
Humanism and Political Development in Nigeria: A Philosophical Examination of Protagoras' "Man is the Measure"

Elijah Okon John, Ph.D*

Department of Philosophy, University of Uyo, PMB 1017, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Lucky Uchenna Ogbonnaya

Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Calabar

ABSTRACT

The position of this paper is that the political developments in Nigeria has bearing with Protagoras' "man is the measure". This dictum simply implies humanism. It is based on this that this work posits that humanism is what underlies and informs the political developments in Nigeria. Hence, it is argued that all the political eras in Nigeria have the well-being of human beings as their impetus. Thus, this work is premised on the need to meet up with the welfare of Nigerians, in which its failure has resulted in the political developments experienced within the Nigerian-nation states. This conclusion is reached through critical analysis and evaluation.

Keywords: Humanism, Man, Nigeria, Political Development, Protagoras

INTRODUCTION

Humanism is a concept that has implication for the entire human society as well as the political development of any given society. And Nigeria is not an exception. Thus, this work will examine the relationship that exists between Protagoras' humanism, especially as enshrined in his popular dictum "man is the measure" and the political development in Nigeria. This paper will also consider the concept of humanism, Protagoras' dictum of man is the measure of all things, the political import of his humanism. And the extent or progress or damage about in Nigeria's political development shall constitute critical points in this work and this will help us to lay the foundation for the issue at hand: humanism and political development in Nigeria.

THE CONCEPT OF HUMANISM

"Humanism" is a philosophy that has its root in human. It is a concept that is connected with the humans or human beings, that is, people. Humanism, therefore, can be said to be the study of humans; as well as a devotion to human interests and welfare in order to understand, appreciate, improve and preserve the quality of being human life. It is the attitude of the mind or mindset that is concerned with humanity and human well-being in general. Mesembe Edet tends to share in this view as he posits that "The concept of "humanism" is derived from the word "human" which relates to or is connected with people - human beings - rather than animals, machines, gods, angels, devils or spirits; in its broadest sense, humanism is an attitude of the mind that is centred on mankind and human interests" (2013:4).

Humanism "refers to any theory, system or movement that extols human worth, achievement, happiness and perfections; and values the intellect, freedom and dignity of human beings and their ability to learn and enhance their whole cultural situation" /;[p./p (Uzoukwu, 2004:31). This implies that humanism is an attempt to discover, understand, explain, promote and enhance the unique qualities of man or simply, is a philosophy that seeks to elevate the dignity of man. It also seeks to place man at the centre of the universe.

Humanism is that philosophical system or ideology that is interested in making the human society a better and conducive environment for human existence. It is not concerned about any other thing

**Address for correspondence:*

elijahjohn@uniuyo.edu.ng

outside of human realm. Human beings are central and remain the sole concern or interest of humanism. Thus, if at all, any other being is taken into consideration, it is for human good. It is based on this that Reynolds asserts that: “Humanist (or humanism) concentrates on those things that help a person become more completely human: more good, more knowledgeable and more whole in his or her ability to experience life, love, and other emotions” (1972:144). From this point of view, it means that humanism is that study that focuses simply on the nature of human beings, with the aim of understanding their substantial qualities and teaches the human person on how one can improve or restore his dignity as a human being endowed with certain inherent qualities, potentials and rights. It is in this light that Ozumba argues that “the purpose of humanism was and still is to restore the dignity of man” (*Philosophy and Method*, 2010:14).

Against this backdrop, Jim Herrick notes that humanism lays emphasis “on the human, the here – and now, the humane” (2006:1). It is not after the hereafter or an abstract world, outside of this world. It is in this vein that Barbara Smoker excludes “gods, angels, devils and other make belief beings” (2006:5). This is to say that humanism in its strict sense is atheistic and anti-theistic in nature and operation. It has no God or gods factor. It is solely linked to the human factor that occupies a central place in the cosmos. As a matter of fact, it is the fulcrum of the humanist debate and fight. Herrick puts it thus: “humanists are atheists or agnostics and do not expect the after-life; it is essential to humanism that it brings values and meaning into life” (2006:1). By this, the humanist is saying that it is this terrestrial sphere that constitutes life, and it should be made humane. It is in this vein that Mesembe Edet notes that humanism is humanocentric (2013:12).

