

Reinventing Moral and Political Hygiene in Africa's Governance Culture: Explorations into Aristotle's Virtue Theory

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Abstract This paper examines the crisis of governance in post-colonial Africa by tracing the problem to the deficiency in requisite moral and political formation of state actors. In this paper, I argue that to fill the gap in Africa's governance culture, there is need for proper education of political state actors in ways that comprises ethical rebirth, attitudinal change, civic resonance and value reorientation. There is need for the return to moral building and character training required for reestablishing the right attitude or grit towards governance. In the light of this overarching need, I propose Aristotle's virtue theory as a philosophically defensible model for reinventing moral and political hygiene in Africa's governance culture. I argue that, given the fundamental role of virtue in the regulation of conduct of the entire citizenry and in the act of socio-political (re)engineering, Aristotle's virtue theory can facilitate the development of good character traits and habits which corresponds to the higher ideals and virtues that political state actors ought to cultivate in order to respond appropriately to issues of governance. I conclude that elements of Aristotle's virtue theory can provide defensible grounds for intelligible moral and political choices necessary for good governance structures in post-colonial Africa.

Keywords: Politics, Governance, Culture, Post-colonial Africa, Moral Education, Political Education, Virtue Theory

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INTRODUCTION

Governance refers to the process of steering, ordering, directing and coordinating the affairs of the state. As a routing process, it involves the notion of a political system which accommodates all the structures and processes through which rules or policies are authoritatively determined for society as a whole. Governance is about the delivery of public good, public safety and public well-being in ways that are accountable, transparent and ethically defensible. But quite often, as with the experience of several post-colonial African states such as Nigeria, good or constructive governance eludes society because political *dramatis personae* seem to assume political offices often unprepared and ill-equipped. As such, they end up pursuing self-serving and insatiable interests at the expense of public good, public

safety and public well-being. The consequence of this state of affairs is that there is, among other things, a 'moral deficit' in the governance process which is suggestive of the dearth of moral excellence, virtue inculcation and discipline among political functionaries in several African states such as Nigeria. It is also suggestive of the sheer disregard for the character of the moral and political agent which actually provides the basis for appropriate action. When the ship of state of any given political sovereignty is not ethically steered by relevant state actors towards the realization of well-being, happiness or common good of the people, there is bound to be an upsurge in social crisis in the polity resulting to a failure of governance. I intend to address this crisis of governance in post-colonial Africa by exploring the basic

elements of Aristotle's virtue theory, the strength of which can help in checking the human inclinations towards evil, self-centeredness and mischief, policing equally, the behavioral excesses of those in power or positions of authority.

The Link between Politics and Ethics

The failure in recognizing that there is a close link between politics and ethics is responsible for the failure of political governance in most societies. In particular, the tendency to separate ethics from politics is part of the reason for the collapse of most African states. Part of the goal of ethics is to help us cultivate the appropriate moral behaviour in the society. From this goal or concern of ethics, it follows that it can also help provide us with standards or reasonable guidelines to direct the affairs of people in the 'polis,' that is, the political society. From the foregoing, it can be asserted that ethics and politics aim at similar goals, which include ways to help people cultivate good moral behaviour and the promotion of a good political order that will enable members of society achieve socially worthy goals (Agulanna, 2014: 27). It has been argued that politics is grounded in ethics and that every political theory is based on some ethical premises (Ukpokolo, 2014: 73). If this argument is true, then it follows that ethics cannot be left out of the political equation, since it aims primarily at determining what ought to be done by individuals, so as to promote the good life in the society.

Similarly, politics aims at determining what the government of a state ought to do and how it ought to be constituted, including questions as to how a society should be approached by the governed (Bear, 1955:108). For Isaac Ukpokolo, ethics and politics do not only have conceptual linkages, but content linkages with the goal of increasing or elevating human interests (Ukpokolo, 2014: 78). For this reason, the political life must be structured in such a way to reflect the moral values and civic virtues needed to enhance the well-being of every member of the society. Put differently, politics and governance must reflect moral norms those civic virtues needed for promoting peace and harmony in the human community. African states have not fared too well in the areas of ethical governance and leadership. Similarly, politics and governance in Africa have not been well-grounded in ethics or morality. There exists in most African societies today, a tangible gap between the ideals of ethics and the practice of politics. This gap arises from a plethora of sources, which includes the tension created between politics and morality by Niccolo Machiavelli and his misleading account of how governance and political authority should be ordered.

Most African leaders exhibit the tendency of wanting to remain in or hold onto power no matter the ethical implications that may arise. Their insatiable love

for power has overshadowed their moral responsibility and duty towards the people. For this reason, most of them have hastily digested Machiavelli's tyrannical idea of demagoguery at the expense of ethical governance. Not only does Machiavelli relegate the place of moral goodness in politics, he also counsels any leader (or prince), who wishes to maintain himself (in power) to learn how not to be good, and use this knowledge or not use, according to necessity (Machiavelli, 1961: Ch. xv). This seemingly attractive account of *Realpolitik*, enjoins would-be leaders to flee from moral goodness, as morality weakens or ruins a leader in his or her quest for power quaffing. In a situation where some African leaders decide to follow this misleading example of governance, there is bound to be a gap between politics and morality or ethics in most African states.

On his part, Adebola Ekanola opines that this apparent gap signifies "a moral deficit in the psyche of both the general citizenry and the people who govern them (Ekanola, 2016: 105)." This moral deficit, manifests in various forms of vices which generate bad governance, lack of focus among political leaders, and inadequate dedication to the quest for development. In the wake of this and in a concerted effort to stem this tide of woeful governance and delimit the Machiavellian dimension to governance, there is need for a sustained moral and political education or reorientation in the political culture of Africa. This moral and political education ought to emphasize the character building, virtue inculcation, value orientation and moral training of the individual in the society. It also has to reflect the civic values and virtues needed to achieve socially worthy goals for socio-political flourishing of the society. In the light of this present need, Aristotle's virtue theory which focuses primarily on character formation, virtue inculcation and moral training of the individual for effective engagement in the society, can serve as a philosophically defensible ethical model for the reinvention of moral goodness, good character, germane values and civic virtues for decent leadership and civilized followership in Africa.

