

VALUE THEORY AND CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN SOCIETIES

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Abstract

As human civilization experience diverse breakthroughs in science and technology, there has been a concomitant ripple effect on the value systems that held humanity together. While different epochs of human civilization unfold, value systems have changed mercurially and society has been made to grapple with the challenges of modernism, post modernism and civilization up to this present time. And while first world nations have sought systems to allow for balance and wholistic development, the African society continues to give way under the weight of a loss of value and meaning. Corruption, inordinate crave for power and erroneous glorification of success, notwithstanding it's source, reveals the urgent need for a revisitation of the value systems that holds African nations. This paper therefore bears the burden of the developmental hitches that has bedeviled Africa in general and Nigeria in particular and seeks to realign African societies under one umbrella of value driven goals towards nation building and human development. It therefore calls for a reevaluation of value systems with emphasis on our own African values. This paper adopts the critical and analytical method.

Keywords: Value Theory, African, Society, Contemporary

Introduction

Value theory has been of great concern to many philosophers in the field of axiology. Hence, different philosophers have given different definition of what axiology is all about, from these different understanding of axiology by scholars, what can be maintained then is that value is a property of objects, including physical objects as well as abstract objects, e.g. actions, situations or relations, representing their degree of importance or worth to individuals, communities and societies at large. The question of value revolves around what a person or society conceives as being good, valuable, desirable or preferable. Hence, it is on this ground we shall be discussing the relevance of axiology that is value system in Nigeria society.

The following methodology shall be adopted in writing this paper. We shall endeavour a clarification of terms that shall be used in this paper, which will be

followed by the meaning of Axiology, closely followed by the Nigerian value system. A close look at the relevance of axiology in the Nigerian society shall be the high point of the paper, which will thereafter be subject to a critical analysis before the final conclusion

Conceptual Elucidation

What is Value?

The word *value* is derived from the Latin word *Valor*, ordinary every day usage of the word designates the importance or worth of something for someone.”¹ The most helpful general meaning of value is the famous definition given by R. B. Perry: “Value is any object of interest”² to be interested in this usage means to be for or against something. According to Anselm Ekhelar, it bears relevance to almost every sphere of human interest. “It is so ubiquitous that it is not only of interest to philosophers, the learned, but also to every rational and conscious human person.”³ The ambiguity of value is demonstrated in our daily choices and preferences of one thing over another and the human general attitude of evaluating things and situations. Hence, we can see issues concerning value are as old as man. Thus, we can etymologically refer to axiology as the science of worth. “Worth as used here refers to value concerning this view, Ralph Perry observed that until recently, the theory of value was a kind of by-product of other sciences,”⁴ hence, axiology as existed even though it was subordinated to ethics until recently.

Basically, the task of axiology has been to locate the source of value. The issue is whether value is located in the object of value or located in the subject that ascribes value to an object. Perry tried to make a sharp distinction between this subjectivism and objectivism of value when he said, “Is a thing valuable because it is valued? Or is a thing valued because it is valuable”⁵

People often confuse “value” with values. Consequently there is need for some clarification. The term “value” is ambiguous. There are three basic senses of “value” which appear in everyday speech and in philosophical literature:

¹ Ansem K. Jimoh, *Philosophy, A Guide for Beginners*”, Ibadan: Ebony Books & Kreations, 2014, p.78

² Cf. R. B. Perry, *General Theory of Value: its Meaning and Basic Principles Constructed in Terms of Interest*, New York: Longmans, Green, 1926, pp.155-200

³ Anselm Ekhelar, “ The Philosophy of Value of Ralph Barton Perry “, A Dissertation submitted for a Doctorate Degree in Philosophy, Pontifical Urban University, Rome,1999, p.36

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ R.B. Perry, *General Theory of Value: its Meaning and Basic Principles Constructed in Terms of Interest*, p.4

