A DIALYSIS OF HUMAN PERSONALITY AND THE EFFECT OF POVERTY ON CHARACTER

Dr. Adesina Abiodun Olubitan
Department of Religions, History and Heritage Studies,
Kwara State University, Malete, Kwara State, Nigeria.
adeshina.olubitan@kwasu.edu.ng
+234 8052494342

Abstract
The concomitant effect of poverty on the character of a person cannot be over-emphasised. Poverty and the array of socio-economic woes in the society portend grave capacity that demeans and dehumanize the personality of an individual. A 'person' as a unit, loses personal ego and self-worth when the potential of what makes him/her a 'Person' and gives the individual voice and power in the society is lacking. In this scenario, a person's character which is tied to personality will suffer some indignity. In the context of economic power therefore, viz-a-viz; poverty, the character of a Person cannot be fully exhibited, hence, the person is prone to a character dentations and incapacitation. This paper therefore, prods into the human personality in an attempt to conjecture the effect of poverty on the character of a person. If it can be said that the individual trait, character and temperament are the basic ingredients of personality; then it goes with the reason why personality reflects the different categories of people. Apparently, this explicates the purpose for having successful people and those who are not successful. The methods used in gathering data, are psycho-analytical, participatory observation, analytic and experiential.

Keywords: Dialysis, Person, Human Personality, Poverty, Character

Introduction

According to Mayer[2], a professor of psychology, who avers that between the years 1995 and 2010, scientists reached a more advanced level in their understanding of the concept of personality. And possibly this explains the reason why there has been some recent debate over the subject of studying personality from cultural perspective or otherwise. Some people think that personality comes entirely from culture and therefore there can be no meaningful study in cross-culture study while on the other hand, others believe that some elements are shared by all cultures. Mayer noted further quoting an article, by Dan McAdams and Jennifer Pals, which identified five areas of ongoing studies of personality: "(1) an individual's unique variation on the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as a developing pattern of (2) dispositional traits, (3) characteristic adaptations, and (4) self-defining life narratives, complexly and differentially situated (5) in culture and social context."[3] Either way the concept is defined, it is apparent as it behooves us to mention here that the concept of personality is a complex issue. According to Nyameti[4], in Western philosophy, a 'person' is classified as incommunicability, subsistence and intellectuality as essential constituents of personality. Within the intellectual milieu of Hellenistic-Roman culture, the concept of the person as a unique, unrepeatable entity (*hypostasis*), rather than a functional identity

(*prosopon*), having meaning only within a socio-political or-as in the case of Stoicism-divinely instituted order, had not yet arisen. It was only later, in the age of the ecumenical councils, that a rigorous definition of the human person was established.[5]

Amolo and Anyanwu noted that, psychology, as well as the Bible; acknowledge that man has both material and immaterial nature. The material composition of man is his body, while the immaterial constitution is the soul and the spirit.[6] The African philosophy on the other hand, view a person has a unit despite the constituents. However, the composition of this unit comprises of existential constituent parts. And as Metuh observes, these parts do not contradict the unity, rather they link a person to become the real person[7]. In the Yoruba world-view, there are five existential constituent parts namely; "*Ara*" (the physical body), "*Ojiji*" (the human shadow), "*Okan*" (the heart), "*Ori*" (the head) and "*Emi*" (breath).[8] On the other hand, the Igbo belief that man has three different existential constituent parts which are; "*Obi*" (heart or breath), "*Chi*" (destiny), and "*Eke* or *Agu*" (Ancestral Guardian).[9]

However, in contrast, the Medieval European's sense of self was linked to a network of social roles: "the household, the kinship network, the guild, the corporation - these were the building blocks of personhood".[10] In these varied composition which is evident in different world-view lies the personality self. It is the personality self that inform the character of a person. And in most instances, it is the character that reflects the attitude of a person to a particular situation. Apparently, one can view personality as a combination of emotional, attitudinal, and behavioural response patterns of an individual.[11] Hence, the paper assesses the burden of poverty on the character of a person. In other words, how does poverty diffuse the character of a person or how is the issue of poverty impinging on the personality of a person.

