

WILLIAM JAMES' PRAGMATIC THEORY OF TRUTH: A HERMENEUTIC OF THE POLITICS OF DECIET IN NIGERIA

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.19692.39043

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Abstract

Truth seems to be an undervalued quantity in Nigeria's sociopolitical space. Politicking in Nigeria is, therefore, bedeviled by a fearsome manner of dishonesty. The main political actors themselves- the politicians are viewed as men of questionable repute because of the prevalent notion that politicians are gullible, cunning and untruthful; hence the aphorism, 'Politics is a dirty game.' What is the place of truth as a moral virtue in the Nigerian political space? Is Nigerian politics incompatible with moral probity? This article sought answers to the above questions through the study of James' pragmatic doctrine on truth. In spite of the notable shortcomings of James' postulations, the article finds some reputable elements in his notion of truth that could serve as curative to the culture of deceit in the Nigerian political space. It suggests that if Nigerians, both the elite and proletariat class, could adopt James' pragmatic approach of viewing reality, the bulk of the vices that have shortchanged Nigeria of the desired progress would be surmounted.

Keywords: Pragmatism, Politics, Truth.

Introduction

Aristotle's assertion in the opening paragraph of his *Metaphysics* that "all men by nature desire to know," relates firmly to the epistemological question on the nature of truth. Man, among all created beings, is one whose concern goes beyond mere opinions; he seeks for how things really are in themselves. He is the only creature concerned with nothing but the truth. The search for truth is so

deep-rooted in man that any attempt to deviate from it would expose his existence to grave jeopardy. This search for truth propelled what William James undertook in his pragmatic theory of truth.

Rather than argue over whether truth can be known, James simply redefines the meaning of truth in his pragmatic theory of truth. According to James, the problem with the disputes between skeptics and dogmatists is that the latter professes to know the truth while the former asserts that the idea of truth is doubtful (or that one should suspend judgment). James counters both positions by asserting that truth is not a correspondence between belief and an actual state of affairs, but truth is that which works or produces proper consequence. Due to the misunderstanding of James' viewpoint in his pragmatic theory of truth, critics raise lots of objections against it.

In spite of the many criticisms shot at James' theory, this article finds some wonderful elements in James pragmatic theory of truth that could help curb the incidence of immorality that has become the norm in Nigerian system of politicking and governance. The aim of this study, therefore, is to offer some reputable elements in James' pragmatism as curative to the incidence of deceit in the Nigerian political space.

The Meaning of Pragmatism

The term pragmatism stems from "the Greek word *pragma* meaning action from which words like 'practice' and 'practical' come."¹ Generally, pragmatism is described as "a philosophical movement that includes those who claim that an ideology or proposition is true if it works satisfactorily, that the meaning of a proposition is to be found in the practical consequences of accepting it, and that unpractical ideas are to be rejected."² Stumpf notes that:

As a movement in philosophy, pragmatism was founded for the purpose of mediating between two divergent tendencies in 19th century thought. On the one hand, there was the cumulative impact of empiricism, utilitarianism, and science.... On the other hand, there was a more human-centered tradition, stemming from Descartes' rationalistic

¹W. James, *Pragmatism*. Boston and New York: 2002, p. 22.

² D. McDermid, "Pragmatism," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: <https://iep.utm.edu/pragmati/>. Accessed 21/08/2020.

philosophy and moving through Kant, Hegel, and other German idealists.³

Sanders Peirce gave more prominence to the term in an article entitled '*How to Make Our Ideas clear.*' Lawhead observes that "he [Peirce] derived the term pragmatism from Kant's notion of *pragmatisch*, which refers to principles empirical or experimental, as opposed to *a priori*."⁴ However, it was William James who popularized it. William James (1842-1910) is perhaps the most widely known of the founders of pragmatism.⁵ Historically, his *Principles of Psychology* was the first unification of psychology as a philosophical science. James presents his pragmatism as an empirical attitude that turns away from the problematic abstract, absolutist, *a priori* attitude of traditional philosophy and towards facts, practicality and action. He notes, thus:

Pragmatism represents a perfectly familiar attitude in philosophy, the empiricist attitude but it represents it, as it seems to me, both in a less objectionable form than it has ever yet assumed. A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins."⁶

Truth and Theories of Truth

Determining what truth is and the prerequisite that qualifies an idea, fact, or belief as true is a massive challenge in philosophy. This is why there are different theories of truth in philosophy. Nonetheless, truth is broadly defined as "as the property of being in accord with fact or reality."⁷ Hence, in our day to day manner of speech, "truth is typically ascribed to things that aim to represent reality or otherwise correspond to it, such as beliefs, propositions, and declarative sentences."⁸ What then are theories of Truth?

³ S. E. Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 6th ed. New York: McGraw Hill Companies, 2003, pp. 393-394

⁴ W.F. Lawhead in D. McDermid, "Pragmatism," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

⁵ Archie L. & J. G. Archie, "The Pragmatic Theory of Truth by William James," *Reading for Philosophical Enquiry: A Brief Introduction to Philosophical Thinking*, 2004, p. 344.

⁶ W. James, *Pragmatism*, p.24

⁷ See "Truth," *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary*, 2005.

⁸ M. Glanzberg, "Truth," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), E. N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/truth/>. Accessed 20/08/2020.

Theories of truth are descriptions of how a person, thing, fact or belief can come into possession of truth. They are mostly speculative since truth in itself is an abstract phenomenon, and hence, can be hardly successfully subjected to experimentation. Theories of truth are, therefore, theories that seek answers to the question of what is the proper basis for deciding how words, symbols, ideas and beliefs may properly be considered true, whether by a single person or an entire society. Viewed from the broadest perspective, there are two major branches of truth theories; substantive and minimalist theories of truth. Minimalist theories include deflationary, performative, redundancy and related theories of truth. Pragmatic theories of truth fall under the umbrella of substantive theory. Other theories of truth that are classified as substantive are correspondence, coherence, constructivist and consensus theories of truth. A brief overview of correspondence and coherence theories is necessary because of their relationship to James' pragmatic theory of truth.

Correspondence and Coherence Theories of Truth

Correspondence theory is the oldest and most popular theory of truth, first introduced by Plato and Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*. It is a realist theory that proposes that "a proposition is true provided there exists a fact corresponding to it."⁹ Simply put, correspondence theories emphasize that true beliefs and true statements correspond to the actual state of affairs. Glanzberg observes that "the basic idea of correspondence theory is that what we believe or say corresponds to the way things actually are - to facts."¹⁰ This theory emphasizes a relationship between thoughts or statements on one hand and things or objects on the other.

Bertrand Russell is an advocate of the correspondence approach. This claim is substantiated by his asserting that "although truth and falsehood are properties of beliefs, they are properties dependent upon the relations of the beliefs to other things, not upon any internal quality of the beliefs. This leads us to the view that truth consists in some form of correspondence between belief and fact."¹¹ This

⁹ B. Dowen & N. Swartz, "Truth," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, J. Frieser & B. Dowen (eds.), <https://iep.utm.edu/truth/#H3>. Accessed 20/08/2020.

¹⁰ M. Glanzberg, "Truth," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), E. N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/truth/>. Accessed 20/08/2020.