(i) Value as what a thing is worth

“What is the value of this house?” “The naira has little or no value”. These are obvious instances of using “value” to refer to the worth of a thing in our country Nigeria. It is typical of economic contexts. The Marxian theory of surplus value adopts value in this economic context. The Marxian theory of surplus value adopts value in this economic sense. But the use of “value” in this sense also appears in ethical and aesthetic contexts as in when one asks, “Has the life of a genius greater value than the lives of ten average men?”⁶

(ii) Value as something to which value is ascribed: When we say that somebody’s action’s possess a great a given social value, or a given statue a high artistic value, or that the value of somebody’s behaviour consists in his altruism, or that the value of a novel lies in the wealth of its language-we use the term “value” in the second sense. This sense of value may be described as attributive or inscriptive because here value is ascribed to objects, properties or facts. Again, this sense of value is not very essential for Axiology or the philosophy of value.

(iii) Value as idea which makes us consider objects, qualities, actions, events, situations as valuable:

When somebody says that the value of a literary work consists in its originally i.e. that being original is a valuable property, we have to assume that originality is a value. To recognize as valuable, acts of charity as a value; regarding honor as a value makes honorable behaviour valuable. In this context we are using “Value” as a certain idea; something like the Platonic form; “some kind of principle, or criterion, which allows us to evaluate particular occurrences, objects, qualities, actions, events, situations-and, consequently, to ascribe to them value, positive or negative.⁷ Here we see some overlap of the second meaning above, but the second meaning is distinguishable from the third meaning.

This last meaning of ‘value’ is what we may call axiology. This is the most important and essential sense for Axiology or the philosophy of value. “The quantitative, attributive and axiological meanings of “value” have acquired a firm footing and seem to be well embedded in everyday language, and prospects for eliminating any one of them, or all of allotting a special, separate term to one

⁶ Research on Humanities and Social Sciences, www.iiste.org (online) Vol.4, No.2, 2014, p.129

⁷ Ibid.

of them are bleak.”⁸ We should, therefore, demand only that when using the term “value,” philosophers clearly realize and indicate the sense in which they understand it.

The quantitative sense of “value” can appear independently whenever value is measurable in accordance with commonly accepted standards i.e. when applied to commodities, money, and the like, in economics and so on. In G.O Ozumba’s analysis of the concept of “Value”, he submits that the term “value” could be used as a noun and a verb. “He writes that, as a noun, it is sometimes used in abstract terms. In concrete terms value is used to represent things that are tangible and are of utility to us.”⁹ Here we mean things like cars, book, houses, etc. As an abstract noun, it designates the property of value or of being valuable. Here, for instance, we might talk of things like happiness, beauty, pleasure, satisfaction and even the notion of God. “Value in its real sense is used as equivalence to worthiness or goodness, i.e. the desired good in which case evil is used or seen as having no value.”¹⁰

Meaning of Axiology

Axiology is from a Greek word “axios meaning ‘value’, ‘worth’, thus, it is the philosophical study of value. The term was first used by Paul Lapie, in 1902, and Eduard Von Hartmann, in 1908.”¹¹ Axiology as a concept studies mainly two kinds of values, ethics and aesthetics, while ethics investigates the concepts of ‘right’, ‘good’, and ‘bad’, ‘evil’ in individual and social conduct. Aesthetics studies the concepts of ‘beauty’ and ‘harmony’ in the world or universe.

