

A FURTHER NOTE ON THE ELEMENTARY RESPONSIBILITIES
OF POLITICAL AND ALL OTHER SCIENTISTS IN NIGERIA.

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The significance of the issues raised in my paper, The Elementary Responsibilities of Political and All Other Scientists In Nigeria, is clearly illustrated by a reaction to that paper by Sam Oyovbaire.¹ This reaction, in the form of a rejoinder, illustrates quite well the necessity of facing up to and fulfilling some elementary responsibilities of scientific inquiry and discourse, before a useful and clear-headed examination of the responsibilities of political science, or any other science, can be embarked upon. Without fulfilling these elementary responsibilities, and especially without even an understanding of what they are, a great deal of confusion, and even inanity, will ensue. This is so clear from the paper, The Responsibility of Political Science by Sam Oyovbaire and in the rejoinder mentioned above. This further note is intended to use some of the remarkable opportunities offered by this rejoinder to illustrate the importance of these elementary responsibilities for all scientific inquiry and discourse.

I. THE COMMON BASIS OF SCIENCE

In this rejoinder the writer has touched upon the even more elementary issue of the very nature of science by referring to the difference between the natural and social sciences in a way which reveals a serious lack of clarity regarding the common characteristics of all science. On page 5 of the rejoinder he asks :

"...in what serious sense is historical or political studies scientifically like medicine, pharmaceuticals and engineering to take only a few examples? The degree to which the studies of human knowledge - "political and all others sciences" - demonstrate Yusufu Bala Usman's five "most elementary responsibilities" diverge not only from each other but also within one area, sub-area and sub-sub-area of knowledge."

Whatever the writer may think he is communicating here, by the rather mysterious phrase "the studies of human knowledge," he obviously does not clearly understand that all science has common and basic characteristics and that is why it is called science. The term, actually, is not just a piece of jargon. These common and basic characteristics apply to all science, irrespective of the field of inquiry or of the sub-area, sub-sub-area or even sub-sub-sub-area of a field. The existence of differences in concepts and methods, because of the different nature of the fields of inquiry, of the subject and even context of inquiry, do not, in any way, deny these common and basic characteristics. Indeed, these differences make it even more important to be clear and firm on these common elements, so that the variations, due to the nature of the subject of study, are brought out clearly as variations, and are not made to constitute frontiers, behind which careerism poses as specialisation or professionalism.

Some of these variations between the natural and social sciences are significant as I have tried to point out elsewhere.² But these significant variations do not, excuse those engaged in the natural sciences from, for example, consistency, in the definition of categories and in the application of standards of classification; or those engaged in the social sciences

from, for example, making clear the basis of their assumptions and the scope and limitations of the empirical evidence. This writer cannot therefore excuse himself from fulfilling these elementary responsibilities of all scientific inquiry by the simplistic device of putting the words science and scientific in-between quotation marks. He cannot evade fulfilling these elementary responsibilities by a fake question about whether the study of history, politics, medicine, pharmaceuticals and engineering are scientifically alike, no matter how many quotation marks he uses, or how many opaque expressions, like the studies of human knowledge", he shores up the sentences with.

II. THE MOST ELEMENTARY RESPONSIBILITIES OF ALL SCIENCES

But this type of evasion comes out even more clearly over whether the writer accepts that political scientists, like all scientists, have a responsibility to fulfill the five requirements which I propose as common to all scientific inquiry and discourse, on page 2 of my earlier note. For, the argument in that note, is that the writer's contentions about the responsibilities of political science are both baseless and meaningless, because he does not fulfill these responsibilities. A rejoinder to it has to deal with that directly; by accepting, denying or in some way exposing the lack of relevance or meaning of these central propositions.

In the rejoinder, however, the validity of what I propose as the elementary responsibilities of all scientists, their applicability to political science in general, and to this discussion of its responsibilities, in particular, are treated in an incoherent and shifty manner -

The writer states:

"The five "most elementary responsibilities of all sciences" which I was accused of having not discharged (YBU's Comments p.4) are quite a curious charge if it is intended to mean: (a) that any piece of writing (books, journals, articles and public lectures) must proceed from (i) to (v) in the order set out in YBU's comments because Yusufu Bala Usman knows, I think, that no scholar proceeds in that manner always. It is the writing at hand that lends itself to the manner of procedure."