Following the above argument, it is germane to aver that in the modern and contemporary sense, humanism is anti-Christian and does not focus very strongly on the spiritual realities of life. Humanism as a worldview has no place for the supernatural. Accordingly, Azenabor avers that “Humanism first began as a result of protest against the idea of personal immortality of Christianity; it is a call to man to build the best of life in the world, delight in earthly achievements, and build a better life here on earth; It maintains a morality or ethics that grounds all human values in this earthly existence and experience” (2010:111).

Humanism, by this current of thought, is human-oriented and this-worldly; it has no place in the world outside this world for humans to exist. It is a system of thought that sees this present world as eternal, and a place where human existence begins and also terminates; of which outside of this world human existence cannot be established. Humans are unconscious of this any other world. This is to say that “man has no conscious survival after death” (Azenabor, 2010: 111). (Human) existence and aspirations are restricted to this world and human beings. It is due to this that the spokesman for humanists, Corliss Lamont, posits that “on the ethical and social plane, humanism sets up services to one’s fellow man as the ultimate ideals” (1965:15).

In view of the fact that humanism strictly focuses on and restricts itself to humans, many thinkers are compelled to “simply refer it to as ‘human beingism’ – that is, “a devotion to the interests of human beings” (Azenabor, 2010:111). The philosophy of humanism is very vast and interesting, thus Azenabor declare: “Humanism is a philosophy in which man; his nature and problems are the central focus” (Azenabor, 2010:112). It is a philosophy that places human nature and needs in focus. Lamont states that the philosophical theory called humanism: “Stems from the perennial need of human beings to find significance in their lives, to integrate their personalities around some clear, consistent and compelling view of existence, and to seek definite and reliable methods in the solution of their problems” (1965:3).

It is therefore the seeking for solution to the existential human problems that humanism seeks after and desires to meet. It seeks to humanize and domesticate philosophy. It desires that philosophy should serve human needs. Philosophy can be a humanized “when philosophical concept and principles are not discussed just for their own abstract theoretical interest, but are discussed and applied to the understanding and improvement of the conditions of human life” (Oruka, 1990:128).

Historically, humanism is believed to be a 20th century movement which seeks to restore the value and dignity of man on earth. This could be the probably reason that it is also linked to Karl Marx and his communist manifesto. Although humanism is traceable to the modern period of philosophy, one can still see traces of it in other eras of philosophy. For instance, the sophists in the ancient period of philosophy are believed to have been humanists since their interest was on man and their place in the

cosmos. A good example of the sophists that scholars link humanism to is Protagoras, especially in respect to his popular dictum: “man is the measure of all things”, and this shall constitute the central focus of this work as we progress.

Also, Socrates is said to have been a humanist forerunner as his philosophical stand emphasizes human virtue; and particularly his assertion that reads: “Man, know thyself”. This assertion calls for self-consciousness, self-awareness and self-realization in man. Socrates’ dictum is therefore a call for humans to examine themselves in order to note their limitations and abilities as well as their abilities and strengths. It is this way that humans can fully actualize their dreams and visions and make the world a better place for their existence.

Aside from Socrates, Aristotle is also believed to have been a humanist. This can be seen in his philosophy, which is chiefly ‘this-worldly’, and not ‘the other-worldly’, as posited by his mentor and teacher, Plato. His ethics is based on and directed in its entirety towards humans. A better society for human individuals was the primary goal of the society and government that he proposed and constructed. It is germane to note that Aristotle’s humanism had some limitations. This is because it was not opened to all humans. It does not have a place for women, children, invalids and slaves, since, for him, they are non-citizens or sub-humans. He also encouraged war against those who are supposed to be ruled but would refuse to submit. This makes Aristotle’s idea of humanism a dubious paradox in as much as humanism is concerned. This is because it negates the logic of humanism by affirming and denying reality at the same time. While it encouraged dehumanization to some groups of persons, he also sought for a state that will provide for the greater good of the citizens and produce happiness.

