (PMS)—the energy lifeblood for most sectors of the economy. While successive administrations acknowledged this mechanism's importance to public welfare, the status quo was abruptly dismantled by President Bola Tinubu in his inaugural address on May 29, 2023, with the declaration: "Fuel subsidy is gone!"

The Economic Aftermath

This abrupt policy shift raises a critical question: was such a sweeping mandate prudent in the absence of a compensatory framework? The aftermath was immediate and severe. Pump prices surged from approximately ₦200 to over ₦1,350 per litre. This rapid inflation, fueled by escalating logistics costs and rising energy expenses for businesses, crippled household purchasing power, eroded the middle class, and forced the closure of numerous small-scale enterprises and manufacturing plants. Because this elimination was executed without a phased transition or robust public engagement, the ripple effect across the nation has been devastating.

A Popperian Critique

When subjected to the epistemological framework of Karl Popper, the government's unilateral approach appears fundamentally irrational. Popper did not argue against the necessity of reform; rather, he advocated for "piecemeal social engineering"—the idea that policy reforms should be executed incrementally. This allows for empirical adjustments as policies are tested against the realities of the social landscape.

Popper strongly opposed utopian or "holistic" restructuring, which imposes sudden, radical shocks on society. He emphasized that human societies are subject to unpredictable variables that inevitably complicate even the most carefully constructed plans. Had the Nigerian administration adopted a gradual, step-by-step reform strategy, the systemic damage could have been significantly mitigated. As labor leader Joe Ajaero has suggested, the aggressive and hasty nature of the subsidy removal contradicts the rational procedures required for sound public policy, particularly when the resulting shock to the domestic economy is both predictable and profound.

National Security and Consciousness

National security plays a crucial role in the socio-economic reform of any country. Therefore, any reform aimed at transforming the socio-economic fortune of the state must first

and foremost put security of lives and properties as top of its agenda. But what has been the major visible reform in the Nigeria security sector?

In Nigeria, the security system suffers the menace of lack of proper agenda for reform, lack of political will and commitment to the course of collective national security devoid of bias and sentiments, lack of capacity and motivation on the actors in the theatre of war across several locations where conflicts exists, among others. Some or all of these factors congeal to mitigate against not only the security sector reform, but also on the models and strategies that have been enunciated by the government to move the nation to the next level of peace, stability and development in the 21st century and beyond (Akinwumi et al 89).

The Nigerian state requires more than what is already available for us as a nation. It is on this premise that the whole reform strategies need a new lease of life. For us to move forward as a nation there is the dire need to revisit our past, reconstruct some of the structural and institutional loopholes and then, tailor our collective resolve towards a direction that places national interest truly above parochial regarding. There is also the need to re-orient our minds either as leaders or followers. The re-orientation here is two-pronged. Leadership is critical in reforms. The followers are likely to emulate what the leaders do. What this means is that there is need for vertical and horizontal re-examination and re-orientation (Akinwumi et al 89). This is what Popper mean by critical rationalism; a deeper reasoning for growth.

CONCLUSION

One will readily agree with Popper that the greatest problem encountered in practical politics is the issue of passion beclouding reason. This makes agreements impossible as self-interest overrides national interest. In developing countries, the pursuit of personal/group interest is the basis of financial and political corruption. So, rather than governance alleviate human suffering, it creates more of it. Popper insists that through critical rationalism, the greatest challenges confronting mankind can effectively be handled. The resort to violence is only an evidence of the failure or absence of reason. In the practical sense, Popper is saying that the most urgent evil or suffering should be identified and agreed upon. This then is followed by debates on how to address it and resolve it. The debates should produce a consensus on how to resolve the problem. The resolution of the problem now proceeds through trial and error or conjectures and refutations until the problem is finally handled. What serves as conjectures and refutations is a continuous appraisal through self- criticism and public criticism. It is the critical input made into a programme or project that refines and perfects its implementation. This has a positive impact on the quality of the final product delivered.

It is worthy of note that even in our contemporary society, various degree of piecemeal approach has become a common feature. There is hardly any government policy that does not from time to time witness adjustments. The adjustments may be arising from insufficient funds, or unforeseen circumstances which were not taken into consideration at the inception of the project. So, the modern society is not a stranger to policy adjustments. However, this is not a conscious desire to follow piecemeal approach. What Popper is contending for, is a situation where the piecemeal along with its critical rational method is adopted as the standard modus of operation in a democratic open society. This will definitely require some constitutional provisions to entrench the principle. Though Popper did not mention this aspect, but a certain degree of constitutional provision needs to be put in place before it can be practically implemented.

This work makes significant contributions to knowledge, particularly in areas of contemporary political philosophy and policy science, by successfully bridging Western critical rationalism with African sociopolitical realities. First, it advances the theoretical discourse on liberalism by demonstrating that Karl Popper's political philosophy contains an inherent, implicit "social element" via negative utilitarianism, proving that his explicit individualism does not preclude structured state-led welfare interventions to alleviate suffering. Second, it pioneers a unique cross-cultural philosophical synthesis by mapping Popperian fallibilism and "piecemeal tinkering" onto the communalistic textures of African societies, specifically illustrating how regional adages (such as the Ibibio proverb "drip by drip palm wine fills the gallon") conceptually mirror piecemeal social technology.

Furthermore, the study provides a robust, non-partisan diagnostic framework for evaluating recent Nigerian macroeconomic policy anomalies, demonstrating through the "laboratory of Popper" that the aggressive, simultaneous execution of the 2023 naira redesign and immediate fuel subsidy removal constituted an irrational, holistic "policy mismatch" that caused severe, avoidable human suffering. Finally, it redefines the parameters of democratic accountability in developing post-colonial states by arguing that sustainable economic resilience cannot be achieved through top-down elite mandates, but rather requires the institutionalization of Popperian open-society values, state neutrality, and participatory parity where citizen dissent actively shapes iterative policy modifications.

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THE GENERAL WILL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MODERN DEMOCRATIC THEORY: A STUDY OF ROUSSEAU'S CONCEPT OF COLLECTIVE SOVEREIGNTY

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ABSTRACT

This study critically evaluates Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of the General Will and its implications for modern democratic theory. Existing scholarship has explored Rousseau's notions of popular sovereignty, legitimacy, and the tension between direct democracy and representative governance, yet much of this literature either overlooks or only partially engages with the specific friction between the General Will and the realities of pluralistic, multi-ethnic representative systems such as those found in Africa, often offering fragmented treatments that lack a comprehensive philosophical synthesis. This gap leaves unresolved the question of how, and to what extent, Rousseau's vision of direct collective sovereignty can be adapted to the complex institutional structures of contemporary democratic states. The problem driving this research, therefore, lies in the inherent tension and difficulty of reconciling Rousseau's vision of collective sovereignty with the realities of modern representative governance. Consequently, the main objective is to analyze the philosophical foundations of the General Will and assess its adaptability in fostering inclusive, participatory governance in modern states, building upon and critically extending previous discussions to offer a more focused evaluation of its relevance to contemporary democratic theory and practice. Employing the qualitative philosophical methods of critical and analytic inquiry, the study deconstructs core concepts like popular legitimacy while interrogating the perceived universality of Rousseau's theory, while at the same time exposing its inherent limitations. The findings reveal that while the General Will remains a powerful normative tool to counter elite capture and majoritarianism, its practical implementation in large-scale pluralistic societies is severely hindered by institutional bureaucracy, voter apathy, and sectional politics—vividly illustrated within the Nigerian democratic framework. The study concludes that genuine democratic legitimacy must transcend

periodic elections to achieve continuous civic engagement. It recommends the cultivation of a robust civic culture rooted in public dialogue, institutional accountability, and inclusive participatory structures, ensuring that citizens act not merely as subjects but as active co-authors of the common good.

KEYWORDS: Sovereignty, Governance, Institution, Democracy, Freedom, General Will.

1. INTRODUCTION

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idea of the General Will stands out as one of the most powerful and thought-provoking ideas in political philosophy, laying a strong foundation for understanding democratic rule and shared sovereignty. In his major work, *The Social Contract*, published in 1762, Rousseau argues that real political power does not come from divine authority or force, but from a mutual agreement made by free and equal citizens. This agreement, known as the social contract, requires that laws be made to serve the common good rather than individual desires. The General Will expresses the shared aim of the people working for the benefit of all, setting it apart from classical liberal thinkers like Locke and Mill, who focus more on individual rights and personal freedoms. Rousseau challenges these views by suggesting that real freedom comes when individuals follow the common good. Today's democratic debates still wrestle with this idea, especially as societies question the fairness and effectiveness of their political systems (Rousseau 54; Bertram 112; Canovan 200).

The importance of Rousseau's General Will lies in how it sheds light on the difficult balance between personal freedom and collective decision-making, a challenge that modern democracies continue to face. As democratic thought has developed, Rousseau's ideas have influenced newer democratic practices, especially deliberative democracy and participatory governance. These approaches promote open discussion, agreement, and inclusive decision-making, which match Rousseau's belief that people can, through reason and dialogue, identify and act on the common good. Still, it is difficult to tell the true General Will apart from majority opinion or the views of dominant groups. Critics warn that political leaders can misuse the idea by claiming to speak for the public while actually ignoring minority voices (Mounk 45; Levitsky and Ziblatt 132). This ongoing debate shows the complexity of the General Will and its potential to both strengthen democracy and justify authoritarianism.

There is no doubt that democracy has been widely accepted as the best system of government across the globe. Most of the world's more stable democracies laid their foundations on ideas of political reconstruction advanced by great political philosophers, and the French Revolution, carried out primarily to fight against arbitrary rule, owed much to Rousseau's doctrine of the general will (Okeke and Oginyi 14-15). Rousseau's political thought has deeply influenced revolutionary movements and the development of constitutions, and leaders invoking the General Will did so to justify the transfer of power from monarchy to the people, asserting that legitimate governance must reflect the collective interests and desires of the citizenry rather than the whims of a ruling elite.