The writer's position here would appear to be that, while he does not challenge the validity of these elementary responsibilities, and implicitly accepts them, he does not think that they have to be fulfilled in every piece of writing in the order I set them out. This would depend on the type of writing one is engaged in. But a few lines below, on the same page, he states:

"that in any piece of writing these so-called "most elementary responsibilities" must be demonstrated is simply untrue if not bogus. The exercise of conceptual definitions and clarity, for example, is largely a matter of the writers intended audience."

Further down on the same page he states:

"The degree to which the studies of human knowledge - "of political and all other sciences" - demonstrate Yusufu Bala Usman's "five most elementary responsibilities" diverge not only from each other but also within one area, sub-area and sub-sub-area of knowledge."

From these two passages of the rejoinder, it would appear that the writer has shifted, on the same page, from accepting the validity of these elementary responsibilities to rejecting their validity. For, the reference to them as "so-called" and as my fabrication, amount to rejecting their validity. But then, even after describing them as "so-called" he proceeds to argue as if

he accepts their validity, by stating that the need to fulfill the one relating to conceptual clarity and precision, for example, depends on the audience. Similarly, a few lines later, as quoted above, he goes back on his rejection of their validity, to argue again that their applicability is conditional and varies with the area or sub-area of study.

The point, however, is that these five elementary responsibilities of all scientists I propose, are either valid or they are invalid. They cannot be "so-called" and fabricated by one person, and therefore invalid, and still be applicable, depending on the manner of writing, the audience or the sub-area of study. If the writer cannot comprehend them and therefore cannot assess their validity he should admit it, and not try to cover up this incomprehension in such a transparently shifty way.

III. THE BASIS OF THE FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS

This incoherence in the writer's treatment of important issues would appear to amount actually to a strange failure to even be able understand some of what he himself has written in the paper, The Responsibility of Political Science. This comes out most clearly over the issues of the need to justify why political science has normative responsibilities, and why its primary object of study is the state.

(a) Political Science and Political Systems

A basic assumption of the writer in his paper is that political science can have responsibility, regarding the nature of political systems beyond analysing how these systems come into being, operate and change. The contention in my note is that this assumption about the nature and capability

of political science is widely contested and that, at least, is a reason why its basis has to be established. The question, why should political science have normative responsibilities, as has to be answered, in relation to the theory and method of the discipline and how these relate to social existence in general, and political practice in particular. But merely asserting that political

science has normative responsibilities is not a valid basis for a scientific

discourse. The writer's explanation, seems to indicate that he does not understand what is really a straightforward issue. He writes on p.6 of the

rejoinder:

"I was charged with having assumed that political science can have responsibilities regarding the nature of political systems beyond analysing how these systems come into being, operate and change" (YBU Comments, p.2) if by "beyond" YBU Comments meant how political system ought to operate as distinct from how a particular system operates here and now, then the imputed assumption "in my paper is correct, otherwise there is no such assumption. The elaboration of this imputed assumption (YBU Comments pp.3-4) does not show the content or evidence of YBU's imputation. The debate about how political systems ought to operate can issue not taken up in YBU comments) is a timeless one, and my paper read closely, reveals a Popperian bent.

"YBU Comments pointed out what was referred to as different "assertions" of the responsibility of political science by American scholars and Dudley's CDC and Ibadan University, clubs (p.3) but each of these "assertions" are intended to relate to particular social existence and political practices of a people. In my paper the basic features of the Nigerian social existence and basis of political practice for which appropriate responsibility was advocated (against the background of rejected responsibilities or political functions of political science) were set out on pages 13-15 of the paper. In discussing the preferred paradigm for the discharge of this responsibility the paper also identified (pp.15-19) the fundamental basis of these basic features and political practice. One could legitimately criticise my choice of basic features and their basis but this is not what YBU Comments have done."