On the Need for Moral and Political Education for Reasonable Governance in Africa

What occupies a conspicuous stead among the multifarious concatenation of issues besetting Africa today is what I term the crisis of governance. The cankerous state of governance in most African countries with Nigeria as a case study is increasingly disturbing. There seems to be a high demand for power acquisition by ill-equipped mercenaries who care very little about employing the right means in achieving a people-centered government. Governance, according to Jim Unah is about the delivery of public good, public well-being and public safety. It is the human machinery for executing or operationalizing government programs and policies for

the good and well-being of members of the society (Unah, 2017: 2). But, quite often, as with the experience of several African states, real governance eludes society because state actors end up pursuing parochial and self-serving interests at the expense of the people. The consequence of this state of affairs is that there is deficit in every aspect of the people's life (Unah, 2017: 3). This deficit has been blamed upon certain external and internal factors. The externalist position, as publicized by Walter Rodney, holds that the failure of governance in Africa is traceable to some externalist machination such as colonialism (Rodney, 1972). The internalist concern as popularized by George Ayittey holds that the imperialistic hegemony of the colonial regime had come and gone, and that the problem lies deep within us as Africans (Ayittey, 1998: 4).

Put simply, the problem lies in the graft and poor leadership credential of political elite, who deliberately distort the concept of power to the benefit of the ruling class and their foreign cohorts (Falaiye and Okeregbe, 2016: 160). Another noticeable approach to this problem is the mental decolonization strategy through cultural, moral and value education of leaders and the entire citizenry. This approach recognizes the externalist element as a causative factor of the problem of governance in Africa. Although the effects of these factors can be seen displayed by political state actors in Nigeria today, it would however be proper to settle for an internalist remedy. This internalist remedy demands that in addressing Nigeria's problem of governance, we need to put an end to the blame game. Since the problem is largely self-induced, there is need for critical self-examination and self-evaluation through moral and political education of state actors. In Nigeria, as well as most African states today, the quality of political leadership is such that places low premium on moral excellence and probity. What we witness regularly are that power, violence and money have become instruments of statecraft in the hands of the political elite, all to the forfeiture of character, because the system has not built or do not have strong institutions of character.

On his part, Godwin Sogolo argues that "Nigerian leaders and their people require proper education; one that comprises ethical rebirth, attitudinal change and value orientation (Sogolo, 2014: 85)." They need rights and empowerment education that is built into the culture and way of life of the people. This is central to their extrication from the shackles of political and economic slavery: internal slavery consistently carried out by persons in power and their puppeteers from the powerful countries of the west and elsewhere (Falaiye and Okeregbe, 2016: 162). From the remarks above, we can say that when we equate statecraft with manipulation or political duplicity in Africa, it becomes clear that we lack

the necessary moral and political tools for constructive ordering of the state. In the absence of these tools, one can be rest assured of the constant show of ineptitude, ineffective and despotic governance in the African Political landscape. Looking through most African states like Nigeria today, there is a visible 'moral light out' or 'moral turpitude' that affects the proper ordering of the governance process. The surest way out of this moral and political dungeon is the inculcation of values and civic virtues in the citizens and political state actors. Quoting Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Madu avers that "the prosperity of a nation depends not on the strength of its fortifications, not on the beauty of its public buildings, but it consists on the number of cultivated citizens, its men of character and enlightenment (Madu, 1998: 10)."¹

Achieving good governance or ripping the dividends of good governance in Africa requires a high sense of moral consciousness on the part of those governing and the governed. This is necessary because morality, according to Bernard Gert checks the human natural inclination towards evil, self-centeredness and mischief, by policing, especially, the behavioral excesses of those in power or positions of authority (Gert, 1970: 61). It offers a precautionary measure against political unrest and societal upheaval. If this argument is true, then moral education is essential for the flourishing and survival of society. Moral education builds in the individual a heightened sense of right or wrong, good or bad; a sense of rectitude through the process of socialization. For Sogolo, it is impossible "for a good society to exist without some kind of moral institutions (Sogolo, 1992: 151)." For this reason, moral education is essential for inculcating in members of the society the right social values (through the right means) necessary for constructive social engagement and relationship in the society.

Political education is also necessary for stemming the tide of governance failure in Africa. What political education does is to inculcate in members of the society the mental capacity to comprehend and address social or political matters in reasonable and effective ways necessary for living as good citizens of society or to maintain social institutions. Here, emphasis is placed on the inculcation of civic virtues or values that empower or enable the individual to achieve certain reasoned objectives in the society. By civic virtues, values or right dispositions I envision Philippe Schmitter's character traits, such as: civility, sociability, honesty, self-restraint, tolerance, trust, compassion, a sense of political efficacy, capacity for cooperation, loyalty, courage, respect for the worth and dignity of each person and concern for the common good (Schmitter, 1997). It is worth mentioning that the moral and political education which is either obtained formally or informally aim at one goal: the practical realization of the happy life in society. In the

¹ I include "women" also in the totality of cultivated citizens. Their role in politics today cannot be ignored.

Politics, Aristotle asserts that “man is “*zôion politikon*” i.e., a political animal (Aristotle, 1999: Bk. I).” But that animal (whatever Aristotle meant by that) needs to be tamed or trained through constant habitual virtue inculcation, moral instruction, value formation and character building. If an individual or if that animal is not accurately given the necessary training to be able to relate with people at the micro level in the community, then, it would be difficult for such a person to relate effectively with the political ideals, economic and social values at the macro level. The starting point of this moral education for significant contribution in the political sphere begins informally from the smallest unit of the society, which is, the families or homes, and formally from schools, churches, mosques and social gatherings. In Nigeria for instance, Civic education needs to be taken very seriously, for it has the potentiality of inculcating in pupils the needed knowledge of what it means to be responsible citizens. Civic education has the power of making the pupils morally sound and political informed for significant and meaningful contribution in the community.

For many years, philosophers in Africa, particularly in Nigeria have been clamoring for the inclusion of ethics as a subject, to be taught in primary and secondary schools. The proposal has often been met with opposition - no thanks to the activities of moral skeptics and relativists who constantly rile at the idea of a universal moral standard that is binding on all people who live in society. In practical terms, the truth is that if the chances of success for the inclusion of ethics in primary and secondary schools are infinitesimal or almost infeasible, then it behooves on the existing Philosophical bodies in Nigeria to device means of augmenting the curriculum of civic education to reflect appropriate ethical theories, values, virtues and right principles for pupils' instruction. This would go a long way to inculcate the needed civic and moral virtues in the younger generations for constructive social engagement.