It is probably this thought by Aristotle that Epicurus his intellectual descendants and picked up and developed further as they asserted that the greater good should bring about happiness through association. This is what makes Epicurus and the Epicureans forerunners of humanism. The Epicureans following Aristotle’s ideas that “a good conduct is that which promotes human happiness” (Edet, 2013:8), avers that “friendship goes dancing around the world proclaiming to awake to the praises of happy life” (Herrick, 2006:6). Their desire is simply to make the world a happy place and better for all, including the future generation.

With respect to the idea of humanism in the medieval period, some are of the view that there was no real thorough-going humanism since God was at the centre of the stage. Egeonu rightly observes: “The Middle Ages in Europe, with its dominant Christian culture was an age more concerned with the divine than with the human, more interested in life after death than in life here on earth, an age which rejected the idea of “man as the measure of all things”, but rather emphasized the concept of man as the product of a nature debased by original sin, in order to make man more aware of his need for divine mercy and forgiveness; it was an age of faith” (2005:4).

But immediately after this era was the renaissance. It is argued that in this period there was humanism, and that it was of two kinds, namely: religious humanism and secular humanism. There were some moderate religious humanists due to the fact that they were Christians, and made God their focus and the measure for human ethical life. But for the true humanists, God is not part of the human life; humans became the author of life and fate. A good example of a true humanist is Michael Montaigne. Accordingly, he declares: “I am a man, I consider nothing human to be alien to me” (Herrick, 2006: 7). Other humanists of this era include: Erasmus, Thomas More, Vittorina de Fletro, Voltaire, Diderof and other 14th century Italian thinkers.

In the modern period, there were many thorough-going humanists like Francis Bacon, John Locke, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mills and Charles Darwin. Humanism at this point had nothing like God or any supernatural being as part of its bargain. It was an era that makes humans the all for themselves. It was this era that humanism extends its current to the contemporary period. According to John, “Modern humanism variously called naturalistic humanism, evolutionary humanism, ethical humanism and democratic humanism is defined as a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human philosophy” (2006:192).

Etuk adds to this emphasis very succinctly thus: “Modern humanism makes it seem that in order for man to improve his well-being in his present life, he must deny the possibility of any other life; in order for man to make this world a better place for himself, he must repudiate the existence of another world; and in order for him to realize his dignity, he must set himself up in the place of God” (1999:3).

Scholars such as Francis Bacon, and John Locke who belong to this period are said to be real humanists as they argued against any abstract entity as having anything to do with humans and their lives. Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mills and Charles Darwin also belong to this intellectual clan. Bertrand Russell, a 20th century British philosopher, was also a thorough-going humanist.

In summary, humanism and in particular secular humanism holds that human should focus their faith on human and nothing else. This is because man has infinite possibilities as well as infinite limitations, and can accomplish anything he sets out to achieve. It is indeed “a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science and democracy” (Etuk, 1999:8). It is a philosophy that makes humans humane and emphasizes human’s limitless ability to produce a conducive environment for human habitation.

PROTAGORAS’ DICTUM AND HUMANISM

As earlier observed, Protagoras is one of the first humanists in the ancient philosophical tradition. This can be seen in his famous dictum: “man is the measure of all things, of those that are that they are, of those that are not that they are not” (Copleston, 1963: 87). This dictum for Ozumba (*Philosophy and Method*, 2010:14) is the basic principle of humanism. According to John, “This assertion amounts to the belief that man is responsible for what is real or true” (2006:129). It is man who defines what exists or counts as reality or truth; it is man who decides what ought to be or ought not to be. Man also decides how life ought to be lived as well as the life that is worth living; and it is in this light that one can say that Protagoras’ dictum carries with it the seed of humanism. In the words of John, “Protagoras of Abdera (500-411B.C.) is closely associated with the history of humanism. In fact, he is regarded as the patron saint of humanism. He was the most influential of the sophists. He anchored his entire philosophy on the theory of relativity of truth (2006:202).