The problem here is that the writer recognises that his paper assumes that the responsibility of political science extends into how political systems ought to operate, but he does not recognise that he should make clear the basis of this assumption in general, before discussing the particular instance of Nigeria. And what is more, when he comes to examine what responsibility political science should have in Nigeria it is not possible to arrive at this merely by describing the basic features of the Nigerian political environment. The section of his paper titled "The Environment of Political Science in Nigeria" is a generalised description of the Nigerian political environment and how it came into being. Even if its incoherence and jargon are overlooked, and meaningless sentences on p.13, like

"The first important point of interest is that prior to colonial domination the present social system was simply a geographic mass."

and

"It was this simultaneous existence of fundamental similarities and differences that the British for purely imperialistic motives created and dominated as a colonial state."

are ignored, this description does not provide the basis for the assumption that political science has normative responsibilities. This section of the paper merely describes the political environment in Nigeria and what therefore conditions political science. It is not the foundation upon which the paper is built, as the writer says on p.4 of the rejoinder.

This is where it is quite clear that he does not understand what he himself has written. For otherwise how can a section of a paper which merely attempts to define the environment which should condition the responsibility of political science, be said to be the foundation of a paper on the responsibility of political science. Surely it would be the sections of the paper which deal with the nature of science in general and political science in particular and with the meaning and basis of responsibility in the social sciences, which would form its foundation. But these sections are non-existent in this paper.

The paper actually lacks a foundation in an examination of fundamental assumptions and concepts as has been pointed out. This ^{examination} could have been done elsewhere and just referred to here. But when there is nothing like a foundation and no reference to where it may exist, to call a ^{secondary} section of a paper which merely conditions the argument ^{its foundation,} is to reveal a striking failure to grasp what the writer himself has written. Thus the reason why there was no point in bringing in this section of the paper in my earlier note, is that the whole argument collapses before the point where this section, on the environment of political science in Nigeria, becomes relevant. Scientific discourse does not require that a paper is discussed page by page, but in terms of the structure of the arguments and evidence.

(b) The State as Object

Again, over the issue of why the primary object of political science should be the state, the writer reveals a glaring inability to understand why his assumptions are not valid in themselves and even their significance. He assumes, as given and conclusive, that the primary object of political science in Nigeria and everywhere else in the world is the state. The question is, why should it be the state? The pompous incomprehension with which he reacts to this question is pathetic. He writes on page 8 of the rejoinder that:

"The unschooled query about "why a reader" should "accept that the object of political science is the state and not say interest groups or classes or families (YBU Comments, p.5) is glaringly demonstrative of the highly limited "discipline in political science" of Yusufu Bala Usman - for I do not see how the study of "interest groups," "classes" or "families" alone, important as they are can constitute the primary object of political science."

This incomprehension extends to the fact that he cannot even understand that the assertion that the primary object of political science is the state is an assumption that required to be supported by empirical evidence, or to be shown to be deduced from some general principles. It is as a result of this gross incomprehension that he complains of being quoted incorrectly on page 7 of the rejoinder. The words that he says are left out, and the whole of the much-touted-Section III of his paper, do not at all provide the basis for the assumption he makes, that the primary object of political science is the state and not anything else.

What was demanded in my note is the empirical evidence from which he inferred that the primary object of political science in Nigeria

and elsewhere is the state. In the absence of this evidence, he could show how he deduced from some general principles that the state is the primary object of political science. But without doing either of these, why should anybody accept this assertion regarding the object of political science. Of course, the writer suffers from the confusion about what the state actually is, and seems to hold the view that it can be several different things at once.

But this should not prevent him from realising that whatever the state may be, interest groups, families, classes, political parties, citizens, voters, constitutions, etc., are not the same as the state, and being objects of political science, can validly be argued to be its primary object, depending on the conceptual framework.

IV. CONSISTENCY: THE DEFINITION OF THE STATE

If the primary object of political science in Nigeria, and elsewhere, is the state, then in a paper on the responsibility of political science in Nigeria, the nature of the state in Nigeria and elsewhere should be quite clear and consistently used. But, not only is there no clarity over what the state actually is, in this paper, but the writer believes that "the state" can mean several different things. He writes on p.9 of the rejoinder.