Contemporary scholarship continues to return to Rousseau precisely because the tension he identified, between the freedom of the individual and the authority of the collective, has not been resolved by the passage of time. Recent commentators have read Rousseau's social contract as a moral and philosophical foundation for political obligation, one that explains not merely how states come to exist but why individuals are bound to obey the laws and authorities that flow from them (Kumar and Aahire 175). Others have applied Rousseau's insistence that political

authority must rest on the collective “will,” rather than on force, to societies still working out the practical meaning of democratic legitimacy, arguing that the principle of the general will offers a corrective to elite-driven politics wherever it takes root (Okeke and Oginyi 15). Still others have traced how Rousseau's peculiar synthesis of sovereignty and liberty, achieved through his theory of law as an exclusive expression of the general will, shaped the revolutionary vocabulary of later actors who invoked his name for purposes he himself might not have endorsed (Carruthers 2-3). This article joins that conversation, not by cataloguing the secondary literature exhaustively but by returning to Rousseau's central claims directly and asking what they demand of, and offer to, democratic theory today.

This article revisits Rousseau's concept of the General Will and asks what it still has to offer modern democratic theory. It proceeds in four movements. First, it situates Rousseau's thought within its historical and philosophical context. Second, it reconstructs the logic of the social contract and the general will as Rousseau himself presented it, including his controversial account of collective sovereignty. Third, it takes stock of the principal criticisms levelled against the theory, particularly its vulnerability to authoritarian appropriation. Finally, it considers the implications of Rousseau's thought for participatory democracy, the rule of law, and popular sovereignty, closing with a brief reflection on what the Nigerian democratic experience illustrates about the General Will's promise and its limits.

2. ROUSSEAU IN CONTEXT

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born on 28 June 1712 in Geneva. His mother died of puerperal fever nine days after his birth, and Rousseau was raised first by his father, a watchmaker who introduced him to classical literature, and then by relatives after his father fled the city following a dispute. His formal education was minimal; his intellectual formation instead came through self-directed reading and the patronage of Françoise-Louise de Warens, under whose guidance he encountered Descartes, Locke, and Malebranche (Cranston 15-20; Kelly 6-8; Leigh 22). Rousseau's engagement with the Enlightenment was similarly unconventional. Though he briefly contributed to Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, he grew sceptical of the movement's faith in science, progress, and reason as guarantees of human improvement, arguing instead that civilisation had corrupted an originally compassionate human nature (Bertram 17; Masters 33).

Rousseau developed his political thought against the backdrop of the Ancien Régime, whose rigid hierarchies of aristocratic privilege and clerical authority stood in tension with Enlightenment appeals to reason and human dignity. He concluded that political institutions of his day served the elite and perpetuated inequality, a conviction that shaped his insistence that legitimate authority must rest on the collective will of the people rather than hereditary privilege (Cranston 114). Philosophically, he positioned himself against both Thomas Hobbes, who had argued in *Leviathan* that individuals must surrender their freedom to an absolute sovereign in exchange for security, and John Locke, who in his *Second Treatise* grounded government in the preservation of natural rights, including property. Rousseau rejected Hobbes's absolutism and denied that property could ground political legitimacy, advancing instead the proposition, in the opening line of *The Social Contract*, that “man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” (141).

Rousseau also drew on the classical republican tradition, admiring the civic virtue of the Greek polis, where citizens were expected to subordinate private interest to the common good, while remaining alert to the problem of scale: a form of government suited to a small city-state might not easily transfer to a large modern nation (Shklar 29). This tension between the ideal of

active citizenship and the practical difficulties of size and diversity runs through the whole of his political philosophy and reappears, as we shall see, as one of the central objections to his theory today.

3. THE SOCIAL CONTRACT AND THE GENESIS OF THE GENERAL WILL

Rousseau's Social Contract Theory remains one of the most influential contributions to modern political philosophy. His 1762 treatise proposes a model of legitimate political authority grounded not in force or hereditary privilege but in the collective will of the people. Where Hobbes held that individuals surrender all sovereignty to an absolute ruler, and Locke maintained that only limited sovereignty is transferred to government, Rousseau introduced the concept of the General Will to resolve what he saw as the central puzzle of political association: how individuals might unite with others while still obeying only themselves. His answer was that although each person surrenders all their rights to the collective, they receive back, through participation in the general will, a form of protection and moral freedom unavailable in the state of nature (Carruthers 2).

According to Udo and Inua, the social contract holds significant relevance as it offers a credible basis for understanding the origin of human political society. As they put it: The contractual agreement that exists between a constituted authority and the citizenry as predicated by social contract model assumes various responsibilities and obligations as far as each party to the contract is concerned. The ability of contract to properly address the issue of the contract vitiation in an event of a party not living up to his responsibilities or obligations is an issue of serious concern to socio-political philosophers (14).

This reveals the harsh and intolerable conditions of life in the state of nature, demonstrating the necessity for individuals to adopt alternative strategies for survival. The concept highlights how personal survival is better secured within a collective societal structure. Furthermore, the social contract not only serves as the foundation of organised society but also affirms the distinct value of each individual within political relationships, ensuring that individual uniqueness is acknowledged and preserved in the broader political context (Udo and Inua 18).

Rousseau begins with the state of nature, a condition in which individuals are free and equal but exposed to the risks of self-interest unconstrained by law. To escape this condition, people enter into a social contract, an agreement to leave their pre-social state and form a civil society governed by shared rules and a unified purpose. Central to this agreement is the general will, which reflects the collective interest of the whole community rather than any private desire, and which serves as the moral and rational basis for law-making (Kumar and Aahire 174).

At the heart of Rousseau's theory lies a distinction between natural liberty, which is unlimited but insecure, and civil liberty, which is bounded by law but guaranteed by the community. The general will is arguably the most distinctive and contentious element of this theory. Unlike the "will of all," which is simply the sum of individual preferences, the general will represents what citizens would choose were they to consider themselves as members of a single moral community rather than as private individuals. Rousseau insists that "each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and in our corporate capacity we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole" (61). Any law that reflects the general will, even one opposed by some individuals, is legitimate because it issues from the collective agreement of citizens as moral equals; and obedience to a law one has prescribed for oneself, Rousseau insists, is not subjugation but freedom (Dent 55).

It is worth pausing on how sharply this departs from Rousseau's two great predecessors. Hobbes, writing in the aftermath of civil war, argued in *Leviathan* that human beings in the state of nature exist in perpetual conflict, driven by self-interest and the fear of violent death, and that only the surrender of natural right to an absolute sovereign could secure peace (109-112). Locke, by contrast, held a more optimistic view of human nature, arguing in his *Two Treatises* that individuals in the state of nature already possess rights to life, liberty, and property, and that government exists to protect, not replace, those rights; should government fail in this task, the people retain the right to revolt (135). Rousseau accepted neither the pessimism of Hobbes nor the propertied individualism of Locke. Like Hobbes, he thought the state of nature unsustainable and in need of a contract; unlike Hobbes, he refused to see that contract as a one-way surrender of right to an unaccountable ruler. Like Locke, he grounded legitimate government in consent; unlike Locke, he denied that private property could serve as the foundation of political right, locating legitimacy instead in the moral transformation individuals undergo when they exchange natural liberty for civil liberty as members of a sovereign people (Bertram 28).

A further distinction, central to understanding what Rousseau meant by the general will, is his separation of it from the mere “will of all” (*volonté de tous*). The will of all is nothing more than the sum of private preferences and may, at any given moment, produce outcomes that reflect majority opinion without reflecting the common good. The general will, by contrast, is meant to emerge from public deliberation in which each citizen sets aside narrow self-interest to consider the welfare of the whole community; it is, in this sense, a normative rather than a merely empirical or statistical notion. As Rousseau puts it, “if, when the people, having been adequately informed, held its deliberations, the citizens had no communication with one another, the general will would always be the result of the great number of small differences” (72). For this convergence to occur, Rousseau insists, certain conditions must hold: rough equality among citizens, an absence of entrenched factions, and a citizenry educated enough to deliberate about the common good rather than merely aggregate private demands (Kelly 124). The general will, in other words, is not simply whatever a majority happens to decide; it is what a rightly constituted and rightly informed community would decide, which is precisely why identifying it in practice has proved to be Rousseau's most difficult legacy.

Rousseau's preferred political form, direct democracy modelled loosely on the Athenian assembly, follows from this account of legitimacy. He rejects representative government on the grounds that surrendering the right of self-legislation to any representative body amounts to a kind of moral abdication: “the moment a people allows itself to be represented, it is no longer free” (Rousseau 93). Government, for Rousseau, is merely the executive agent of the sovereign people, never the source of law. This is, admittedly, a demanding ideal, one Rousseau himself conceded was better suited to small, culturally cohesive communities such as ancient city-states than to large, modern nations (Masters 98; Shklar 47). Nevertheless, its core commitment, that legitimate authority derives from the consent of the governed and that freedom consists in participation rather than mere non-interference, remains central to democratic thought (Bertram 91).

4. COLLECTIVE SOVEREIGNTY: INDIVISIBLE AND INALIENABLE

Sovereignty is among the oldest and most contested concepts in political theory, broadly understood as the supreme authority within a political community, not subject to any higher power. Historically, the concept entered political reflection through Jean Bodin, who located sovereignty in the person of the monarch and defined it as “the absolute and perpetual power of a

republic,” constrained, if at all, only by divine and natural law (25). This absolutism was later hardened by Hobbes, for whom subjects were bound to surrender their rights irrevocably to an undivided sovereign whose word was simply law (Hobbes 109). Locke softened this doctrine by grounding sovereignty in the consent of the governed and insisting that the people retain the right to withdraw that consent should government violate their natural rights (111, 124). It was Rousseau, however, who most radically reconceived the idea, relocating sovereignty entirely within the collective body of citizens and severing it altogether from the person or office of any ruler.

For Rousseau, sovereignty is nothing other than the exercise of the general will; it cannot be represented, delegated, or divided without ceasing to be sovereignty at all. In one of the most quoted passages of *The Social Contract*, Rousseau writes:

I hold then that Sovereignty, being nothing less than the exercise of the General Will, can never be alienated, and that the Sovereign, who is no less than a collective being, cannot be represented except by himself: the power indeed may be transmitted, but not the will.... Sovereignty, for the same reason as makes it inalienable, is indivisible; for will either is, or is not, general; it is the will either of the body of the people, or only of a part of it. In the first case, the will, when declared, is an act of Sovereignty and constitutes law: in the second, it is merely a particular will, or act of magistracy—at the most a decree (83).

