

**RORTY'S INTERSUBJECTIVE AGREEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN
POLITY**

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Introduction

The question of certainty of knowledge has been problematic from time immemorial. The criterion for knowledge has been the pace set before philosophers of different epochs. 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 backgrounds and cultures, different world views and ideologies. Each of the groups or backgrounds 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 intersubjective 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 Wittgenstein'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 account 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) assert:

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, Rort (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 he 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 Nigeria 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 and 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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