"...obviously the concept of state is here intended to mean "the system of laws or regime" and sets of rulers or authority patterns"..."

But clearly "the state," in Nigeria or anywhere in the world, cannot mean all of the following:

- (i) the system of laws
- (ii) regime
- (iii) sets of rulers
- (iv) authority patterns.

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- (ii) regime
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- (iv) authority patterns.

"The state" cannot even mean any two of them, as they are quite distinct, even if connected -- political phenomenon.

But this staggering confusion on the very principle of defining the nature of a phenomenon, is brought out more clearly on page 10 of the rejoinder.

The writer states:

"The observation by Yusufu Bala Usman that the above quotation confirms that I conceive the state as the organised power regulating society is not a contention about distinction because I recognise this as one manifestation of the phenomenon called state: the proper point of argumentation is whether there are other manifestations..."

After stating this the writer goes on, later on page 11, to assert that he uses the state in only one sense, although he himself points out, on page 10, the places in which he also refers to the state as a political community.

Now, the state is either the organised power regulating society or it is a political community. These two conceptions of the state are distinct.

Like the four alternative meanings of the state, the writer sets out above, these two also define distinct political phenomenon, even though they are connected.

What really seem to cause this confusion is that the writer does not understand that while it is possible to give different definitions to a term each of these definition is only valid within a certain conceptual framework. The state cannot, within one and the same conceptual framework, mean a political community and organised power. It has to mean one or the other. conceptions of the state do exist, but they do not define different manifestations of the same political phenomenon, they represent differing

conceptions of what it is in different conceptual frameworks in social science. The writer therefore cannot just use all the various conceptions of the state eclectically. He has to remain consistent to it in a particular inquiry or discourse. Such a consistency in the conception of the state would, of course, prevent the writer from been able to stand between Max, Weber and Gavin Williams on the one hand, and Talcott Parsons and James O'Connell on the other. But the consistency would bring about a coherence presently lacking because of the attempt to utilise ^{two} separate sets of jargon.

V. THE DEFINITION OF CENTRAL CONCEPTS

Paradigm is clearly a concept central to the paper by this writer. But the definition he apparently uses is derived simply and parrot-like from a book by Thomas Kuhn. This copyist way of arriving at the definition of a concept central to an inquiry, is at the root of the emptiness at the core of the arguments of this writer, as I contend on page 15 of my earlier note. For unless the writer has a clear and firm grasp of the meaning, boundaries and contours of the central concepts he uses, then he cannot classify and categorise on any other basis than convenience.

The issue is actually that the writer proposes the existence of two paradigms and he should therefore show what the studies of the various writers he groups together, have in common. In other words, in what way do they belong to one paradigm. This cannot be done scientifically without a clear definition of what is a paradigm. The definition he say he uses presumably, because

it is in Thomas Kuhn's book, is really worse than useless.³ It is, from p.14 of the rejoinder, that paradigm is:

"the achievement (which) for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of academic practitioners."

This definition can not only be applied to any formulae or to a form of experiment, but leaves out the elements, of theory and concepts, central to a paradigm. The definition is faulty not only because it leaves out, in its scope, important elements of the abstract concept, it seeks to delineate, but also because it contains element extraneous to this concept. The mention of "achievement" and "a community of academic practitioners" in this definition is incorrect for a paradigm does not have to be an achievement or to be used by a community of academic practitioners. A theory can constitute a paradigm even if it does not get recognition as an "achievement" and is not used by a "community of academic practitioners", as long as it provides a body of premises which define the fundamental boundaries of a mode of inquiry. Einstein's discovery on relativity constituted a new paradigm before it was recognised as an achievement and had a community of academic practitioners using it. The two notions of paradigm I propose on p.13-14 of my earlier note have, by no means, any definitional finality about them, even if far more meaningful than what the writer copies from Kuhn. The argument I was making was that in the context of the writers paper, if a paradigm is seen as meaning the premises defining the essential features of a given object whether abstract or concrete, then it is possible to show how the writers mentioned in the papers may be categorised into two or several paradigms. But if the

epistemological principles from which these premises are derived are also part of a seem as constituting/paradigm, then it would appear ridiculous to even attempt a categorisation, for there would be no basis for a distinction, they would all belong to one paradigm.

