

AFRO-COMMUNAL VIRTUE ETHICS AS BASIS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Governance, though with different interpretations and models of measurement, is conceptually conceived as the use of state resources and powers by government officials in the pursuit of generally accepted goals geared towards the betterment of society. On the contrary, the misuse, misappropriation, embezzlement, deprivation, and denial of people's equal access and opportunities to economic resources, unpopular economic policies that threatened people's quality of life, and so on, characterised governance in most African states. This has contributed to increased poverty, insecurity, poor economy, bad leadership, and corrupt practices that hinder the development of most states on the continent of Africa. It is based on this that this paper attempts to delve into the discourse on the problem of poor governance in Africa with a view to argue and prescribe, contrary to the dominant Western ethical theories (Utilitarianism and Kantianism), that the viable and pragmatic way out of this quagmire is to resort to endogenous Afro-communal virtue ethics that places premium on good character formation and the exhibition of virtues such as integrity, honesty, solidarity, compassion, respect, transparency, accountability, and the like which altogether exemplifies the common good of the society. This theory qualifies an individual as a human person, thereby imbuing as a moral necessity excellent characters and behaviours that will moderate and synergise the relationships between an individual and the community, such that the flourishing of the society determines the flourishing of an individual. This theory unites the ruler and the ruled as a holistic entity in which the ruler is conceived as the guardian and the keeper of the ruled, and the welfare of the ruled becomes a priority for the ruler (political leaders). This paper adopts conceptual and critical-analytical methods to understand the causes and factors responsible for poor governance in Africa and to prescribe Afro-communal virtue ethics (endogenous African ethics) as a viable and practicable way out of the chronically poor governing system in Africa, thereby engendering sustainable development for Africa and Nigeria.

Keywords: Afro-communalism, Virtue Ethics, Africa, Nigeria, Good Governance, Sustainable Development

Introduction: State of Nature and the Formation of a Civil (Political) Society: Social Contract Theories in Perspective

A social contract, according to Muiyiwa Falaiye and Anthony Okeregbe, is a fundamental principle of the legitimisation of governmental organisation, for it provides a starting point for a rational explanation of the origin of the state.¹ This presupposes that a contract of agreement between the ruler and the ruled legitimately authorises the origin of the state and the exercise of its powers. This contract is bonded with a consensual agreement that the ruler will provide security, maintain and foster peace, and enact and implement laws that will engender a harmonious existence and social order. At the same time, the ruled will willingly submit their rights and natural liberty to live within the confines of laws and the authority of the ruler. This contract is necessary for man's survival and the only possible way to create a civil and orderly society devoid of lawlessness, violence, war, crisis, and anarchistic behaviours that threaten human safety and welfare. Hobbes, as quoted by Charles Edward Merriam, describes the life of man in the state of nature thus:

In faculties of mind and body, men are, on the whole, so nearly equal that one cannot claim for himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he. From this equality of ability arises equality of hope in attaining the ends desired. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies... hence where there is no common power to keep men in awe, they are in that condition called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man. This war need not be a constant conflict since the nature of war consists not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary².

The above points to Hobbes' hypothetical description of the life of man in a pre-social contract state. This state of nature, says Hobbes, is a lawless and anarchic state that is devoid of any modicum of morality and rationality. However, rationality cannot be dispelled from man's activities in the state of nature because, if anything at all, his reason is controlled by his appetites and the natural right of self-preservation. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes further describes that man in the state of nature is self-centred, selfish, greedy, and fraudulent. Man, in this state, always desires to possess and have everything to himself, not minding what becomes of others when all the resources are forcefully

¹Michael Falaiye and Anthony Okeregbe, "Social Contract Theories and Governance in Contemporary Nigeria", *Ethics, Governance, and Social Order in Africa: Essays in Honour of Godwin S. Sogolo*, Olatunji A. Oyeshile & Francis Offor (eds). Ibadan: Zenith Book House Ltd, 2016, 153.

² Charles Edward Merriam, "Hobbes' Doctrine of the State of Nature", *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*, 3, 1907: 151-157. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3038543>.

taken away by the powerful and stronger man. The sense of survival that is inherent in all humans triggered the conflict, strife, struggle, and insalubrious competition between and among men to possess the limited available resources (goods) needed for survival. Hobbes explicitly captures the causes of the brutal war in chapter 13 of his popular book, *Leviathan*:

Like man, we find three principal causes of quarrels. First, Competition; Secondly, Diffidence; Thirdly, Glory. The first maketh men invade for Gain; the second, for Safety; and the third, for Reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves Masters of other men persons, wives, children, and cattell; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, such as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their Persons, or by reflexion in their Kindred, their Friends, their Nation, their Profession, or their Name³.

The state of nature, therefore, is encumbered and loaded with wars, fears, violence, dangers, force, fraud, and worst of all, death. The condition of man in the state of war is most disastrous and deplorable. Falaiye and Okeregbe describe the state as an “unimaginable situation of *homo lupus hominem* – man the wolf of man.”⁴ This is akin to the popular Latin phrase that describes the state of nature in Hobbes’s *Leviathan* as *bellum omnium contra omnes* – the war of all against all. Man, in the state of nature, is condemned to a life as he has no one to trust and depend on. Little wonder that Hobbes stoutly describes the life of man in the state of nature as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” We need not forget that the power of man in the state of nature is unlimited and absolute because he is allowed to protect his gain from encroachment and forceful possession by another. Consequently, one’s gain of power is to the detriment and loss of another⁵. The acquisition of power by man in the state of nature is never enough, and as such, man is encouraged to have power by any means until he is out of danger. This point is differently related by Merriam when she said, “Every man has a right to what he can get and for just so long as he can keep it.”⁶

In Hobbes’ state of nature, there is no common idea of the morality of right and wrong, justice and injustice, and good and bad, since each man is to himself. Besides, there is no government, and neither is there a commonwealth to enact laws and enforce moral rules on the people. Now, to get out of this state of solitude and perpetual dangers and fear of death, every man has to

³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 13, New York: Penguin, 1968: 185.

⁴ Falaiye and Okeregbe, “Social Contract Theories and Governance in Contemporary Nigeria”, 154.

⁵ James H. Read, “Power in the State of Nature, Power in Civil Society”, *Polity*, 23(4), 1991:506. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3235060>.

