

## KARL POPPER'S CRITICAL RATIONALISM AND THE QUEST FOR TRUE DEMOCRACY

BY

Oyekunle Oluwayemisi Adegboyega, Ph.d  
Faculty Of Arts  
National Open University Of Nigeria  
Abuja  
Oadegboyega@noun.edu.ng / Oyekunle2006@yahoo.com

&

Precious Uwaezuoke Obioha, Ph.d  
Faculty Of Arts  
Department Of Philosophy  
Akwa Ibom State University  
Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria  
Preciousobioha@aksu.edu.ng, Unclepees1@gmail.com

### Abstract

This paper evaluates the relevance of Karl Popper's critical rationalism to the realization of true democratic practice in political society. As a country, Nigeria presumably operates a political process that is democratic in nature. However, since inception, the practice of democracy in the country has persistently indicated different emerging traits and culture of authoritarianism, which is not only antithetical to the values of democracy, but also indicates the lack of adequate understanding of the true meaning and essence of democracy as a political ideology. This, therefore, underpins the lack of developmental processes inherent in true democracy in the country. Popper's critical philosophy or critical rationalism opens everything to revision for better truth which would lead to better understanding of concepts and issues in all ramifications. Thus, the adoption of this process in Nigeria's political space will provide for critical analysis of democracy as a political ideology in particular and various political policies in general. This will enhance the country's democratic practice, growth and development. The work employs the analytical and critical methods of philosophical enquiry. Keywords: Karl Popper, critical rationalism, democracy, Nigeria.

### Introduction

From the birth of civil society till now, different ideologies on how best to organize and administer human society have been conceived, proposed and promoted. Rationality and experience are at the base of these formulations and have equally guided their reformulations and further formulations – a somewhat dialectical process. Thus, human progress and development has been a journey of rationality and experience. Democracy is one of such attempts at formulating an ideology for the organization and administration of human society. Democracy itself has been touted by many to have an advantage over other forms of government towards the achievement of social order (Adegboyega, 2010: 5). Be that as it may, a democracy that rejects the guiding principle of progressive rationality

becomes an authoritarian democracy and as it were constitutes itself as absolute canon for social organization. Such democracy abhors criticism. Such a system does not acknowledge the intrinsically fallible character of our knowledge according to Karl Popper. Through his critical rationalism, Popper shows that scientific knowledge can be objective and rational without being certain, and without appealing to induction or grounding itself upon expert opinion, consensus, and authority of any kind (Gattei, 2009:1). Authority of reason is itself irrational because whereas reason may be objective it is not absolute. Reason is intrinsically fallible and questionable and therefore must be progressive to accommodate the fallible character of knowledge. Thus an understanding of the constitution of the human person is germane in a critical discourse of her development (Obioha, 2014: 249). What rationality requires is not an absolute foundation but critical dialogue. Knowledge grows by progressive rationality – rationality that is critical and engaging.

Inspired by his critical rationalism, Popper argues that all knowledge systems in general or democracy in particular requires constant criticism and revision so as to remain objectively true. Democracy that is devoid of criticism and revision will amount to authoritarianism. To make explicit the above submissions, Karl Popper's critical philosophy is discussed in the first section of the paper. The second section discusses the idea of democracy while the third section engages the reader in Popper's political idea. The fourth section makes an application of Popper's critical rationalism to democracy in

Nigeria. In the fifth and sixth sections of the paper, further reflections and challenges of Karl Popper's critical rationalism and the values of his critical philosophy are discussed respectively.