The Concept of Personality

Theoretically, the personality of an individual can be understood in the context presented by Sigmund Freud in Ciccarelli and Meyer (2006: 446-447) as quoted by Amolo and Anyanwu which state that, an individual is born an *id.* The *id* is the unconscious – amoral part of the personality that contains all the biological traits such as hunger, thirst, self-preservation, sex, etc.,[12] and that defines the nature of an individual where the character is developed. The *id*, he noted further, is also where the pleasure principles reside in an individual. However, as an individual continues to mature, another part of the personality, called the *ego*, which is more rational, logical, and cunning, develops. The *ego* works on the reality and pleasure principles, which tend to satisfy the selfish demands of the *id* so long as negative consequences are averted.[13]

This is the central point of the character nature of an individual. And since no human would want or prefer suffering, any act of suffering or act of de-humanization can bring the ego of the individual down. With time, another part of the personality emerges known as the *superego*. The *superego* is divided into two parts, the *ego* ideal and the conscience.

The *ego* ideal is the measuring rule of what is correct and acceptable behaviour. Whereas the conscience is that part of the human being, which makes an individual feel pride for doing what is right, and to feel guilty, for doing the wrong thing.[14] Freud, therefore, opined that during this personality development, there could be crisis (e.g. poverty, economic, emotional or financial crisis), that would lead to mal-development of any, or all the personality components bearing in mind that personality of an individual from the angle of psychology, resides on the soul – *psuche*. The *psuche* as Amolo and Anyanwu quotes Strong (1969) in Thiessen (1992), is man's nature looking earthward, and touching the world of sense.[15]

Apparently, from this standpoint, poverty situation can subject the character of a person to begin to look down on him/herself as his/her senses teaches him/her to compare his/her condition of living. The reason is premised on the fact that, personality is a set of individual differences that are affected by the socio-cultural development of an individual, i.e.: values, attitudes, personal memories, social relationships, habits and skills.[16] In other words, the self-worth of a person (value) and his social relationships (economic power) contribute to the socio-cultural status (attitudes, habits and skills – character formation) on an individual person in the society. Although different personality theorists present their own definitions of the word based on their theoretical positions; but the term "personality traits" as used in this context, refers to enduring personal characteristics that are revealed in a particular pattern of behaviour in a variety of situations;[17] *sitz im leben* (life context), situation of economic powerlessness. For instance, Gray regards personality as referring to a person's general style of interacting with the world, especially with other people- to such things as whether a person is withdrawn, for example, because of powerlessness, poverty or social degradation; or outgoing, because of economic power status, i.e. being successful; excitable or placid, tidy or messy, generous or stingy. Personality sub-summed ways in which individuals differ from each other in such characteristics.[18]

Although the need to engage different personality theories might not be necessary in this work, but we shall provide for working definition to form the basic concept of our discussion in this paper. The definition provided by Hampson concurs with our discourse. According to her, "personality refers to more or less stable internal factors that make one person's behaviour consistent from one time to another, and different from the behaviour other people would manifest in comparable situations".[19] According to this definition, if personality is taken to be a stable internal factor, what congruence does it has on the person's character exhibition in a worse situation? This definition contains four key underlying assumptions on personality. Firstly, the notion that personality is more or less stable is indicative of the fact that personality can to a limited extent, undergo changes; hence, it is not entirely stable.[20] The suggestive idea here is that, character cannot be totality stable given a worst situation. And that is why one maintains that the situation of poverty can change the character of a person for the worst.