⁶ Merriam, “Hobbes’ Doctrine of the State of Nature”, 151.

agree to relinquish their natural rights and liberties to the authority and sovereign power of one man or group of men or assembly on the condition that their motive of self-preservation will not be compromised. The sovereign performs no other function than to ensure peace, orderliness, and stability in society. However, the problem with Hobbes' contract theory is that the sovereign (in civil society) possesses absolute powers to make and enforce rules. That is, the sovereign decides what is right, wrong, just, unjust, good, or bad. The sovereign is above the law and not accountable to his subjects. One notable fact from Hobbes' contract theory that is beneficial to any government anchored on a good governing process is that the task before any government is to ensure stability, peace, and social order. However, Hobbes' contract theory is unfit for the Nigerian polity.

John Locke, in *The Second Treatise of Government*, also describes the living conditions of man in a pre-social contract society. Contrary to Hobbes's war-like state of nature, Locke's state of nature was a nicer, perfect, and natural condition for man. Man is free to pursue his desires and is politically equal to others in the state of nature. Like Hobbes, Locke insists that man is politically equal, so that people have different talents and abilities, and none of them is so superior as to be master of any of the others.⁷ This is clearly expressed in the words of John Locke:

To understand political power, right, and derive it from its original, we must consider what state all men are naturally in, and that is, *a state of perfect freedom* to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature... A state also of *equality*, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection.⁸

Locke, in line with Hobbes' theory, preserves the liberty of man to defend and protect his life and property from encroachment by others who possess similar liberty.⁹ While Locke's state of nature is not as disastrous and brutish as Hobbes's state of nature, the life of man in Locke's state of nature is filled with fear, perpetual danger, and insecurity. The danger of insecurity persists in

⁷ Jean Hampton, *Political Philosophy*, Routledge, 1997: 53.

⁸ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chap. II, para. 4, 1690: 18.

⁹ Adesina Afolayan, "The Aristotelian Imperative: Ethics and the Good Society", *Ethics and Public Affairs*, F. A. Adeigbo, D. Irele, and A. Udefi (eds.), Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 2014, 37.

Locke's state of nature because every man is the interpreter and executioner of the law of nature that fits into his interest of protecting his life, liberty, and estate. In that case, "everyone has a right to punish the transgressors of that law to such a degree as may hinder its violation... what any man does in prosecution of that law, everyone must have the right to do."¹⁰

The way out of this state of nature, as proposed by Locke, is radically different from Hobbes's contract theory. Locke submits that the remedy out of the state of nature is for everyone to submit his natural right to judge or punish offenders to a commonwealth that makes and enforces laws (*legislative, judicial, executive power of civil society*) on everyone who has consented to be a member of the civil (political) society. In this way, man enjoys in return "comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and greater security against any that are not of it."¹¹ However, it is worth noting that the commonwealth, unlike Hobbes's authoritarian government with unlimited power, is created with limited power to legislate, adjudicate, and execute laws and policies favourable to the values and preferences of the people in the civil (political) society. The problem worth noting in Locke's social contract theory is that the will of the majority is *sine qua non* to the legitimacy of government decisions. This problem is termed the problematics of majoritarianism.¹² We will buttress more on this problem in the latter part of this chapter and also show how it is an impediment to governance for the public good.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau radically departs from Hobbes' and Locke's description of the state of nature. Man, according to Rousseau, is "born free, and he is everywhere in chains." This popular saying, attributed to Rousseau, explains the socio-political condition of man before and after the creation of the civil (political) society. Contrary to the state of war, fear, continual danger, and insecurity that pervade the state of nature as accentuated by Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau conceives man's life in the state of nature as naturally good. It is the artificial creation of society that corrupts the true and good nature of man. However, for man to protect himself and others in society, he consented, like others, to surrender his rights and freedom to the community. The community's decisions on matters that affect the people are legitimately supported by what Rousseau calls the "general will." General Will is the collective and popular will of the people that protects the interests of aggregate individuals against personal and self-interested individuals. The General Will, contrary to Hobbes's authoritarianism and Locke's majoritarianism, encourages participation and collectiveness to eschew and repress an individual's pursuit of personal interest and gains that are detrimental to the public good.

¹⁰ Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 19.

¹¹ Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chap. VIII, para. 95, 23.

¹² Afolayan, "The Aristotelian Imperative: Ethics and the Good Society", 39.

What is the import of the above contractarian theories to governance? One indisputable fact that could be gleaned from the above is that governance is about responsibilities. Responsibilities as used in this sense are not the same as accountability because a government can be responsible for carrying out some specific tasks but not be accountable. This instance suffices in Hobbes' social contract theory, characterised by the unlimited and absolute power of a commonwealth that enjoys the submissiveness of its citizens but, in turn, is not accountable to them for its actions. Responsibilities, a concept that permeates the social contract theories discussed above, show that the formation and institutionalisation of a state (government) is saddled with the responsibility to protect and preserve the interests of all citizens while also promulgating policies that engender quality living and the common good. This aligns with the submission of Falaiye and Okeregbe when they aver that "contractarian models show that there is a correlation between political structures or institutions of state and the betterment of the citizenry."¹³ Evidence of this correlation is the different reasons encapsulated above on why people consensually agreed to submit their rights, freedoms, liberty, and property to a constituted authority in return for a peaceful, orderly, and non-violent society. Unequivocally, the state is instituted to serve and govern the people to achieve their common interests and good. Also, one would notice that the formation of the state is borne out of people's agreement to institutionalise values that strengthen the capacity of the society to survive and thrive. For want of space, we would not delve into other contemporary discourse on social contract theories.

Bringing this discourse into perspective within the framework of Africa's political system, we may want to ask, is governance supporting the people in realising their will and aspirations? Is the state responsible and accountable to the people? Is the state serving the interest of the common good or the interest of some selected individuals and/or cabals in government? No doubt, Africa, within the purview of the global world, is battling with the problems of underdevelopment characterised by corruption, bad governance, tribalism and nepotism, ethnic rivalries, political instability, and bad leadership, among others. This paper is an attempt to prescribe a remedy for this quagmire using Afro-communal virtue ethics as a basis for good governance to thrive. The next section of this paper will examine the idea of Afro-communalism as it is conceived within the socio-political terrain of Africa.