### **Karl Popper's Critical Rationalism**

Critical rationalism was Popper's rejection of classical empiricism, and the development of the classical observationalist account of science. The classical observationalist account of science is the scientific model explicated in 1620 by Francis Bacon, whose intention was to discredit and subvert traditional thinking. In his model, Bacon asserts that a scientist observes nature, tentatively poses a modest axiom to generalize an observed pattern, confirms it by many observations, ventures a modestly broader axiom, and confirms that, too, by many more observations, while discarding disconfirmed axioms (William, 1988). Bacon's position generated variants of scientific processes, most of which sound contrary to his position but were indirectly an adoption of his inductivism. Some of these variants are, David Hume's Hume fork and Problem of induction (Hume 1975), Immanuel Kant's kaleidoscope Pure reason (Funkenstein, 1986 and Luchte, 2007), J S Mill's adoption of August Comte's positivism and his (Mill's) justification of enumerative induction made possible by the uniformity in nature as observed through experience (Eisenberg, 2018; Lewisoh 1972). Also, is William Whitwell's recognition of "superinduction", an explanatory scope or principle invented by the mind to unite facts, but not present in the facts. The idea of superinduction attempt the proposition of hypothetico-deductive model as scientific method. Furthermore, the logical positivism although, not asserting inductionism per se, but condoning it and seeking to justify belief in the truth of scientific laws and theories, accepted hypothetico-deductionism, and also launched the principle of verificationism.

While hypothetico-deductionism is a process by which a general hypothesis is formulated in

science via the deduction of a particular statement from an observable experiment the principle of verificationism on the other hand is a principle that suggest the acceptance of a statement as true basically because there are grounds/warrants for asserting it (Mautner, 1999:262-263,590). Popper, in his attempt at asserting a variant of hypothetico-deductionism termed falsificationism, criticized inductionism as an utterly flawed model of science. He declared that Francis Bacons' enumerative induction is nothing but a myth.

Popper (1963) argues strongly against Bacon's view, holding that scientific theories are abstract in nature, and can be tested only indirectly, by reference to their implications.

To him, scientific theory, and human knowledge generally, cannot be reduced to mere opinion without evidence or an unreal situation, and is generated by the creative imagination in order to solve problems that have arisen in specific historio-cultural settings. Popper holds that logically, no number of positive outcomes at the level of experimental testing can confirm a scientific theory, but a single counterexample is logically decisive: it shows the theory, from which the implication is derived, to be false (Popper, 1963). The term "falsifiable" does not mean something is made false, but rather that, if it is false, it can be shown by observation or experiment. Popper's account of the logical asymmetry between verification and falsifiability occupies the pivot of his philosophy of science. It also inspired him to take falsifiability as his criterion of demarcation between what is and is not genuinely scientific. His contention then is, a theory should be considered scientific if and only if it is falsifiable. This led him to attack the claims of both psychoanalysis and contemporary Marxism to scientific status, on the basis that their theories are not falsifiable (Popper, 1963).

The point that can be inferred from Karl Popper's critical philosophy is that his conception is concerned with how to expand knowledge through unending process of criticism. The mode of criticism as noted by Popper is beyond verbal argument but includes process of observation and experimentation in the quest to test theories, challenge theories and refute theories. Perhaps it should be pointed out, that the idea of philosophy of criticism began with pre-Socratics. Socrates started the tradition of critical discussion as a process of expanding knowledge (Magee, 2003:229). Before the preSocratic age, the society's core body of knowledge and doctrine remain static and not dynamic. It is against this backdrop that the pre-Socratic philosophers developed a more rational process of acquiring knowledge devoid of any dogmatism, which also paved way for criticism.

Popper's critical rationalism centers on his principle of falsificationism, which has a great quality of idea embedded in it. His critical rationalism contains the powerful theoretical justification of the case for freedom. Falsificationism, which is the pivot of Popper's idea is directed at the acquisition of knowledge free of dogmatism and also allow for improvement on the knowledge acquired. This is evidently the intellectual counterpart of what is, the pragmatic sphere, in the strict sense of the term, the outlook of liberalism or democracy. His concern was how to espouse a method of free inquiry and freedom. Thus, his idea was said to be drawing the age of totalitarian ideologies in Europe to a close. According to Helmut Kohl, the Hamer German chancellor as cited in (Popper, 1992: 55), the belief in the historic mission of one race or class has proved to be the most devastating fallacy of this century and has swayed many innocent people who fell victim. Popper challenged this fallacy tirelessly. He is

amongst the most significant champions of the open society. The triumph of freedom and democracy in Europe demonstrates that Karl Popper was right. His message from the future is that we must remain alert critical rationality is the precondition for the coexistence of people and nations in dignity and peace.