This is symptomatic of the direction of the issue of discourse that this work is driving at; that is, that poverty influences the character of a person and can inform character changes. If personality can undergo changes in rare instances, it goes then that the inflictions of poverty can determine the character inhibition of that individual especially in a situation where the individual was once buoyant, but with the change of times things turned the other way round. On the contrary, if fortune smiles on the person, there is the probability that the individual, it is supposed would exhibit a different character. Either way it is viewed, the stability of a person's character corresponds to our everyday experience; in other words, the character content of person per time has a telling effect on the personality of that individual.

The second key assumption underlying our discussion here has to do with internality[21], that is, personality is located or imbued inside the individual. In other words, personality can be measured by indirectly making observation of external occurrence or experience of the person which allows for inference about the personality of that person on the basis of his/her attitudinal behaviour observed. Thirdly, it is also noted from the definition that personality make(s) one person's behaviour consistent from one time to another. Although this is controversial, but Hampson observed that, this is assumed to explain behavioural consistency because it is assumed to be a major determinant of behaviour and, according to her, since personality remains relatively stable, the behaviour it determines will be consistent.[22] This point can to a large extent be proved to be controversial indeed. A person's character can be consistence if he/she has to forgive, ignore an issue, or bear certain things. But not with the reality of poverty, hunger, suffering and untold hardship which can be so debilitating and horrific as to relegate a person self-worth completely.

Finally, the definition states that personality makes a person's behaviour different from the behaviour other people would manifest in comparable situations. Of a truth, we cannot deny the fact that, individual differences in response to the same situation are assumed to be the product of variations in personality. And this variation in personality has a way of affecting the status quo of a person, i.e. the condition of a person at a given time whether good or bad.[23] At this juncture therefore, it is paramount to ask how far or to what extent are individuals reacting to the same situation of poverty? This we shall now turn as we assess the moral angle of character changes in situational cases.

Moral Dimension of a Person's Character

The aforementioned speaks more of the psychological dialysis of the human personality. In this section, the moral concern of character is put in view from the analytic angle. It is suffice to say that matters that relate to morality are embedded in the thinking of persons- they turn out to become character traits; and the character of a person is informed by factors of moral choices forced upon an individual as a result of enormous burden of poverty.[24] This is corroborating our preceding discourse of personality and the issues raised on the behavioural pattern of the human person.

In conceptualizing the nature of the human person however, one must articulate a method of inquiry which can utilize the concept of value as its beginning point, owing to the fact that what a person is becomes much more essential to one's nature and being.[25] However, since character essentially reflects intrinsic values of people, hence, from moral perspective, character entails qualities of the intrinsic values of a person which have extrinsic expression.[26] In sum, character can be said to be structured in such a way that it is in it that one's integrity, moral strength, temperaments, preferences and moral qualities can be determined. In other words, what one is to others speaks extensively of one's character.[27] Congruously, speaking to the moral strength of an individual, it is not impossible for a person to lack the forte to stand against the situation of poverty, especially when it bites like an 'iron economic rod'.

From the perspective of morality therefore, Akanmidu puts it in a more laconic context that, life's prospect influences behaviour, which in the long run has effects on people's character. As Hampson also rightly noted[28], Akanmidu in the same light stated that this summation may not be absolutely accepted that character formation is a by-product of life's situations. Nonetheless, he asserts that there are instances where such situations have clear roles to play in the process of character development, choices and changes.[29] He put forward a theory to validate this point. The theory is that: "The character of persons and their circumstances of life are interdependent phenomena." According to him, this theory is premised on life's principles which are predicated on the outcomes of circumstances and challenges of life.

Apparently, this connotes that, the more endemic and precarious the circumstances of a person are, the more badly affected are the principles that shape the character of that individual. In this nexus, character projects enduring personal characteristics or personality traits that are revealed in a particular pattern of behaviour in a variety of situation. In other words, there is a clear indication, as shown so far, that character is more malleable by environmental influences, for instance, poverty and no doubt, personality differences also predict the occurrence of life experiences. We shall briefly discuss few lines on poverty before returning to the issue of the character of a person. In this context, it will focus on the interrelation of poverty and character in order to adduce the influence they have on each other.