The Idea of Afro-communalism Revisited

One of the popular political theories theorised by African scholars to address different political, social, economic, and environmental problems confronting Africa is Afro-communalism. Within the terrain of African political philosophy, many African philosophers and political scientists are strongly of

¹³ Falaiye and Okeregbe, "Social Contract Theories and Governance in Contemporary Nigeria", 157.

the view that the problem with Africa requires an inward and endogenous consideration that is internalised within the cultural framework of the African people. This has led many scholars to fall back on cultural frameworks that are embedded in the African community. To this end, this section will revisit the African idea of communalism. Afro-communalism, according to Jonathan Chimakonam and Uchenna Ogbonnaya, is an ideology both ontologically and axiologically that highlights the relationship between the individual and their community in a typical African society (emphasis added).¹⁴ This suggests that Afro-communalism is concerned with establishing and reiterating the link and bond that fused the individual and the community to become a whole. In this sense, to see the individual as an independent entity, separate and disconnected from the community, is abhorrent to the core values of African communal living. These values are founded on social harmony, solidarity, shared identity, cooperation, interconnectedness, and relationships among individuals in the community.¹⁵

As a corollary to the above, Afro-communalism ensures that the collective interests of the people supersede and prevail over the singular interest of an individual. To put it in another perspective, the socio-political structure of the community in Africa subsumes the interests of the individuals within the collective interests of the community as a whole. This suffices to say that individuals are encouraged to pursue the common good of society since, in doing so, the individual is at the same time pursuing his good. Little wonder that John Mbiti's social structure of the African community is remarkable when he accentuates that "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."¹⁶ The African communal community, therefore, emboldens the spirit of selflessness, generosity, altruism, humanism, and solidarity for the common good and flourishing of all human beings. Segun Gbadegesin, corroborating the African communal spirit of selflessness, opines that "every member is expected to consider himself/herself as an integral part of the whole and to play an appropriate role towards the good of all."¹⁷ Contrary to the argument that the community consumes the rights, autonomy, and freedom of individuals in the community, African communal society protects the rights,

¹⁴ Jonathan O. Chimakona and L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya, "Can Afro-Communitarianism Be Useful in Combating the Challenge of Human Interaction Posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic?" *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 19, 14255, 2022: 2. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192114255>.

¹⁵ Ifeanyi Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought", *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, R. Wright (ed), 3rd ed. 1984: 171–181. Lanham, MD: University Press of America; Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 35-76; Segun Gbadegesin, *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991; Thaddeus Metz, "Replacing Development: An Afro-Communal Approach to Global Justice," *Philosophical Papers*, 46(1), 2017a: 111-137. DOI: 10.1080/05568641.2017.1295627.

¹⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*. London: Heineman, 1970: 141.

¹⁷ Gbadegesin, *African Philosophy*, 65.

interests, and needs of individuals. The reason for this is that in protecting individuals' rights, freedom, and autonomy, the community is protecting itself from internal and external encroachments. This is akin to the position that the problem of one individual is the problem of the community; solving this problem is the same as solving the community problem. This is practically possible in African communal society because the individual does not live and exist as an atomic entity alone in the society, nor is he conceived as a monad in Gottfried Leibniz's metaphysics. The existence of an individual is deeply rooted in their community. Kwame Gyekye, as quoted by Martin Aseigbu and Anthony Ajah, explains this rootedness of an individual in his community when he comments that "an individual human being is born into an existing human society, and therefore, into a human culture... the community alone constitutes the context, the social or cultural space, in which the actualization of the possibilities of the person can take place, providing the individual persons the opportunity to express his individuality, to acquire and develop his personality and to fully become the kind of person he wants to be."¹⁸ This further reiterates the communal values of interconnectedness and interdependence of the community and the individuals.

From another perspective, Afro-communalism has also been interpreted to define the humanness and personhood of a human being. Just as Opoku remarks, "A man is a man because of others, and life is when you are together, alone, you are an animal."¹⁹ This suggests that in African communal society, one is regarded as a human person because they share, identify, and participate in communal activities that will advance the interests of the community over and above the self-centeredness and self-aggrandisement of an individual, which is detrimental to the common good of the community. Archbishop Desmond Tutu expresses a similar idea when he writes that "a person is a person through other people." It is not "I think, therefore I am." It says, rather, "I am human because I belong." "I Participate, I share."²⁰ Thaddeus Metz's idea of Afro-communalism also fits into this perspective. For him, Afro-communalism is better demonstrated when it is anchored on shared identity and solidarity. On shared identity and solidarity, Metz has this to say:

To identify with other people consists of two main things. First, it includes being close in the sense of sharing a common sense of self or thinking as a member of a group or part of a relationship. Instead of thinking of oneself as an "I," distinct from and perhaps even above others, the self becomes part of a "we," enjoying a sense of togetherness... Second, identifying with others also includes participating

¹⁸ Martin F. Asiegbu and Anthony C. Ajah, "The Community and the Individual: Revisiting the Relevance of Afro-Communalism," *Filosofia Theoretical: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*, 9(1), 2020: 35.

¹⁹ Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African traditional religion*, FEP International, 1978: 92.

²⁰ Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, New York: Random House, 1999: 35.

with them on even-handed terms. One engages in joint projects in which people cooperate to achieve shared or at least compatible ends... Failing to identify with others could take an extreme, divisive form in which one has an attitude of “me versus you” and subordinates other people to achieve one’s ends. Beyond identifying with others, a harmonious or communal relationship also consists of exhibiting solidarity towards them. This is a matter of being positively oriented towards others’ interests or caring for them, in a word. Such behaviour includes helping other people by sharing one’s labour and money to meet their needs and doing so for their sake. It also includes acting out of sympathy with others, for instance, choosing in ways consistent with being happy when others flourish and sad when they fail. Failing to exhibit solidarity could take an extreme form of ill will, involving doing harm to others and acting consequent to taking pleasure in their pain.²¹

Afro-communalism, as gleaned from Metz’s perspective, collapses the “I” and the “we” to have a community that prizes collectivity, togetherness, participation, solidarity, sympathy, and participative care for the needs of others. This aligns with what Ifeanyi Menkiti calls “collectivities in the truest sense.”²² It is in this sense that Afro-communalism prizes the duty of an individual to his community over and above his rights, contrary to the Western world, where the concern is mainly with individual rights. In African communal society, while the duty to the community is primary, the rights of an individual are secondary.²³ This is because the duty of an individual to his community will determine whether he is entitled to community protection or not. The idea that says think of what you can do for your society is true of the African communal society. This idea is differently expressed in the works of African political theorists cum leaders such as Julius Nyerere’s *Ujamaa* (Brotherhood); Leopold Sedar Senghor’s *Negritude*; Kwame Nkrumah’s *Consciencism*, and the like. In the Southern African tradition, African communalism is demonstrated in *Ubuntu* (Humanness), an African value that highlights that everyone sees himself in relations with others, and these relations are guided by other values such as respect, kindness, tolerance, hospitality, cooperation, friendliness, participation, solidarity, and willingness

²¹ Thaddeus Metz, “African Ethics and Public Governance: Nepotism, Preferential Hiring, and Other Partiality”, *Ethics and Accountable Governance in Africa’s Public Sector*, Vol. 1, K. Ogunyemi, I. Adisa, and R. E. Hinson (eds.), Switzerland AG: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, 116-117.