The main interest of Karl Popper is in paradigmatic logic and method of investigation and discovery. The origin, growth and strength of the principle of critical rationalism underpin the realm of modern science where it derives its vitality. Knowledge for Karl Popper grows through constant criticism (critical test) and revision and it accounts for his core faith in fallibilism (Popper, 1992: 55). This brought to bear his democratic theory that he anchored on proper election and critical rationalism. Karl Popper did not conceive democracy as the ruling of the majority of people over all people but that democracy is a system which prevents damage from the bad rulers in politics through peaceful changes to prevent absolute governance (authoritarianism).

#### **The Idea of Democracy:**

Some scholars have argued that democracy has no definite definition as the practice of democracy depends on the culture of the particular society. This open-ended nature of democracy has made some societies more democratic than others.

Traditionally, however, democracy is derived from the ancient Greek words, *demos* and *cratos*, which mean people's power. However, this Grecian idea of people's power in the long run translates to the dictatorship of the disparate rabble and is no more feasible in large modern societies.

Abraham Lincoln's (1809- 1865) traditional expression of democracy gave democracy its popular meaning. Lincoln expressed democracy as 'government of the people, by the people and for the people. This expression "of the people" points to the power of citizens to choose those to rule and to ensure that they are governed in conformity with the general good of the society. In the same way, the expression "of the people" suggests that democracy is a system of government whose constitutional rules, principles and procedures are set up by the people themselves (Adegboyega 2015:2). This understanding of democracy stresses the notion of the people which places democracy as a system that gives institutional expression to the will of the people. It also recognizes the inalienable rights and power of the governed to remove any government that no longer serves the general good of the community. Lincoln's definition has over the years generated analysis thereby opened the concept, to different interpretation and practices. Due to the open-endedness of democracy, some scholars have argued that it constitutes a continuum as its practice varies from one society to another. Usurpers have been known to adopt the appellation of democracy to justify their usurpation. That is why the purest ideals of democracy are not realizable by any human society. When placed under critical analysis, discussions about democracy are observed to be indefinite and so can take any form.

In fact, while the African democracy is seen as consensus democracy, the Western and Eastern democracy is seen as majoritarian democracies. But then, it is important that for

any meaning of the concept to be acceptable, it must adequately acknowledge the participation of the people who have the power of administration or authority to rule in their possession.

Thus, we can define democracy as a system of government in which citizens in the society participate in the process of government either directly as an elected representative or indirectly through an elected representative. Participation of the people in governance is a fundamental feature and of course the nexus of the conception of democracy by the Greek. What characterized democracy are: those in government are responsive and responsible to the people; free, fair and periodic elections are held; press freedom and freedom of expression as well as freedom of association; rule of law and accountability and transparency in governance; and separation of the functions of the three arms of government. All the following are realizable and possible only when the people rule. And to Popper, the people can only rule through genuine criticism and proper election.

### **Popper's Political Idea**

Although, Popper's primary interest was nature and not politics, however, his political thought has great impact as his philosophy of science. An understanding of his political idea shows that he supported freedom, individualism, democracy and an "open society". Also, it is observable that his political idea rest squarely on the camp of Enlightenment rationalism and humanism. He rejected totalitarianism, nationalism, fascism, romanticism, collectivism, and other kinds of reactionary and irrational ideas.

His opposition and rejection of these ideas was strongly connected to a critique of the philosophical beliefs that he argued, underpinned them, especially a flawed understanding of the scientific method. This approach invented by him gives his political thought its particular philosophical interest and originality and its controversy, given that he locates the roots of totalitarianism in the ideas of some of the West's most esteemed philosophers, ancient as well as modern (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Popper's defense of a freed and democratic society stems from his opinion on the scientific method and how it should be applied to politics, history and social science. Little wonder then that most of his political treatise, *The Poverty of Historicism* (1954) and *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) were fusion of his vision of science and politics. Indeed, the people and democratic institutions in society that Popper envisioned would be imbued with the same critical spirit that marks natural science i.e. critical rationalism. This openness to analysis and questioning was expected to foster social and political progress as well as to provide a political context that would allow the sciences to flourish.