¹¹ M. Velasquez, *Philosophy*, 9th Edition. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005, p. 446.

theory remained the norm until the 19th century when it came under attack from pragmatists and idealists.¹² Dunwoody notes, thus:

The idealists objected to the notion of fact. They argued that the apprehension of a fact was itself an act of judgment and perception and consequently, a belief held by an individual. Because objects in the world are not directly knowable, but mediated by our senses, they are only representations of objects in the world. Correspondence of beliefs with facts, they argued, was impossible to assess since facts were also beliefs.¹³

It is this argument that led to the coherence theory of truth, the idea that truth is assessed via consistency of belief.¹⁴

Coherence theories in general posit that truth requires a proper fit of elements within a whole system. "A pervasive tenet of coherence theories is the idea that truth is primarily a property of whole systems of propositions, and can be ascribed to individual propositions only according to their coherence with the whole."¹⁵ This implies that "a set of two or more beliefs are said to cohere if and only if (1) each member of the set is consistent with any subset of the others and (2) each is implied . . . by all of the others taken as premises or, according to some coherence theories, each is implied by each of the others individually."¹⁶ Internal consistency and logical standards are therefore vital to determining the essence of truth in coherence theories of truth. This is evident in Blanshard's statement that, "It is perhaps in such systems as Euclidean geometry that we get the most perfect examples of coherence that have been constructed."¹⁷

A major criticism or objection to coherent theory is the argument that "Coherence theories focus on the nature of verifiability and not truth. They focus

¹² See, F. F. Schmitt, "Truth: An introduction," F. F. Schmitt (Ed.), *Theories of truth*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), pp. 1-38.

¹³ P. T. Dunwoody, "Theories of Truth as Assessment Criteria in Judgment and Decision Making," *Judgment and Decision Making*, vol. 4, No. 2, 2009, 116-125, p. 119.

¹⁴ See, F. F. Schmitt, "Truth: An introduction."

¹⁵ See "Truth," *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia*, <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/truth>. Accessed 20/08/2020.

¹⁶ R. L. Kirkham, *Theories of truth: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992, p. 104.

¹⁷ See, Blanshard in R. L. Kirkham, *Theories of Truth: A critical introduction*, p. 106.

on the holistic character of verifying that a proposition is true but don't answer the principal problem, 'what is truth itself?'"¹⁸

Pragmatic Theory of Truth: An Overview

Pragmatic theories of truth suggest that a proposition is true only if it is useful or if it can be put into useful practice. That is, "Beliefs that lead to the best 'payoff,' that are the best justification of our actions, that promote success, are truths according to the pragmatists." ¹⁹ The three most influential forms of this theory were postulated by Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey. Although there are differences in their individual viewpoint on truth, they all agree that truth is verified and confirmed by the results of putting one's concepts (ideas, beliefs, etc) into practice.²⁰ Hence, for the pragmatists, practicability (not correspondence or coherence) is the standard by which the truthfulness of a statement, idea or belief may be determined.

William James' Pragmatic Theory of Truth

William James leveled some criticism at empiricism; yet he sees pragmatism as founded on empiricist tradition. He presents pragmatism first as method- praxis, and later as a theory. He avers that "pragmatism has no dogmas and no doctrines save its method." This method he characterized as "the altitude of looking away from first things, principles- 'categories'- supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts."²¹ On this note, therefore, "[a pragmatist] turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins."²²

Thilly and Wood rightly observes that for James, "Pragmatism is a method of determining the truth or falsity of propositions according as they do or do not fulfill our purposes and satisfy our biological and emotional needs; a true proposition is one the acceptance of which leads to success, a false proposition is one which produces failure and frustration."²³ Note that "in introducing a

¹⁸ B. Dowen & N. Swartz, "Truth," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See, "Pragmatic Theory of Truth," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 5. Macmillan, 1969, p. 427.

²¹ W. James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1907, p. 31.

²² Ibid.

