CRITICAL ESSAYS ON POSTMODERNISM

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(Edited)
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In this work titled *Critical Essays on Postmodernism*, the various authors have endeavoured to savour the concept of postmodernism from diverse disciplinary fronts. This approach is intentional so as to provide every interested author with a perspective that will interest him or her. Since postmodernism cannot be fully captured from a single disciplinary frame of reference, this is why we have handled the concept of postmodernism from the background of the mythical elephant that was subjected to varied descriptions depending on the part of the elephant the perceiver was touching. Postmodernism is an enigmatic concept with protean and malleable conceptual texture which meaning and application can be made to serve purposes with elastic dimensions.

In this work, we have divided the book into seven sections, the first section deals with introduction, definitions and conceptual issues. The second section deals with forbears of postmodernism. The third section deals with postmodernism and the branches of philosophy. The fourth is concerned with postmodernist thinkers. The fifth section is concerned about postmodernism and other disciplines. The sixth section deals with postmodernism and science. The seventh section is on postmodernism: benefits, critique and transcendence.

Under section one; we have the introduction, the preface and the basic concepts of postmodernism. In section two, we have forbears of postmodernism with the postmodern tendencies in Foucault, Habermas, Marx, Nietzsche and others. The third section contains such topics on epistemology, logic, ethics, environmental philosophy, economic philosophy Aesthetics. The fourth section contains postmodern thinkers like Lyotard, Derrida, Baudrillard, Rorty and Levinas. In section five we consider postmodernism and other disciplines like Political philosophy, Economics etc. In section six we have topics like postmodernism and science and other related issues in the philosophy of science. Finally, the last section, the book contains materials on benefits of postmodernism, critique of postmodernism, and transcendental issues that border on posthumanism, postfeminism and integrative humanism.

This is a compendium of the thoughts of competent philosophers belonging to the Calabar School of Philosophy, University of Calabar. Authors were allowed to exercise their thoughts in the different areas of maximum competence, exploring how the
postmodern thought system affects, aligns, penetrates or hold the possibilities for the direction of their areas of specialities in the coming years. The intellectual output has been wonderful and amazing. The result is this massive explorative compendium which we have titled CRITICAL ESSAYS ON POSTMODERNISM. The work is comprehensive, targeting to meet the yearning gap in the availability of well-researched texts with indigenous flavour in postmodernism.

This work promises to assuage the thirst of lecturers, students, wayfaring readers who desire to understand the “nitty-gritty” and the sensationalism with which postmodernism is famed as the most controversial genre of discourse in our contemporary times.

The over twenty contributors to this text are congratulated for a job well done. They in turn wish the reading public “bona petit” as they savour the richness and fecund and ample excogitations laid bare in these lines by these philosophical worthies.

We hope that this work will receive the hilarious reading overtures it rightly deserves. Happy reading.

Prôf. G. O. Ozumba
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This work titled *CRITICAL ESSAYS ON POSTMODERNISM*, is work of genius displaying the organizational and intellectual assiduity of the editors and contributors to this text. Postmodernism is a post-contemporary vogue which cuts across different disciplines such as philosophy, literature, arts, social science, architecture, history and in short, the entire gamut of humanistic intellectual endeavours. In philosophy, it flowed from the endless search for the ultimate principles of reality spanning the ancient to the modern periods. Postmodernism marked a breakway from the thought patterns of these periods as it advocated what Francois Lyotard regarded as the breaking down of the grand narratives. Postmodernism kicks against all forms of grand totalizing of ideas and rebuffs beliefs in stereotypes, standards, foundations or any all-transcending way of determining rationality. It calls for a deconstruction of all status quos and standards in every field of human endeavour. It questions everything, deconstructs, breaks up all assumptions and collapses the barrier between space and time it celebrates fragmentation, spontaneity, superficiality, irony and playfulness. It has Feyerabend as its forefather as it subscribes to his principle of “anything goes”. The leading postmodern thinkers include Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, Jean Francois Lyotard, Richard Rorty, Roland Barthes, and a host of others. This is a bird-eye view of postmodernism.