### **Critical Rationalism and Democracy in Nigeria**

Observably, Karl Popper's critical rationalism has more potential than what he thought of. Although, he carefully draws a division between his view and early classical doctrine and equally state his idea as avenue to differentiate democracy from dictatorship, however, his theory has a normative aspect that is desirable when it is related to democracy. Perhaps, we should state that an understanding of the required principles for postulating theories of democracy is unattainable because a given democracy's goals at any time are temporary, not to mention that they vary significantly across democracies. Thus, his rationalism really

further the quality of a democracy by making it more effective at measuring and implementing the different and varying objectives of given societies through valid elections. Karl Popper's view could be seen as one something that is desirable and his theory enhances desirable outcomes achievable through an effective expression of a society's ideals at a given time through elections. A capacious rule of democracy is very paramount and necessary too to accommodate democracy's spread. As democracy gains wider influence in various socio-political traditions, its acceptance and practices is put to many interpretations. The conceptions have been between "formal" (minimalist) and "substantive" (thick) with a clear cut distinction. In distinguishing the two conceptions, Noberto Bobbio (1989:158) asserts, "Every regime is democratic according to the meaning of democracy presumed by its defendants, and undemocratic in the sense upheld by its detractors". Noberto's view favours a subjective position in the operation of democracy. Thus, democracy should be a system that is open to interpretation that (will) align with the true intents of the ideology. Great values that are democratic not the undemocratic ones should therefore be considered so that the traditions and subjectivity of the processes can be accommodated.

Although, the installation of democracies at first may entail some unpleasant democratic processes however, such could be seen as short-term sacrifice within a long-term process, which cannot begin if the country in question is rejected as a democratic state at the outset. Logically, every newly adopted policy could be given various connotations with its initial challenges but could thrive after critical rationalization of the different connotations and unpleasant challenges. This position is corroborated by Bobbio's assertion that "it is known that the greater the number of connotations attached to a concept, the narrower is the range which it denotes" (Noberto 1989: 61). Democracy as political ideology should be encouraged because, it is not a selective club that has a set of criteria. In Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1997) view, a true democracy would require a small state, simplicity in public business, equality among citizens and an absence of luxury. Rousseau remarks, if there was a nation of gods it would be governed democratically. Such a government is not suitable for men (Rousseau 1997). Democracy is driven by elections. Thus, the desires of a given democratic society are best reflected in consequences when free and fair election is allowed to define the government and it has direct ways or means of influence on government. As against or opposite to thicker theories that rely on a set of outcomes or standardized values that are superimposed on society before rule is exercised (Barber 1988:193-194).

One fundamental conviction held by Karl Popper is that democracy allows the constantly changing needs and desires of society to find a place in government through elections. It provides a nonviolent, institutionalized and regular way to get rid of bad rulers by voting them out of office, this to Popper, is the intrinsic value of democracy. Thus, democracy is a preferable ideology, not because the people rule but, because, it permits the change of government without bloodshed. The purpose of democratic theory is to emphasize widely its acceptable values and illustrate what it can accomplish. Therefore, Karl Popper's theory addresses the demands of being both realistic and directed at advancing many goals, of which 'fairness in elections' advocated by Popper is one. Most of the minimalist theorists advanced fairness in election as the fundamental condition for democracy to thrive (Adams,

1999). When the citizens of a democratic country like Nigeria realize that elections are the sole guiding force of their democracy, their efforts would be geared towards ensuring free and fair elections for functional democracy. Giving premium value to elections would enhance democratic values in the country. Popper's focus on elections assigns them value from the perspective of the electorate, so it would be unreasonable to suggest that those who support fair elections would possibly be anything other than an overwhelming majority. Commenting on fair elections or electoral processes, Przeworski's, cited in Adams (1999) evaluated rational choice compliance when he argued that in all but the most extreme cases of continued deprivation, groups would prefer to fairly lose elections in a democracy than to undermine democracy itself, since a debasement of its democratic institutions can lead to repression and arbitrary violence. Ensuring fairness is the provision of rights and political rights underscore credible and effective elections. The provision of rights is explicitly corroborated by Przeworski and Karl Popper when they assert that the focus on institutions leads to provision of rights. However, it is imperative to know that rights are not forms of policy but rather aspects of political institutions. Popper (1945) in his political theory argued for strong political institutions that could guarantee people's rights. Political rights are made possible by a country's constitution. Constitution promotes peoples' rights and not interests; it also provides for processes that effectively translates popular opinions into policy (Obioha, 2013:135).