John is not through yet with Protagoras as he further declares: “This point of view has an enduring impact on the history of humanism. By this statement, Protagoras has set an agenda for the restoration of the dignity of man, which is of utmost importance to humanists. Not only did he proclaim the relativity of truth by raising the personality of man to the center stage, but also as a most remarkable corollary, Protagoras initiated, from this principle, the tenet of equal rights for all, a theory that is so dear to the hearts of humanists” (2006:203).

Protagoras’ dictum does not only bring humans to the centre stage of the cosmos but also makes humans equal. It emphasizes the special position of humans in the world. This is what makes the dictum one of the backbones of humanism. This kind of humanism that Protagoras’ philosophy promotes is known as secular humanism. It is a humanism that is not spiritual, neither is it theistic. It is anti-theistic atheistic and agnostic humanism (Ozumba, *Spiritocentric* 2013:22). This idea can be seen in the statement of Protagoras that reads: “With regard to gods, I cannot be sure that they are or that they are not, nor what they are like in figure; for there are many things that hinders sure knowledge, the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of human life” (Russell,1964:93).

What can be inferred from this assertion is that for Protagoras, since there are some human limitations with respect to the concept of gods or supernatural beings, there is no need to bother about them. It is based on his that he calls on humans to focus on themselves rather than any abstract entity. Hence, if any being does not make sense, it cannot be relevant to humans and their existence; neither can such a being become a standard for humans; meaning that, such a being cannot be the measure of anything since its existence is questionable. The position of the secular humanism is in tandem with what Oliver Reiser and Bloderen Davids explain: “The doctrine that man, through the use of intelligence, directing the institutions of domestic government, can create for themselves, without any aid from ‘supernatural power’, a rational civilization in which each person enjoys security and finds cultural outlets for whatever normal human capacities and creative energies he possesses” (1944:212).

Humanism, in this secular sense, makes every man to believe in himself, rather than anything else. This implies that it is only humans that can and are capable of handling as well as controlling the events and happenings around them. Human beings are the ones to give meaning to being and existence. They are the highest of all things and nothing is above or beyond them or their aspirations (Titus and Smith, 1974:416). Following Protagoras’ secular posture in humanism, man is all and over all; thus, humans should take their rightful place in the cosmos. It is based on this that they order things for their good, without fear of any other being outside their fellow humans.

THE POLITICAL IMPORTS OF PROTAGORAS’ HUMANISM

The political implications of Protagoras’ humanism flow from the fact that the human person is by nature a social being. In spite of the various disagreements among philosophers and political thinkers about human nature, they all tend to subscribe to the thesis that the human person is by nature a social animal. In the history of Western philosophy, Aristotle is perhaps the most vociferous affirmer of the social nature of humans and his idea; no doubt, he has exercised tremendous influence on socio-political philosophers. Little wonder, then that Aristotle’s description of the human person as a “political animal” is one of the most quoted maxims on the gregarious nature of man and his socio-political milieu. What Aristotle actually meant by this is not that every human being is by nature a politician but that every human being is by nature a being created to live with others in the *polis* – that is, political or civil society and this cannot completely divorce politics from his day-to-day activities. This point becomes glaring when Aristotle avers that: “He who is unable to live in a society or who has no need for society because he is self-sufficient is either a beast or a god” (1946:4).

Given the widely acknowledged fact that the human person is by nature a political being, the position of humanism that “man is the measure of all things” necessarily implies that human beings are the determinants and propellers of politics. Man determines not just the emergence of political societies but also the nature, structure, principles, systems and goals of their political societies. In this connection, one of the political implications of Protagoras’ humanism is political liberty – the liberty to form, criticize, dissolve and adopt any political system they deem fit. In other words, humanism kicks against a theocratic conception of the State. Humanism sees the state as fundamentally a product of human beings according to their idiosyncrasies.