²² Menkiti, “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought”, 179.

²³ Menkiti, “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought”, 180.

to go beyond selfish interest and work for others' interests (emphasis added).²⁴ Corroborating this view, Metz comments that Afro-communalism is "other-regarding values," which is analogously the same as saying that a person is a person through other people.²⁵ Mogobe Ramose shares this view on the nature of *Ubuntu* when he posits that "to be a human being is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them."²⁶

One fact is indisputable from the above discourse and nuances on Afro-communalism, and that is that Afro-communalism is anchored on the "common good." This means that the main concern of African communal living is the welfare and flourishing of the community. The belief is that if the community flourishes, concomitantly, individuals in the community will also flourish. As such, Afro-communalism stresses the need for the end point of individuals' activities and actions to promote the common interest and good of the community. This is corroborated by Desmond Tutu's view when he vehemently condemns any actions or activities that undermine or subvert the greatest good. Such actions should be avoided like the plague, so he says. This idea is significantly relevant to our concern in this paper in the sense that any government agenda and/or programmes that are not geared towards the attainment of the common good should be avoided like a plague, to use Tutu's words.

Virtues in the African Moral System

African moral systems are prescribed moral codes and conduct that guide and judge human actions as good, bad, right, wrong, praise-worthy, or blame-worthy. That is, it is a single principle that purports to entail and explain all permissible decisions, as contrasted with those that are not morally permitted.²⁷ Metz avers that "a moral theory counts as African if it is informed, not so much by Western cultures, but rather by many of the long-standing ethical beliefs and practices of a variety of peoples in the large sub-Saharan African region."²⁸ African moral codes and principles are indigenous to African people, and they are principles that bind everyone together in the community. Conversely, any action or conduct of an individual that does not conform to the moral codes of the community is vehemently condemned and prohibited. The reason for this is not far to seek. It is believed that in achieving

²⁴ Philip Ogo Ujomudike, "Ubuntu Ethics", *Encyclopedia of Global Bioethics*, H. Ten Have (ed). Switzerland: Springer International, 2016, 2869-2881.

²⁵ Thaddeus Metz, "Toward an African Moral Theory." *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 15(3), 2007: 321-341; "Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa", *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 11, 2011: 532-559; "Two Conceptions of African Ethics." *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, 2013: 141-161; "An Overview on African Ethics", *Themes, Issues and Problems in African Philosophy*, I. Ukpokolo, (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, Switzerland, 2017b, 61-76.

²⁶ Mogobe B. Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*, Harare: Mond Books, 2002: 51.

²⁷ Metz, "African Ethics and Public Governance", 114.

²⁸ Metz, "African Ethics and Public Governance".

the common good and interests of all individuals in the community, all members of the community must voluntarily comply and abide by rules and principles that engender togetherness, cooperation, oneness, cohesion, interrelation, and interpersonal relationships. It is in this sense, contrary to Western ethical theories (Utilitarianism and Kantianism), that the African moral system is anchored on relationships. Little wonder that Opoku, as cited by Kemi Ogunyemi *et al.*, accentuates that African societies were maintained based on ethical principles; regard for those values kept these societies in order.²⁹ Metz maintains the same argument when he observes that African ethics imply that morality is possible only through interaction with others. These interactions, as noted earlier, are anchored on two distinct moral virtues – shared identity and solidarity.³⁰

However, it is important to reiterate for emphasis that the African moral system is communal, such that an action is seen not only to affect the actor but all of society, because it is believed that every individual is connected and deeply related to a common ancestral origin and the same motherland. As such, African moral ethics is strongly characterised by a greater interest in the common good than in that of the individual.³¹ This resonates with John Ayotunde Bewaji's submission when he affirms that the wellspring of morality and ethics in African societies is the pursuit of a balance between the individual and communal well-being.³² He avows further that moral obligation, in the African thought system, is social rather than individual. This is not the same as saying the individual's good or interest is of no significance to the community, but that in pursuing the common good of the community, one is equally pursuing his good, since one is a member of the community. The point we are driving at here is that ethics in African traditional thought is virtue-centred, which means that it is concerned with securing the collective interests and common good of the community as the end, and an individual's flourishing as the means. The implication of this in securing the common good of the community is that the community strives for the greatest good because individuals who make up the community are virtuous in acts and deeds. But the difference between African virtue ethics and Western virtue ethics is that in the former, an individual is virtuous not for his own sake but for the sake of the community, while the latter is characterised by personalised virtue, that is,

²⁹ Cf Kemi Ogunyemi, Isaiah Adisa and Robert E. Hinson, "Leadership and Policy Implementation for Good Governance in Africa", *Ethics and Accountable Governance in Africa's Public Sector*, Volume 2, K. Ogunyemi, I. Adisa & R. E.Hinson (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan: UK, 2022, 3.

³⁰ Thaddeus Metz, "African Moral Theory and Public Governance: Nepotism, Preferential Hiring and Other Partiality", *African Ethics: An Anthology for Comparative and Applied Ethics*, M. F. Murove (ed), Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009, 340.

³¹ Ogunyemi et al., "Leadership and Policy Implementation for Good Governance in Africa", 3.

³² John A. I. Bewaji, "Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture", *A Companion to African Philosophy*, K. Wiredu (ed.), USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004, 396.

virtue for one's own sake. Given that, virtue ethics in the African moral system is of merit because it repudiates selfish and egoistical self-seeking interests. As rightly noted by Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya, African ethics is communocentric or sociocentric and not egocentric.³³ To put this point in a clearer perspective, an action is morally good if it strives towards promoting social harmony, togetherness, friendliness, impartiality, cooperation, solidarity, cohesion, and human welfare, while actions that subvert the common good of the community are morally bad.