For Karl Popper, the tyranny of the majority is no larger a problem for his democracy, although, it was one of his greatest concern, he contended that his democracy will prevent it without betraying its definitional integrity. Popper's argument and rejection of authoritarianism and totalitarianism is a vital move towards enhancing social order, better democracy and development in a country. Popper (1945) in his defense of democracy entails the submission of public opinion and the institution that influence it to scientific tradition of his critical philosophy (critical rationalism) which opens everything to revision for better truth and better understanding. This idea if incorporated into Nigeria's democracy, would encourage the subjection of policies to critical analysis, and promotes public participation, encourage the habit of listening to another person's point of view and strengthens our democracy which will on the overall promote the enhancement of the dignity of the citizenry (Obioha, 2009: 30). This will be a step towards resolving the problem of dictatorship and autocracy in our nascent democracy. Since the emergence of democratic rule in Nigeria, there have been manifestations of trends and characteristic of authoritarianism both at the federal and state levels and attempts at serving personal interests, which are in conflict with democratic values and good governance. Appointment of public officers, formulation of policies and other issues are constantly challenged by majority of the public, an indication that governance is not by the people but by few individuals whose elections mostly does not reflect people's choice. This makes democracy in Nigeria prone to insecurity and the country is plunged into a state of social, political and economic insecurities.

In view of this, there is a growing optimism that Karl Popper's critical philosophy and idea of democracy will address these problems if adopted. The Nigerian state is in a situation where the citizens are in constant fear of dictatorship, flagrant abuse of human rights and

intolerance of dissenting views of the public by the government.

More often the citizens are crying for safety, while the politicians employ any means fair or foul in the pursuit of naked and inordinate power. The electoral processes are often marred with alarming irregularities, there is lack of public morality, rule of law and other essential democratic values. Popper's conception of knowledge proceeds from the provisional and then the permanent thought and grows through constant criticism and revision. The gains from his critical philosophy can be viewed in three ways: first that knowledge can grow; two that science can progress; and three we can learn from our mistakes correct our ways and make the better options. Only the critical tests, which Karl Popper's critical rationalism offers us can enable the realization of these enumerated gains that can improve Nigeria's democratic practice. The process is directed by him to oppose the antidemocratic and illiberal political philosophies of Plato, Hegel and Marx. Its adoption by political elites in Nigeria would prevent poor control of thought, paucity of ideas in governance and some obvious internal political and policy contradictions, lack of internal democracy in various political parties that enthrone godfatherism where one person (in the name of a father figure) hijacks the structures of the party and practically decides unilaterally the goings on in the party. It would challenge and checkmate antidemocratic system operating in Nigeria. The relevance of Popper's ideas was corroborated by Helmut Kohl's assessment of the political situation in Europe. To him, the age of totalitarian ideologies in Europe is drawing to a close. The belief in historic mission of more race or class has proved to be the most devastating fallacy of this. Millions of innocent people fell victim to its sway. Karl Popper ceaselessly fought this fallacy. He is amongst the most significant champions of the open society... the triumph of freedom and democracy in Europe demonstrates that Karl Popper was right (Popper, 1992:5).