²³ F. Thilly & L. Wood, *A History of Philosophy*. Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1957, p. 639.

reference to satisfactoriness, expediency, practicality and instrumentality in his definition of truth, James drastically alters the complexion of the pragmatism of Pierce's more intellectualistic formulation."²⁴ For James, therefore:

The test, then, of a theory, a belief, a doctrine, must be its effects on us, its practical consequences. This is the *pragmatic* test. Always ask yourself what difference it will make in your experience whether you accept materialism or idealism, determinism or free will, monism or pluralism, atheism or theism... The test of truth, then, is its practical consequences; the possession of truth is not an end in itself, but only a preliminary means to other vital satisfactions. Knowledge is an instrument; it exists for the sake of life, not life for the sake of knowledge.²⁵

Horrigan observes that for James, "an idea is not simply a mirror or passive reflection of reality; it is a habit of acting in a certain way, and therefore it is a plan or guide for our action. If we follow out this plan, we will have a series of experiences that either lead up to the reality or do not."²⁶ Thus, James affirms that:

Truth is not an unchanging or inherent property of an idea; it is something that happens to an idea when it is verified by experience... Neither is truth something we discover in reality, as though it existed there before we thought about it. We make truth by formulating ideas and acting upon them; the process of verification (as the word indicates) is indeed one of 'truth-making'.²⁷

Bergson elaborates on the nature of truth in James's philosophy, thus: "We invent truth in order to use reality, as we create mechanical devices to use natural forces. It seems to me that we can sum up the whole essence of the pragmatic conception of truth in a formula such as this: *while in other doctrines a new truth is a discovery, for pragmatism it is an invention.*"²⁸

²⁴ P. G. Horrigan "Critique of William James' Pragmatic Theory of Truth," <https://academia.edu/critique-of-william-james-theory-of-truth/>, 2010. Retrieved 19/08/2020, p. 3.

²⁵ F. Thilly & L. Wood, *A History of Philosophy*, p. 639.

²⁶ P. G. Horrigan "Critique of William James's Pragmatic Theory of Truth," p. 4.

²⁷ W. James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, p. 32.

²⁸ See, H. Bergson, in P. G. Horrigan "Critique of William James's Pragmatic Theory of Truth," p. 5.

William James insists that it is one of man's primary duties to pursue true ideas, yet he does not regard their possession as an end in itself but only as 'a preliminary means towards other vital satisfactions.²⁹ This corresponds with his voluntary psychology which claims that perception and thinking are only for the sake of action, and action is for the satisfaction of some human need.³⁰ Therefore, "James sees little value in a purely objective knowledge divorced from human desires and human reasons for knowing. True ideas are always useful ones; they enable us to use reality in order to satisfy some need. Thus, truth is a species of good."³¹ James affirms that "The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons."³² He identifies two aspects of a true idea- its verification by the facts, and its usefulness for life. These can be distinguished but not separated: unless we have some need or desire for an object, we will not be led to verify our idea of it. If we have no interest in tigers, we will not be prompted to set in motion the actions that will lead us into their presence. An idea is, consequently, nothing but an instrument for satisfying some desire or need, and its verification in experience is not an end in itself but a process that is fulfilled only in its actual use.³³

James considers *thinking* as secondary to *willing*. Idea reflects impulse, and reflects it as it wants it to be reflected. The will determines how and what we shall think. Ideas, insofar as they satisfy or disappoint the expectations of the will, envisage truth or error. The truth of an idea has nothing to do with anything outside experience, or even with any permanent form and constitution of experience. It denotes simply that the idea is working satisfactorily at the moment as a means of getting out of experience what we now *want*. For James, therefore, to be true an idea must continually *come* true.³⁴ Let us round off this section with Sanguineti's succinct summary of James pragmatism:

According to James, ideas have value only in virtue of their practical results for the individual or for society. The sole criterion of truth is *efficacy*: for example, if religion betters man, it is true. It is not necessary to ask whether a theory is true or not in itself, because this will be seen in the concrete action. Ancient empiricism assigned

²⁹ W. James, *Pragmatism*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1907, p. 203.

³⁰ W. James, *The Will to Believe*, Longmans, New York, 1897, p. 114.

³¹ P. G. Horrigan "Critique of William James's Pragmatic Theory of Truth," p. 5.

³² W. James, *Pragmatism*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1907, p. 76.

³³ W. James, *The Will to Believe*, p. 61.