Afro-communal virtue ethics, following from the above discussion explicitly and implicitly, suggests that the community determines what is morally right and wrong. An action that does not conform to and aligns with the interests and good of society is easily discarded. This is true of all societies in Africa, even though what is moral in concrete moral situations may not be universally the same in all societies.³⁴ Virtues in the African moral system have been interpreted differently in literature, though all these interpretations have one thing in common: the common good. The virtues prized by the community, according to Desmond Tutu, are "harmony, friendliness, and community are the greatest goods. Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum* – the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague."³⁵

In sub-Saharan thought, moral virtue is subsumed in what is called *Ubuntu* (humanness) in the Nguni language, which is a good character. Virtue in the African moral system is used to measure the degree of personhood. That is, the more one practices virtues in his relations to others and his duty to the community, the closer one is to becoming a complete person. By implication, acting virtuously is used to distinguish a person from a non-person or even an animal. Menkiti comments that personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be competent or ineffective, better or worse.³⁶ Those within the circle of lower animals are often regarded as cruel, wicked, selfish, and corrupt because their actions distort and contravene the common good of the community and, consequently, could bring harm to all members of the community. Segun Gbadegesin's view resonates with this thought when he writes that Yoruba will describe a wicked person when they say "*kì í ṣe ènìyàn*", which is translated to mean he is not a person because such a person has acted below the moral status of what qualifies one to become a person in the genuine and complete sense.³⁷ Gbadegesin posits further that one is virtuous by "a life of selfless devotion and service to the communal welfare.

³³ Chimakona and Ogbonnaya, "Can Afro-Communitarianism Be Useful", 4.

³⁴ Bewaji, "Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture", 397.

³⁵ Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 35.

³⁶ Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought", 173.

³⁷ Gbadegesin, *African Philosophy*, 27.

Here, selfishness and individualism are abhorred and are expected to be rejected by a developed sense of community.”³⁸

One may ask, how does one learn to be virtuous in African thought? According to Aristotle, virtue ethics is learned through what he calls “habituation.” That is, the only way for one to perfect a virtuous act is to consistently practice acting in a way that strikes a balance between the extremes of excess and deficiency. However, in African society, embedded and characterised by communal social existence, individuals are socialised into the norms and practices of the community from infancy, starting with the extended family and age group, to the larger society.

Conceptualising the Meanings of Governance and Good Governance

Governance is an important concept discussed in public administration, political science, development studies, and political philosophy. Governance, as a result of its multifaceted nature, has taken on different meanings, making it notoriously slippery to use the words of Pierre J. and Guy Peters.³⁹ Generally, governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).⁴⁰ This definition is broad in the sense that it connotes that governance is beyond political administration and governmental policies. The definition entails that the running of an organisation or institution is largely dependent on the policy and decision-making of a legitimate authority vested with the power to formulate, execute, and implement policies. As such, there are various contexts in which governance has been used. For instance, we speak of community governance, corporate governance, local governance, national governance, and international governance.⁴¹ However, while we cannot jettison governance as a process of making and implementing decisions, this conception of governance does not help us understand political governance. Now, what is governance within the ambit of the political domain?

According to Eston, as cited by Bolatito Lanre-Abass and Emmanuel Layode, governance is construed as a process that involves the notion of a political system that accommodates all the structures and processes through which rules or policies are authoritatively determined for society as a whole.⁴² What is true about this definition is that it affirms the institutionalisation of government as

³⁸ Gbadegesin, *African Philosophy*, 58.

³⁹ Jon Pierre and Guy Peters. *Governance, Politics and the State*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000, 14.

⁴⁰ Muhammad Ali, “Governance and Good Governance: A Conceptual Perspective”, *The Dialogue*, 10(1), 2015: 67.

⁴¹ Christopher Agulanna, “Foundations of Good Governance for Sustainable Development in Africa”, *The Development Philosophy of Emmanuel Onyechere Osigwe Anyiam-Osigwe: Enhancement of Socio-Political Existence and Order*, vol. 2, O. Oladipo and A.B. Ekanola (eds.), Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2009, 4.

⁴² Bolatito A. Lanre-Abass and Emmanuel A. Layode, “Moral Basis of Governance”, *Ethics, Governance and Social Order in Africa: Essays in Honour of Godwin S. Sogolo*, O. A. Oyeshile and F. Ofori (eds). Ibadan: Zenith Book House Ltd, 2016, 88.

machinery vested with powers and authority to administer the state, control its affairs, and manage the state's resources for the benefit of all citizens. Governance, as understood from this perspective, encapsulates the relationships between governance and government. Conspicuously, governance is explicitly expressed in the functions and activities of the government in governing society. Aliyu, cited by Lanre-Abass and Layode, describes the role of government thus:

Government exists to effect and sustain the total well-being of members of the state... Governments make decisions on macroeconomic and social policy that have a direct impact on the long-term health of the economy. Governments provide critical goods and services, such as infrastructure, health, and education, that determine the competitiveness of the economy. Governments foster an enabling environment for private sector growth and regulatory structures that balance objectives of growth and equity.⁴³

It is deduced from the quotation above that the government not only enforces rules but is also saddled with the responsibility of creating an enabling environment for the flourishing and well-being of the citizens by engendering policies and harnessing resources of the state for the common good of all. It is important to note that these functions or attributes of government could be performed by either a democratic or a military government. The government is one actor in governance. There are other actors involved in governance. Lanre-Abass and Layode point out that:

Governance as a process encapsulates layers of relationships and political nuances between policymakers (individuals who constitute the government) and citizens. Governance presupposes a power structure with its hierarchical categories, incorporating the economic, social, cultural, and political tensions within the society, and thus displaying an inherent dynamism that absorbs ebbs and flows of pressures towards ensuring peaceful solutions to existential problems confronting the citizens within the society.⁴⁴

The above quotation is to clear the misconception that the liabilities and burden of governance rest solely on the shoulders of the government. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the major player in governance is the government. Now, the question that calls for attention and deliberation is,

⁴³ Lanre-Abass and Layode, "Moral Basis of Governance", 87.