But how do we educate or inculcate in active political state actors or those in positions of authority the needed moral values and civic virtues for reasonable statecraft? How do we get them to change their settled habits, passions, inclinations and desires? How do we cultivate in them the character or virtue of accountability and transparency in all cadres? This is not as easy as it sounds, because there seem to be a certain kind of settled political habit in the political culture of most African states. Within the Aristotelian *corpus*, when we say something has become a habit, it denotes a settled tendency or usual manner of behavior; an acquired mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary. It designates a quality in itself difficult to change, disposing well or ill the subject, in which it resides, either directly in itself or in relation to its operation. Habits are behaviors, associations, or inclinations, acquired by repetition; activated and expressed with little or no thought, and performed without much resistance (Augeles, 1981: 113).

And so, one of the most effective ways of inculcating the needed civic virtues and values in the leaders is through the activities of moral and social institutions. There is need for the creation of such institutions where none exist, because it is impossible for a good society to exist without some kind of social and moral institutions. According to Godwin Sogolo, “what society does from cradle-up, is to mold the individual by inculcating into him standardized modes of behavior embodied in social institutions. In some cases, the process is subtle, while in others it takes the form of unbridled indoctrination (Sogolo, 1987: 43-51).” Unfortunately, in most African states, like Nigeria for instance, neither the subtle nor the indoctrination form of virtue inculcation that would ensure a consistent attitude to the pattern of governance is going on. And this is highly lugubrious for a continent that floats on a plethora of socio-political predicaments. If the social and moral institutions are not functioning properly to checkmate or moderate the excesses of political state actors, then there is likely going to be a complete decay of governance in Nigeria. As a panacea, there is urgent need for the establishment of ‘*Citizenship and Leadership Training Centers*’ for the onward molding or training of present and future leaders in civic and moral virtues for constructive socio-political engagement.

Another key point worth mentioning is that for us to enjoy a healthy socio-political culture in Africa, more philosophers must be ready to venture into mainstream politics. I strongly believe that ‘until philosophers participate actively in politics or politicians engage actively in philosophical consciousness,’ the problem of governance will remain unchallenged. Philosophers with the tools of logic, language, values, virtues, and so on, would know how to navigate the political terrain for significant social engineering. Philosophers in Nigeria for example, ought to show interest in Political affairs and not just remain at ease with armchair pontifications which only brings about rage, misery and unhappiness. Philosophy is one key sphere of influence that stands at the heart of every well-meaning society.

Marie Eboh has argued that Philosophy is the missing element in the Nigerian Political system (Eboh, 2017: 35). I align with her claim and broaden it to include the entire Africa. Active participation in politics is the key; this is how and where philosophers can also contribute their own quota towards reordering Nigeria and other African states that exists as mere political space in the continent. But can we boast of the “will” to bring this to fruition? Within the delineations of Aristotle’s virtue theory, kin attention needs to be given to the term *akrasia*, meaning weakness of the will, that is, knowing the right thing to do which promotes the good, without having the will or moral stamina to do it. This failing which seems to have afflicted mankind all over is left unchallenged in most African states like Nigeria. For this reason, there is an expression of mistrust by the people towards the government for its inability to initiate or implement policies

that would promote the well-being of the people. To win back this trust, which is a crucial key for effective governance, there is need for an overarching return to moral building, character training and value orientation.

The issues discussed in the preceding paragraphs are well-stated, but suffice it to say that one other effective means of changing or rethinking the cancerous political culture of Africa is by enforcing the civic values and virtues embodied in all political party constitutions or guidelines. If none exist, then political parties should make sure that their constitution or guidelines reflect a high level of civic and moral considerations. It is through this process that emerging leaders of these parties or different political state actors would gradually inculcate and exhibit the needed perspicacity for constructive social engineering. Every political party in Nigeria for instance, needs to answer these questions: what ethical value or civic virtues are we projecting or identified with as a party? Do our candidates suitably reflect these values and virtues? Can they effectively, rationally and constructively steer the ship of state without losing focus in the face of stress, tension, conflict, correction and affluence? Effective measures should be put in place to sanction those who through their actions defy these political ideals. Also, suitable measures (where necessary) should be put in place for amendments of these ideals to agree with the common values that make society stronger and firmer. On the whole, African states have a lot to learn from other civilizations on how they inculcated moral character in their citizens for socio-political engagement. It is true that most traditional African societies also had ways of awakening moral, civic and political consciousness in the people, but how has the practice fared in the light of contemporary exigencies, what were the shortcomings and what are the visible prospects that can be gleaned for African states today?

How other Civilizations Inculcated Moral Character

I begin this enquiry by first highlighting how some traditional African societies, in this case Nigerian communities, inculcated moral character in the citizens. According to Anyiam-Osigwe, there are trans-cultural and trans-historical moral precepts by which traditional Nigerian communities inculcated the right social and moral character in young people (Anyiam-Osigwe, 2013). One of such ways was through moral concepts embedded in names, such as *Omoluabi*, *iwarere* or *iwalewa*, among the Yoruba (Awoniyi, 1975: 357), signifying that there is beauty in character far more important and valuable than physical beauty which fades away with time and bad conditions of living (Unah, 2017: 5). Others include virtue concepts such as: the Hausa *hali ma kyau*; *Ibibio eti owo* or *owo eti esit*; and the Igbo *ezigbo mmadu*, all of which, for Chiedozie Okoro, translates as good character (Okoro, 2017: 62) or most fittingly, one who, according to

Christopher Agulanna, possesses good conduct or moral fiber (Agulanna, 2010: 5). These kinds of persons are often said to possess qualities that are worthy of emulation by others and are in contradistinction to persons who are flawed or defective in character (*ajo mmadu*).