³⁴ B. A. G. Fuller, *A History of Philosophy*, Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1957, pp. 536-537.

importance to the *past* experience as the cause of knowledge, but James holds to be more important the *future* experience as the field of inquiry and verification.³⁵

The Politics of Deceit in Nigeria

Politics is described as the set of activities that are associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations between individuals such as the distribution of resources or status.³⁶ It is the art and science of governance.³⁷ "It is the system that unifies the society together, especially, in the area of public affairs, welfare, social amenities and exercising of power to organize and control a particular community or state."³⁸ In the traditional Greek sense, the term is used to refer to the quest for what is good in the governance of the *polis*; namely the city or the society.³⁹ Manus opines that "In the contemporary age, people look upon politics as either the art or science of government or as the competition between competing interest groups or individuals for power and leadership in a polity."⁴⁰

From the brief exposition of the meaning of politics in the foregoing paragraph, it is evident that the true essence of politics is to provide qualitative service and good governance to the masses. This does not, to a very large extent, represent the thrust or essence of politics in Nigeria. The average observer would agree that the aphorism 'politics is a dirty game' is seemingly a perfect description of the species of politics practiced in Nigeria. The situation is so bad in Nigeria that politics is often considered a venture undertaking by only the cunning and

³⁵ J. J. Sanguineti, *Logic and Gnoeology*. Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 1988, pp. 182-183.

³⁶ See "Politics," Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia, <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/politics>. Accessed 21/08/2020.

³⁷ M. G. Yusuf, "Politics and Governance in Nigeria: The Relevance of Islamic Principles of Shura and Mas'uliyyah," J. K. Ayantayo et al, *Religion and Governance in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Samprints & Graphics Co., 2012,

p 43.

³⁸ D. S. Ajayi, "Towards the Enhancement of Morality in the Nigerian Politics," *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2016, p. 5.

³⁹ A. A. Akinwale, "Religion and Politics: Philosophical Origins of Separation," *Orita : Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* Vol. 32, Nos. 1&2, 2002, pp 115-141

⁴⁰ U.C. Manus, "Religion and Politics in a Multi-Ethnic Society, Nigeria: Reflections of a Christian Theologian," *Orita : Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* Vol. 38, June & Dec. 2006, p 9.

deceitful. Morality is, thus, extricated from the practice of politics in Nigeria, while immorality is considered the norm. Immorality of all sorts is consequently considered a prerequisite to excel as a Nigerian politician.

The expression ‘the politics of deceit’ is a gimmick used to capture the practice of immorality by Nigerian politicians in politicking, a horrible mannerism that has been widely accepted as a formidable part of the Nigerian political culture. Ajayi affirms that:

The Nigerian politicians have separated ethical virtues from politics; they have made us believe that politics and morality do not go together. The notion is that once a person starts playing politics he must jettison morality, hence the statement ‘politics is a dirty game.’ They hold that what matters is to grab political power by all means fair or foul, and sustain it the same way. The focus of any government is to cater for the citizenry, but this is not the aim of Nigerian leaders.⁴¹

We see the politics of deceit instantiated in various ways in Nigeria, such as electoral malpractices, political godfatherism, political gerrymandering,⁴² lust for power or what may be described as ‘sit-tight in office syndrome,’ assassination of political opponents, thuggery, money politics, looting of public funds, etc. The effects of this insidious manner of politicking in Nigeria are enormous. It has led roundly to the failure of governance in Nigeria; a fact that is exemplified in the high rate of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and infrastructural decay. This has also led to institutional decay in Nigeria; a terrible precedence set by the political elites to enable them perpetuate their horrible brand of politics. The overall implication of this blight is the rapid growth of political apathy among the helpless masses.

But is politics and morality incompatible? Is immorality a necessary part of politics? Isn’t it possible for politicking to be done morally? Is politics virtuous or vicious in itself? Politics is virtuous in itself and is therefore inherently a moral practice. It is very much compatible with morality. The two; politics and morality can exist conterminously. Agulanna admits that morality and politics are

⁴¹ D. S. Ajayi, “Towards the Enhancement of Morality in the Nigerian Politics,” p. 9.