Another basic political implication of Protagoras’ humanism is the historical and cultural relativity of political systems and values. An application of the view that “man is the measure of all things” to politics means that human beings in different societies and at different epochs are the major determinants of the ideal political system and values for them. What this points to is that there is no political system that is objective and absolutely good for all societies, at all times, independent of the opinion of human beings. Protagoras made this point clear when he explicitly affirms: “I hold that whatever practices seem right and laudable to any particular State are so for the State, so long as it holds for them” (Copleston, 1963:89). The corollary of this is that a political system is adjudged as good or bad not by an appeal to some abstract ideals separate from the opinion of human beings living within a given place, at a given time. Thus, a political system that is adjudged as the best by a given society today may be jettisoned by another society and even by the same society in the future. This implication is logically connected to the fact that Protagoras is an ethical relativist and political thinker is in the sense that he deals with the moral evaluation and reconstruction of the political and social order (Gaub, 2003:7).

However, despite the fact that humanism denies the existence of objective truth and political ideals, it supports the view that democracy is an ideal political system that can elevate human dignity and promote good governance (John, 2006:210). In a fundamental sense, democracy as a political system is a philosophical heritage of the humanist belief in equality, liberty and unlimited ability of the human person to rule himself, master nature and improve the quality of his life. The fact that democracy is strongly anchored on the principles of human participation, equality, liberty, and majority rule substantiates this point. Russell unveils the link between Protagoras’ humanism with majority rule when he comments that: “The disbelief in objective truth makes the majority, for all practical purposes, the arbiters to what to believe” (1964:94). The point here is that Protagoras though opined that there is no objective truth, he nonetheless maintained that in practical matters, the view of the majority is the most plausible to follow. And this is no doubt a core principle of democracy. Against this back drop, it is pertinent to note that democracy, whether liberal or social democracy is a humanist political philosophy. Humanism is against the imposition of any brand of democracy on any country. This is because humanism is against all forms of tyranny, autocracy and imperialism (John, 2005:210). All that humanism stands for in every society is the voice of the majority of the people, not of any divine or supernatural being, should be the final arbiter.

The last political implication of humanism to be considered here is that human beings are the architects of their socio-economic and political fortunes and misfortunes. The point is that the proposition that man is the measure of all things connotes that human beings are to be blamed or praised for the conditions of their societies. In view of this, one of the political implications of

humanism is that the socio-economic and political condition of any given society is ultimately a product of the intended and unintended actions and inactions of human beings.

HUMANISM AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN NIGERIA

The political development in Nigeria to a large extent tends to canonize the humanist’s dictum which sees “man as the measure of all things”. The emergence of Nigeria as a country, its, the political experience and the contemporary conditions are all products of human beings. These facts reveal that humanism is one of the major philosophical movements that influence the political developments in Nigeria. A succinct reflection on the historical and existential political developments in Nigeria makes this position more vivid.

Though the people and their diverse ethnic nationalities that make up what is today known as Nigeria may have been in existence since the beginning of the world, but before 1914 “there was no country in the world known by the name Nigeria” (Ezeani, 2013:15). Prior to 1914, the diverse ethnic nationalities were independent nations/societies with little or no interactions. It was Great Britain, through its stooge, Lord Lugard, who for the sake of administrative convenience decided to amalgamate these ethnic nationalities into one country named Nigeria. In view of this, Philip Aka rightly states that “Nigeria is a wholesale product of British colonialism” (2002:229). Chinua Achebe in one of his monumental books, *There was a Country* concurs with this perspective when he explicitly affirms that Nigeria, and its complicated political destiny is a creation of colonialism (2012:1-2). It is necessary to note that these different ethnic nationalities were externally merged together by Great Britain, without their due consents or the consents of their God/gods. At this point, one only needs to discover the link between humanism and colonialism to know that the creation of Nigeria as a political entity in 1914 was made possible by the inspiration of humanism.