The aim of this book is to tell a fuller story of postmodernism as applied to philosophy and a few other related disciplines. The book considers postmodernism from different angles. Apart from examining the nexus between postmodernism and different branches of philosophy, the ideas of leading postmodern thinkers were critically discussed. In an age where students find it very difficult to buy relevant books, this book is a handy reference material because it covers the very essential areas of postmodernism.

I must commend the Editors of the book for their editorial astuteness and all the contributors for exhibiting a wonderful and overwhelming enlightenment for philosophy students and students of related disciplines. I strongly recommend the book for these and enlightened readers who seek a deeper knowledge of the subject.

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In the course of putting together the articles that make up this compendium on post modernism, the editors incurred the debts of many benefactors. First and foremost, we wish to thank the Almighty God for His benevolence and loving kindness which has made the actualization of this text possible. We also want to thank all the authors from whom the contributors had drawn so profusely and lavishly for providing the intellectual resources upon which we had to build. We are therefore thankful to eminent postmodernists like Lyotard, Derrida, Baudrillard, Foucault, Habermas, Deleuze, Rorty and other worthies of the postmodernist fame.

We also owe debts of gratitude to all the contributors who worked tirelessly to supply to us the very erudite contributions which make up this text. They deserve kudos for their timely submissions. We must appreciate the lecturers in the Calabar School of Philosophy for providing congenial atmosphere that has enabled Scholarship to thrive in the Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar. We will not fail to appreciate Prof. A. F. Uduigwemen for the very professorial foreword he wrote and his commendations.

Finally, we commend ourselves as editors for working so hard to provide this text to close up the gap in the very wide lacuna that exists in the domain of extant literature. We wish all who love knowledge happy reading.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

RORTY'S INTERSUBJECTIVE AGREEMENT: IMPLICATIONS TO NIGERIAN POLITY

By

Dr Jude Onuoha A.
&
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Introduction

The question of certainty of knowledge has been problematic from time immemorial. The criterion of knowledge has been the pace set before philosophers of different epoch and periods. Philosophers and epistemologists in the strictest sense have been in self battle in order to proffer the most certain way of knowledge acquisition. Majority of them have formed one school of thought or the other and many have joined any epistemic school of thought of their choice. Richard Rorty, who is an American philosopher, developed his own notion of intersubjective agreement.

Rorty's intersubjective agreement entails knowledge being what a particular people in a particular place and in a particular epoch have accepted to be the true knowledge. For Rorty, it is an intersubjective objective knowledge. He maintained that intersubjective agreement must define true knowledge and it is the manifestation of truth for a giving community. Hence for Rorty, knowledge is dependent on societal agreement. In Rorty's epistemic position, knowledge is no longer justified true belief, but justified accepted belief.

Rorty observed that every society has its own set down or laid down rules and patterns of doing things which are said and are unanimously agreed upon by all the members of the state or that society. Knowledge therefore, is relative to societal agreement or social practice.

However, Nigeria is a cosmopolitan country, a country with people from different background and culture, different world views and ideologies. Each of the groups or background has commonly
accepted creed or norms that guide their actions or behaviours. Meanwhile, Nigeria since its inception as a country in 1960 has suffered societal unrest and political rancor because of its cosmopolitan nature. Hence, each microscopic group in the country tries to parade their commonly accepted norms as the one to be followed and adopted by the rest. This has had adverse effects on the peace of the country for so many years.

Therefore, our aim in this research is to apply Rorty’s epistemic position to the situation of Nigeria and see if adopted, will be for the good interest of the country or vice versa.