⁴² Note that political gerrymandering refers to the practice of redrawing electoral districts to gain an electoral advantage for a political party.

compatible because they aim at similar goals. He elaborates: "While ethics aims at determining how people ought to behave in striving for what is good over what is bad, politics on its part aims at determining what the government of a political society ought to do and how it ought to be constituted in order to achieve socially worthy goals."⁴³ Ajayi insists that "The separation of morality from the practical politics will definitely produce a society where the rights of the members are not respected. There is always a grievous danger in any art of politics jettisoning morality."⁴⁴ Ekeh affirms that "any politics without morality is destructive."⁴⁵ How then can deceit be eschewed from the Nigerian political space since as Eke affirms it amounts to destruction? In the section that follows, attempt is made to answer this question via the pragmatism of William James.

A Pragmatic Solution to the Politics of Deceit in Nigeria

The politics of deceit practiced in Nigeria is built on falsity and duplicity. Dishonesty and guile have thus become pertinent component of the arsenal of the average Nigerian politician. They employ these tools to bamboozle the masses and bulldoze their way to the summit of their political aspirations, all to the detriment of the gullible masses. It must be emphasized here that not all involved in politics in Nigeria are deceitful; there are still some that are honest. However, one prevalent trait among the Nigerian political elites (both the deceitful and honest alike) - those who have managed to arrive at governmental positions, is the absence of political will. The absence of this vital element has led to the collapse of many wonderful government policies and projects. Political will may be described as the determination of an individual political actor to do and say things that will produce a desired outcome. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as the firm intention or commitment of a government to carry through a policy, especially one that is not immediately successful or popular. This social cum political virtue is apparently arid in the Nigerian sociopolitical space. This explains the rampant failure of many beautifully churned policies in Nigeria from one political dispensation to the order. It is the bane of deceitful politics in Nigeria.

⁴³ C. O. Agulanna, "Moral & Political Education as Foundation for a Reasonable Social Order in Africa," F.A. Adeigbo et al, *Ethics and Publics Affairs*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 2004, p 13

⁴⁴ D. S. Ajayi, "Towards the Enhancement of Morality in the Nigerian Politics," p. 6.

⁴⁵ P. P. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 17, No 1, 1975, p 111.

There is aridity of political will among the Nigerian political elites- the primary political actors in Nigeria because they do not approach politics with a pragmatic mindset. Pragmatism, as already observed, is a philosophy of action, a theory that advocates for practice, for results. Pragmatism preaches utility, beneficence, profit and it is upon these values that it determines the worth or value of a policy, belief or idea. With the pragmatic mindset, the average Nigerian politician would realize that politics is a call to service and service is action, not mere vociferation. Hence, the pragmatic saying; ‘action speaks louder than voice.’ For the average Nigerian politician, however, voice speaks louder than action. This is why they make a lot of noise during electioneering campaigns. They continue same noise all through their stay in office using media outlets to sale policies to the public that they never really care to implement. This is an ‘unpragmatic’ approach to politics and governance. For political actors in Nigeria to imbibe the right disposition to politics, there is need that they embrace the pragmatic approach to reality which is based on fact, action, practice and result delivery. This will help revamp the cold political will common to the majority of Nigerian politicians.

William James avers that the pragmatist turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. The pragmatic disposition is, therefore, one of continuous self evaluation and reevaluation. James’ pragmatism is conscious of the fact that ideas, beliefs or even propositions that were valuable in the past may not remain valuable in the future. That something was useful in the past doesn’t mean that it will always be useful. The Nigerian political space and her prominent political actors- the politicians seem to be ignorant of this fact. Far from what James preaches, Nigeria is founded on abstraction and insufficiency and the few politicians this condition favours continue to protect the said insufficiency and abstraction from devolution. The country is also founded on fixed principles and pretended absolutes; she operates a closed system. Thus, a change in the Nigerian sociopolitical status quo is always going to be difficult. From its very origin, the country was founded on the faulty abstract idealism that amalgamating the Northern and Southern protectorates would lead to economic boom and prosperity among the peoples of Nigeria. This expectation is not pragmatic because the peoples of the North and South were not the same and the differences in their culture and approach to life were not considered in the said amalgamation policy; hence, the incessant tribal and religious crises in the country since independence. Since then, Nigeria has remained a closed system.