VI. EMPIRICAL BASIS

The degree to which this writer shifts his position on this issue illustrates clearly why bringing out clearly the nature and scope of empirical evidence and its limitations is an elementary responsibility of all science. In the paper, parts of which are even quoted in the rejoinder, the writer makes it quite clear that the most important protagonists of the "neo-Marxists/structuralists" are not regular scholars of political science. But in reaction to the empirical evidence from Eshor Toyo, which does not support his convenient classification, he says that it is the writings of regular political science scholars which he is mainly concerned with and not non-regular political science scholars like Eshor Toyo and Segun Osoba. But on pages 7 and 8 of his paper it is quite clear that far from the non-regular scholars of political science being a footnote, he presents on them as the major protagonists of the "neo-Marxists/structuralist" paradigm. He writes on page 7 and 8

"one interesting thing about this paradigm in this country is that its protagonists are largely non-regular scholars of political science. Trained initially as historians, sociologists and economists, only a couple of scholars initially trained in political science, but who also found their conventional boundaries less helpful has actually written within this paradigm and interestingly they are non-Nigerians (Turner, 1976, 1979)" (my emphases).

But even the beginning of the "neo-Marxist/structuralist paradigm" he

ascribes to Osoba, a non-regular scholar of political science. In fact, this is the significance he attaches to Osoba's writings on page 8 of his paper:

"Beginning as a critique of what is wrong in the operation of the Nigerian social system (Osoba 1970, 1973) it has acquired the paradigmatic status of what needs to be done."

But in the rejoinder the writer tries to shift away stating that

"In one or two places in my paper, I made footnote references to Dr. Segun Osoba but these were supplementary rather than the main evidence of the points advanced."

But if the only two writings he can cite as the beginning of the neo-Marxist/structuralist paradigm in Nigeria are those of Osoba in 1970 and 1973; and if he had already said, in black-and-white, that the major protagonists of this paradigm are non-regular scholars of political science, trained as historians etc., etc., how can he attempt to turn around and say that they are supplementary to his argument without facing more charges of academic fraud?

The fraudulence of the writer here is not only limited to the brazen contradiction between his contentions in the paper, written in black-and-white, and his attempt to cover-up and deny them in the rejoinder. It extends to the attempt to push over the argument that, showing that, Eskor Toyo's writings, for example, do not fit into his definition of the "neo-Marxist/structuralist", paradigm in terms of the important concepts he uses, is only "minor evidence." For far from being "minor evidence" the definition of the state proposed by Eskor Toyo contrasted with what the writer says about neo-Marxist/structuralist treatment of it raises the question of

whether the writer has ever read any marxist or even neo-marxist discussion of the nature of the state or the nation, or other form of political community.

In any case the sweeping claim by the writer on page 4 of his paper, regarding the literature from which he draws the empirical evidence for definition of two existing paradigm that:

"This is a selective commentary on the existing literature. Not all published works are included but even those which are left out of the selection do not constitute or consist of any new framework."

makes it imperative that he should have read all the extant literature.

He cannot make such a sweeping claim and then when questioned look for excuses for not having read or even ever known about the writings of Eskor Toyo or most of the people he cites as the main protagonists of one of the paradigm.

Such a claim should not be made if the writer had fulfilled one of the elementary responsibilities of all scientists, of stating the scope, and especially, the limitations of their sources. Having failed to do so, the writer is left, when the actual limitations of his empirical data are brought out, to resort to fraudulent denials.

VII. THE QUESTION OF ARISTOTLE AND CONFUCIUS

One of the foundations of the copyist mentality in Nigerian intellectual life is the esteem given to quoting writers, especially those which are regarded as authoritative, even if, the basis of this authority is not known. This writer quotes Aristotle, and indeed section II of his paper on page 2 opens with a statement about the significance of Aristotle in political science. The statement that:

"perhaps the best definition of politics and tradition of studying it is the oldest one, the Aristotelian.."

is inaccurate and merely reflects the writers mental subservience.