On this account, sovereignty is not identified with government at all; the two stand opposed, and government's sole function is to enforce and respect a sovereign will it did not create. As Rousseau puts it, “each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will,” so that government becomes merely the agent, never the author, of law (61). This has clear moral as well as legal implications. Because sovereignty is legitimate only insofar as it expresses the general will, and the general will aims always at the common good, Rousseau's theory of sovereignty is inseparable from a substantive theory of justice: laws are binding not merely because a state apparatus enforces them but because they issue from the collective self-legislation of a moral community (Bertram 85; Dent 76).

It is precisely this totalising character that has made Rousseau's account of sovereignty controversial. Because the general will is held to be always right, individuals who deviate from it may, in Rousseau's notorious phrase, be “forced to be free.” Some scholars have read this as an opening to totalitarianism, in which the state claims to know citizens' “true” interests better than they do themselves (Berlin 134). Defenders respond that Rousseau's sovereign is not a ruler or a state apparatus at all but the citizenry itself, and that the general will, properly understood, functions as a standard against which the arbitrary exercise of power can be judged and resisted rather than as a licence for its exercise (Cranston 157; Kelly 127).

5. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE GENERAL WILL

Rousseau's theory does not ask the individual to disappear into the collective; it asks the individual to become, in a specific sense, both author and subject of the law. The individual retains autonomy not by escaping the community but by helping to shape the laws that bind everyone, including themselves. Rousseau's famous declaration that “man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” is not, on his own reading, a lament for lost liberty so much as a diagnosis: the chains that matter are illegitimate ones, and legitimate chains, those “forged by collective agreement,” are compatible with, indeed constitutive of, freedom properly understood (49).

This requires the individual to occupy two roles at once: a private person with particular desires, and a citizen with civic responsibilities. The general will is not simply the sum of these private desires; it is what citizens would will if they considered themselves as part of a whole rather than as isolated individuals (Shklar 41). Rousseau grounds the plausibility of this transformation in his account of human nature, arguing that human beings are endowed with a natural compassion, or *pitié*, that inclines them to recognise the needs of others and restrain purely selfish impulses. This moral sense, however, requires cultivation through civic education and public institutions if it is to be reliably expressed in political life (Dent 62). The individual's role in Rousseau's system is therefore not passive; it is the ongoing, active work of transforming private judgment into a contribution to collective deliberation, and of accepting the outcome of that deliberation as binding (Cranston 67, 127).

6. CRITICAL ASSESSMENTS: AMBIGUITY, COERCION, AND THE PROBLEM OF SCALE

Rousseau's concept of the general will has been a persistent object of critique in political philosophy, in large part because of its ambiguity. Rousseau offers no precise institutional mechanism for identifying the general will in practice, leaving the concept vulnerable to appropriation by anyone willing to claim to speak in its name. As Berlin observes, the general will can easily become a rhetorical instrument by which leaders justify authoritarian practice while suppressing dissent as a supposed betrayal of the collective good (32). Talmon goes further, arguing that the very indeterminacy of the general will paved the way historically for totalitarian appropriations of Rousseau's doctrine, most notably by revolutionary leaders during the French Revolution who invoked it to legitimise coercion in the name of unity (54). The tension is real: a principle designed to secure liberty and equality can, absent clear institutional safeguards, be transformed into an instrument for enforcing conformity.

A second and related difficulty concerns the relationship between individual freedom and collective authority. Rousseau's claim that a person who rejects the general will may be "forced to be free" has drawn sustained criticism for appearing to license coercion in the name of liberty. Bertrand Russell reads this as opening the door to authoritarianism, since governments may claim to defend freedom while in fact suppressing dissent (164). Berlin similarly warns of a form of "positive liberty run amok," in which the state assumes authority to define citizens' "true" interests and compel them accordingly, thereby eroding the very autonomy Rousseau sought to protect (134). A doctrine conceived as one of emancipation can, under these conditions, become a mechanism of domination, particularly where obedience to authority is conflated with civic virtue.

A third criticism concerns Rousseau's assumption of a degree of moral and civic homogeneity that modern societies rarely possess. His model presumes citizens capable of setting aside private interest for the sake of a unified common good, an assumption that may have had some plausibility for a small, culturally cohesive city-state such as Geneva but sits uneasily with large, pluralistic, modern nations marked by deep divisions of class, religion, ethnicity, and ideology (Constant 19). Where such divisions are entrenched, the general will risks becoming indistinguishable from the "will of all," the mere aggregate of competing private and factional interests that Rousseau himself was at pains to distinguish from genuine collective will. This distinction, however conceptually elegant, proves difficult to operationalise in practice, since it is exceedingly hard to separate concern for the public good from the overlapping, often competing interests of particular groups (Kumar and Aahire 175). The upshot is that Rousseau's

neat theoretical separation between the general will and the will of all provides little practical guidance for discerning, in any actual polity, when a collective decision expresses genuine common interest rather than the dominance of a particular faction.

These criticisms do not, on balance, dissolve Rousseau's contribution so much as clarify the conditions under which it remains useful. Rousseau's own defenders have long argued that his sovereign was never intended to be a state apparatus capable of arbitrary command, but the citizenry itself, bound together by equality, civic virtue, and habits of public deliberation that make coercion in the name of the common good less an imposition than a rational obligation freely accepted (Bertram 94). On this reading, the coercive edge of "forced to be free" presupposes precisely the conditions, equality, informed deliberation, absence of faction, that Rousseau elsewhere insists are necessary for the general will to exist at all; strip those conditions away, and what remains is not the general will misapplied but simply its absence, dressed in borrowed language. This does not fully answer the worry that the language of the general will can be, and repeatedly has been, invoked by those who lack any real claim to it. But it does suggest that Rousseau's theory functions best not as a blueprint for direct, unmediated collective rule, nor as a licence for whoever currently holds power, but as a normative standard, a way of asking, of any law, institution, or claim to speak for "the people," whether it could plausibly be endorsed by citizens reasoning as equal members of a shared political community rather than as partisans of narrower interests.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR MODERN DEMOCRATIC THEORY

1. Participatory Democracy

Rousseau maintained that laws are just only when they are self-imposed by the community as a whole, reflecting a shared pursuit of the common good rather than the private interests of individuals or elites (60). This conviction resonates directly with the modern ideal of participatory democracy, which insists that citizens should not remain passive recipients of periodic elections but active participants in shaping the decisions that govern their lives (Pateman 21; Held 7). Where the general will is not grounded in genuine participation, it risks collapsing into an abstraction easily claimed by elites who assert to speak for "the people" without securing their actual consent (Held 45). Participatory mechanisms, whether citizen assemblies, town-hall deliberation, or referenda, can be understood as the institutional expression of Rousseau's theory: they give the general will a concrete procedure through which to be discovered and expressed rather than merely asserted.

At the same time, Rousseau's demand that citizens rise above private interest sits in some tension with the pluralism that participatory democracy is meant to accommodate (Dunn 118). The theorists who revived participatory democracy in the twentieth century, Carole Pateman and Benjamin Barber among them, argued that meaningful democratic legitimacy requires citizens to acquire, through ongoing participation in everyday institutions, precisely the civic capacities that Rousseau's theory presupposes rather than takes for granted (Pateman 55; Barber 116-117). John Dryzek's argument that participatory mechanisms should complement rather than replace representative institutions offers one plausible route toward reconciling Rousseau's ideal with modern institutional complexity: citizen assemblies and deliberative forums can check elite dominance and cultivate the shared civic orientation the general will requires, without pretending that a nation of many millions can convene as a single Athenian assembly (Dryzek 14, 89).

2. The General Will and the Rule of Law

The rule of law, the principle that no individual or institution stands above the law and that legal norms bind rulers and citizens alike, is deeply connected to Rousseau's account of the general will. For laws to be legitimate, in Rousseau's view, they must not merely reflect the will of the people procedurally but must also be general and impartial in application, binding all members of the community equally. This requirement of impartiality is precisely what links the general will to the rule of law: both insist that legitimate authority cannot be arbitrary, particular, or exempted from its own strictures (Dent 76; Bertram 85). Rousseau's account thus transforms political obedience from an external imposition into a form of self-legislation, in which citizens remain free precisely because they obey only laws they have had a hand, however indirect, in making.

This synthesis, however, faces real difficulty in pluralistic societies, where deep and legitimate disagreement over values makes consensus on the content of the “general will” elusive (Dunn 118). Deliberative institutions, inclusive forums, and citizen assemblies of the kind Dryzek describes offer one way of bridging this gap, ensuring that the general will is arrived at through fair deliberation rather than imposed by simple majoritarian force (Dryzek 89). On this reading, the rule of law is not a static barrier against politics but a living framework that requires constant renewal through participation, accountability, and civic deliberation if it is to remain an expression of collective self-rule rather than a mere instrument of the powerful.

The stakes of this connection become clearer once impartiality is taken seriously as a constraint on governance rather than a mere formality. A legal order that applies rigorously to the poor while shielding the powerful, or that is invoked selectively to punish dissent while excusing those with influence, does not simply fail at good administration; on Rousseau's terms, it forfeits its claim to express the general will at all, since a law that binds some citizens and exempts others has ceased to be general in the relevant sense and has become, in his words, “merely a particular will, or act of magistracy” (Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, III, XV, 83). The rule of law, understood this way, is less a technical achievement of legal drafting than a continuous test of whether a polity's laws still answer to the people they govern, or have quietly become instruments serving those who administer them.

8. POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY AND THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Collective sovereignty, for Rousseau, is inseparable from the practical question of how a people continually reasserts its authority over those who govern in its name; this is the terrain of popular sovereignty, the principle, sharpened during the Enlightenment and embedded in most modern constitutions, that all legitimate political power flows from the consent of the governed (Locke 124; Rousseau 72). Rousseau went further than Locke in this respect, remaining sceptical of purely representative arrangements on the grounds that they risk diluting the people's active role in governance, reducing sovereignty to an occasional and largely symbolic act of voting rather than an ongoing exercise of collective will (Rousseau 74; Dunn 141).