### **Karl Popper's Critical Rationalism: Further Reflections and Challenges**

The application of Popper's principle to democracy involves subjecting every fact to the process of falsificationism. As enunciated above, Popper's philosophical ideology began with the rejection of induction as a scientific method. He contended that the real method of science is a continuous process of conjecture and refutation. According to Popper, human knowledge (scientific knowledge) progresses by unjustified anticipations, by guesses, by tentative solutions to our problems refutations, which include many critical tests. He further asserted, that while our knowledge may survive these tests, they can never be positively justified and the certainty or probability may not be possible. This is because, he sees all knowledge to be hypothetical or conjectural (Stephanie 2015). The development of critical philosophy by Popper is to enhance his demarcation of science from non-sciences. To him, scientific knowledge can be considered knowledge only if it is refutable. It suffices to argue here that Popperian method is a deductive model of scientific criticism that contains empirically falsifiable universal proposition, initial conditions and their consequences. Thus, to criticize it, we require a logical principle, Modus Tollens, which enables the elimination of falsified conjecture. A conjecture to Popper (2014) should be discarded once it has been falsified. For instance, if a conjecture states that "the sun sets daily in the west" and it happens in the cause of research that on a particular day the sun set in the east, then the conjecture stands falsified. A conjecture may be confirmed severally through researches, however, there

is possibility of its nonconfirmation. The more often a conjecture passes efforts to falsify it, the greater becomes its "corroboration" but once it is falsified, it should be jettisoned. However, corroboration is a form of induction, which Popper sneaked into philosophy with a new name. For Popper, there is no such thing as induction yet he introduces the principle of corroboration.

Popper recognizes but dismissed as unimportant, the claim that every falsification of a conjecture is simultaneously a confirmation of an opposite conjecture and every conforming instance of a conjecture is a falsification of an opposite conjecture. For scientists and philosophers who are not Popperian, the language of science is induction and science operates basically by induction (confirmation) and precisely less often by disconfirmation (falsification). Assuming, Popper bet on somebody to win a race and the person won, one would not expect Popper to shout, "Great the person I bet with failed to lose" (Hume 1975: 96).

It should be pointed here that Popper's reference to conjecture and refutation as a new way of knowing, is contradictory. From commonsense, we do not normally claim to 'know' something which is unjustifiable, tentative or hypothetical. Our claim to know is always based on the justification of our claim. In other words, knowledge is something that it is possible to be sure of, to justify, to validate, to prove and to be certain of. Thus, the proposal that "all knowledge remains conjectural" is a pure contradiction. Conjecture by definition is not knowledge. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary explains a conjecture as "an opinion or idea that is not based on definite knowledge and is formed by guessing." (Hornby, 2006: 320). Given this meaning of conjecture, it will require further proofs or confirmation before conjecture can be regarded as knowledge. And as soon as there is a series of confirmation of a conjecture, it ceases to be a conjecture but knowledge. Also, the fact that one cannot define an idea by means of other ideas which are contrary to it, it will be wrong to consider knowledge as conjecture.

Second, understanding the idea of conjecture depends on the prior concept of knowledge. The concept of conjecture was arrived at, to explain a form of mental activity, which was unlike knowledge, and to distinguish clearly from knowledge an idea put forward as opinion without proof. All knowledge is conjectural and may sound intriguing but throughout his career Popper worked within a framework of knowledge, not of conjecture. A further problem comes when one examines the concept of "growth" in Popper's assertion that knowledge grows via conjectures and refutations. To our mind, the concept of growth implies the existence of a thing, a body, an entity of some sort, that which grows. It may be true that conjectures and refutations play a role in the growth of knowledge but, they could hardly do this without some knowledge of other things to work on. In this regard, the growth of knowledge through conjecture and refutation presupposes pre-existing knowledge, not pre-existing conjectures. It therefore, seems, that his claim that "all knowledge is conjectural" is simply untrue.

### **Values of Karl Popper's Critical Rationalism**

We need to recall, that critical rationalists hold that scientific theories and any other claim to knowledge can and should be rationally criticized, to ensure such knowledge, concepts or

ideas are not reduced to what humans individually claim they know, that is, not reduced to subjective endorsement. Critical rationalism requires the collaboration of other people in establishing what is true, factual or knowledge. It therefore, has the advantage of enabling the development of political ideas, policies and other issues beyond an individual or party in the political realm of any society. Thus, the identified challenges in Popper's critical philosophy notwithstanding, his idea is futuristic. It could, through the broadening of the political space with more robust discussions on national issues made possible through critical and more inclusive views, serve as a necessary foundation for peaceful coexistence among citizens and leadership in a state if embraced. It equally assures a level playing ground among the political elites and adequate representation and participation by the citizens. Popper's idea is a means of eliminating the disconnect between the political elites and the electorates and assures peaceful transition of power in Nigeria and any democratic state.