“Value theory also known as axiology was not formulated until the end of the 19th century. “Man was concern about value from the very beginning, and philosophical theories about particular types of values have since Plato been the subject of many profound pages.”¹² The process of assigning value follows how a person thinks. To be able to place on an item or object, the person must be able to filter, and have a critical analysis of the data or object of valuation. Each object and its different aspects must be considered and judgments must be made before choosing what value to assign to it. In axiology, the unique pattern of thinking involved. In the process is referred to as value structure. It is important to

⁸Research on Humanitiess and Social Sciences, www.iiste.org, ISSN 2222-1719 (Paper) ISSN 2222-2863 (Online) Vol. 4, No.2, 2014, p.130

⁹ G. O Ozumba., *A Course Text on Ethics*. Lagos: Obaroh & Ogbinaka Publishers, 2001, p.40

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ R. B. Perry, *General Theory of Value: Its Meaning and Basic Principles Constructed in Terms of Interest*. p.4

¹² F. Risen, *What is Value?* Illinois, Open Court Publishing Company, 1971, p.3

understand that axiology studies value, and not values. Value as we have established so far, deals with thinking and then assigning meaning to the properties of everyday reality. While values will suppose ideas that people stand for, believe in and find important.

“Man, if not all of philosophers are of the opinion between what has value and what is desirable for its own sake and what is intrinsically valuable.”¹³ They hold that what is desirable for its own sake has a value not dependent on anyone’s having interest in it. Both of these claims have been criticized by other value theorists. Dewey, for instance, criticizes any sharp distinction between what is intrinsically good and or good as an end and what is good as a means is the resolution of conflicting impulses and desires. While Perry denies that anything can have value without being an object of interest. For him, for instance, if gold is valuable, means interest is in gold and that it is a subject’s interest in a thing that confers value on it.

The Nigerian Value System

Nigeria is a nation in which the composition of her citizens is complex, the life style of those citizens is so complex and contradictory, at times, and that one finds it very difficult to have a proper word to clarify them. Value misplacement has generated value crises and the value crisis in Nigeria is crushing the citizens. This is a nation where many people are out to cheat every other person. This nation’s wealth is used by the political elites, the privileged, the opportune and oppressors oppress those they govern, instead of using the wealth of the nation for the general good of the people.

Former President of Nigeria, “Olusegun Obasanjo during his first military regime , listed some traditional Nigerian values such as the respect for the human person, family, hospitality, deep religiosity and high moral standard”¹⁴ and many others to mention a few. One of the most dominant traditional Nigeria values is the concept of respect for the human person. “The Nigeria society has the human person as a priority, central and end point in her anthropological valuation and engagements.”¹⁵ The Nigeria people has more respect for the

¹³ Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (2ndEd.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.949

¹⁴P. Iroegbu, *Enswisdomization and Africa Philosophy*, Owerri, :International Universities Press, Ltd. 1994, p.83

¹⁵ Ibid.

human person because of their deep religious reverence for God and the gift of life is seen as God's handiwork.

Axiology and the Nigerian Society

The realm of values and their foundations are manifest at various realms of human existence and interactions. Let us consider some of these and attempt to trace the foundations of such values, and their relevance to the Nigerian society.

In the educational sector, the relevance of axiology in education is an immeasurable one. In the first place, education as a programme of enlightenment is an all-embracing one. When equated with knowledge and skill, education encompasses all disciplines. "Education as we know, deals with the whole man, that is, the mental, spiritual and the physical. It involves training, instruction and indoctrination."¹⁶ When we look at these areas of formation of man, we will see their relevance to these three levels of man's compositional needs.

In addition, to harness the values of education to its fullness we must bear in mind that education is not something that should be left to the private individuals or groups alone because it is a capital intensive project. Just like Aristotle said "in as much as the end for the whole state is one, it is manifest that education also necessarily be one and the same for all and that the superintendence of this must be public and not private lines."¹⁷ Relating to Frondizi's notion of axiology to the Nigeria educational sector would imply a call to responsibilities on the part of all state holders to education that is they must ensure a standardized educational quality. Values abound everywhere in education, they are involved in every aspect of school practice, and they are basic to all matters of choice and decision making. For instance, it is with value that teachers evaluate students and students on their part evaluate teachers.