Nigeria offers an instructive, if sobering, illustration of the gap between this ideal and its practical realisation. Rousseau's theory presumes a rough consensus on the “common good,” yet in a society as ethnically, religiously, and regionally diverse as Nigeria's, such consensus is elusive, and political competition frequently organises itself around sectional loyalty rather than deliberation about shared interest (Okeke and Oginyi 15). Compounding this, corruption and the capture of public institutions by ruling elites erode the very trust on which the general will depends. As Umotong observes, ruling elites often infiltrate and subvert key institutions, from

the civil service to the judiciary, filling strategic positions with loyalists rather than the meritorious, a process that “undermines meritocracy, the rule of law, property rights, transparency, and administrative capacity” (Umotong 142). The consequences are severe: corruption of this kind “distorts economic growth, healthy competition, and innovation,” curtails the “voluntary contributions to public goods and services” on which a functioning polity depends, and “erodes positive societal values and norms” (Umotong 141).

Yet Rousseau's theory is not merely a diagnosis of failure in such contexts; it also supplies a normative vocabulary for reform. Okeke and Oginyi argue that Nigeria stands to benefit from embracing the principle of the general will as a corrective to extreme individualism and the political “godfatherism” that has dominated much of its post-independence democratic experience, offering a model of governance centred on the sovereignty of the people rather than the ambitions of a narrow elite (Okeke and Oginyi 15). Good governance, on this view, requires precisely the qualities Rousseau's theory demands of citizens and leaders alike: legitimacy, a demonstrated commitment to the public good, and an equitable, inclusive process for managing collective affairs (Obioha and Adegboyega 26-27). Where governance instead tracks ethnic, religious, or personal loyalty rather than the common interest, what is produced is not the general will in Rousseau's sense but its opposite: the aggregated, factional “will of all” that Rousseau warned against from the outset.

9. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE GENERAL WILL IN MODERN DEMOCRACIES: NIGERIA AS A CASE STUDY

Implementing the general will faces serious challenges in Nigeria. The foremost is the difficulty of defining a “common good” in a society as diverse and fragmented as Nigeria, where over 250 ethnic groups and deep religious, cultural, and regional divisions make consensus on what benefits all elusive. Human rights and social justice are constantly compromised by paradoxical power dynamics that fail to prioritise minority concerns (Ignatius & Denis 36). The Niger Delta conflict is illustrative: the Ogoni people's call for environmental justice in the 1990s clashed with the federal government's priority of maximising oil revenue, and the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Nine showed how a regime-defined “national interest” could override minority rights (Udo et al 32-42). Such episodes reveal the divergence between state-constructed notions of the common good and community-centred perspectives, complicating any realisation of the general will.

This tension is compounded by entrenched ethnic and religious loyalty. Rousseau envisioned the general will as transcending private interest, but Nigeria's political landscape is fragmented along sectional lines, and the federal system is frequently manipulated by elites to reinforce ethnic patronage rather than inclusive policy (Ignatius and Umotong 54). Political competition thus becomes a contest of ethnic blocs rather than deliberation about the common good. Obioha's standard for genuine governance is instructive here: it demands a “true communitarianism which is inclusive of general human community based on the recognition of the humanity of all including those that do not have immediate and proximate relationship to the community but who are nonetheless accommodated by the community based on their humanity and as it were members of the world community” (“An Afro Communal Ethics” 32)—that is, every member affected by a decision should have a share in making it.

Institutional weakness deepens the problem. Azoro, Onah, and Agulefo note that the Nigerian state exhibits classic attributes of institutional weakness: minimal control over territory,

non-provision of basic services, pervasive corruption, displacement, and economic decline. As they put it:

A weak institution depicted a state of decline or powerlessness of government agencies to effectively discharge some of the fundamental responsibilities of the state such as the maintenance of law and order and the protection of its territorial integrity. Some of the manifestations of institutional weakness are losing control of territory or the sole power of using physical force therein, the crisis of legitimacy in which some part of the state seeks disintegration, inability to provide basic services to the citizens etc (62).

For Rousseau, legitimate law is an impartial expression of the general will, dependent on trust in institutions and leaders' accountability. In Nigeria, that trust is eroded by corruption and unfulfilled promises, and conflict often follows from weak institutions and inequitable governance (Adeleke 176). Adegboyega and Obioha observe that: "The political elites have remained the determinants of the country's fate. Other ideas, suggestions and criticism from the citizens and opposition parties do not count" (11). Umotong similarly argues that ruling elites infiltrate institutions such as the civil service, judiciary, military, media, and banking, undermining meritocracy and administrative capacity:

Strategic positions in the police and military are filled with personally loyal individuals, as political defeat could lead to exile, imprisonment, or worse. Economic reforms that would remove state controls and reduce scarcity are opposed because such controls are sources of rent extraction for the ruling elites. Those excluded from power often resort to violence, insurgency, and civil war (142).

Corruption, which permeates every sector of the Nigerian society, thrives openly and is rarely absent from public discourse. Its effects are severe:

Corruption distorts economic growth, healthy competition, and innovation, leading to reduced productivity and foreign direct investment due to inefficient contract allocation and bribing of foreign officials and tourists. Corruption curtails voluntary contributions to public goods and services owing to diminished trustworthiness, exacerbates inequality, brain drain, criminal activities, and institutional inefficiencies, while eroding positive societal values and norms. (Umotong 141)

Ologbenla and Babatunde add that corruption is fundamentally an abuse of public trust for private gain:

Corruption ensues when a citizen tries to influence the outcomes of the public affairs, events, contracts using monetary or pecuniary affluence... This is why corruption is usually defined as the abuse of public office for private gains... Corruption also connotes the extraction of bribes from the citizens by public servants or political office holders with a promise that the outcomes of public policy would be thwarted. (191)

The result is a culture of selective justice: the poor are punished for petty infractions while elites who embezzle public funds escape accountability and are celebrated as "successful," an inversion that turns law into an instrument of oppression rather than a safeguard of the general will (Ezeanya 131). Good governance, by contrast, requires managing public affairs for society's well-being, yet Nigeria's elections, the primary mechanism for aggregating the general will, are routinely undermined by ballot snatching, vote buying, and manipulation of results (Ojo 62). Nwankwo and Udebasi describe this starkly:

The most disturbing and damaging form of corruption is made manifest in the succession of kleptocratic governments, which has produced extremely wealthy generals and political leaders. Similarly, electoral corruption is prevalent. This is a situation that includes the purchase of votes

with money, promises of office or special favors, coercion, intimidation, and interference with freedom of election, sale of votes, killing and maiming of people in the name of election, and a situation where losers end up as the winners (71).

Compounding this is "godfatherism," where political patrons dominate candidate selection and filter citizens' preferences through elite structures (Arowolo and Aluko 65), so that the general will is neither genuinely expressed nor effectively aggregated. Nigeria's sheer scale compounds the difficulty: Rousseau imagined small, participatory polities, but with a population exceeding 200 million, direct participation is nearly impossible, and youth and women alike face structural exclusion, leaving the "general will" shaped by a small minority. Governments have also invoked "national security" and "unity" to justify curtailing dissent in the Niger Delta and among IPOB, weaponising the language of justice to protect elite interests while excluding the vulnerable (Udo et al. 40), showing a vivid illustration of the authoritarian risk latent in Rousseau's own theory.

Thus, Nigerian democratic practice remains largely procedural, centred on elections rather than sustained citizen deliberation, accountability, or policy co-creation (Omotola 57). This weak civic engagement undermines Rousseau's vision of citizens as co-authors of the law, reducing democracy to elite-driven governance. Bridging the gap between Rousseau's ideal and Nigeria's realities will require not only institutional reform but a civic culture rooted in dialogue, inclusivity, and accountability.

10. CONCLUSION

Rousseau's general will, anchored in the social contract and the principle of collective sovereignty, reminds us that genuine democracy thrives when people participate actively in shaping the laws that govern them, and that freedom is found, paradoxically, in obedience to a law one has helped to prescribe for oneself. This insight speaks directly to the heart of democratic governance: legitimacy cannot rest merely on periodic elections but requires the continuous, substantive involvement of citizens in the decisions that affect their lives. Applied to contexts such as Nigeria, Rousseau's theory challenges societies to close the gap between leaders and the governed, to build institutional trust, and to ensure that collective decisions reflect the aspirations of the majority while still respecting the rights of minorities.

At the same time, the difficulties encountered in translating Rousseau's ideal into practice, the ambiguity surrounding how the general will is to be identified, the risk that appeals to collective unity will be used to justify coercion, and the sheer scale and diversity of modern political communities, should caution against treating Rousseau's theory as a ready-made institutional blueprint. Its enduring value lies elsewhere: as a normative standard against which existing democratic practice can be measured, and as a persistent reminder that political authority which does not, in some meaningful sense, belong to the people it governs has yet to earn the name of legitimate government. Read in this way, Rousseau's general will remains what it has been since 1762: not a finished system, but an unfinished demand, one that each generation of democratic theorists and citizens must take up anew.

What Rousseau ultimately offers modern democratic theory, then, is less a design for institutions than a criterion for judging them. Electoral procedures, constitutional structures, and deliberative forums all matter, but they matter, on Rousseau's account, only insofar as they succeed in making political authority genuinely traceable back to the people it governs. Where that traceability breaks down, whether through corruption, factional capture, or the quiet substitution of elite preference for popular will, democracy retains its outward form while

forfeiting the substance Rousseau thought essential to it. The task he leaves to contemporary theory is therefore not to resolve, once and for all, the tension between individual freedom and collective authority, but to keep building the institutional and civic conditions, participation, transparency, education, and accountability, under which that tension can be worked out anew by each generation of free and equal citizens.

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AN APPRAISAL OF STOICISM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

This study, titled “An Appraisal Of Stoicism For The 21st Century Nigerian Youths” examines the relevance of stoic philosophy as a practical framework for addressing contemporary challenges faced by the youths such as depression, anxiety, suicide, caused by unemployment, cyberbully, and the “fear of missing out” (FOMO), in-authenticity, and contented nature of the youths in this 21st century. Using analytical, critical, and expository approaches of philosophical enquiry to explore the teachings of Zeno of Citium, Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. Central to the analysis is the dichotomy of control, the distinction between what lies within human power and what does not- and the call to live in accordance with nature. The paper argues that stoicism offers Nigerian Youths tools for resilience, character formation, and authentic living in the face of social and economic pressures. By cultivating virtues such as wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance, the youths can develop mental fortitude, reduce vulnerability to external events and build self-confidence. Though critiques like Nietzsche and Julian call stoicism delusional and in Nietzsche’s words “self-tyranny” but this study concludes that stoicism, when applied contextually, provides a timeless solution for navigating well-being among Nigerian youths.