⁴⁴ Lanre-Abass and Layode, "Moral Basis of Governance", 88.

what is good governance? This question is normative because it deals with the assessment and evaluation of government performance and services to citizens and society at large. The question of good governance presupposes that a government could fail in its responsibilities and duties to citizens by instituting and executing inhumane policies that bring suffering, poverty, insecurity, injustice, inequality, marginalisation, and so on. Consequently, a government that fails to promote the interests of those who make up the society would have failed in its duty or moral responsibility.⁴⁵

Good governance, according to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, consists of eight major characteristics. These are: it is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law. This conception of good governance is rooted in democratic practices that advance the interests of the majority and guarantee the rights of minorities to express their views. It is argued in some quarters that good governance and democracy are mutually inclusive.⁴⁶ However, this conception of governance is parochial, exclusive, and narrow-minded. The practice of democracy does not guarantee good governance. An example of this is evident in Nigeria. With the acclaimed practice of democracy in Nigeria, why is the country still experiencing bad governance? No wonder Fukuyama categorically states that the argument that good governance and democracy are mutually supportive is more of a theory than an empirically demonstrated fact, and that we cannot empirically demonstrate the connection if we define one to include the other.⁴⁷ The experiences of good governance and development by some countries in East Asia, “tigers” like China, South Korea, and Taiwan, are rebuttals to the argument that good governance can only be guaranteed and sustained with the practice of democracy.⁴⁸ It is, of course, a truism that good governance is characterized by principles and basic ideologies of democracy such as the enforcement of the rule of law, protection of fundamental human rights, protection of life and properties, checks and balances against arbitrary rule, right to freedom of association, movement, and expression among others, nevertheless, it is misleading to think that good governance and democracy are mutually inclusive.

Good governance, from another perspective, has been conceptualised to mean economic development. This conception of governance measured the

⁴⁵ Agulanna, “Community and Human Well-Being in an African Culture”, 289.

⁴⁶ Francis Fukuyama, “What is Governance?” *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 26(3), Wiley Periodicals, Inc. 2013: 350. doi:10.1111/gove.12035.

⁴⁷ Fukuyama, “What is Governance?” 351.

⁴⁸ Francis Fukuyama, “Governance: What Do We Know, and How Do We Know It?” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 19, 2016: 92. 10.1146/annurev-polisci-042214-044240; Francis Offor, “Social Justice, Democracy and the Crisis of Development in Africa”, *Ethics and Public Affairs*, F. A. Adeigbo, D. Irele, and A. Udefi (eds), Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 2014, 97.

performance of government based on the increase in the country's national income and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Put differently, the quality of governance is determined by how much wealth was created by the government. Governance, as construed from the economic standpoint, prized wealth accumulation against the welfare and well-being of the people. Consequently, attention was focused on increasing the wealth of the nation rather than on the welfare of the people.⁴⁹ The import of this to the understanding of good governance is that a situation in which the output and outcome of governance on the people brings nothing but suffering, pain, hunger, poverty, scarcity of foods, high price of goods and commodities, high cost of fuel, paucity of infrastructural facilities like roads, hospitals, schools, electricity and so on, lack of shelter, increased tax rate, and unemployment is bad governance. Good governance, therefore, can better be understood when compared to poor governance.

It is gleaned from the two conceptions of good governance considered above that democratic principles and economic development are insufficient for conceptualising good governance. It could be inferred from the above discussion that a country can be democratic and yet experience poor governance. Similarly, it is also deduced that economic development is not a yardstick for determining and measuring a government's performance as good. This is because a country could be rich, and yet the living conditions of the people are poor.

Given the insufficiency of the conceptions of good governance considered above, this paper will consider inclusive and human-centred conceptions of good governance. In this sense, good governance is conceived as the process of formulating and implementing policies that are transparent, open, equitable, accountable, and responsive to the needs and interests of the people. It must ensure the minimisation and eradication of corruption, bad leadership, embezzlement of public funds, partiality in awarding contracts and recruiting government personnel, racial discrimination, religious fundamentalism, insecurity, paucity of social and infrastructural facilities, wastage of resources, lack of accountability, and incompetence. Governance is good if it focuses on the formal and informal actors who are involved in decision-making in society, as well as the way the decisions are implemented or carried out to meet social expectations.⁵⁰ In a not dissimilar vein, Aliyu, cited by Lanre-Abass and Layode, surmises that the conditions under which good governance could be obtained are instructive:

Good governance is, among other things, participatory, transparent, and accountable. It is also effective and equitable; it promotes the rule of

⁴⁹ Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1996: 11

⁵⁰ Agulanna, "Foundations of Good Governance for Sustainable Development in Africa", 4.

law. Good governance ensures that political, social, and economic priorities are based on a broad consensus in society and that all the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources. Good governance defines the processes and structures that guide political and socio-economic relationships.⁵¹

It is unfortunate, however, that the conceptions of good governance discussed above are lacking in the case of Nigeria, despite its practice of democracy and years of independent governing. Now, despite the indisputable fact that Nigeria is blessed with both natural and human resources, why is Nigeria still in search of good governance on the one hand and development on the other hand? This question indicates one important thing, and that is that the resources embedded in Nigeria are not effectively, efficiently, and responsibly utilised to transform the lives of the people for the better. What are the clogs hindering good governance in Nigeria? The answer to this question is our concern in the next section of this paper.

Leadership Crisis and Governance in Africa

The extant literature on governance and development studies has pointed out leadership as one of the major problems facing governance in Nigeria and many other countries in Africa. It is argued in some quarters that if the problem of leadership in Africa is solved, it is as good as saying that the problem clogging development and good governance is more than half solved. The reason for this, as earlier noted in the preceding sections of this paper, is that the major actor in governance is the government, and the government is constituted by people who are vested with power and authority to legitimately make and implement policies that set the country on the path to development through responsive, responsible, accountable, and transparent governance. Shanum (2013), as quoted by Dhikru Yagboyaju and Adeoye Akinola, opines that the progress of any nation rests on the stature or standard of its leadership and how it can bring this to bear on the welfare of the people of the nation.⁵² This further reiterates the earlier position maintained in this paper that political leaders are major determinants of what becomes of a country, whether developed or underdeveloped. Political leaders are expected to deliver responsible and responsive services to the people. That is, they are expected to serve others. Conversely, leaders in Nigeria and other African countries are not serving the people; rather, they serve themselves, their families, friends, political associates, and godfathers. To serve better in this capacity, they struggle and contest for power in fraudulent, deceitful, and manipulative

⁵¹ Lanre-Abass and Layode, "Moral Basis of Governance", 88.

