

BOOK REVIEW

TITLE: MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND CHARACTER FORMATION: NIGERIA UNDER THE LENS

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NUMBER OF PAGES: xxvi + 293

PUBLISHER: Aboki Publishers

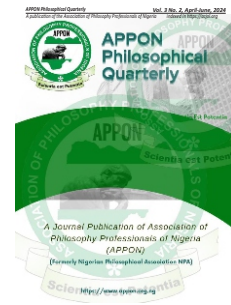
DATE OF PUBLICATION: 2024

ISBN: 978-978-861-08-8

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When Socrates several centuries ago said *the unexamined life is not worth living*, he was alluding to an ocular fact that it is a mark of good sense to periodically review our thoughts, words and deeds for possible adjustments towards expected positive ends. Such is the reason for the aphorism that, an open mind that never makes up its mind is an empty mind. In a distressed State such the Nigeria of today, many think that it is a thing of common sense not to reflect on or scrutinise basic issues in life as well as question things. Others consider it sophisticated to believe in nothing though, it is the argued position of some thinkers that a man without the proper use of the intellectual faculties of a man, is if possible, more contemptible than even a coward, and seems to be mutilated and deformed in a still more essential part of the character of human nature. Contemporary studies in philosophical cogitation argue that only wisdom, not foolishness, is our portion in life. So, the convinced conclusion of the ancient sages is that, he who knows not, and knows not that he knows not is a fool. But he who knows not, and knows that he knows not is a wise man; for he/she seeks to know what he/she knows not.

Therefore, through philosophy, with philosophy and in philosophy, even nothing is something. Such is the very reason why it often said that, philosophy is the deposit of the serious thoughts of thinkers. When and where these thoughts are deposited within the mother discipline itself, it is termed the philosophy of philosophy. When it is deposited outside philosophy, it is said to be philosophy of infrastructure, i.e. the philosophy of other disciplines. Here understood, philosophy functions as the necessary epistemological principles and techniques of criticism for appraising the methods, assumptions and presuppositions of knowledge, wisdom and truth in in the service of humanity.

In this book, *Moral philosophy and Character Formation: Nigeria Under the Lens*, Dr. Terna Patrick Francis seeks to deploy his philosophic sagacity to formulate questions, follow arguments and reveal the epistemological and metaphysical presuppositions and assumptions of morality in the Nigerian geography. This he argues has been informed by the level of moral decay of the Nigerian nation. As it were, the author seeks not only to ascertain the nature and scope of moral claims and its impact on society, but to instantiate character formation and chart a new path toward rediscovery, reassertion and recalibration of our national values. More so, the assumption by many Nigerians that *something is wrong with Nigeria and that, something is wrong with anyone who thinks that nothing is wrong with*

Nigeria triggered Philosopher Terna Patrick Francis to brilliantly sketch his thoughts in this book. Herein, the author undertakes a critical examination of one of the many wrongs of the Nigerian nation namely, the problem of character deficit and its accompanying socioeconomic baggage. The author argues that something of moral significance is missing in the Nigerian character. Thus, there is the need to advance a pragmatic solution in an effort to foist a national ethic that establishes a culture of wholeness, humaneness and hospitality of humanity. This national philosophy stresses empathy, deep kindness, friendliness, generosity and compassion among Nigerians with mental magnitude and moral depth as a guiding compass.

Captured in the most expansive sense in 293 pages, the twelve chapter book queries the paradox of human behaviour in a Nigerian that is seemingly saturated with many unanswered moral questions. Few such issues like;

- Why do we hoard petroleum products, food stuff and other essential commodities (palliatives) with the sole purpose of creating artificial scarcity for cheap gain?
- Why do elected/public officers embezzle quantum billions/trillions of Naira (monies) more than what they (as individuals and their entire family/lineage) can spend on earth?
- Why do fellow human beings callously and criminally kidnap (sometimes kill or maim their helpless/hapless poor victims) and negotiate ransom in a manner(s) that are less that fit for human dignity?
- What, if anything, can morality contribute to character formation in Nigeria, and free the nation from the many vices that have arrested national development?

In attempting answers to these and many other questions of moral concerns in the

Nigerian social space, the book blames the situation on the gradual weakening of crucial national institutions. Given this moral quagmire, the author advanced the Aristotelian Model (*Virtue Ethics*) as a positive character formation among Nigerians. Argued as *the doctrine of the golden mean*, the model avers that moral virtue is moderation in both human actions and in-actions. The book opines then that, *virtue is a reality that exists in the middle and situated between two extremes of excesses and deficiency*. The author's postulations here counter the current criminal disposition of ethnic and religious entrepreneurs who cherish ethnic and religious profiling and extremism in religious practice and material acquisition. Here stated, the author may have anticipated Mahatma Gandhi's eloquent and quintessential statement that, *the world has enough for our needs but not enough for our greed*.