The revival of interest in humanism during the Renaissance, with its strong emphasis on the human rather than the divine is what signaled the end of the Middle Ages and restored the belief in the infinite abilities of human beings to better their lot through the power of intellect. This belief, nay faith in the power of human reason led to lots of scientific discoveries and technological innovations that culminated in the industrial revolution (Egeonu, 2005:5). Consequently, the emergence of the industrial revolution created the need for cheap labour and raw materials. It also encouraged travels, adventures and the quest for new discoveries. The “discovery” and creation of Nigeria came as a result of the European adventurism, and search for cheap labour and raw materials; attitude and situation that were remotely inspired by humanism. True to the humanist tenet, Nigeria as a political entity is man-made for the betterment of humans. However, Western humanism was an exclusive humanism it intended to see the West as the paragon of humanity (Egeonu 6) and every other race as sacrificial lamb that can be sacrificed when necessary for the good of the West. Thus, colonial Nigeria was created by the West, for the interest of the West, to the detriment of Nigerians. Fortunately, just as humanism inspired the West to colonize Nigeria, it also inspired Nigerians to decolonize Nigeria.

The next major political development in Nigeria after colonialism was nationalism and this finally culminated in political independence. The embers of nationalism were fanned by Nigerian intelligentsias such as Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Eyo Ita, Obafemi Awolowo, etc. These nationalists derived inspirations from the humanist’s ideals of self-determination, freedom, equality, liberty and equity. This is evident in the fact that they were properly exposed to the ideals of humanism during their educational pursuits in the Western world, specifically, in Great Britain and the United States. Again, it was the activities of Nigerians drunk with the ideas of humanism that led to the political independence of Nigeria. The independence of Nigeria came as a result of the conscious activities of Nigerians through the authentic application of human reason to solve human existential problems. It was therefore, the ideals of humanism not supernaturalism that propelled the dawn of Nigeria’s political independence.

More so, the political developments and the socio-economic condition of post independent Nigeria are all products of the activities of human beings. It is a fact that by divine providence Nigeria is one of the wealthiest countries though with poorest inhabitants on earth. Nigeria is one of most richly endowed countries in the world in terms of human and material resources. Nigeria can boast of many renowned personalities in all works of life (Uzoukwu, 200:258-9). In terms of material and or mineral resources, Nigeria has more than a fair share. These include: abundant fertile land and mild climate that is favourable for the production of almost all types of food and cash crops, a “rich deposit of high

petroleum, a yet untapped reservoir of natural gas, and an appreciable deposit of solid minerals like Iron ore, limestone, tin, coal, etc (Ehusani, 1996:5). Yet Nigeria is today one of the poorest countries in the world. Olusegun Oladipo makes this point clear when he asserts: “Nigeria today is a country in which poverty, human degradation and despondency reign supreme” (1999:35). Similarly, Umez re-asserts: Numerous scholars, political observers, and ordinary people have commented, often with anger, frustration, and disappointment, on the current problems of development in Nigeria. It is now obvious that the giant of Africa is on the verge of colossal failure. The nation (which once was the green pasture of its neighbouring countries) is in great ruin. The people are currently living in a City of Destruction - dying nation - and as such, have given up hope. At present, Nigeria is facing acute and chronic problems of development” (2000: 22-23).

The contradiction between the natural resources endowed in Nigeria by divine providence and the existential situation of Nigerian as noted above goes to show that human beings are the architect of their fortunes. The progressive or retrogressive development as well as the underdevelopment of any society are and will always be the by-product of human activity. The political developments in the history of post independent Nigeria, from the civil war, military coups d'état, social instability, to incessant religious crises, militancy, inter and intra-States terrorism are products of negative and anti-humanist actions. One of such actions is corruption. Appositely, Acha lucidly avers: “From a professional point of view, the two greatest tragedies facing Nigeria today are systematic attempt by the Nigerian leaders to deceive Nigerians and systematic corruption, both of which constitute moral debasement and deterioration, which human beings of lower caliber enjoy, leaders of a nation systematically deceiving their people and robbing the public treasury heroically are among the most immoral acts of a civilized society. Millions of naira have been stolen and hidden in foreign lands” (1991:46).