These traditional virtue concepts played significant role in ordering and reordering the mental blueprint, character building and value consciousness of the individual towards a reasonable social engagement in society. These virtue concepts made people strive to lead the kind of life that reflects the intrinsic values of the names, which subsequently influenced all facets of their lives and social engagements. Some even become models of society, while others sparkled in rays of moral worthiness. These traditional virtue concepts, on a closer look also reflect the thoughts of Aristotle on the virtuous life in ancient Greek civilization. But what happened that some of these embedded virtue concepts could not be harnessed to inculcate character in a systematic and sustained manner within the present political climate? Jim Unah's response to this question is that the highlighted character training principles (or traditional virtue concepts) got "confused and relegated in the scramble to teach the dogmas of prefabricated and imported religions that promote inter-faith hatred and stoke the fire of divisiveness and anarchy (Unah, 2017: 7)."

Another important way the right social character and moral virtues were inculcated in most traditional Nigerian communities for instance was through 'active oath swearing or taking.' This oath swearing mechanism, which has been recently revamped by Jim Unah is said to "be feared and highly effective (Unah, 2017: 9)." The reason for this is that the average African exhibits legitimate fear for whatever relates to the local shrine: not forgetting the potency of words uttered therein. And so, if one finds the courage to swear before the shrine, he or she knows that once there is a defiant of promises, the punishment is likely to be catastrophic and sometimes on the spur of the moment. But this approach is not bereft of criticisms, such as a growing fear of bribery of the custodians of the shrine and the prohibitive rod of foreign religions like Christianity, towards all kinds of swearing. It is however, debatable whether this mechanism truly inculcates civic values and moral virtues in the person. One may ask: why build or inculcate character through a machinery of fear? What happens after one's political tenure has expired? Does the individual renounce the oath and return to business as usual or is the oath eternally binding on anyone who once swore by it? How about other citizens who are not in leadership positions, are they not inclined to swear an oath to become forthright citizens? Myriad questions can be raised to stifle the oath taking mechanism, but it seems that its proponents are undeterred, for in their collective resolve they believe that since the process produces ethically fortified custodians of public wealth for the development and collective

prosperity of modern African societies, the resuscitation of the mechanism is timely and appropriate. Having seen how some traditional African societies inculcated character, it is apposite then to examine how other civilizations inculcated character in their citizens. I intend to interrogate two civilizations as our supervening guide: *the Greek city-states and the Chinese example*.

The city-states of Sparta and Athens in ancient Greece are two societies of classical antiquity with unique notions of moral building and character formation. Sparta, on one hand was famous in military might, more than any other city in Greece. For this reason, the Spartans placed great value on military prowess. According to Bertrand Russell, their sole aim was to produce good soldiers, wholly devoted to the state (Russell, 1948: 24). Virtue or character was defined by the Spartans in relation to perfection or excellence in the arts of war. One, who could exhibit the character of a true soldier was said to be virtuous, since virtue or *arête* for the Greeks meant 'excellence.' The training received by the Spartans was to make them fully hardy, resilient, informed, disciplined, dogged and firm. This meant a great deal for them, for virtue or *arête* was also seen as a skill to be acquired through constant practice and habituation.

On the other hand, Athens was a counterpoise to Sparta. Here, much premium or value was placed on the inculcation of moral virtues through education. Education in morals, politics and rhetoric, for the Athenians was considered sacrosanct for proper ordering of the society. While Sparta inculcated character through constant training in the military sense, Athens achieved theirs through reasoned instruction (or constant education). These two approaches constituted the framework for Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle in their various discussions on virtue. The idea of virtue or character building was not limited to the Western philosophical tradition alone. Non-Western moral and religious philosophers, such as Confucius in ancient China, also incorporated ideas that may appear similar to those developed by the ancient Greeks. And like ancient Greek Ethics, Chinese ethical thought makes an explicit triadic relationship among virtue, familyhood and statecraft or politics.

Confucius, in the *Analects* stresses the need for education of children from a very tender age and from the smallest unit of society, that is, the family (Yu, 2007). There seems to be a certain underlying discipline, informed zeal and collective will within the Chinese clime which makes it possible for 'moral or character drives' to be inculcated in individuals easily. Study, says Confucius "as if you were following someone you could not overtake, and were afraid of losing (Creel, 1949: 141)." This is the only true measure, through which the good and virtuous life can be attained. Today one can see the dividends playing out well in the moral, economic, scientific, industrial, technological and socio-political life of the Chinese society. In spite of their staggering

population, the Chinese society was still able to build morally fortified and integrally fashioned citizens. Given these recorded success, African societies have a lot to glean from the aforementioned civilizations. Like the Chinese society, African societies can begin to reorder their morally moribund states, through the leaning of discipline, courage, and a well-focused or strong will. Leading wisely, living by example and teaching by practice can create an endless ripple of informed disposition in an individual to sting a morally decrepit state to rectitude. Like the Spartans, political state actors in Africa (nay Nigeria) ought to imbibe the painstaking discipline of constant practice, habituation and inculcation of civic virtues and moral values, through social institutions which would in turn become a settled habit.

Aristotle captures it in clear terms, when he argued rather strongly that "since excellence is an art won by training and habituation and given that, we are what we repeatedly do, excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit (Aristotle, 1984: Bk II)." Lessons from Athens can help develop the needed intellectual perspicacity and moral probity in the individual for constructive political engagement and social engineering in Africa. Discipline in statecraft, above all else must be strongly emphasized. I now turn my beam to the elements of Aristotle's virtue theory and how they can serve to reinvent moral and political hygiene in Africa's governance culture.

Aristotle on the Idea of Human Nature and Our Moral Choices

In his ethical and political writings, Aristotle consistently maintained that the human person is the originating cause of moral actions, and that it is within our power to be good or bad (Aristotle, 1915: Bk I). By nature, says Aristotle, we are neither good nor bad; rather, by nature, we are adapted to receive virtues and made perfect by habit and education (Mbukanma, 2000: 34). In W.K.C Guthrie's thinking, "since we are potentially good, with the *dynamis* of virtue in us which we may develop into the *eidōs* by forming right habits, we are also potentially bad, depending on the choices we make (Guthrie, 1960: 156)." This is so, for as individuals, we have the faculty of reasoned choice, and it is up to us to determine which way we go.