For the author therefore, this model acts like a directing principle for national behaviour and character formation towards a moral nation. According to him, if and when a person cultivates positive character from childhood, government agencies such as the independent corrupt practices commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nigerian Correctional Service, Nigerian Police Force, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and other similar agencies will be reduced to irrelevance.

Introducing the subject matter of philosophical ethics, the author unveils ethics as the rational justification for our moral judgement. The author thus defines ethics etymologically as derived from the Greek word *ethikos* meaning "the discipline concerned with what is morally good and bad and what is morally right and wrong" (p. 1). In a broader sense, the author recoils to the root word *ethos* meaning, relating to

one's character and moral nature. Thus, ethics reflects on human beings and their interaction with nature and with other humans, on freedom, on responsibility and on justice. It deals with what one ought to and ought not to do. Over all, ethics places greater premium on matters of character formation which encompasses: conscience, choice, honour, value, integrity, principles, honesty, right, fairness and responsibility.

Clearly, this book is a grand summary of the Aristotelian Moral philosophy which signposts *the doctrine of golden mean* that exemplifies how to develop a virtuous life according to which *we are what we repeatedly do*. Critically argued here is the view that excellence is not an act but a habit. It is a journey that requires effort and practice over time. According to the author therefore, any attempt to develop a virtuous life is an attempt to live a good life. The argued conclusion in this book is that, character formation is central to the morality of any society though, contemporary Nigerian society lacks this index of good character formation due to moral bankruptcy, unemployment and poverty, compromised security apparatus, poor attitude to crime control by government, poor leadership recruitment model, poor parental control and endemic corruption.

Painstakingly, and step by step, the author eruditely explains the concepts of moral formation and the application of morality and ethics to concrete life situations. These illuminations are prescriptively captured in chapter six to twelve. In chapters one, two and three, the author records the fundamental objective of moral philosophy as that which involves three modes: the speculative, prescriptive and analytic. Re-echoing Aristotle, the author argues that, application of moral philosophy in our everyday life will curtail human excesses, greed and exploitative nature and so utilize the Nigerian commonwealth for the common good of

citizens. This of course will diminish crime and remake a Nigeria worth living in and dying for.

For the author then, moral philosophy, acts as a guide to organize human thought and data to stand erect before the human court of reason and so to develop analytical skills that will provide humanity with the basic ingredients in his moral formation thereby exempting it from the typical deficiency diseases of present day undernourished mind; feebleness of moral grasp, misconception of moral points of view, vagueness of reason, inability to express oneself, and control of emotions in arguments. This is what moral philosophy anticipates and which the author lavishly presents in chapter twelve.

A careful consideration of the issues raised and discussed by the author in this book leaves no one in doubts as to the explosive, topical, controversial and indeed, thought-provoking contents of the book. Apparently, Dr. Terna Patrick Francis aims at resolving the problem of a national ethic for Nigeria. The success of the book can only be measured by extent to which the lives of citizens are pathetically and practically audited. It must be stated though that the author has offered a variegated and elucidating array of definitions of ethics ever attempted by many professional philosophers and critically examined the thoughts of touch stone philosophers on virtue and how these can affect decision making of Nigerians. In fact the devotion of separate chapters in this book on the African Ubuntu moral code as a necessary and sufficient guide for character formation sounds relevant and efficacious though, the omission of a discourse on the Tiv communitarian *Ayatutu ontology* undervalues the book.

This Afrocentric value system of the Tiv allows life grow more meaningfully in solidarity with other members of the community and encodes a morality of human integration that is popularized by *ya-*

na-angbian (democratic humanism). This value system also aids the development of a reliable disposition for character formation and the promotion of long-term relationships and communion of minds. This metaphysical grounding of Tiv morality may just not be the timely release of a tethered Nigeria in moral captivity, but a long awaited intervention in our recovery from moral slumber. More so, the Tiv *Ayatutu* is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that one's humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in others and that; one is human because he/she belongs to the community. It speaks about wholeness and about compassion. The inclusion of this and other similar Afrocentric ideas will therefore help provide the missing link of reality that will halt fragmentation human existence, dismantles walls of ethnicity/sectional interests and curb the problems it breeds, namely hatred, division, ethnicity, violence wars and amoral behaviour and reactivate a Moral Nigeria.