According to Cranswick (2015), Bertrand Russell states that Popper's view would help to eliminate the enemies of democracy as the totality of his critical philosophy is directed towards better democratic system. Also, Sam Ghandchi (2015), in his analysis of Popper, and like some other scholars, who have criticized Plato for creating a closed society in his political treatise (*The Republic*), underscore the relevance of Karl Popper's idea of democracy built on 'Open Society'. To him, unlike Plato's idea, the open society had become, in the seven years of its gestation, a major treatise on the intellectual and social ills of the time. It offers an explanation of how totalitarianism had gained intellectual respectability and how post war society of it would involve rethinking politics, education and social morality. An open society marks that difference and confronts its members with personal decisions and the opportunity to reflect rationally on them.

One other value of Karl Popper's idea of democracy is that it rates personal decisions high and creates opportunity to reflect rationally on them. This is missing in Nigeria democratic system of governance where any government in power (since the return to democracy in 1999, especially the present administration) is often intolerant of personal but opposing views held by any citizen or citizens on government policies and institutions. Most times governments have outrightly disregarded and disrespected the opinions of the generality of its citizens on national issues of critical importance. For instance, very recently the generality of Nigerian citizens including Medical Professional Bodies advised the Federal government against inviting some purported medical personnel from China on COVID-19 pandemic. The government blatantly ignored this advice and at the end, the case ended as a charade and a shame. Again, the generality of the citizens has condemned the decision of the government to renovate the National Assembly Complex with a humongous amount of money, yet this fell on the deaf ears of a seeming insensitive government who went ahead, against all good economic reason and humanistic sensibility, to budget for the renovation. Whether of being intolerant of dissenting views of citizens or outright refusal to heed the advice of the generality of the citizens on critical national issues, often, the consequential actions of government have led to serious abuse of human rights and the collective dignity of the citizens (Obioha & Adegboyega, 2022: 20-37).

Therefore, rather than an atmosphere of critical evaluation of the system, Nigeria Democracy has often created an atmosphere of the pursuit of selfish interest on the part of the political elites and this has consequently led to violence, terrorism and insecurity among the citizens. Engaging in critical rationalism will enhance the awareness of the need to adopt the principles of democracy like the rule of law, separation of power, justice, equality, as well as the pursuit of public good. Karl Popper's philosophy, is directed at understanding what true democracy means, actualizing good governance, accountability and transparency, which are required for development in society. The democratic atmosphere in Nigeria leaves the question of adequate understanding of true democracy yet unanswered, and lack of critical reasoning in our processes underpins this factor. The political elites have remained the determinants of the country's fate. Other ideas, suggestions and criticism from the citizens and opposition parties do not count. Politicians manipulate the state craft for their selfish interests and the effects have been inequality, economic regression, terrorism and social disorder. Popper's critical philosophy aims at eliminating all these, through the change of government without bloodshed and the political elites' adoption of the scientific tradition of critical discussion. It encourages the political class to willingly submit their ideas to public criticism and embrace the habit of listening to other people's point of view in order to enhance good governance.

### **Conclusion**

Lessons from Popper's critical rationalism is a direct support towards ensuring true democratic process in any society. Its focus underpins political elites' consideration of opinion from members of the public who are not elected into public offices in the art of policy making. The benefit of this is that it allows the public to also have a say in the administration of their affairs. Hence, mass participation in decision making underscores Popper's critical philosophy, this to him, will enhance development in the society. In this regard, Popper's critical philosophy aims at realizing the traditional popular meaning of democracy, which we understand as the administration of the human society by its members through direct or indirect means, as directed by the constitution of the society. Thus, the acceptability and practical application of Popper's critical philosophy, in the Nigeria democratic process, and in any other society where the ideology is adopted, will enable the political ideology, that is, democracy to thrive and realize its true essence.