KEYWORD: Stoicism, Nigerian Youth, Dichotomy Of Control, Character, Resilience.

INTRODUCTION.

In Nigeria, much is out of our hands, for instance, grid power failures, erratic fuel queues, sudden currency fluctuations, and or unpredictable traffic, social media and peer group pressure, motivational speakers and preachers miracles and get-rich fast sermons among others. Stoics practice enduring minor hardships to inoculate themselves against major ones (dichotomy of control), there adapting to living according to nature. Deploying a qualitative approach grounded in analytic, expository, and critical methods of philosophical inquiry, to analytically breakdown stoic concepts such the dichotomy of control and living according to nature into their essential

components, clarifying their meaning and relevance. Expository methods is to present the historical development of stoicism through the works of Zeno of Citium, Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius, while highlighting their central themes of virtue, resilience, and character formation. The critical method evaluates stoicism's applicability to the lived realities of Nigerian youth, particularly in relation to challenges such as unemployment, cyberbully, peer pressure, and the influence of religious and motivational figures. Primary sources includes classical stoic texts such as meditations and The *Enchiridion*, while secondary sources consist of scholarly commentaries and contemporary analyses of stoicism. By synthesizing these materials, the study aims to provide a balanced appraisal of stoicism as a practical philosophy for fostering resilience, and well-being among Nigerian youths.

Starting with the historical background of the stoic, this paper will briefly look into its core tenets, who are youths is?, we look at the various causes that warrants anxiety, depression and suicide in youths such as in-authenticity, lack of contentment, that is crippling their self confidence and self-worth and a possible way out using the stoic philosophy, followed by evaluation and then conclusion.

The foundations of Stoicism can be traced back to the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher like Socrates and his student Plato. Since Socrates believed in the importance of self-discipline and cultivating inner strength, which are key tenets of Stoicism. Plato also emphasized the idea of self-control and detachment from worldly desires. However, it was Zeno of Citium who formalized these ideas into a distinct philosophical system. (Lawhead 94). Then Epictetus picked it up from Zeno and other philosophers followed suits but with vary perspectives, as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius emphasized on perspective, Epictetus dealt on dichotomy of control from inner and external events.

Stoicism is an Hellenistic philosophical school of thought that originated in ancient Greece and became popular during the Roman Empire. The word "stoicism" comes from the Greek word "stoa," which means "porch" or "colonnade," as the philosophy was first taught in a public colonnade in Athens. The Stoic school of thought was founded by Zeno of Citium in the early 3rd century BCE and was later developed by prominent philosophers such as Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius. The philosophy of Stoicism emphasizes the development of self-control and resilience, and has had a lasting impact on Western thought and culture. (Lawhead 94). The stoic philosophy was developed about the same time that Epicurus founded his school. This school developed into a formidable rival that competed with the hedonism of Epicurus for the minds of the Greek and Roman populace. (Lawhead 94). This Hellenistic philosophers emphasizes developing self-control and fortitude to overcome destructive emotions, aiming for a virtuous life, they include; Zeno Citium, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius, among others. This paper will focus on Zeno's dictum of "living according to nature" and Epictetus's "dichotomy of control" respectively.

Zeno of Citium (334-262 BCE): The founder of the Stoic school of philosophy, who lectured on porch or open colonnade. Accordingly, the name of the school comes from the Greek word stoa, which means "porch". he attracted many followers in Greece and Rome. He was wildly admired for his moral earnestness, and the Athenians gave him official honors. (Lawhead 94). Zeno's teachings focused on the concept of living in accordance with nature, or living in harmony with the natural order of the universe.

Epictetus, (C.50-120): Epictetus was a prominent Stoic Roman philosopher whose teachings focused on practical ethics, personal freedom, and moral responsibility. He was a former slave, who taught that philosophy is a way of life, not just theoretical study, aiming to

teach individuals how to achieve inner peace (ataraxia) by distinguishing between what is our control and what is not. He said, “If you have assumed any character beyond your strength, you have both demeaned yourself in that, and neglected one which you might have filled with success”. The foundation of Epictetus’s philosophy is that things are within our power our opinions, desires and actions (our prohairesis or moral choice) while others are not our bodies, possessions, reputation, and public offices. As he wrote; “Ask not that events should happen as you will, but let your will be that events should happen as they do, and you will have peace” (2.2).

This idea is reflected in the famous Stoic maxim, "Happiness (*eudaimoni*) and freedom begin with a clear understanding of one principle that is some things are within our control, and some things are not." Stoicism also places a strong emphasis on the development of moral character and living a virtuous life. And lawhead wrote that “ their ethical outlook was influence by Socrates’ life and death and by his confidence that no real harm can come to a person whose life is based on virtue and eternal values”. (94). Meaning that, Stoicism is a philosophical school of thought that emphasizes self-control, resilience, and living in accordance with nature. Its teachings have had a lasting impact on Western thought and culture, and continue to be studied and applied in modern times as this paper seeks to apply it on the 21st century Nigerian youth.

Though some critiques as Friedrich Nietzsche as a prominent critic of stoicism, particularly its doctrine of “living according to Nature”. He argued that stoicism is a form of self-tyranny and a denial of the passions and life itself, rather than a virtue. As Nietzsche mocks the stoic ambition of living according to nature, asking why they make a principle out of what they actually are, labeling it a “fraud of word” and a “self-deluding” tyranny (Twilight 13). Another critique is, Julian Baggini. She argues that the stoic idea of detachment makes them less engaged with life, fostering an unhealthy individualism that ignores human rationality. When Beggini said “The Stoic disinterest in “externals” such as loved ones and health, arguing that this makes them cold and stern “rather than merely resilient” (1).

In contrast, the Stoic demand to cultivate a radical differences to external events can lead to an unhealthy suppression of emotional complexity. While Seneca advises that we should feel pain but not allow ourselves to be overcome by it, suggesting “let your tears flow, but let them also cease” this high standard can inadvertently encourage the belief that sadness or anxiety have no place in a well lived life. This may be termed “toxic possibility” but is highly possible, because it is not right to let our fear have the best of us at any given time, because it maybe too late to recover.

THE NIGERIAN YOUTHS

Youths has various definitions, generally referring to the period of life between childhood and adulthood, the state of being young, or young people as a group. The precise age range associated with “youths ” can vary widely depending on the social, cultural, or institutional context (United Nations). Organizations use specific age ranges for statistical or policy purposes. For example, for statistical purposes, the United Nations defines “youth” as persons aged between 15 and 24 years (UN). The World Health Organization (WHO) similarly defines the word “youth” as those aged 15-24, while “adolescents” are 10-19 years old (UNFPA). However, the age range can differ in various countries, with the African Youths Charter defining youth as ages 15-35. Who within this age range behave in a certain way, by taking things too personal which resort to something serious like suicide if is not taken. This is where this paper seeks to propose a possible solution using the stoic philosophy.

THE CHALLENGES FACED BY NIGERIAN YOUTHS AND THE STOIC WAY OUT

As stated in 2022 paper by the Ministry of youth development, Nigerian youth face multiple challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and underemployment, preacher influence, motivational speakers, limited educational opportunities, and health challenges. (Statista 2022). The low literacy level of Nigerian has had important implications for other indices of development, particularly health. (Dele-Adedeji et al., 2021). On the issue of unemployment, recent estimates for Nigeria indicate that only a minority of the youth demographic are employed within the formal sector (Federal Ministry of Youth Development). Young women in particular, face significant barriers to employment. Those from economically disadvantaged and /or low-income backgrounds are forced to accept precarious, unskilled and/or lowly paid jobs, such as beer promotion for alcohol producers and makers, where they are vulnerable to sexual harassment from predominantly male patrons by Dumbili and Nelson. Motivational speakers like Robert Kayosaki and Donald Trump influence youths positively by boosting self-esteem, encouraging resilience, and fostering innovation. However, they negatively impact youth through unrealistic success narratives, fostering unhealthy comparison, inducing depression, and promoting get-rich-quick schemes. These speakers can drive ambitious dreams or lead to disappointment if their messages are not tempered with realistic actionable advice. In like manner, Nigerian preachers wield immense influence over the youth, acting as Spiritual guides, social mentors and even “pseudo-welfare” providers. Their impact is a mix of moral grounding and community support, alongside concerns about financial pressure and the promotion of unrealistic expectations. They encourage material wealth and “seed sowing” over hard work, which can lead youth into reaction, while others are not (external events), the opinion of others, and outcomes should not affect us so much as to have the fear of missing out, depression or far most suicide (Limaj 50-52). The youth should be navigating Social Media and Technology, the “For You Page” and instant connectivity of social media often fuel anxiety and comparison. Stoic practices like *prosoche* (constant attention to one’s own mind) and *memento mori* (remembering one’s mortality) can be used to treat the internet as a tool rather than allowing it to dictate emotional state. Youth can apply the stoic advice to “ignore the rage bait”, reduce online consumption, and focus on genuine connections, thereby the “fear of missing out”(FOMO) and the impact of cyberbully. (Mobicip ,<https://www.effectofcyberbullying.com>).

THE SIGNIFICANT OF STOIC PHILOSOPHY AND ITS PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

To mitigate these rising tides of despair, this paper proposes the deliberate integration of stoic philosophy into the psychological toolkit of the contemporary Nigerian youths. The core stoic thesis posits that emotional suffering does not emanate from external crises themselves, but rather from our faulty judgement s regarding them. Ranging from the issue of unemployment/inflation, which stoic believed can be approach with dichotomy of control, meaning for one to focus his/her energy on skills acquisition and personal character, accepting that macroeconomic factors are external and thus we can treat it as such. Social media FOMO/cyberbullying, pertaining this, the stoic suggested *prosoche* (mindful Attention), meaning for one to practice digital minimalism; realize that online vitriol and curated lifestyles are external opinions that cannot harm the soul. Preacher/Motivational pressure can be handled using Amor Fati/Contentment, this meaning implies reconditioning the mind to value internal virtue over the chasing of material wealth or deceptive “get-rich-quick” narratives.

Stoicism emphasizes the important of Purpose and Character, to provides a clear, actionable guide for living a virtuous life, focusing on wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance rather than purely materialistic success. It fosters a “growth mindset”, encouraging students to see setbacks as opportunities for learning, unlearning and relearning, rather than permanent failures. (Limaj 54).