Given that a person has the capacity for reasoned deliberation, the outcome must be such that, the end of all human activities (happiness) is attained. For as clearly shown by Aristotle, a person's nature and activities can only be explained by reference to an ultimate end or objective, *telos*, a supreme good towards which natural powers and functions are ordered, and in the attainment of which they are perfected (Mbukanma, 2000: 36). Being the fulfillment of a person's nature and function, this supreme good constitutes the ultimate standard of his dispositions and actions; for these must be considered

excellent in so far as they contribute to the attainment of the good towards which human nature is ordered, and defective in so far as they deviate from or hinder the attainment of that good (Tracy, 1969).

Interestingly, given that by nature, we are adapted to receive virtues, and made perfect by habit and education, this assimilation of virtues *ipso facto* enables the person in the perception of good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust (Aristotle, 1999: Bk I). The person can become morally good or bad, depending on the choices he or she makes. In other words, moral activities are not done out of mere instinct; they are activities that arise from deliberate choice (*proairesis*). And choice entails the exercise of reason or thought as well as a disposition of character. The importance of reason in the Aristotelian conception of the virtuous life is that “we are fulfilling our own nature when we live according to reason, and the life of reason is the only means to human happiness (Jacques, 1965: 58).” In addition, human nature for Aristotle is a dynamic source of activities, but a person cannot realize his or her end (perfect fulfillment or happiness) unless his or her activities are ordered; that is, unless they are able to maintain a harmonious balance among their natural drives, passions, pains and tendencies (Mbukanma, 2000: 40). For this reason, the habituation or inculcation of virtues is quintessential. Having established the nature of the human person and its link with moral activities, I now turn to Aristotle’s treatment of virtue and the process of habituation.

Aristotle on *Arête* (virtue) and the Process of Habituation

It is the conviction of Aristotle that “what capacities we have, we have by nature, but it is not nature that makes us good or bad (Aristotle, 1984: Bk II).” That is why Aristotle’s treatment of virtue begins in his recognition of the *telos* of human existence (activity). The *telos* or end of human activity, which he also identified as the *summum bonum* (the highest good) of humans, is *eudaimonia* or what is loosely translated as happiness or well-being. Having established this fact, Aristotle, then, proceeds to state that happiness, or human flourishing is neither a gift of the gods to humans, nor something acquired by chance (Aristotle, 1984: Bk I). Aristotle defines happiness as an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue (Aristotle, 1984: Bk I). This definition is one that immediately calls for another question: what then is virtue? Aristotle answers this question this way: “virtue is a purposive disposition, lying in a mean that is relative to us, and determined by a rational principle, and by that which a prudent person would use to determine it. More accurately, virtue is a disposition of the soul in which, when it has to choose among actions and feelings, it observes the mean relative to us, this being determined by such a rule or principle as would take shape in the mind

of a person of sense or practical wisdom (Aristotle, 1984: Bk II).”

This definition implies that virtue is concerned with actions and passion, which are always accompanied either by pleasure or pain. For this reason, virtue, which is a disposition or settled habit of acting wisely, can also be referred to as a *hexis* which has to do with *proairesis* (choice) or what Aristotle terms “desire wedded to thought (Aristotle, 1984: Bk IV).” From this definition of virtue, it is clear that in choosing among actions and feelings or among pleasures and pains, the mean is individually determined, that is, the agent individually determines the mean by herself, for herself (Rowe, 1976: 106). Hence, Whitney Oates opines that this definition of virtue completes or complements the definition of the supreme human good. i.e., happiness which is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue (Oates, 1963: 272).

Aristotle further posits a bipartite division of virtue, viz, *intellectual and moral* (Ross, 1995: 221). Intellectual virtue (or virtue of thought) owes its birth and growth to teaching (for which reason, it requires experience and time); while moral virtue (or virtue of character) comes about as a result of habit. Aristotle devotes a wide range of his ethical treatise to a detailed discussion of moral virtue (or goodness of character). For him, moral virtue is “a quality disposing us to act in the best way when we are dealing with pleasure and pain (Aristotle, 1984: Bk II).” Like crafts, moral virtues are practical virtues of social life, acquired only by practice and habituation. This means that they are concerned with what we do or say in social intercourse. There is need to cultivate the moral virtues, because they dispose us properly to respond intelligibly to all vices that deter us from doing well (Aristotle, 1915: Bk I).

Some of the virtues identified by Aristotle include intellectual virtues such as *sophia* (theoretical or philosophical wisdom), *sunesis* (understanding) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) or prudence (Aristotle, 1984: Bk I). Others include justice, fortitude, courage, liberality, magnificence, magnanimity and temperance. For Aristotle, virtue is an all-or-nothing affair. We cannot pick or choose our virtues. We cannot decide that we will be courageous and temperate, but choose not to be magnificent; nor can we call people properly virtuous if they fail to exhibit all of the virtues. Though Aristotle lists a number of virtues, he sees them as coming from the same source. A virtuous person is someone who is naturally disposed to exhibit all the virtues, and a naturally virtuous disposition, exhibits all the virtues equally.

For Alasdair MacIntyre, the exercise of the virtues is a crucial component of the good life for man (MacIntyre, 1984: 184). As seen from a discussion of Aristotle’s ethics, his immediate concern was what constitutes a good character as a crucial component for the good life. In the light of this, since all the virtues for Aristotle, spring from a unified character, so too, no good person can exhibit some virtues without exhibiting them all. This

avertment has over time been a major subject of debate among scholars, especially for its utopian strides. However, we do not intend to explore the growing concerns of the debate in this study, but suffice it to say that the relationship between moral and intellectual virtue is such that, there can be no choice without reason and a moral state for well-doing; the opposite also, cannot exist without the cooperation of the intellect alongside character. This is why Aristotle speaks so strongly about the need for *phronesis* (practical wisdom) as an infallible guide for moral action or choice (*proairesis*).

Aristotle's Idea of *Phronesis*

Phronesis or *Prudentia* (often translated as prudence, foresight, practical wisdom or personal discretion) is one of the central devices employed by Aristotle to drive home his ethical teachings. Aristotle begins his discourse on *phronesis* by turning our attention to the *phronimos*, that is, the 'person of practical wisdom.' He avers that we may grasp the nature of prudence if we consider what sort of people, we call prudent. This, then elicits the question, how do we know a prudent man or woman? Aristotle answers the question this way: "it seems a feature of the prudent person is to be able to deliberate nobly about things, good and useful for oneself, not in some partial way, as about what is good for health or strength, but about what is good for living well as a whole. A sign is that we call those prudent about a thing when they calculate well in view of an end of which there is no art. So, on the whole, a person who has ability to deliberate (well) would be prudent (Aristotle, 1984: Bk VI)."