Rorty’s Intersubjective Agreement: An Exposition

Rorty reasoned that in matters of knowledge, only intersubjective agreement is important. He maintained that if for instance there is a consensus on ‘X’ being good, then it is good. Moreover, knowledge is according to Rorty (1991:24) ‘is a compliment paid to the beliefs which we think so well justified that for the moment further justification is not needed’. Knowledge in his opinion is no longer justified true belief, but, justified commonly accepted belief. He reasoned that each human community has its own vocabulary, its own set of statements which are said and accepted. There is no overarching vocabulary in which all others can be discussed; there is no privileged vocabulary which is in some way absolute, and no universal truth.

Rorty maintains that it is not correspondence which leads to statement being labeled true, but the practice of a linguistic community. Truth is based on a community’s solidarity not on some independent facts of the case. So for Rorty, statements are indeed true, but not in any universal, privileged way, only in the way any communally accepted discourse is true. Being consistent of his conviction, Rorty (1994:52) asserts: ‘the search for objective truth is not the search to correspondence to reality; instead it is a search for the widest possible inter-subjective agreement’.

Rorty maintained that the standard for justification of knowledge is by reference to the consensus of the community’s beliefs. The community therefore is the source of epistemic authority. He further maintained that at some point, individuals have to decide whether something is good or if something is justified to believe in a
consensus therefore requires that people have an opinion of their own, for you cannot build a consensus from no opinions. Furthermore, Rorty maintained that individuals decide their opinion by reference to the practice of the community.

For Rorty, knowledge is relative to societal agreement. An assertion he maintained is true and justified if and only if it is warranted by the epistemic norms of the relevant society. Knowledge therefore is a matter of social practice. He therefore conclude that justification is then based on this unending regress of intersubjective agreements, made up of individual decisions, and individual decisions, made by reference to intersubjective agreements. Justification for him therefore does not seem to get very far—it is based on immediate reference logically held to be either true or false.

Rorty’s Pragmatism

Rorty’s view is that human inquiry, as it ceases to be an attempt to correspond with an intrinsic nature of reality, becomes an exercise in human problem solving. Hence Rorty (1999:22-23) writes:

Pragmatists hope to break with the picture which, in Wittengenstein’s words, ‘holds us captives’—the Cartesian-Lockean picture of a mind seeking to get in touch with a reality outside itself. So they start with Darwinian accounts of human beings as animals doing their best to cope with the environment—doing their best to develop tools which will enable them to enjoy more pleasure and less pain. Words are among the tools which these clever animals have developed.

Rorty’s opinion is that no organism human or non-human is ever more or less in touch with reality. For him, it is a Cartesian error to think of the mind as somehow swinging free of the causal forces exerted on the body.

He reasoned that we should give up seeing inquiry as a means of representing reality, and rather see it as a means of using reality. The relationship between truth claims and the world becomes causal rather than representational and the issue becomes whether our beliefs provides reliable guide to getting what we want. He however
sees philosophy as a tool to keep conversation going. Hence Rorty (1979:378) opines:

To keep the conversation going is a sufficient aim of philosophy. To wisdom as consisting in the ability to sustain a conversation, is seeing human beings as generators of new descriptions rather than beings one hope to be able to describe accurately.

Rorty’s Attitude Towards Truth
Reacting to truth, Rorty (1999:25) asserts:

We cannot regard truth as a goal of inquiry. The purpose of inquiry is to achieve agreement among human beings about what to do, to bring consensus on the end to be achieved and the means to be used to achieve those ends. Inquiry that does not achieve coordination of behavior is not inquiry but simply a world play.

Truth however as Rorty views it is not a matter of reality, but of the community. It does not require knowing anything about reality, only of other people thinks. What matters in Rorty’s opinion is what other people think. Instead of truth as correspondence, Rorty argues for truth as justification, warranted assertability. Thus, Rorty (1979:389-380) articulates:

If we seek knowing not as having essence, to be described by scientists and philosophers, but rather as a right, by current standards, to believe, then we are well on the way to see conversation as the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood. Our focus shifts from the relation between human beings and the objects of inquiry to the relation between alternative standards justification.