In fact, the rate of economic, financial and political corruption in Nigeria is so alarming that it cannot be actually pen-down. Nigerians have been so mesmerized in the vicious circle of corruption that seems everybody seems to be helpless about what to do to come out of this debacle. This is evident in the fact that almost all past Nigerian Heads of State and Presidents verbalized on the evils of corruption and, yet failed to lead Nigerians out of “the same corruption which was the major cause of the civil war” (Acha,1991: 4), most at times each succeeding regime because more corrupt than their predecessor. Men and women who lack either the political will to lead are enthroned into leadership positions by some powerful, corrupt and kleptomaniac political elites to abuse the laws of the land with impunity, loot the treasury and satisfy their selfish, social, political, economic as well as religious interest (Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, 1983:1-2). This is antithetical to the humanist faith in the inherent moral capacity of the human person.

Consequent upon the insincerity and irresponsibility of our leaders arise the problem of political apathy. In the present, overwhelming majority of Nigerians, including the elites regards politics as essentially dirty, nasty and brutish; they distant themselves from participating in active politics directly or indirectly for fear of death. To wit, instead of venturing and daring to change the socio-economic landscape of Nigeria through human actions, rather resort to religious corporatism by pretending to be praying. Accordingly, Okolie in his “Foreword” to Odoziobodo’s book, *Society and Revolution: A Nigerian Perspective* illustratively explains: “Yes, under the crushing weight of unwarranted, unjustifiable and socially insensitive increase in the pump price of fuel, Nigerians pray to God for Obasanjo’s removal! But in the Sudan, a marginal increase in the price of a loaf of bread sparked off mass protest that eased Jaafar Niemery out of office. In Venezuela, Chile and even in Brazil and Mexico, violent protests have trailed unpopular government policies and actions. Right now, in Great Britain, the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, is sweating over the Kelly affair, simply because the ordinary Briton feels that he/she has been fooled on the Iraqi question. Why is the situation in Nigeria different? Why are Nigerians so docile, apathetic and apparently unconscious of the happenings around them?” (2003:3).

The implication of this is that the post-independent Nigerian disappointing situation has continued unabated for more than five decades because of the negative actions of human beings and the inauthentic bend for the supernatural assistance. The positive and negative political developments in Nigeria are therefore the products of the positive and negative actions of human beings. The progressive development of Nigeria can only be possible through positive human actions anchored on effective leadership or people-oriented political or welfare programs. Odey captures this point thus:

“Aligning Nigeria on the part of self-redemption demands that all those who care for a better Nigeria must break loose from our sedating state of apathy. We cannot align Nigeria on the path of self-redemption by merely wishing it. We must fight for it, for our freedom. And as we know freedom, under whatever form it is been demanded, has been and will ever remain a costly venture... If we want to be free from the chains that have been put round our necks by those who claim to be our leaders, we must be prepared to pay the cost. Freedom has never and will never be placed on a platter of gold for any wayfarer to pick and go. We must fight for it and die for it if the need arises before we can be free” (2009:22).

Hence, the betterment of Nigerians depends on the collective efforts of all Nigerians, who must seriously move to its realization. Nigeria’s survival must not be left in the hands of few selfish individuals or metaphysical entities. We must do all we can to make Nigeria work and better.