EVALUATION

The foundations of Stoicism as a practical Hellenistic philosophy championed by figures such as Zeno of Citium, Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, who offers a compelling framework for navigating life's adversities through mental discipline and emotional detachment, or *apatheia*. Historically, Stoicism can be traced back to the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher like Socrates and his student Plato who believed in the importance of self-discipline and cultivating inner strength, which are key tenets of Stoic philosophy. Plato mainly emphasized the idea of self-control and detachment from worldly desires. However, it was Zeno of Citium who formalized these ideas into a distinct philosophical system. (lawhead 94). A practice this paper believes should be adopted by the Nigerian youths, because, due to some circumstances the Nigerian youths finds their selves in ranging from unemployment, underemployment, harassment, motivational speakers, preachers, gender inequality etc. All this factor can geared any individual to doubt his/her self and act other wise like attempting suicide when fade up. To avoid such this paper proposes the adaptation of stoicism to remedy anxiety, depression and/or suicide, as the core Stoic argument suggests that emotional suffering arises false judgments about external events that is things beyond our control and that by adopting a perspective of indifference toward these externals, one can achieve tranquil equanimity. As Udofia puts it that, values ought to procede and initiate pursuit and not vice-versa..., from the correlation between value and goodness, some pursuits lack goodness, and hence, are evil and not worth pursuing. (116). It is pertinent, that, the youth get education no matter how little it may be, because that is the only thing that can never be taken from someone compare to any other material things that keeps changing value and can be taken development in every society. In developing countries including Nigeria, education is conceived as the tool through which national objectives (such as nation building, social integration etc. As pointed out by Itohowo, et al that, Education is the bedrock of economic development) are achieved. (itohowo and Umohong 1). In a sense, education is the bedrock for any good thing. And by so doing, we can treat circumstances as external event, that will definitely pass, because nothing is permanent. As Obioha characterizes extreme individualism as a system “steeped in egoism, unhealthy and divisive competition”. (20), because enlightenment liberate any human state as Dennis in “Ethics of Posterity and National Sustainable Development” wrote that, "It is because human beings are bundles of consciousness who interpret their daily lives in time that existence... become symbiotically interrelated for meaning-making. (26). Conscious decision making will help and keep the youth sane, balance and unique. Dennis further add that Ethics of posterity is a principle of morality. It regulates human conduct along the path of care for the well-being of future generations and their world. (1). Dennis believes that individuals who care for the well-being of posterity in all their decisions, actions and policies are considered to live wrongly. (1). when people live right, with respect to care for posterity, they achieve inner personal peace and peaceful coexistence with others. (1). So the young should build a healthy relationship that will stand a test of time, learn their temperaments ranging from Melancholy, Sanguine, phlegmatic and choleric respectively, this will give them the power to practice the dichotomy of control as

strongly recommended by the Stoic, and enable them relate better with any circumstances they find their selves and know what to respond to and what to ignore. In that note, Seneca wrote as quoted from Roger that;

True happiness is to enjoy the present, without anxious dependence upon the future, not to amuse our selves with either hopes, or fear but to rest satisfied with with what we have, which is sufficient, for he that is so wants nothing. The greatest blessings of mankind are within us and within our reach. A wise man is content with his lot, whatever it may be, without wishing for what he has not. (1).

This implies contentment with the present, now, rather than being shackled by restless desire or fears about what is to come, which mostly end up creating anxiety, endless want, and leave one felling void and empty.

CONCLUSION

This study has appraised stoicism as a practical philosophy for addressing the pressing challenges of 21st century Nigerian youths, challenges like; depression, anxiety, that is arises out of unemployment, cyberbully, and the fear of missing out. By analyzing the teaching of Zeno of Citium, Epictetus, Seneca, the research highlights the enduring relevance of stoic principles such as the dichotomy of control and living in harmony with nature. These concepts provides youths with tools to cultivate resilience, ethical character, and authentic self-confidence in the face of social and economic pressures. While critics such as Nietzsche and Baggini caution against stoicism's potential for emotional suppression or detachment, this study argues that, when applied contextually, stoicism fosters balance rather than denial. It equips young people to distinguish between what lies within our power, and what does not, thereby reducing vulnerability to external influences and promoting inner stability. Ultimately, stoicism offers Nigerian youth a timeless framework for navigating adversity, building sound character, and contributing meaningfully to personal and societal well-being.

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ALTRUISM VS EGOISM: THE ETHICAL QUESTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper on “Altruism vs Egoism: The Ethical Questions”, tends to explore the motivations behind human actions as it is a fundamental discourse in ethical philosophy. Altruism is an ethical concept that advocates a selfless concern for the welfare of others. In contrast, Egoism prioritizes self-interest. The philosophical inquiry since antiquity in reshaping ethical theories and moral practices across culture to comprehensively address the complexities in human society paved the way for the development of Altruism and Egoism as ethical concepts to help in complementing human motivations. Though no theory is without criticism, the prominent philosophers of the theories and their counterparts will be brought to book. The significance of this study is to enhance our understanding of moral behavior and how Altruism can help us in making informed public policies and social governance by revealing how self-interest and concern for others shape collective actions. We will also see how the complementarity of both theories will contribute effectively to the development of ethical frameworks that balance personal and communal well-being to address contemporary global challenges such as Gender Equality and social inclusion (GESI) and Environmental Sustainability. This paper will adopt analytic and phenomenological research methods in critically analyzing the theories.

Key words: Altruism vs Egoism, motivation, self-interest, Ethical theory, GESI, Environmental sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

The ethical theories, Altruism and Egoism has a contrasting meaning, though of each of the theories offers unique perspectives on moral behavior and societal values. While Altruism advocates selfless concern for the well-being of others, it prioritizes the needs and interests of others above self's needs. But in the other hand, Egoism emphasizes “self-interest” as the foundational motive behind human actions, asserting that individuals are inherently driven by their personal gains and advantages.

This paper will access the implication of Altruism and Egoism in addressing contemporary global challenges, particularly focusing on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

(GESI) and Environmental Sustainability. These pressing issues underscore the ethical choices and societal frameworks that shape our collective future.

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) represent a critical frontier in societal progress, demanding equitable treatment and opportunities for all individuals regardless of gender identity, socioeconomic status, or cultural background. Altruism, with its emphasis on empathy and fairness, offers a moral framework conducive to dismantling systemic barriers and promoting inclusive policies. By prioritizing the welfare of marginalized groups and advocating for their rights, altruistic perspectives strive towards a more just and equitable society where all individuals can thrive. At the other hand, Egoism criticizes to a greater extent how self-interest can impacts the broader goals of GESI. Because Egoism will argue that individual empowerment and economic incentives are essential drivers of societal progress, potentially highlighting the role of personal ambition in achieving gender parity and social inclusion. However, criticisms arise regarding the potential perpetuation of inequalities and the prioritization of short-term gains over long-term societal benefits.

Environmental Sustainability presents another urgent global challenge, underscoring the need for ethical frameworks that prioritize the conservation of natural resources and the mitigation of environmental degradation. Altruism shines as a guiding principle in environmental ethics, advocating for stewardship and responsibility towards future generations and the planet as a whole. By promoting collective action and environmental justice, altruistic perspectives foster policies and behaviors that mitigate climate change, preserve biodiversity, and ensure sustainable development.

In contrast, egoism may approach environmental sustainability through the lens of self-preservation and economic pragmatism, emphasizing the role of innovation and market mechanisms in balancing environmental protection with economic growth. Critics caution, however, that unchecked self-interest can lead to exploitation of natural resources and ecological harm, undermining long-term sustainability goals.

For the purpose of this work, we will analyze how the ethical theories of altruism and egoism, with their contrasting meanings, will complement each other in addressing contemporary global challenges such as Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) and Environmental Sustainability. While altruism underscores the importance of empathy, fairness, and collective responsibility in shaping equitable societies and sustainable futures, egoism challenges the balance between self-interest and societal well-being. A critical analysis of these theories reveals their significance in navigating complex ethical dilemmas and shaping policies that promote justice, equality, and environmental stewardship on a global scale.

BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ALTRUISM VS EGOISM

The ethical theories “altruism and egoism” evolved from ancient philosophical inquiries to encompass diverse cultural, religious, psychological, and scientific perspectives. Altruism underscores the moral imperative of empathy, compassion, and collective responsibility, while egoism challenges the balance between individual self-interest and the broader welfare of society. The ongoing dialogue between these two ethical paradigms continues to shape our understanding of human behavior, moral reasoning, and the pursuit of ethical principles in contemporary societies.

The historical discourse between altruism and egoism spans through centuries, reflecting fundamental debates about human nature, morality, and the foundations of ethical behavior.

These two philosophical concepts have evolved through diverse cultural and intellectual traditions, shaping perspectives on individual motivation and societal values.

Ancient Era

The Ethical Theories, Altruism and Egoism can be traced back to ancient civilizations. The ancient Greece, philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle talked about the nature of virtue and the role of self-interest versus altruistic virtues in human conduct.

Plato's idealism emphasized on the pursuit of the common good and altruistic behavior as essential components of a just society. Conversely, Aristotle's Ethical Theory, while acknowledging the importance of friendship and altruistic actions, also posited the cultivation of personal virtues for individual flourishing.

Ethical Virtue and the Common Good: In his work on Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle defined ethics as the study of how individuals should best live, with the sole aim of flourishing (flourishing means eudaimonia). He argued that ethical virtue involves finding the mean between extremes, promoting harmony and contributing to the common good, and Aristotle's emphasis on excellence (arete) and moral virtues like courage and justice aims at cultivating qualities that benefit both the individual and society.

According to him: "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for these reasons the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim" (1-3).

Friendship and Altruism: Aristotle saw friendship as sacrificial; to him, friendship is as essential to moral development and social cohesion, where genuine friendships are based on mutual goodwill and the desire for the other's well-being. He said Friendship is characterized by altruistic concern; that human relationships are integral to achieving the common good: "Without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods" (5-6).

In Plato's Idealism, his concept of Justice and the Common Good in The Republic posits that individuals find happiness in the pursuit of wisdom and justice, which are essential for maintaining a just society, Plato argued that each person fulfilling their societal role contributes to the harmony and well-being of the community, emphasizing the common good over individual interests. "Justice means minding one's own business and not meddling with other men's concerns" (433).