What makes Aristotle's the best definition of politics? It is certainly not the oldest tradition of studying politics. The mention of Confucius on page 12 of my earlier note is to point out that the Confucian is in fact an older tradition of studying politics by over one century, then the Aristotelian, if there is actually any body of of tradition one can call that, outside the fantasies of British classicists. But even if Aristotle's is the oldest definition of politics extant, and there is a tradition of political science one can call Aristotelian, why just repeat what he says and call that establishing a definition. In any case the factual error of calling Aristotle's the oldest definition of politics and an Aristotelian tradition, the oldest tradition of studying politics, cannot be covered up by the writers attempt to evade facing up to this error on pages 12 and 22 of his rejoinder. One of the elementary responsibilities of all scientists is to bring out openly the limits of their empirical evidence and not attempt when to cover up these limitations are pointed out to them.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The rejoinder is quite useful. It lays bare an important level of the set of notions and assumptions on which the writer drifted towards and arrived at the assertions in the paper, The Responsibility of Political Science. The absence of scientific method in this process and indeed of any form of systematic thinking is well illustrated in the rejoinder.

The paper and the rejoinder together provide a striking example of what results, in even the social sciences, when the most elementary responsibilities of science are not fulfilled. Taken together, they should make us begin to cease posing with jargon, formulae and quotations, and begin to tackle seriously the fundamental concepts and method of scientific inquiry.

REFERENCES

1. This reaction in the form of a rejoinder is titled The Responsibility of Political Science in Nigeria - A Rejoinder to Yusufu Bala Usman's Comments Entitled "The Elementary Responsibilities of Political and All Other Sciences" by S. Eglite Oyovbaire. Department of Political Science, A.B.U., Zaria, June 1979.
2. "But there is a basic problem in the study of history and society which becomes obvious when one goes into this realm of consciousness and perception. Once you go into this realm of how people think, there is a very basic problem which comes up. This is the problem of the relationship between the person making the study and the subject of study. That is the problem of distance, detachment and objectivity. This is a fundamental problem in the physical and natural and human sciences. It is the problem which makes the study of history and society far more profound and complex than the study of physical and natural phenomena. The person with a perception of history, who is studying history, has been produced and moulded by history. The very concepts he uses are historically determined and produced. And he is involved in looking at what has produced and is moulding him. It is a much more complex and fundamental thing than the study of rocks and plants, for example."

"Even if somebody were to leave the earth and go to mars, or to the outer planets or to another constellation, he will still be the product of a specific epoch of human history. You cannot get away from that. The only solution is to cease to exist and then there is no study, no perception. There is no distance between the student of history and society, and the subject of his study, in the same way, as there is between the geologist and his rocks, or the biologist or medical scientist with bacteria or the veterinarian and his donkeys and cows. The chemist who is studying a chemical reaction has a distance from it which the molecules in the reaction do not have, and can never have. The student of history is like a molecule studying a permanent reaction which produces it."

"You can therefore see that in the study of the natural and physical sciences you are dealing with simple phenomena and you are dealing with a relationship which is a simple one, compared with the study of society and history. And therefore, the variables involved can more easily be determined with some precision and therefore they can more easily be quantified. Unfortunately, some of our colleagues in the study of society and history, impressed with the precision and quantification of the physical and natural sciences run around and chase after what they regard as the prestige of these other sciences. And as a result of that give the impression that all you need is to develop better techniques and better computers, then you can reduce the study of history to the same level as the study of atoms. But in fact, they will find that no matter how fine the techniques, they introduce, the phenomenological fact that you are studying yourself cannot be removed. You cannot relate yourself as you relate to a donkey or a rock. You cant." in History, Tradition, and Reaction: The Perception of Nigerian History in the 19th and 20th centuries. A.B.U. Public Lecture, 27 April 1977. p.3-6.

3. I have no immediate access to Thomas Kuhn's book to confirm that he is actually understood by the writer.