What is implied here is that Nigeria is our product; we have defined and brought it to what it is today inasmuch as political development is concerned. Nigeria is so politically backward and cannot compete with some other nations of the world. This state of the nation needs redemption, which no one can offer except by the humanistic effort of all Nigerians. The destiny of Nigeria politically is in our hands. We either make or mar it. Nigerian political leaders have failed to better the lots of Nigerians because they lack prerequisite knowledge of what it takes to lead. They are suffering from ignorance. Hence, the way out of this problem can only be found through sound political education. Education is a major instrument that can disperse the vice of ignorance and lead to knowledge which is virtue. It is education that can make people humane and promote humanism. What Nigerians need is proper education. In the opinion of Chukwudum B. Okolo, “Like philosophy, education banishes ignorance and liberally criticizes people’s value, life-options and redirects society goals and pursuits. Plato in his Laws, for instance, decrees that it is education that determines whether a man becomes the tamest or the widest animal on earth. If man lacks education, he says, ‘he is the most savage of beasts’” (Education and Nigeria Value, 1993:22).

One question that confronts us is: are those manning our political offices and directing the political life of Africa uneducated? The answer is simple: they are educated wrongly or partially (Okolo, The African Condition 1996:19). This deficit in education accounts for their materialistic lifestyle; the craving for materialism by African leaders is indeed due to mis-education. They were wrongly educated by the Westerners to see themselves as appendage to the westerner and the Western values, which are individualistic. This has made our leaders to become inhumane. Thus, the need for the re-education of Africans to take into serious consideration their value system is very necessary and of humanistic value (Kanu, 2012:299).

The re-education of Nigerians will certainly help Nigeria to recover the battered African image that will place man at the centre of political activities. This involves the reconstruction of the Nigerian value system which hitherto is Western in orientation to conform to the one that is African which will and promote human dignity that is tied to his Africaness. Macaulay Kanu captures this point thus: “Hence, the call for the reconstruction of our cultural value system, which depicts the authentic African experience calls for the reawakening and reactivating of those positive traditional values that promote human dignity in our society. And this is in the name of African humanism” (2012:300).

This humanism that we advocate eschews individualism and capitalism that promote high level corruption borne out of selfishness and other inhuman treatments by few privileged Nigerians. It rather advocate for the restoration of communalism and egalitarianism. “This will give Africa (Nigeria) a modern (political) development. In fact it is a combination or synthesis of the typical African humanism and egalitarianism, and the modern, dynamic and enterprising efforts of the individuals that can make a united strong and self-reliant society. This is what we call African socialism” (Kanu, 2012:300).

The truth about humanism and African political system is that it tells us of the priority of human over the, mundane material and the economic considerations (Iroegbu, 1994: 83). It is through this system that our political life as a nation can “minister to the existential needs of man and his well-being” (Ijiomah, 1996:iv), since no individual will think of himself as the only one that should benefit from the wealth of the nation in that view of his political position. It is at this point that we can really say, we (Nigerians) are the measure of our political development and that it must be geared towards the betterment of the lots of Nigerians, which is the goal of humanism and in this case African humanism.

CONCLUSION

The point buttressed in this essay is that Protagoras’ dictum, “man is the measure of all things”, is one of the core canons of humanism. And that this view point among other things connotes that human beings are the architects of their fortunes. The political implications of this includes that human beings have the right to liberty and self-determination; to wit, humanism eschews theocracy, autocracy, tyranny, imperialism but rather extols democracy. In the finale analysis it will be seen that the factors that created, shaped and still influence the political development in Nigeria are inspired by humanism. The negative political developments in Nigeria are a product of negative attitudes of Nigerians and these developments have persisted for so long because Nigeria’s over reliance on and faith in wishful thing and beggarly posture instead of exploiting the infinite power of human beings to solve their problems through the positive application of human reason. This paper therefore calls on Nigerians to wake up from their slumber to their responsibility and define their being and the being of their nation Nigeria. We must do this by developing or domesticating our political system that will be humanistic, by emphasizing human dignity and eschew inhumanity of any form or fiat.

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AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY



Elijah Okon John (Ph.D), is a public affairs analyst, research consultant and senior lecturer in philosophy at University of Uyo, Nigeria. he specializes and publishes in sociopolitical philosophy, value and logical theories. Dr. John has more than sixty (60) research publications all over the world. he is the editor of three scholarly journals and two magazines.