It may not be exaggeration to say that this book stands out as a distinct and excellent compendium in philosophical ethics in the 21st century. Bursting with intellectual energy and ambition, the book provides a good account of moral issues needing debate in our depressed nation. In accessible language, Dr. Terna Francis articulates many of today's key moral and social problems with methodical and insightful analysis of concepts such as located in the moral philosophies of the sages of ancient times. Here captured, the book views morality broadly as a process of learning to live as a useful and acceptable member of the community to which one belongs. It is the *all-round development* of a person physically, intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

In this work therefore, Dr. Terna Francis not only succeeds in bringing together the various different moral theories and concepts on the subject matter in a single volume, he has done so in a comprehensive,

lucid, excellent crisp and, above all, readable way. The most admirable aspect of this book is the willingness to confront every important aspect of the moral triad; the polity, economy and education in the most intelligently comprehensive manner. A bald summary of this interesting and passionately argued book does insufficient justice to the subtlety of many of the detailed arguments it contains.

It must be mentioned however that, a few very important subject matters that must be captured in a book under this title such as the concepts of morality and leadership recruitment, Morality and security, Morality and ethnic, and morality and religious entrepreneurship and the likes are conspicuously missing. For instance, the recruitment of a leadership that is strong in African heritage resource inclusive of epistemic prowess is a combination of the virtues of temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity to the service of the common good of the poor, the marginalized and the physically challenged in the society. In his convinced mind, humanity must boldly speak for the poor and demand a more just society that upholds rights of persons. This is the exemplary life and lived commitment to the principle of *Ya Na Angbian* that passes as moral governance in the Nigerian state. The non-inclusion of ethical theories in chapter one is another omission that should be considered in a revised edition. While these omissions and many others issues may not have minimized the academic quality of the book, their inclusion in a reviewed edition will add intellectual value to this great book.

It must be said that while it is a truism to argue for moderation in order to tame human excesses, greed and exploitation, to advance same as a central philosophy of character formation is anti-antithetical to the morality of human development. In between the good, the bad and the Ugly for instance throw up the bad as the mean. We

may seek to know for example the *mean* or *Moderation* between the devil and the deep blue sea in any decision making situation. We may also ask what is the reality that exist in the middle and situated between two extremes of stealing one hundred billion Naira (N100,000,000,000) and two hundred billion (N200,000,000,000) Naira by an official of government. The two extremes here being stealing moderately and stealing radically (big money) itself creates a moral dilemma. The question of how this is a virtuous act in birthing a society with high respect for moral values is intriguing to say the least.

Leaders must not only be dedicated to the cause of human development, they must transparently act in such manners that will release the fibres of human existence; truth, justice, concern for others and reset them to form the pillars of a New Nigeria in contemporary world. The argued point here is that, a book under this title must inscribe a doctrine of Moralism that puts the other before or alongside the self and uphold honesty, service and concern for the interest of the common good as the basis and measure of all government actions and policies. This if done will transcend the narrow definitions and beliefs of '*self*' and '*other*', '*ours*' and '*theirs*' and free Nigerians from the pangs of their post-truth advocates of morality.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, it is not in doubt that this book is a master piece in Moral philosophy. It is a persuasive critique of present day theory and practice of moral philosophy. The author's analysis herein deconstructs the most difficult read areas in applied ethics. It must be said without fear of contradiction that, the author has succeeded brilliantly in making the philosophical jargons like deontology, consequentialism that are applied to ethics readable and understandable by students of philosophy and the 'aphilosophical' public. The storied idea in this book will not be complete without the wise advisory words

of Einstein who, in his letter to his daughter *Lieserl* said, *If we want our species to survive, if we are to find meaning in life, if we want to save the world and every sentient being that inhabits it, love is the one and only answer.* As a society surrounded by *idiots*, our virtuous show of love, care and empathy, humaneness, gentleness, hospitality, deep kindness, friendliness, generosity, compassion and willing to share (all morally attuned concepts) will single out our Nigeria, as a nation that has exempted itself from being one of the idiotic nations in the world.

Dr. Terna Patrick Francis may not be the best expositor on philosophical ethics in the manner of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle or our own encyclopaedic Bertrand Russell and many others listed in the book though, he stands out as a commendable commentator of quintessential status in the Nigerian Philosophy family. He thus offers in this book the ripened fruit of sustained reflection on the relationship between philosophy and morality which contributes to upgrading the quality of scholarship that is found wanting in many contributions to contemporary ethical studies. Such is the depth of passion and learning that Terna Francis brings to his book on *Philosophy and Character Formation: Nigeria Under the Lens*.

Clear in style, flexible and interestingly sharp insights into the geography of Nigerian character, the book ranks as meticulous scholarship whose quality makes it a must read for students and teachers of humanities, social sciences, Religious and Political Leaders. Those readers interested in an incisive introduction to a crucial debate across the blurred boundary of philosophy and ethics in the 21st century would do well to pick up this thoughtful and engaging book. It is therefore highly recommended to all serious scholars and the general reader. All those who seek knowledge and wisdom to promote total quality human person should

read this book. Any politician/religious leader who desire to lead men aright should read this book. Anyone who wants to

understand the *somethingness* and *nothingness* of human condition should read this book.