"The shaping of the student's value system and life is greatly affected by the teacher and his ability to teach his subject well."¹⁸ Hence, to say a student has dignity is to demand that he be honoured and be taught the type of values that will enable him to make reasonable decisions on his own. "Making proper thinking together about education values would have to be dependent on

¹⁶ A.F Uduigwomen and Karo Ogbinaka, *Philosophy of Education: An Analytical Approach*, Lagos, Joja Educational Research & Publishers Limited, 2011, p.49

¹⁷ Aristotle, Politics, in Jonathan Barnes (trans), *Complete Work of Aristotle*, vol. 1, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1984, vii.

¹⁸ Ibid.

educational experience and such can be of tangible value to educational practice.”¹⁹

Furthermore, Kiryakova and Olkhovaya notes that the axiological approach as a methodological foundation for investigating the problems of university education allows us to determine the structure and hierarchy of values, which not only guide the future professional activity of the student, but also shapes his relations with the world and people. Due to its value-orienting function, the educational process takes students into the sphere of philosophical understanding of social and educational reality.²⁰ Education is the main channel of introducing a future specialist into the cultural, educational and professional values. At each stage of the development of society the education system undergoes certain changes according to its needs, ideology, values. The dramatic changes in the international community has resulted in new priorities in the field of university education²¹

In the realm of human relationship with the Supreme Being and fellow human beings, religious values hold forth. Religious values have basically to do with the fear of God. Religious values would include the quest for salvation; righteousness; aspiration for eternal life, self-realization, spiritual discipline, meditation, etc. “Traditionally the fear of God and adherence to his commands are the source or foundation of religious and spiritual values.”²² This fear of God and adherence to his commands yield religious systems. The value of religion to the Nigerian society from the above explanation is that it helps the people to build a relationship with the divine, and also to help build moral society by inculcating religious values into man. Religious men and women have lost value of their meditative role rather, they allow things of this world to entangle them, hence, they fight for worldly positions and use unworthy means in establishing churches.

More so, ethical or moral values have a way of forming the human person to imbibe virtues. For instance, this has to do with qualities like honesty, promise keeping, integrity, love, forgiveness, mercy, faithfulness, generosity, to mention

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Aida V. Kiryakova and Tatiana .A. Olkhovaya. "The Axiological Approach to the Analysis of the Problems of Modern University Education," in *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No 2, April 2015, p 24.

²¹ Ibid

²² Research on Humanities and Social Sciences, www.iiste.org (online) Vol.4, No.2, 2014, p.131

but a few. Religious systems provide the basis or foundation of certain ethical or moral values. The foundation of values here is considered to be of divine revelation. Of course, part of any religious system is its moral values which regulate and harmonize human life. It is religion which tells us what is right and what is wrong; what is good and what is evil, what is just and what is a vice. God is considered to have commanded these do's and don'ts. no society can exist without morals. Religion enriches people's morals, for the welfare of the individual and society at large. It is morals which build relationships between people and between them and the world around. The Nigeria values have being reduced to nothing due to our emulation of the Western values. Like Friedrich Nietzsche, there should be a trans valuation or redefinition of our time tested values, because in our country Nigeria, a lot of the African values that were once celebrated by pre-colonial African societies are today given less attention by Africans themselves because of crisis of identity and influence of global ethical principles that are promoted by the West.

Economic values have to do with wealth, profit, economic power, fame, etc. The relevance of axiology in the economy of the Nigerian society cannot be over emphasized, because with value system competitions arise in the economic market. Hence, different products, are being produced every day, it is with the value system that one is able to take proper decision on one's needs. Contemporary Africa is a "monetized" society as people are more focused on money than they were a generation ago. The yearnings for money has over powered other values like consideration, respect for others, honesty at work and in relations with others.