An appraisal of Aristotle's ethical teaching, seems to suggest that he proposes two closely related, but in some ways distinct definitions of *phronesis*. The first refers to the human capacity to deliberate about the human good as end in itself. Here, Aristotle defines *phronesis* as the capacity of deliberating well about what is good and advantageous for oneself. This is not just in a partial sense, but regarding what sort of thing contributes to the good life in general, it is "a rational faculty exercised for the attainment of truth in things that are humanly good or bad (Aristotle, 1984: Bk VI)." The *phronimos* or practically-wise person in this regard is thus presented as one who is good at grasping the nature of the good (that is, the end itself). A second definition points to deliberation about the means to the good, rather than the end (good) itself. Here, Aristotle attempts to relate practical wisdom to moral virtues by arguing that "it is due to moral virtue that the end we aim at is right, and it is due to prudence that the means we employ to that end are right (Aristotle, 1984: Bk VI)."

Put differently, moral virtue makes us aim at the right target, and practical wisdom makes us use the right means. This second definition takes care of the question

of why the intellectual virtue (*phronesis*) would be necessary if one were already directed to the good by moral virtue itself, for example, if one were already courageous by habit, why deliberate again about courage? In truth, one would still have to deliberate properly about the right means because situations present themselves differently. And given that circumstances or state of affairs differ to some extent; one ought to weigh his or her options properly to avoid acting excessively or deficiently. Practical wisdom perceives the good that has already been determined by human potentiality and personal habit, and deliberates either on it or about how to reach it. It understands and pursues the good (*eudaimonia*) which is already written into the fabric of human nature (Wall, 2003: 319). Prudence and moral virtue make possible the full performance of the function of a person. As such, moral virtues without practical wisdom are blind, and practical wisdom without moral virtues is empty (Mbukanma, 2000: 76).

Consequently, to live a morally fine and noble life, one needs not only the moral virtues but also *phronesis*, because "if we do not have a guide, we stumble (Aristotle, 1984: Bk VI)." *Phronesis* is not just the ordering of the means of our moral actions to their proper end, but a reasoned plan of doing things. Reason and deliberation cannot be separated, since reasoning itself is a form of deliberation and if a prudent person deliberates well, it is because he or she reasons well. Since *phronesis* is an intellectual virtue and all intellectual virtues belong to the rational part of the soul, and the rational soul is rational only to the extent that it possesses reason, it follows that *phronesis* cannot be devoid of reason. This explains why for Aristotle, to possess practical wisdom is to possess all the moral virtues. For let a person, he says, have the one virtue of practical wisdom, and all the moral virtues will be added unto him (Aristotle, 1984: Bk VI).

Teleology, *Eudaimonia* and the Golden Mean

The prelude to Aristotle's teaching on virtue is in his recognition of the *telos* of human existence or activity. Every rational activity, every action and pursuit, says Aristotle, aims at some end or good; with the good defined as that which all things seek (Aristotle, 1984: Bk I). This *telos* or end of human activity, which is also identified as the *summum bonum* or the highest good, is the same as well-being. Aristotle does not say that we *should* aim at happiness, rather that we *do* aim at happiness. His goal in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is not to tell us that we ought to live happy, successful lives, but to tell us what this kind of life would consist of. Most people think of happiness as physical pleasure, wealth, health or honour. This is because they have an imperfect view of the good life.

For Aristotle, happiness does not consist in pleasure; neither does it consist in honour but it is the contemplative life that Aristotle considers as the best form

of life or the highest virtue, since it is in accordance with *eudaimonia*. And *eudaimonia* or happiness is for Aristotle, a complete and sufficient good for human beings. It is the best, the noblest, (and) the most delightful thing in the world. It is that which brings about self-sufficiency, self-actualization and practical realization of self-fulfillment. No one chooses happiness for the sake of something else, but for its own sake. It is neither a gift of the gods to humans nor something acquired by chance. *Eudaimonia* is achieving one's full potential; and that surely is not simply a matter of feeling, delight or pleasure, although doing so would be very satisfying (Jackson, 2007: 2; Graham, 2004: 53). Happiness in the end becomes for Aristotle, 'living well' or 'doing well.'

Given the ethical premise that 'the good life is the virtuous life,' there is need to emphasize here the role of proper education in the attainment of the good life (Rorty, 1987: 353). For Aristotle, there are three factors which contribute to moral goodness. They include *nature*, *habit* or *training* and *reason*. The most essential, of course, is *nature* and *reason*. Without these, training is impossible; and because these are present, we can talk about the role of moral education in the attainment of the good life (Aristotle, 1999: Bk vii). In the *Politics*, Aristotle argues that the ideal society (or the state) must afford its citizens the opportunity for attaining the good life, self-fulfillment or practical realization of well-being. For Christopher Agulanna, "the good life" refers to "the complete and active realization of all man's capabilities of activities (Agulanna, 2001: 161)," that is, "those activities which contribute to man's self-fulfillment (Agulanna, 2010: 287)." Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* is often associated with the mean (*mesotes*) of human action and pursuit. The Latin phrase *in medio stat virtus* (in the middle stands virtue) implies that a character trait is a virtue, if and only if, it is conducive to *eudaimonia* in all spheres of action. Aristotle's doctrine of the mean presupposes that an excellence of character is a state often flanked by two vices: one of excess and one of defect; of too much and of too little.

In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle explains that the moral virtues often have opposing vices that tag along them, for example, courage versus cowardice, temperance versus excessiveness, and so on (Aristotle, 1996: Bk. II). A systematic reading of the doctrine of the mean shows that Aristotle aims to show that right conduct is incompatible with excess or deficiency in both feelings and actions. The mean, which is equidistant from each extreme is determined by a rational principle, and by that which a prudent person will use to determine it. Aristotle's line of argument as Whitney Oates rightly states, runs somewhat like this: 'asked what the highest human good is, he answers, Happiness. What is happiness? An activity of the soul. What kind of activity? One in accordance with virtue. What is virtue? A purposive disposition lying in a mean that is relative to us. Where can one find this mean which holds the key to the whole

problem? Aristotle answers, it can be identified if one appeals to one's reason and if this fails, one can always ask the *phronimos* (that is, the practically-wise person) and he or she will produce a definition (Oates, 1963).'