Plato's Philosopher-King and Altruism: in The Republic. Plato's ideal state was to be governed by a philosopher king who is altruistically motivated by knowledge and wisdom rather than personal gain. To Plato, the philosopher-king's rulership is guided by a deep understanding of the forms of justice and the common good, aiming to lead the state towards true justice and harmony. According to Plato:

"Until philosophers rule as kings or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide, while the many natures who at present pursue either one exclusively are forcibly prevented from doing so, cities will have no rest from evils" (473).

His concept of Community ownership of Property and Unity, Plato in his "The Republic" advocated for a community of property among the guardians, eliminating private ownership of properties to minimize selfishness and promote unity. This communal approach according to him would have foster a sense of shared responsibility and altruistic behavior towards others in the

community, ensuring that all members work for the collective good. To Plato, "Until our philosophers become kings, or until those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands, cities will never have rest from their evils" (416)

To this end, we have seen how the ancient philosophers, Aristotle and Plato pre-conceived the theories of Altruism and egoism laying emphasis on the pursuit of the common good, which requires individuals to transcend personal interests and act in ways that benefit the whole society.

Medieval/ Moral Foundations

In the medieval period, morality teachings significantly influenced the development of Altruism and Egoism theories. Religious doctrines, such as those found in Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, often advocate for altruistic principles such as compassion, charity, and selflessness as pathways to spiritual fulfillment and moral righteousness.

Enlightenment and Rationalism: During the Enlightenment period in Europe (17th to 19th centuries), philosophers like Thomas Hobbes and Jeremy Bentham brought forth rationalist perspectives that challenged traditional notions of altruism rooted in religious beliefs. Hobbes, known for his social contract theory, posited that individuals are fundamentally motivated by self-interest and the desire to avoid suffering. His view laid the groundwork for egoistic theories that emphasize personal utility and rational calculation as primary drivers of human behavior.

Jeremy Bentham, who coined **Utilitarianism**, but was later refined by John Stuart Mill, represents a consequentialist ethical framework that evaluates actions based on their outcomes in terms of maximizing happiness or utility. While utilitarianism promotes the idea of promoting the greatest good for the greatest number, it also incorporates elements of egoistic calculation by considering individual preferences and interests within the broader calculus of societal welfare.

Modern Psychological and Sociological Perspectives: In the 20th century, advances in psychology and sociology contributed to nuanced understandings of altruism and egoism. Psychologists such as Sigmund Freud explored the unconscious motives underlying human behavior, suggesting that even seemingly altruistic actions may be driven by unconscious egoistic desires for gratification or recognition. Social psychologists, such as Solomon Asch and Stanley Milgram, conducted experiments that shed light on the complexities of human social behavior and the interplay between self-interest and altruistic norms.

Contemporary Debates and Applications: In contemporary philosophy and ethics, the debate between altruism and egoism continues to inform discussions on moral responsibility, justice, and societal well-being. Contemporary thinkers explore how altruistic virtues can be reconciled with individual rights and freedoms, especially in contexts such as healthcare ethics, environmental stewardship, and global justice initiatives. The rise of evolutionary psychology and game theory has also spurred discussions on the evolutionary origins of altruism and its adaptive advantages in promoting cooperation and social cohesion.

COMPARISON OF ALTRUISM AND EGOISM

Several philosophers have criticized the prevailing theories of knowledge, offering various insights that challenge the traditional epistemological frameworks, while others complement both theories. For instance, in Altruism;

David Hume, in his work *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* emphasized the role of sympathy and benevolence in human nature and moral judgment, according to him: "A generous and noble action, a resolved and courageous suffering, a tender and affectionate sentiment, make their way to the heart by a natural and easy passage" (265). For Egoism, an ethical theory that prioritizes self-interest as the foundation of moral behavior.

Thomas Hobbes in "Leviathan" part 1 chapter 14, argued that self-interest drives human actions and is the basis for social contracts. To him: "No man gives, but with intention of good to himself; because gift is voluntary; and of all voluntary acts, the object is to every man his own good." (88)

Ayn Rand in her work "The Virtue of Selfishness" developed the philosophy of Objectivism, advocating rational self-interest as the basic ethical standard. "The achievement of his own happiness is man's highest moral purpose." (*The Virtue of Selfishness*, 27)

PROBLEMS THAT NECESSITATED ALTRUISTIC ETHICAL THEORY

Altruism as an ethical theory arose in response to several complex problems and concerns that challenge traditional ethical frameworks. Below are some of the issues that necessitated the development of altruistic ethical theory:

1. **Issues of Self-Interest and Collective Welfare:** Traditional ethical theories like ethical egoism prioritize individual self-interest, which can lead to conflicts with the collective welfare. When everyone acts out of self-interest, the result can be detrimental to society as a whole. So, the theory of Altruism became necessary as it proposes that individuals have a moral obligation to act in ways that benefit others, even at a personal cost, thus promoting collective well-being over mere individual gain.
2. **Issues of Moral Motivation and Responsibility:** The question of what motivates ethical behavior and how individuals should be held accountable for their actions is a central issue. Many theories struggle to explain why individuals should act ethically beyond personal or societal benefits, which makes room for Altruism theory in order to address this by suggesting that moral actions should be motivated by concern for others, not just by external rewards or personal satisfaction.
3. **Ethical Dilemmas in Conflict Situations:** In cases of conflict, where one's own interests clash with the needs of others, conventional theories often fail to provide clear guidance. Here, Altruism theory becomes necessary to provide a framework for making ethical decisions in such scenarios by emphasizing self-sacrifice and prioritizing others' needs, which can lead to more morally consistent outcomes.
4. **Global Issues and Inequality:** Global challenges such as poverty, environmental degradation, and humanitarian crises often reveal the limitations of self-centered ethical approaches. These problems require collective action and concern for the well-being of people across the globe. Altruism as an ethical theory supports a global perspective on ethics, advocating for actions that address global inequalities and promote the well-being of all, regardless of geographical or social boundaries.
5. **Human Flourishing and Ethical Growth:** Many ethical theories focus on rules or outcomes but may not fully address the development of moral character or the deeper aspects of human flourishing. Altruistic ethical theory became necessary because it encourages the cultivation of virtues like compassion, empathy, and generosity, which contribute to personal growth and the flourishing of both individuals and society.

6. **Interpersonal Relationships and Trust:** Maintaining trust and positive relationships can be challenging in environments where individuals are primarily concerned with their own interests. By emphasizing selflessness and the well-being of others, altruism fosters trust and stronger interpersonal connections, which are essential for healthy, functioning communities.
7. **Empathy and Human Connection:** Many ethical theories lack emphasis on the emotional and empathetic dimensions of moral behavior, which are crucial for understanding and connecting with others. Altruism incorporates empathy as a core component, fostering a deeper emotional connection and understanding that drive ethical actions towards others.

ALTRUISM AS AN ETHICAL CONCEPT

Altruism is an act or a behavioral pattern of having the interest of others rather than oneself. It is a theory whose interest is not in self but in people's welfare. It is another version of Hedonism, Altruism as an ethical theory provides a response to these problems by emphasizing selflessness, empathy, and the moral obligation to consider and act upon the needs and well-being of others. This approach aims to address the limitations and challenges of other ethical frameworks, promoting a more comprehensive and humane approach to moral decision-making.

Auguste Comte, a French philosopher and sociologist, coined the term "Altruism" as he was the one who developed it as a foundational concept in his positivist philosophy and sociology. Auguste Comte in his book, *The Positive Philosophy*, coined the term "Altruism" to describe the ethical doctrine that individuals have a moral obligation/duty to act for the interest or benefits of others, promoting social solidarity and cohesion. Comte believed that altruism was crucial for the development of a harmonious society, where individuals prioritize the welfare of others alongside their own interests. This concept is integral to his positivist philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of social order and cooperation in advancing human progress.

"The essential basis of altruism is the direct control which the social point of view has over the self-regarding tendencies of each individual. We are led constantly to temper or even to overcome the primitive attraction of egoism, by the powerful influence of our social environment, in proportion as it becomes more special and intense." (101).

"To live for others is not only a rule of duty but of happiness." (Comte, "The System of Positive Polity", Vol. 1, p. 423). The Theory of Altruism stems from the broader positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte, which sought to establish a scientific basis for understanding of society and human behavior because he argued that altruism, as a moral principle, counters the individualistic tendencies of egoism and promotes social cohesion. In his work, *The Positive Philosophy*, Comte explained how altruism contributes to social stability by fostering mutual aid and cooperation among individuals within a particular community. He believed in society's progress for maintaining social order and moral advancement.

Comte's emphasis on Altruism as a foundational ethical principle influenced subsequent thinkers and continues to be relevant in discussions of ethics, sociology, and social policy today. His work laid the groundwork for understanding the dynamics of social relationships and the importance of collective well-being in the pursuit of a just and harmonious society.

PROBLEMS THAT NECESSITATED EGOISM

Egoism is an ethical theory that suggests individuals should act in their own self-interest, has emerged as a response to various problems and challenges in moral philosophy, below are some of the problems that necessitated the development of egoistic concepts:

1. **Issues of Conflicting Interests in Moral Decision-Making:** When individuals face moral decisions, their interests often conflict with those of others. Traditional ethical theories can struggle to resolve these conflicts in a way that accommodates the individual's desires. For instance, you are a bank manager deciding whether to promote one of your employees who is less qualified but who will help you achieve personal career goals, versus a more qualified employee who will benefit the company more broadly. Egoism theory would suggest that you should choose the option that aligns with your own interests and career advancement. In Ayn Rand's "The Virtue of Selfishness," She posits that acting in one's self-interest is not only rational but morally right and also emphasizes that pursuing one's own happiness and rational self-interest leads to the best outcomes for oneself and, by extension, can benefit society (Rand, 64).
2. **Issues of Motivation Behind Ethical Actions:** Some ethical theories assume that people are motivated by moral duties or external rewards, but this can overlook the fact that self-interest often drives human behavior. For example, someone can donate to charity primarily to gain social approval or tax benefits; traditional theories might question the sincerity of their moral action. Egoism, however, would recognize that the motivation to improve one's social standing or financial situation is a valid and rational basis for action.
3. **Practicality and Feasibility of Altruism:** Altruistic ethical theories can sometimes be impractical, especially when individuals are expected to consistently prioritize others' needs over their own. For instance, a situation where resources are limited, such as deciding whether to spend your savings on personal needs or donate to a charity, an altruistic approach may demand significant personal sacrifice. Egoism would argue that it is more practical and rational for individuals to focus on their own needs and well-being.
4. **Concerns over Ethical Relativism and Self-Determination:** Ethical relativism suggests that moral standards are culturally or individually based, which can lead to inconsistencies and conflicts. Egoism provides a framework for self-determination, where individuals can make ethical choices based on their own values and interests like different cultures having diverse beliefs about what is morally right, egoism allows individuals to prioritize their own values and interests in ethical decision-making, rather than adhering to potentially conflicting cultural norms.
5. **Resentment and Fairness in Social Interactions:** Traditional ethical theories can sometimes lead to feelings of resentment or unfairness, especially if individuals feel their own needs and desires are being ignored for the sake of others. Example, In a workplace setting, if one is expected to take on additional responsibilities for the benefit of colleagues without recognition or reward, Here Egoism theory argues that individuals should focus on their own needs and seek fair compensation for their efforts.
6. **Individual Rights and Autonomy:** Ethical theories that emphasize collective welfare can sometimes undermine individual rights and autonomy. Imagine a society that imposes certain moral obligations on individuals for the greater good, egoism theory becomes necessary here because it would argue for respecting personal autonomy and individual rights, suggesting that each person's own goals and desires should be central in ethical considerations.