Political values have to do with values such as freedom of speech, free and fair elections, good governance, peace, security, independence; etc. With axiology, people are able to protest against bad leadership and express themselves when they feel their rights are relegated. The value of political leadership has being totally lost by Nigeria politicians, such that, the reason they are being elected to lead the country are not being achieved rather, they see it as an opportunity to steal the country's wealth. Many countries have practiced democracy and they are successful and developing today but because we have lost the proper value towards leadership we are under developed instead of developing. Conscienceless promptitude to use power authoritatively for selfish repressive and oppressive purpose; unpatriotic and unjustifiable political discrimination and victimization, scandalous politicking on the corridors of power, unhealthy

election malpractices as well as political arrogance and bitterness; readiness to sacrifice all values-no matter how high, sacrosanct or strategic- In the senseless worship of, and mad rush of money and wealth, the scandalous practice of diverting public funds into private coffers and of inflating contracts all belong to this perspective of value..

Personal and family values occupy a central place in the upliftment of human dignity These have to do with values such as integrity, truthfulness, diligence, loyalty, kinship, etc. The relevance of axiology to family life has to do with inculcating rightful values, morals, good education to children. Axiology helps parents and guardians to choose good things for their family members. It helps families to appreciate aestheticism which as to do with valuing beauty, creativity, originality. Trust and family values have been compromised. Greed in society is on the increase. Sexual promiscuity, crime, violence and disregard for the value of human life have become the order of the day.

Medical values have to do with cherishing good health, peace of mind and body, etc. Some of our medical personnels in Nigeria have lost sight of the value of medicine, such that, they that ought to advice people to run far away from abortion and other related crimes associated with human life, have become abortion counselors who encourage young girls and women to abort their babies just for selfish reason to get their money and material possessions.

These and so many other values have a great role to play in re-evaluating and rekindling the inculcation of values into the minds of the individuals and in the life of modern African societies today. Concerted efforts by all to have recourse to our African traditional values will be of immersed treasure to the soul of contemporary African societies.

Critical Appraisal and Conclusion

Some philosophers claim that no sense can be made of the notion of intrinsic or final value or of something's being good in itself or for it's own sake. The chief target of this type of proposition is G.E Moore's position in *Principia Ethica*. The thesis under consideration is Moore's premise that there is indeed such a thing as intrinsic value.²³ It has been claimed that this is no more than an empty and

²³Jonas Olson, "Axiological Investigations". *Comprehensive Summaries of Uppsala Dissertation*, from the Faculty of Arts 4. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2005, p 28.

profoundly confused concept and it has been recommended that we rid ourselves of it since we would be better off without it.²⁴

T. M. Scanlon has suggested that for something X to be valuable is for X to have certain properties that provide reasons for X to respond in certain ways²⁵. Another contemporary representative of this tradition is Michael Zimmerman who drawing on the works of R.M. Chisholm has argued that to say that X is intrinsically valuable is to say that there is a requirement to favour X for X's own sake²⁶. It is therefore true that in line with Moore's notion, intrinsic value is a reality. Services like Education, Health, Economic well-being and spiritual wellbeing are intrinsically valuable in themselves and should therefore be treated as services of immense value to societal growth in general and human development in particular. Therefore, value based education is a key dimension of building peace, tolerance, social conduct, justice and intercultural understanding.²⁷

Sergey Yachin notes that it is useful to pay special attention to the reputable position of representatives of the communitarian project of the modern society. A. MacIntyre, C. Taylor, A. Etzioni, are thinkers, who aim at bringing a classical idea of "the Good" in its opposition to the idea of "the value" back into the philosophical discourse.²⁸ They sharply raise the question that has become practically the most crucial one for the modern humankind: what are the conditions for the possibility that people and cultures following different values can come to an agreement on norms of collective co-existence? Can the normative order of co-existence be reduced to the value based one?²⁹

In relation to the questions that have been posed, C. Taylor in his work "Sources of the Self" develops a major study on how modernistic axiological narrative is appearing and functioning and how it opposes itself to the classical philosophy of the Good. The author shows that it only

²⁴ M. Beinstein. "Intrinsic Value", in *Philosophical Studies*, 102, 2001, pp 329-343.