The leaders have remained starched to a system that has proven impractical. They have refused to listen to the call for reevaluation, restructuring and constitutional amendment that would liberate the country from the imbalance undermining her progress. The Nigerian politicians are anachronistic. By insisting on the same system that has led to failure of governance over the years, they have shut their ears to the call of William James' pragmatism to eschew fixed principles, pretended absolutes and closed systems. Nigeria, thus, needs pragmatic leaders with pragmatic disposition to lead her to paradise.

What is truth? William James would reply: Truth is the real; truth is fact; truth refers to the practical effects ideas, statements, beliefs or propositions have on us. This is the pragmatic view of truth. Thilly underscores that for James, the test, then, of a theory, a belief, a doctrine, must be its effects on us, its practical consequences. The test of truth is its practical consequences; the possession of truth is not an end in itself, but only a preliminary means to other vital satisfactions. Knowledge is an instrument; it exists for the sake of life, not life for the sake of knowledge. The gullible masses of Nigeria need to understand this. Truth should not be accepted by Nigerians simply because it was told by someone from my tribe, ethnicity or geopolitical zone. Support shouldn't be given to a particular politician simply because he is from my area. Some unfriendly governmental policy shouldn't be accepted simply because it was propagated by my representative in government or just because I am not negatively affected by it. This has been the bane of bad governance in Nigeria. The masses simply stand by politicians from their tribes or geopolitical zones not minding the consequences of their actions or inactions. This is called identity or tribal politics. There is no attempt by the masses to examine and reexamine the worth or political manifesto of the politician before lending their support to him. This is because the masses, like the politicians themselves, lack the pragmatic approach to reality. The masses, following James' pragmatism, should learn to subject politicians and their manifestoes to stern tests before lending their support to them. They must learn to be critical of the persona of politicians, they must engage actively in political campaigns. If they manage to discover any dent on the image, manifesto or political party of the politician, consent must be withdrawn. What difference would a politician, a specific government policy or programme make in my life, ward, district or the nation at large? If the answer to this interrogative is negative, citizens must refrain from lending their support. This is the pragmatic test for truth. It is the right approach to politicking that the Nigerian masses should embrace in order to move the nation forward.

Conclusions

Pragmatic theory of truth does not pre-suppose the denial of correspondence theory of truth. Truth should be considered as a phenomenon that unfolds with time. This is because, in spite of the fact that the truth value of a proposition or an idea may be absolute, there cannot be a time when one can say for sure that he or she has come to the absolute understanding of such truth. This is not being skeptical rather it is being open to accommodate new information. Experience supports this as seen in the case of Copernican Revolution and Kant's Copernican Revolution in the theory of Knowledge, just to mention only but a few. The implication of this for Nigeria is that as much as possible, Nigerians should try to eschew the evil of adopting the Machiavellian principle of the end justifies the means in whatever facet of life they find themselves. Again, in considering what should be done and avoided, the average Nigerian should have at the back of his mind the Kantian categorical imperative which urges that before approving of any act to be done one must measure it with the maxim: 'what I wish to do, can it be universalized or generalized? This is very much related to James' pragmatic test for truth. In James's pragmatic terms, Kant's imperative may be restated thus: would my action be of practical value to the general public? If this is done, it will go a long way to resolving not only the problems with Nigerian polity, but also contribute to building a safe and secure Nigeria where people will live in peace and unity with one another. In this way, the problems of tribalism, nepotism, corruption, etc would be surmounted.