Aristotle's *Phronesis* as Guide for Good Governance in Africa

Having examined details of Aristotle's virtue theory in the preceding parts of this paper, I therefore move to appropriate its elements for the reinvention of moral and political hygiene in Africa's governance culture. I begin with Aristotle's *Phronesis* (practical wisdom) and why it is an essential commodity for political state actors in Africa. Now, it is no longer news that the ship of state of most African polity is today sinking. A paucity of cabal seems to be manipulating the system to their advantage, thereby relegating all established institutions and attempting to become stronger than the state. This is the apogee of corruption, a destroyer of opportunities which has rendered most African states inefficient and most African leaders ineffective. This condition signifies a major dearth in integrity or probity. The *Corruptions Perceptions Index* (2022) has it that the most corrupt African countries are generally located near the Sahara Desert, the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Congo. Some of these countries include Somalia, South Sudan, Libya, Chad and Nigeria. Generally, the countries that are perceived to be the least corrupt are the continent's island-states and those that are in and around southern Africa. They include Botswana, Cape Verde, Seychelles, Rwanda and Namibia (*Transparency International*, 2022). This is not good for a continent that yearns for world recognition and relevance in the socio-economic *cum* political legroom.

Tackling corruption with high-quality governance is one of the most important challenges that African countries currently face. Without value-centered or character-focused reforms that dismantle the financial, political, and administrative structures which perpetuate corruption, Africa will be unable to break the cycle of cronyism and bad governance that has constrained its tremendous potential for economic, political, and social development. This situation calls for a swift resurgence aimed at rebuilding African states and developing or strengthening state institutions. If we look carefully at the reasons for the governance failure in post-colonial Africa, it would no doubt be clear that external or international factors can be held equally responsible. The dependency principle, which continuously places the African continent in chains can be said to have stalled every aspect of effective interior social engineering. But this is a long overdue blame game often used by some individuals to excuse the government or cover up the ills of most African leaders. It would seem that Africa's political crisis today is largely internal. In Nigeria for instance, corruption seems

deified by some political state actors and it is almost becoming the norm or culture of Nigeria's political history. Even the basic things as elections are often settled in courts because of the lack of transparency and corruption in the electoral process. Indeed, Africa's governance crisis is at present an internal collapse that needs an internal remedy. Africa needs to heal herself from within if any significant progress is to be made.

One of such therapeutic ways is the advancement of effective and informed leadership. Effective leadership requires intellectual acuity and perspicacity. In Nigeria for instance, there is a dearth of intellectual force and of perceptiveness which is the bane of democratic governance in the country. This could mean two things: either most individuals assume leadership positions unprepared and with limited skills necessary for political governance or they simply lack the infallible tool of philosophic or practical wisdom (*phronesis*), which is necessary for effective ordering of state affairs. The first disjunct has already been taken care of in the preceding discussion on the need for moral and political education of political state actors, but the second disjunct which is the absence of philosophic or practical wisdom in statecraft deserves strong consideration.

Phronesis (often translated as practical wisdom, prudence, foresight or personal discretion) is one of the central devices employed by Aristotle to drive home his ethical teachings. Practical wisdom is necessary for attainment of good governance in Africa. But how can we identify a practically wise person? Aristotle says that "it seems a feature of the prudent (person) is to be able to deliberate nobly about things, good and useful for (oneself), not in some partial way, as about what is good for health or strength, but about what is good for living well as a whole. A sign is that, we call those prudent, about a thing, when they calculate well in view of an end of which there is no art. So, on the whole, (a person) who has ability to deliberate (nobly) would be prudent (Aristotle, 1984: Bk VI)."

Here, the *phronimos* or practically-wise person is presented as one who is excellent at grasping the nature of the good and as one who is able to deliberate about the means to the good. Now, since governance is a practical affair, it involves deliberations about things or options that will either yield good or bad results. It also involves options that will either bring about well-being or unhappiness to the people in the society. As can be inferred above, Aristotle's *phronesis* (practical wisdom) is a reasoned plan of doing things, this implies that reason and deliberation cannot be separated, for reasoning itself is a form of deliberation. And if a prudent person deliberates well (or nobly), it is because the person reasons well. Sadly, most African leaders do not deliberate properly, reason well (or nobly) about what is good for living well in society. Because of this deficit in good deliberation, practical wisdom, foresight or personal discretion in political affairs, the outcome is the failure of

governance. Most leaders do not see beyond themselves, their vision for the citizens seems limited to what their capacity for deliberation can afford. Since you cannot give what you do not have, it is impossible to analyze hydra headed choices and adopt the proper means of addressing each aspect in ways that will bring about public good. When we go for world summits and meetings as African leaders, we sometimes seem to lack the comparative advantage to even engage or participate fully in the discussions that is meant to grant access to our people. Without practical wisdom and critical foresight as guide, we would surely stumble as a people and continent.

I have personally chosen the example of Nigeria because, it is the deficit in practical wisdom which has led to the dearth of qualitative policies, lack of sustainable development, massive hunger, unemployment and corruption, socio-economic and political anomaly in the country. The state cannot be well-ordered, if leaders do not deliberate or reason well. Indeed, practical wisdom is hypostatically linked with moral virtues, for as Aristotle argues, "it is due to (moral) virtue that the *end* we aim at is right, and it is due to *phronesis* (practical wisdom) that the *means* we employ to that end are right (Aristotle, 1984: Bk. VI)." Put simply, while moral virtue enables political state actors in Nigeria aim at the right target or end, practical wisdom enables them to use the right means to actualize that political end which is the attainment of public good, public safety, public wellbeing and flourishing in society.