⁵² Dhikru A. Yagboyaju and Adeoye O. Akinola, "Nigeria State and the Crisis of Governance: A Critical Exposition", *SAGE Open*, 9(3), 2019: 7. DOI: 10.1177/2158244019865810.

manners to amass wealth and siphon public resources for personal enrichment projects.⁵³ The result is evident in the ways and manners in which elections are conducted in Nigeria and many countries in Africa. The results of elections in Nigeria, rather than expressing the will and choice of the people, are seen to express the will and choice of political godfathers and political elites, thereby denying or disenfranchising the people their political rights to vote for representatives who will be accountable and transparent in making decisions for the people. Consequently, elections, as observed in Nigeria, are merely symbolic and figurative gestures that are neither propitious to good governance nor guarantee political accountability.⁵⁴

What compounded the problem of leadership in Nigeria is that many political leaders were handpicked without preparation and ideological frameworks that would form the fulcrum of government policies and programmes to improve the quality of life and standard of living of the people, and eradicate poverty and corruption in the system. This resulted in the imposition of visionless and incompetent political leaders who lack the moral character and political ideology needed to drive governance that balances “politics with economic imperatives, responds to the dynamics of globalisation, and consolidates democratic structures and programs hinged on the people and autonomous development.”⁵⁵ Still, on the unpreparedness of political leaders, Nigeria’s experience with visionless political leaders confirms the fact that political contestants or aspirants avoid critical debates and engagements, an opportunity to share their programmes and policies with the people they intend to serve and govern. Unfortunately, visionary leaders with a feasible agenda and programmes, but lack the financial capacity to bribe party officials, buy votes, bribe electoral officials, and enforcement agencies, amongst others, do not stand a chance to win elections in Nigeria. Thus, the effect of this on governance is that monetisation of politics has opened the gateway for morally deficient individuals with no integrity and pedigree and without knowledge of government responsibilities, to take up leadership positions to direct the country on the path to a regressive and backwards state. Hence, political leaders bequeathed to Nigeria are kleptocrats and rapacious individuals who siphoned Nigeria’s wealth and resources to foreign countries while their country is in penury and a degenerating state that is not attractive to foreign investors. No wonder it is accentuated by some scholars that Nigerian political leaders conceive of power as a zero-sum game in which all benefits are

⁵³ Denis Venter, “Africa in the Twenty-First Century: The Imperatives of Democracy, Governance and Leadership”, *Africa Review*, 2(1), 2010: 22, DOI: 10.1080/09744053.2010.10597290.

⁵⁴ Agulanna, “Foundations of Good Governance for Sustainable Development in Africa”, 6.

⁵⁵ Dele Seteolu, “The Challenge of Leadership and Governance in Nigeria”, *The Constitution*, 4(2), 2004: 7.

personalised and the generality of the people is not considered and involved in the scheme of things.⁵⁶

The lawmakers (legislative arm of government), who are saddled with the responsibility to make laws and policies that protect the people from dictatorship and autocratic rulership, are busy with policies that benefit their pockets and sponsor their personal enrichment projects. Rather than engage in critical debates and conversations on national matters that concern security, economy, education, health, agriculture, globalisation, environmental hazards, and so on, they deliberate on issues that concern their remuneration, allowances, and security. Bills from the executive that are beneficial to them and their associates are passed without delay, while those that concern the generality of the people are delayed and, in most cases, later thrown into oblivion. Worrisome is that those who attempt to raise their voice against the ill policies and zero-sum politics of the legislatures are forced to silence, intimidated, and persecuted. In like manner, the judiciary has compromised justice, and it is a matter of the highest bidder. The executive controls and dictates the tune of the judiciary, and the judiciary dances to the music of the executive. The result is the normalcy of criminal acts in the country, such that political officeholders get a favourable judgment in the court of law while ordinary citizens are sentenced to jail for no substantive reason. All institutions and structures of government are, therefore, driven by corrupt practices that endanger and deprive the people of the dividends of good governance.

Political System and the Problem of Governance in Africa

Nigeria, since its independence in 1960, has oscillated from one system of government to another. According to Yagboyaju and Akinola, three main epochs can easily be identified as far as governance in postcolonial Nigeria is concerned.⁵⁷ They are the parliamentary system, military autocracy (dictatorial), and the presidential system. The parliamentary system was adopted after Nigeria's independence in 1960, even though it was aborted in 1966 after the first coup that ousted the first civilian government of Tafawa Balewa and Nnamdi Azikiwe. Sateolu aptly describes the political structure of the first republic thus:

This political class pursued power within the framework of the British parliamentary system. It is based on the fusion of powers among the organs, the principle of collective responsibility, the bicephalous executive system, strong party discipline, and strong opposition. The polity was administered on the premise of a regional structure

⁵⁶ Sateolu, "The Challenge of Leadership and Governance in Nigeria", 1-12; Agulanna, "Foundations of Good Governance for Sustainable Development in Africa".

⁵⁷ Yagboyaju and Akinola, "Nigeria State and the Crisis of Governance: A Critical Exposition", 3.

within the context of the federal system. The nature of the federal system allowed the regions to pursue policies and programs hinged on their historical specificities. Besides, the parliamentary system evolved leadership that had immense followership and legitimacy. These strengths were used to mobilise the people behind policies... The parties had ethnic origins and somewhat ideological contexts that constituted the fulcrum of political and economic governance.⁵⁸

The political space, in the first republic, was heightened by regional politics, which further deepened ethnic divisions and crises. Political leaders, in the first republic, failed to manage and harmonise the interests of diverse ethnic groups, and this resulted in different ethnic crises, electoral manipulations, gerrymandering, and manipulations of census figures, among other crises that led to the end of the first republic. An instance of these crises is seen in the 1962 and 1965 Western regional crises; the 1962 and 1963 census crises; and the 1964 general elections crisis.⁵⁹ The end of the First Republic inevitably led to the interference of the military governments in the political structures and institutions of Nigeria. The military sought to re-engineer the political domain, cultivate a new political culture, reduce the influence of money in the political process, and evolve a new political class.⁶⁰ However, the regime of the military governments in Nigeria witnessed retrogressive and repressive economic policies, abuse of human rights, suppression of the masses' voice, killings of opposition, disenfranchisement of people's rights to choose their political leaders, wastage of resources, and corruption. The unfortunate scenarios that depicted the failure of military governments' leadership were seen in the annulment of the June 12 elections, which heated the political space, precipitating national crises, insecurity, and the arrests of critical opposition.

Fortunately for Nigerians, the return to a civilian (democratic) government with federal political structures in 1999 came with hope and aspirations for good governance, responsible and responsive leadership, and accountable, transparent, and robust economic policies that would alleviate poverty; protect life and property, uphold justice, equity, and equal distribution of wealth and resources, and mitigate corrupt practices among public officials. However, these hopes were undermined by personalisation of power, unethical practices of political leaders, mismanagement of the state's resources, uneven development, electoral malpractices, ethnic marginalisation, and corruption, to

⁵⁸ Seteolu, "The Challenge of Leadership and Governance in Nigeria", 4.