²⁵ T.M. Scanlon, *What we owe to each Other*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998 p.97

²⁶ Chisholm R.M, "The Ethics of Requirement". in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1, 1964, pp 147-153

²⁷ Babita Tomar "Axiology in Teacher Education: Implementation and Challenges." in *Journal of Research & Method in Education*, Volume 4, Issue 2 Ver. III (Mar-Apr. 2014), P 52.

²⁸ Sergey Evgenievich Yachin "Critique of Axiological Reason: Why the Idea of Values has Achieved the Totality in Modern Culture," in *International Journal of Philosophy* 2019; 7(1), p 36

²⁹ Ibid. 36-37.

seems that Values are universal, in reality, substantive understanding of the Good lies in the foundation of the collective being of people. "We feel in the very experience of existing that we are moved by some supreme Good, that we are touched by it, but not that it is valuable because of our reaction."³⁰

There is one obvious circumstance that is accepted by all researchers of culture: a person acts, perceives and thinks in accordance with some exact cultural samples (types, schemes, models, patterns, and etc.) that he/she uses to compare the reality with and, in compliance with which, he/she is aiming to transform this reality.

According to Charles B. Henry, Meaning and value are fundamental to humans coexisting in civilized societies. The contemporary world demands mutual respect and understanding whether beliefs in particular thoughts and actions are accepted and shared among stakeholders³¹. Philosophy is an ideal medium for interpreting and conveying such expectations. Philosophy provides the historical basis, the contextual relevance, and the contemporary reality to both expectations and outcomes in thought provoking and meaningful ways. He believes that although traditional and modern views are themselves incomplete, they provide the best alternatives to constructing meaning and values³². Meaning and value are concomitant. Meaning gauges the significance and importance of value. Meaning therefore expresses a "good that is conceptually distinct from happiness or rightness."³³

Traditional ideas of right and wrong have been gradually worn away and a values vacuum has been created. A strong contributing factor to this phenomenon in Nigeria is modernity and the developments in technology and the economy. From the communalistic Nigerian society which is more liberal and Individualistic, morality is now a thing most individuals feel they can decide for themselves.

³⁰Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Harvard University Press.

³¹ Charles Henry, *The Philosophy of Meaning and Value* in *ARPN Journal of Science and Technology*, Vol. 3, no 6, June 2013, p. 593

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

Also, Nigerian communities have adopted a system of market economy, which is based on competition and propelled by selfishness. In the wake of this selfishness has grown the brutality that marks our daily life, as well as corruption, which has reached right up to the government of most African modern day states. People think of themselves and the maximum gratification of their desires while neglecting the common good.

From the foregoing, we have argued that values are an inherent component of human nature and that they are thus essentially natural and further that being natural, they are universal. Human values are intrinsically designed to fulfill man's goal of individual and collective preservation and survival. The negative tendencies and aberrant values are a distortion of human nature which is essentially good, being a spark of divine creation. Though values are an inherent component of human nature, several other sources also provide the foundations of our values, modernity, developments in technology and its products, developments in the global economic system, secularization and the neglect of religion for positive guidance are some of the factors which have led to the intrusion of human values and a consequent value crisis in contemporary African societies and elsewhere in the world.

In conclusion, what is required is 'values-redefinition' or 'values-revitalization' through a process of cultural self-regeneration. In Nigeria in particular and Africa in general, the process of cultural self-regeneration requires that we go back to African moral values for moral guidance, with a commitment to righteousness. On this point, our advocacy is a humanistic religion of righteousness. We have to also return to the "school of love and peace", which is the family, from where we ought to learn the time tested values which guarantee the social order required for our collective and individual preservation and survival of our hard earned and age long values. The guiding principle should be the sustenance and promotion of our good values and the reception and acceptance of those values of others that are good to be incorporated into what is truly ours, in order to have a new blend that will form the fulcrum of our contemporary societal values.