Objectivism is being used by the social metaphysician to describe this view of orienting oneself to the thoughts and ideas of
others rather than to reality. For Rorty, determining if something is
good is more important than determining if it is true. Truth be
maintained does not depend on reality, but is seen as good or useful for
us to believe. Truth for its own sake in Rorty’s view is meaningless. It is
just a way of saying this thing is useful for our ends.

Truth, Rorty further stated is completely human-dependent.
Truth is not ‘out there’ it depends on there being sentences and
propositions which do not exist independently of human
consciousness. It is a function of language. Rorty reasoned that we do
not discover truth rather we create them. They are not ‘out there’
rather they are ‘in here’. Explaining this further, Rorty (1989:5) writes:

Truth cannot be out there—cannot exist
independently of the human mind—because
sentences cannot so exist—or be out there, the
world is out there, but the description of the
world are not only description of the world can
be true or false. The world on its own-unaided
by the describing activities of human beings—
cannot.

The mere existence of the sun in Rorty’s understanding is not a
question of true or false, it is just is. Describing the sun as a star with
such and such characteristics is something that can be true or false. It
either has those characteristics and the description is true or it does
not and the description is false.

**Implications of Rorty’s Position to Nigerla Polity**

The epistemic position of Richard Rorty when situated in
Nigeria polity has several implications and practical relevance.

Nigeria is a cosmopolitan country that has since its inception as
a country been plunged into a series of political, economical and moral
turmoil. One however can see these incessant political rancor social
unrest political thuggery and violent demonstrations in Nigeria as a
result of the cosmopolitan nature of the country. A country with over
four hundred ethnic groups with different dialects, different cultural
heritage, different moral orientations, different belief systems and
different world views and each of these microscopic groups in the
country tries to dominate the other and parade their commonly
accepted creed as the best to be adopted by all. This however has had
adverse effects to the peace and unity of this nation as a country and as a political entity.

However, these societal abnormalities in Nigeria have been attributed as the failure of Nigeria government and the decisive makers in the country to adequately understand the cosmopolitan nature of the country and how best to govern and rule the people with such diverse backgrounds. Hence, this will bring the importance of Rorty’s epistemic position to Nigerian situation into focus. Therefore, this write up aims at exposing the political or managerial, economic and perhaps moral implications of Rorty’s position to Nigerian polity.

**Political Cum Managerial Implications**

Rorty reasoned that the standard for justification of knowledge is by reference to the consensus of the community’s beliefs. The community therefore is the source of epistemic authority. However for Rorty, this communal agreement is based on its workability in a given society.

However, the amalgamation of Nigerian people is the amalgamation of people that are historically different in their background, in their religious beliefs and customs. Therefore, those who manage the political affairs of this country should take cognizance of the cosmopolitan nature and different objective world views of different microscopic groups in the country. Hence, in the management of the political affairs of this country, the interest of each group should be promoted. None of the groups should favoured to the detriment of the other group and all should be given equal attention. No group’s ideology or world view should be seen as model or yardstick for others. This is because each group’s ideologies and cultural values are made based on the intersubjective agreements that are anchored on their workability in their community. Hence each groups’ ideology is unique and special.

Furthermore, the constitution of the country should reflect different belief systems and should incorporate different objectives and cultural orientation of different tribes that make up the country for peaceful and harmonious co-existence.

Nepotism, tribalism and sectionalism should be avoided at all cost by the decision makers of this noble country. For any tribalistic administration will lead to nothing but chaotic and collapsed society.
It is however rewarding to note that a country with over four hundred tribes like Nigeria that fails to adequately represent the common interest of all the tribes that make up the country is bound to fail and collapse, for there will be no basis for unity. One therefore can see the reasons behind the Boko Haram insurgent from the North, movement for the emancipation of sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB) from the East, and militancy from the Niger Delta region as failure of the governance of this country Nigeria to adequately represent their common interests and objectives.