Poverty as a Socio-economic Issue

Conceptually, poverty may be described as a social condition in which material resources are lacking. Dzurgba in explicating this concept posits that, poverty is a state in which an individual or a social group lacks material resources that are necessary for subsistence.[30] Hence, the state in which people cannot afford to meet their immediate or basic needs for living and survival is classified as poverty. In other words, someone is poor when such a fellow is living below the poverty line of one hundred naira (#100). Poverty presents an endemic situation in the society, especially in the sub-Sahara region of Africa, of which Nigeria is having her full share. What led to the situation of poverty may not constitute an

issue for this paper; essentially, the line of consideration is mainly to articulate poverty from the socio-economic perspective and align it with character of persons. However, to be concise, poverty is often seen as a condition wherein a person cannot satisfy his or her basic needs, namely, food, shelter, clothing, health and education.[31] From the moral angle of which we are correlating it with character, "poverty" is classified as a form of human suffering such as "starvation" or "destitution". Hence, poverty according to Akanmidu is the state of lacking the means to exist adequately.[32] This is an aspect that touches on the personality/character of an individual, especially when perceived from the material angle.

It is apparent therefore from this definition from moral philosophical standpoint, that poverty can demean a person character-wise. If it is granted that sufferings of different types can create basis for lack of the means to exist adequately, then, hunger, starvation, destitution, illness, just to mention few can be basic to reasons that elicit lack of means to live adequately.[33] Ultimately, these sufferings in themselves point to a situation of chronic poverty. Taking the issue further, Atere points to the impact of poverty and displacement on women and children as the one that is sub-human. Apparently, what Atere projects in her paper are the kinds that posit inflicting situation on the character of persons. According to her, poverty conditions lead to ignorance, illiteracy, poor health, diseases, mal-nutrition and powerlessness.[34]

In the event of these helpless circumstances, the possibility of one losing his/her self-esteem and worth is not in doubt. Obviously, a person with low self-esteem would lack sense of personhood; hence, such a person can easily be induced into prostitution in the case of women and other anti-social practices. And for children, it may consign them to dejection and in struggling for survival, makes street hawkers out of them, depriving them of education needed in nation building. In the long run they involved themselves in immoral practices, including sexual activities resulting in teenage pregnancies or unwanted pregnancies and drug addiction.[35]From this perception therefore, poverty can be conjectured as a condition of life so characterized by mal-nutrition, high infant mortality and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency.[36]

This position clearly represents what poverty is in Nigeria and what it portends to the personality of an individual. This gives a clear indication of who a poor person is and why it is subtle for poverty to influence his character. A poor person, according to Akanmidu, is one whose life's needs have permanently overwhelmed his resources for life's sustenance.[37] The infliction of a condition of permanent overwhelming situation is such an endemic state that is very sensitive to the point of altering the nature of someone in poverty. This brings us to the effect of the expression of poverty on the character of persons.

The Influence of Poverty on Human Character

The cogent issue raised in this article is the point that life's prospect influences behaviour, which in the long run has effects on people's character.[38] This is to say that

character changes, as a result of life's experiences are at times premised on the assault of poverty on the individual. Although, as stated elsewhere in this paper, character formation or development may not be a complete aftermath of life's situations, but no doubt, one concur with Akanmidu that, such situations have clear roles to play in the process of character choices and changes. This is basic because as he said further, character in question, is an internalized phenomenon in the person. Hence, the influence of poverty on the person shall rest solely on the effects that poverty has on the character of persons' theory highlighted earlier in this work; that is, "the character of persons and their circumstances of life are interdependent on phenomena."