Rethinking Africa's Governance Culture in the Light of the Aristotelian Imperative

For the attainment of good governance in Africa, virtue is the key. There is need for a reordering of the political culture towards the practice of civic virtues, good character, discipline and moral values. The political life must be structured in such a way that it reflects the values and virtues needed to achieve socially worthy goals for the well-being of all and sundry. Political state actors in Africa need to engage in a critical self-assessment, self-evaluation and reorientation of Africa's political culture for the attainment of well-being in the society. Happiness or human well-being is what politics aims at primarily. This is what I call Aristotle's categorical imperative, and it is the only way Africa's political culture can be truly restructured. 'Well-being' is not just for a few people (like the oligarchs), it is neither for an ethnic group nor a particular region, well-being in the Aristotelian sense transcends ethnic barriers, political affiliations and sentiments. Moral and political wellbeing is rather holistic and entitative.

In Nigeria for instance, there is a controversial debate concerning the best form of government that can produce the kind of 'all-inclusive well-being' that Aristotle is referring to in the society. This issue has been highly

polarized in the sense that democracy as practiced in Nigeria (as well as some other African nations) seems not to really enhance public good, public safety and public well-being. Aristotle's attitude towards democracy and his views about a good and bad government is not a pleasant one. Bertrand Russell summarizes this attitude by stating that "a government is good when it aims at the good of the whole community; bad, when it cares only for itself. ... There are three kinds of government that are good: monarchy, aristocracy, and constitutional government (or polity). There are three that are bad: tyranny, oligarchy and democracy (Russell, 1971: 200)."

Bertrand Russell further observes that the good and bad governments are defined by the ethical qualities of the holder of power, not by the form of the constitution or government. This means that it is not necessarily about the form of government in practice, but about the person at the helm of affairs. The state needs virtuous politicians to live out the good acts of a decided constitution. This explains why Aristotle could not conceive of a good life for the citizens of a state that did not involve social relations and social institutions that foster the best life in the *polis*. Since the state needs virtuous politicians in achieving socially worthy goals for the realization of public good, public safety and public well-being, I recommend that the practice of virtue becomes quintessential. Virtues in the Aristotelian sense are acquired; they are deeply ingrained in a person by constant habit or practice. By steady practice, one will be able to make the right choices on every occasion, rejecting at the same time and equally repeatedly, all the naive alternatives as wrong.

Virtue (*arete*) is a goodness fixed in the soul by habituation (Mbukanma, 1986: 165). This means that political state actors in Africa who are able to acquire virtue would effectively steer the ship of state from that ingrained goodness which flows from the innermost recesses of the person's being. This innermost goodness disposes the politician properly for reasonable social engagement, constructive statecraft, sound economic decisions and effective policy making and implementation for the good of the people. To stem the tide of governance failure in African states like Nigeria, political functionaries need to constantly act in a well-disposed manner, taking cognizance of all parties involved and seeking always the well-being of the people above their own self-serving or selfish interests. The practice of virtues needs to become a habit in Africa, with all desires, decisions, inclinations and dispositions weeded to right reason. But for this to happen, the virtues have to be acquired habitually i.e., over time.

Given this process of habituation, political parties, social institutions, citizenship and leadership training centers in Africa ought to harbor the needed civic virtues in their respective domains so that leaders or would-be leaders would be properly formed for constructive socio-political engineering and practical realization of public well-being. Indeed, the training that situates the self within the context of the other, takes habitual effort and practice

over a long period of time to inculcate. For future leaders, training on the self and the other must begin from the family level as the smallest unit of society, through elementary school, secondary and tertiary education down to adulthood. If this is done, then we can be rest assured of a reasonable political future for Africa. Good governance can fully be enjoyed or experienced in Africa once the practice of good virtues becomes habitual. But the ultimate price has to be paid through discipline and patience since the inculcation of the needed values, character and virtues in the present and future leaders through the right channels takes time.

With insights from Aristotle's virtue theory, it is clear that governance in Africa need to be about informed character, inculcation of virtues, practical wisdom, reasoned choice and well-being of the people. It should not be about tribe, unqualified or unmerited loyalties, nepotism, ethnicity or religion. In taking decisions, leaders should always opt for the 'midway or political mean' which I define as a balance point between two extremes in the governance process. Certain decisions that concern the well-being of the people need not be excessively rash or deficiently devoid of content, they have to reflect a certain balance, capturing all parties equally and moderating all interests at all times through the aid of practical wisdom. Consequently, without emphasis on moral virtue and good character in politics, issues of good governance may remain utopian or a pipe dream in most African states including Nigeria. Achieving good governance in Africa requires a high sense of moral consciousness on the part of those governing and the governed. This moral awareness helps to check the human inclinations towards evil, self-centeredness and mischief by policing, especially, the behavioral excesses of those in power or positions of authority.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified and recommended some fundamental elements of Aristotle's virtue theory as an elixir to the socio-political problems besetting post-colonial Africa. The paper has shown that for the attainment of good governance in Africa, there is need for a reordering of the political culture to reflect the practice of civic virtues, good character, discipline and moral values. This intended reordering must take a pedagogical form, wherein moral and political instructions are taken seriously for effective sensitization of those governing and the governed. In all these, virtue or character needs to be properly emphasized, because virtue is fundamental both in the regulation of conduct of the entire citizenry and in the act of socio-political engineering and re-engineering. Since the prosperity of a nation depends not on the strength of its fortifications or on the beauty of its public buildings, but on the number of cultivated citizens, its men and women of character and enlightenment, there is need to emphasize the pursuit of virtue or moral excellence in

governance. There is also equal need or mastery of philosophic or practical wisdom in restoring moral and political hygiene in Africa's governance culture.

Given the numerous approaches advanced by scholars to grapple with the failure of governance in post-colonial Africa and given their disregard for the character of the moral and political agent, my expressed view in this paper is that elements of Aristotle's virtue theory can aid in reinventing moral and political hygiene in Africa's governance culture. My conviction is premised on the fact that Aristotle's virtue theory promotes good character traits in persons, providing morally appropriate grounds for intelligible actions and deliberations in the political arena. I am equally convinced that it helps to check the human inclinations towards evil, self-centeredness and mischief, by policing especially, the behavioral excesses of those in power or positions of authority. Africa's politics and governance culture may continue to be in search of identity if moral virtues and political education is not reestablished at all levels. Thus, Aristotle's virtue theory offers a more pragmatic ethical framework for the regulation of conduct of the entire citizenry and in the act of socio-political (re)engineering.

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