EGOISM AS AN ETHICAL CONCEPT

By addressing these problems, egoism offers a perspective that prioritizes individual interests and autonomy, providing a framework that some find practical and coherent in navigating ethical challenges.

The term "Egoism" is credited to an English philosopher and theologian, Henry More (1614–1687), to contrast it with altruism and other ethical theories that prioritize the welfare of others. More introduced the term in his philosophical works to describe the ethical theory that emphasizes self-interest as the foundation of morality. He described the term “Egoism” to that which individual act primarily out of self-interest, seeking their own happiness and well-being above every other thing.

Henry More is credited with coining the term "egoism" to describe the ethical theory centered on self-interest as the primary motivator of human behavior, providing a distinct philosophical concept that contrasts with altruism and other moral theories. This allowed philosophers and ethicists to distinguish between different moral theories based on their underlying principles regarding human motivation and behavior. It remains a key concept in ethical philosophy, influencing discussions on morality, self-interest, and the nature of human actions.

Ephraim Essien defined the term “Ego” as usually associated with the self (29). It is an Ethical theory that posits that what matters in life is self, one’s well-being. According to Blackburn’s understanding, there are two forms of Egoism: psychological egoism and ethical egoism. To him, “Psychological egoism is the view that people are always motivated by self-interest. Ethical Egoism is the view that, whether or not people like this ought to be like this, usually this is advanced in the form that rational behavior requires an attempt to maximize self-interest” (115).

COMPLEMENTARITY OF ALTRUISM AND EGOISM

While Altruism and Egoism appear to be opposing each other, some philosophers came up with theories that help complement each other in fostering a balanced ethical perspective to show interdependence and Balance. Below are a few ways in which they intersect:

Through Reciprocal Altruism: this can be defined as an action that benefits others with the expectation of future reciprocation. Richard Dawkins, in his work "The Selfish Gene," he explained how altruistic behavior can arise from evolutionary processes driven by self-interest, such as kin selection and reciprocal altruism. "We are survival machines -robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes." (19). Through Ethical Egoism and Social Cooperation, here, Adam Smith in his work on "The Wealth of Nations" argues that individuals pursuing their self-interest can lead to societal benefits through the "invisible hand" of the market, suggesting a harmony between personal gain and social good. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest." (18).

Through Moral Psychology, Michael Slote, in his work on "The Ethics of Care and Empathy" emphasized that the role of empathy, a bridge between altruistic concern and understanding self-interest, in moral development. "Empathy, even in its partiality, can help ground a universalist morality." (The Ethics of Care and Empathy, 119).

To this end, we have seen that Altruism and Egoism, can’t really function alone, it works hand in hand to complement each other to enrich ethical theory by providing a more comprehensive understanding of human motivation and behavior. The interplay between self-

interest and concern for others is essential in various aspects of life, from personal relationships to societal personal relationships to societal structures. By examining the thoughts of influential philosophers, we see that these concepts can coexist and even enhance each other in the pursuit of a balanced ethical framework.

IMPACTS OF COMPLEMENTARITY OF ALTRUISM AND EGOISM IN IMPLEMENTATION OF GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN AFRICA

We discovered that the complementarity of ethical theories “Altruism and Egoism” can help in the implementation of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Africa by first examining how the ethical framework can be applied to these challenges using a strategy that will balance self-interest and collective welfare, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

1) Promoting Gender Equality Through Altruism

Altruism, with its emphasis on selfless concern for the well-being of others, can drive initiatives and policies aimed at reducing gender disparities and promoting inclusion. This approach encourages individuals and communities to prioritize the needs of marginalized groups, leading to more equitable outcomes.

- **Community Support and Solidarity:** Grassroots political organizations or women's groups that advocate for women's rights and provide support services such as education, healthcare, and legal assistance to vulnerable groups. The Altruistic actions performed by these organizations can empower women and enhance their participation in societal and economic activities, especially on political grounds, to reduce gender-based violence. Inclusive Policies and Legislation, for instance, Governor Umo Eno's Inclusion policy of 30percent women to be given an opportunity to serve as leaders in respective local government areas and even among the executives of the Government, such policies that mandate gender quotas in political representation and corporate leadership positions is known as Altruistic policymaking, it ensures that women and people living with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, thereby promoting gender equality and social inclusion.
- **Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Sensitization programs that are aimed at educating communities about the importance of Gender Equality and the harmful effects of social inclusion discrimination through altruistic initiatives can change societal attitudes and norms, fostering a culture of respect and equality.

Egoism Harnessing Self-Interest for Gender Equality

Egoism, which advocates self-interest, can also play a crucial role in advancing gender equality and social inclusion when some persons or organization recognizes promoting gender equality can align with their self-interests; they are more likely to support and implement inclusive practices. A balanced approach that integrates both altruistic and egoistic motivations can effectively address gender equality and social inclusion in Africa. Here are some ways in which these ethical theories complement each other through GESI.

- **Public-Private Partnerships:** For instance, Collaborations between governments, NGOs, and businesses to support gender equality programs. Such partnerships can leverage altruistic goals and self-interested incentives, pooling resources and expertise to create more impactful and sustainable initiatives.

- **Empowerment Programs: Here,** Training and mentorship programs for women and other vulnerable groups attributes altruistic support with opportunities for personal and professional growth, these programs can help those groups develop skills and confidence, benefiting both the individuals involved and the broader community by fostering a more skilled opportunities and diverse workforce.
- **Legislative and Economic Incentives,** Tax incentives for companies that promote gender diversity and inclusion aligns with the financial incentives of altruistic goals, policymakers can encourage businesses to adopt gender-inclusive practices, leading to broader societal benefits.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Corporations and MDAs that support gender equality and social inclusion initiatives as part of their CSR strategies aligns their brands with values and market positioning, companies can enhance their reputation and build consumer loyalty.

IMPACTS OF ALTRUISM AND EGOISM IN HARNESSING THE CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL CHALLENGES OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN AFRICA

Altruism and egoism can also help in addressing the contemporary global challenges of environmental sustainability in Africa in the following ways

Altruism:

1. **Community Initiatives:** Altruistic individuals often initiate or participate in community-driven environmental projects such as Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) management, reforestation, waste management, and conservation efforts. In Africa, this could involve initiatives like providing solared borehole, provision of toilet facilities, community gardens, clean-up campaigns like the monthly sanitation established by the Akwa Ibom State government, or sustainable farming practices such as Agroecology.
2. **Support for Vulnerable Groups:** Altruistic actions can target marginalised communities affected by environmental degradation, such as providing clean water access, sustainable energy solutions, or education on environmental stewardship. This can help mitigate the impacts of climate change and environmental destruction on marginalized populations.
3. **Advocacy and Awareness:** Altruistic individuals and organizations often engage in advocacy and awareness campaigns to educate the public and policymakers about sustainable practices and the importance of biodiversity conservation. This can lead to policy changes and increased public support for environmental protection measures.
4. **International Cooperation:** Altruism fosters international cooperation and aid, which can support African nations in adopting sustainable technologies, implementing green infrastructure projects, and enhancing resilience against climate change impacts.

Egoism (Enlightened Self-Interest):

1. **Economic Incentives:** Egoistic motivations can drive businesses and individuals to invest in sustainable technologies and practices that offer long-term economic benefits, such as reduced energy costs, improved resource efficiency, and access to new markets for eco-friendly products.
2. **Risk Mitigation:** Egoistic concerns about reputation and long-term stability can motivate governments and businesses to mitigate environmental risks, such as water scarcity or soil degradation, which could threaten economic activities and social stability.

3. **Innovation and Technology:** Egoistic interests in gaining competitive advantages can drive innovation in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and eco-friendly infrastructure. This innovation can benefit African nations by providing access to affordable and clean technologies.
4. **Long-Term Planning:** Egoism encourages long-term planning and investment in environmental sustainability to ensure the continuity of resources and stability of ecosystems, which are essential for economic growth and social well-being in the long run.

Synergies and Challenges:

- **Collaboration:** Both altruism and egoism can complement each other when individuals and organizations collaborate on sustainable projects that benefit communities and economies simultaneously.
- **Challenges:** Balancing altruistic goals with egoistic interests can be challenging, especially in resource-constrained environments where short-term economic gains may conflict with long-term environmental sustainability.

CONCLUSION

From the beginning we have noticed how the dynamic interplay between egoism and altruism and how it can profoundly influence decision-making in Africa. While egoism drives economic growth and innovation, altruism ensures social cohesion and sustainable development. The ethical theories of altruism and egoism offer valuable insights for addressing gender equality and social inclusion in Africa. Altruism encourages selfless actions that prioritize the welfare of marginalized groups, while egoism highlights the potential benefits of inclusive practices for individuals and organizations. So, seeking balancing, these ethical concepts is crucial in fostering a prosperous and equitable society in Africa. African societies can also develop effective strategies to implement Gender Equality and create a more inclusive and equitable future. By recognizing and integrating the complementary roles of egoism and altruism, African leaders and communities can navigate the complex challenges of development and create a more inclusive and sustainable future.

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