In this respect, the assumption will then be that life's level of prosperity has some effects on people's character. This points to the fact that circumstances of affluence are different from those of poverty. In this case, each of the two cases builds different world-view into people. This is to say that the rich look at the world differently from the poor.[39] In this respect, the assessment of the poor person of himself in the light of the rich person factor into his character afterwards and how he begins to see himself. These constitute moral challenges for the person.

It is apparent therefore, that all the aforementioned challenges can often time affect the character of a person. The attitude of a poor person who is overwhelmed with the needs around him will be different from someone who easily takes care of his immediate and long term needs without stress. The reason is that poverty affects the complete being of man-body, soul and spirit. Therefore, poverty can in actual fact influence people's thoughts, character or behaviour. Akanmidu puts it this way that, "...life's prospect influence behaviour, which in the long run has effects on people's character and orientation".[40] This point brings out the implication that our behavioural pattern and character exhibition per time hinges on the yearnings or crave of one to become somebody in life.

This explains the reason why Akanmidu further noted that, "the vicissitudes of life do not allow stability of people's character. Some experiences of life do transform people's character, and some reform, while some change the character of people for the worse".[41] In other words, it is safe to say, that some experiences and circumstances encountered through life constitutes a large part of his character changes and formation. In consequence of this, poverty constitutes one major factor that changes the character of people for the worse. This is a reality brought about by inevitabilities which are sequential in the life of someone who is poor.[42] One thing is certain and that is germane to this discussion is the fact that, poverty situation is not a state that is desirable; hence, it carries no advantage with it, rather, to be poor in life is seen as a misfortune, it is one of disadvantage for the reason that poverty does not attract any form of advantage or positive effect whatsoever. They are not reckoned with in the family and in the society at large. Their wisdom is not regarded even if it is worthwhile, he is all the time wrong. In this nexus, there is an established reality that situation and conditions of life enthuse the

personality trait of an individual and that a person's exposure to endemic circumstances of poverty affect the person's character.

Conclusion

It is Cletus Chukwu that opines that,

> Our experience and knowledge of human nature (character) are always incomplete and fragmentary. This inability to achieve a comprehensive grasp of what we are is often revealed as we attempt to clarify of the concepts that emerge from our lop-sided understanding of human nature (personality/character). The concept of self (the human person) is a case in point. It defies universal definition of what it refers to in human existence. Perhaps the ambiguity we encounter in the notion of self stems from the fact that 'self' is interwoven with other complex concepts of attributes of an individual, such as mind, consciousness, soul, psycho-physical body, personal identity, all of which lack universal definitions. The nature and intermingling of our ideas about these attributes of human nature result in unavoidable logical contradictions as we engage in analytic studies of these various concepts.[43] (Emphasis are mine)

To this end, and stemming from Cletus's quotation, this paper is able to establish that circumstances of life, the pressure of poverty and the scourging rod of harsh economic situation all have attendant effect on the character of persons. And when this happens, it creates fear in the mentality of persons which in the process factors in the situation of servitude which ultimately affect the character of a person in a state of poverty and misery. It is practically true to state here that indeed, poverty builds fear into the character of poor people. The poor man might have been a bold man by nature, but in a way, poverty builds fear into his character, because of the master factor that is present in his effort to survive.[44] Hence, ethically speaking, the exposure to poverty pressure may change a number of things in the character of a person.

In sum, Clement of Alexandria enunciating the ethical implications of poverty attitudes adduced that, the value of a human was to be judged not on the basis of that person's status in the society, but rather within a historically minded schema inclusive of creative individuals who are shaping history in their quest for salvation.[45] Therefore, in essence,

there is a call for the poor to have a change of attitude inspite of their poverty situation. The need for the poor to begin to have positive mental perspective of themselves is very important as this is what can and in the long run would enhance their self-esteem that can project their self-image and worth. In this way their confidence will be heightened and the quest for salvation mentioned by Clement, i.e. freedom from servitude, penury, misery, destitution and poverty that have hitherto demented their character would be actualized.

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