**Economic Implications**

The epistemic positions of Richard Rorty not only have social-political implications to Nigeria polity. It has also economic implications. Rorty’s insistence that the community is the source of epistemic authority has some economic implications to Nigeria polity.

Our country Nigeria without doubt is endowed with enormous human and natural resources, blessed with vast land and beautiful landscape; mild climate and rich cultural heritage. A country that has all it takes to be one of the best countries in the world. But ironically, upon all these blessings the citizenry are still suffering of poverty and unemployment.

However, one might see as one of the reasons for economic backwardness in Nigeria to be the failure to base education on the economic values of the environment. Importantly, by saying economic values of the environment, one should not understand it to mean abandoning good foreign values, but rather, the importance of educating our people to discover, transform and advance our own economic values. There are certain economic values that work for us that need to be discovered, harnessed and developed. By so doing, we grow industrially and otherwise.

Our country is indeed blessed with high natural resources that need to be discovered, harnessed and developed for the economic growth of the country. But unfortunately our people are yet to be educated on how to make out something good and valuable from these resources.

It is to note with dismay that most Nigerian students are only interested and are educated on foreign values alone that have no cultural and economic basis in our country. It is instructive to note that if education fails to accrue from the economic values of any given
community then, there will be economic and industrial deterioration which will lead to mass poverty and high rate of unemployment. This however might be one of the major reasons why our country has failed to grow both in science and technology that has led us to total dependence on foreign goods and services that has further left us into the state of alienation.

Therefore, if Nigeria as a nation wants to grow economically, education should be based on our God given economic values that are workable in our society. For failure to do this will mean doom for our economic strength.

**Moral Implications**

Having exposed the social-political and economic implications of Rorty’s epistemic position to Nigerian polity it is pertinent however to look at its moral justifications when applied to Nigeria setting.

It is rewarding to note that adoption of Rorty’s intersubjective agreement will encourage moral relativism. Hence, each person’s human act will be judged based on the moral norms that guide his community. And by so doing, there will be no basis for objective morality and the philosophy of “anything goes” will be the order of the day. Furthermore, adopting the position of Rorty means supporting the myopic philosophy of Boko Haram sect. This is because they hold the view that western civilization is a borrowed culture that is against their religious and moral beliefs. Hence, should not be used as yardstick in Nigerian administration.

In applying Rorty here, we can justify their position. But the objective fact remains that the foundation for such philosophy is faulty and unscreened. The act of killing innocent people and damaging of properties in the name of fighting for common goal is unethical and morally wrong. Life therefore is larger than intersubjective agreement. Killing of people can never be used as a means to an end. Though agreed that there are different moral and religious backgrounds, but it should not on anyway be against the objective morality. For no society supports or encourages killing. Therefore, as we encourage and support different ideologies and moral backgrounds it is highly advisable that these moral backgrounds are subjected to objective scrutiny for peaceful and harmonious co-existence in a country like Nigeria.
Evaluation and Conclusion

Realistically, Rorty’s epistemic position encourages humanistic epistemology that is based on communal perception, relativism and subjectivism. His views when applied to Nigerian society will enhance the economic standard of the country by exposing people to appropriate their economic values. Importantly also, his position will enhance the management of the political affairs of this country by encouraging equal attention to all the tribes that make up the country. This will lead to harmonious and peaceful co-existence in the country.

However, we will not fail to assert that Rorty’s position is not without any adverse effects to Nigerian polity. His epistemic position when applied to Nigerian situation will lead to moral relativism that will enthrone the philosophy of “anything goes”.

Therefore, though his epistemic position is highly commendable, its loopholes should be detected and avoided for peace and unity in our country Nigeria.
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Therefore, though his epistemic position is highly commendable, its loopholes should be detected and avoided for peace and unity in our country Nigeria.
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