Furthermore, since Popper's critical philosophy encourages mass participation in decision making, this would prevent the abuse of power by the political elites, as they are directly under the watch eye of the electorates. Aside, the opportunity provided by the mass participation in the administration of the society would allow for analysis and periodic review of policies in relation to public needs. This will further help in the quest for the development and growth of the society.

### **References**

Adam, P. (1999). *Minimalist conception of democracy: A defense* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(2001). *Democracy and the Market*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Adegboyega, O.O (2015). Readings in Socio-political philosophy, Ibadan: Julisco Press.
- Adegboyega, O.O. (2010). "Politics and the Nigerian Situation." International Journal of Advanced Legal Studies & Governance. Vol. 1. 15-34.
- Barber, B. (1988). The conquest of politics: Liberal philosophy in democratic times, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bechtel, Williams (1988). Philosophy of science: An overview for cognitive science, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Association.
- Bryan, M. (2001). The story of philosophy, New York: DK Publishing.
- (2003). The confession of a philosopher London: Phoenix.
- Eisenberg, J.M (2018), John Stuart Mill on the history: Human nature, progress and the state, London: Lexington Books
- Funkenstein, A (1986). "The persecution of absolutes: On the Kantian and Neo Kantian theories of science" In William-Margalit, E. (eds.) "The Kaleidoscope of science" Boston studies in the philosophy of science, Vol. 94, Dordrecht, Springer
- Gattei S. (2009). Karl Popper's Philosophy of Science. New York: Routledge.
- Gorton, W. "Karl Popper political philosophy" In (Internet encyclopedia <https://www.iep.utm.edu/poppl>). Retrieved, July 16, 2020
- Hornby, A.S. (2006). Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. New 9th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hume, D. (1975). An enquiry concerning human understanding 3rd edition, Selby-Bigge, L.A and Niddirth, P.H, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jouvenel, Bertrand de (1993). On power: The history of its growth, (Trans.) Huntington, J. F, New York: Liberty Fund.
- Lewisohn, D.H (2018). "Mill and Comte on the method of Social Science" In Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 33 (2), 40-56.
- Luchte, J. (2007). Kant's critique of pure reasoning: A reader's guide, UK: Bloomsbury
- Magee, B. (2003). Confession of philosopher, London: Phoenix.
- Mautner, T. (1999). The Penguin dictionary of philosophy, Middlesex: Blackwell.
- Norbert, B. (1989). Democracy and dictatorship: The nature and limits of state power (Trans.) Kennealy, P. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Obioha, P. (2009). "Ethics, Religion and Humanity: Rethinking Religion in 21st Century

Africa." Global Journal of Humanities. Vol. 8 (1&2), 27-34.

Obioha, P. (2013). "A Critique of Atheistic Humanism in the Quest for Human Dignity." Open Journal of Philosophy. Vol. 3(1), 131-139.

Obioha, P. (2014). "A Communitarian understanding of the human person as a philosophical basis for human development". The Journal of Pan African Studies. Vol. 6, (8), 247-267.

Obioha, P. & Adegboyega, O. (2022). "Partiality in African Ethics and its Implications for Good Governance". AMAMIHE Journal of Applied Philosophy. Vol.20 (2), 20-37.

Popper, K. (2014). Conjecture and refutations: The growth of scientific knowledge New York: Routledge

\_\_\_\_\_ (1992). Unended quest: An intellectual autobiography, London: Routledge

\_\_\_\_\_ (1963). Conjecture and refutations New York: Harper and Row

\_\_\_\_\_ (1954). The poverty of historicism, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

\_\_\_\_\_ (1945). Open society Vol.1 Princeton: Princeton University Press

Rousseau, J.J, (1997). The social contract and other latter political writings, (Trans.) Gourevitch, V. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Russell, B. In Cranswick, L. Personal Homepage in Melbourne, Australia  
fhttp://lanchianbluchac.com.au (10/11/2015)

William, B (1988). An overview for cognitive science, Hillsdale: New Jersey

Stokes, G. (1998). Popper: Philosophy, politics and scientific method. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Umotong, I. D. (1999). *An Application of Karl Popper's Idea of Social Engineering to the Future of Nigeria*. Published In **International Journal of Educational Development**. (IJED) Vol. 2. No1. P. 113 – 118.