⁵⁹ Seteolu, "The Challenge of Leadership and Governance in Nigeria".

⁶⁰ Seteolu, "The Challenge of Leadership and Governance in Nigeria".

mention just a few of the evil practices and hostile policies that typified the over-glorified democracy cum pseudo federal system of government practised in Nigeria's fourth republic. Besides, the presidential system of government introduced in the second republic and adopted for use in the fourth republic was characterised by duplications of offices, ostentatious lifestyles of many public officials, unitarism of power at the centre, weak local government autonomy, uneven development, which further heightened ethnic hostilities, militancy, kidnapping, and vandalisation of public property. The point being made here is that the cost of governance has continued to rise, considering the harsh economy that has pilloried the vast majority of the people.⁶¹ Consequently, leadership failure in Nigeria and many other African countries is also seen in political leaders' lack of empathy to identify with the people and understand their economic and social realities.

Political Corruption as an Impediment to Good Governance in Africa

That corruption is a bane to good governance is not a surreptitious idea, as it is unequivocally agreed among scholars, administrators, and political leaders that it is a deadly virus that needs to be uprooted for the realisation of good governance and sustainable development, not only for Africa but the world at large. However, corruption is deep-rooted in Nigeria and many countries in Africa, such that some people only want to get jobs or political appointments where they can receive fat bribes and siphon money to cater for their ostentatious lifestyles. There are different typologies of corruption, but our main concern in this paper is political corruption. As defined by Kwame Gyekye, political corruption is the illegal, unethical, and unauthorised exploitation of one's political or official position, power, authority, and influence for personal gain or advantage (Emphasis added).⁶² Gyekye further maintains that political corruption is an act of corruption perpetrated against the state or its agencies by a person holding an official position in pursuit of his or her own private or personal profit.⁶³ In a not dissimilar vein, Philip Ujomu rightly notes that many people mainly seek state power not because they wish to make a contribution to the common good or to improve the well-being of all in society, but because they want to satisfy their greed and oppressive tendencies.⁶⁴ Jafferji, commenting on the scourge of corruption and the challenge of combating it, also observed that political elites compete for power primarily to acquire wealth and not to serve as a corrective mechanism to promote social justice and economic development.⁶⁵ Political corruption is

⁶¹ Yagboyaju and Akinola, "Nigeria State and the Crisis of Governance: A Critical Exposition".

⁶² Kwame Gyekye, "Political corruption: a philosophical inquiry into a moral problem", *Philosophy and Politics: Discourse on values, Politics and Power in Africa*, M. Dukor (ed.), Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 2015, 354.

⁶³ Gyekye, "Political corruption: a philosophical inquiry into a moral problem".

⁶⁴ Philip Ogo Ujomu, "Corruption, Marginality and Social Disorder as Threats to National and Human Security in Nigeria", *Tattva Journal of Philosophy*, 7(2), 2015b: 10.

⁶⁵ Jafferji Ghaffar. "The Problems of Corruption and Good Governance", *Africa Analysis*, 390(8), 2000: 15.

more than taking bribes; it also involves gifts, kickbacks, graft, payoffs, favouritism, nepotism, and embezzlement of public resources for grandiose personal interests.⁶⁶

Political corruption is motivated by greed and self-interested tendencies. To make this point in a clearer perspective, public officials are corrupt in a bid to satisfy godfathers, political associates, support families, and friends. As such, public officials award contracts and give undue appointments and jobs to unqualified individuals or groups of persons, either as a way to fulfil a promise (agreement) or express their loyalty.

One indisputable fact is that political corruption thrives more in societies with weak, incompetent, and morally deficient political leaders who personalise political power for self-interested purposes. Put differently, the dominance of political corruption in society is attributed to a lack of moral decency, accountability, and transparency in government. The non-existence or ineffectiveness of government agencies or institutions that should probe and combat the prevalent menace of corruption in society is another causal factor that exacerbates corrupt practices among public officeholders. It is instructive to point out that political corruption continues unabated in a situation in which the people see nothing wrong in the corrupt practices of their leaders, so far, they are beneficiaries of the proceeds of the looted money and other public resources. This is what Sunny Akpotor calls the politics of clientelism, or prebendalism.⁶⁷ Richard Joseph, as cited by Sunny Akpotor, describes prebendalism as a situation in which state offices (both elective and appointive) are competed for, and utilised for personal and limited group (political, religious, and ethnic) benefits.⁶⁸ The implication of this on good governance is that political leaders sacrifice the interests of the community to satisfy their own interests and those of individuals or groups of people who are instrumental to them to remain in power.

Likewise, the socio-physical infrastructures like schools, roads, hospitals, and other social services are in a deplorable and devastating state as a result of political corruption. Money meant to construct public roads, improve the quality and standard of education, build and equip hospitals with modern facilities, stabilise electricity, and so on, has been siphoned and stashed in foreign accounts.⁶⁹ It is not a surprise that Nigeria is still recovering looted

⁶⁶ Ujomu, "Corruption, Marginality and Social Disorder", 8; Gyekye, "Political corruption: a philosophical inquiry into a moral problem", 354.

⁶⁷ Sunny Akpotor, "Corruption: The Civil Society and Government", *Philosophy and Politics: Discourse on values, Politics and Power in Africa*, M. Dukor (ed.), Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 2015, 322.

⁶⁸ Akpotor, "Corruption: The Civil Society and Government".

⁶⁹ Harrison Adewale Idowu. "Understanding Governance Challenges in Africa", *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*, A. Farazmand (ed.), Switzerland AG: Springer Nature, 2020, 1-8.

money stashed in foreign accounts by past heads of state. Given the endemic nature of political corruption in Nigeria and its devastating effects, it is correct to posit that it is a scourge to good governance and an impediment to human and capital development.

Ethics of Relations and Interconnectedness as Imperative for Good Governance in Africa

Morality is the bedrock of any functioning society, without which a society will fall apart. Joseph Omoregbe submits that an immoral society is a sick society.⁷⁰ By this, he means that a society permeated with corruption, dishonesty, fraud, selfishness, embezzlement of public funds, and other immoral acts that are devastating to actualising the common good.⁷¹ For emphasis, Nigeria and many countries in Africa are battling with the problem of good governance, considering the abundance of natural and human resources at their disposal to utilise for the betterment and development of Africa. However, corruption, leadership failure, and autocratic political structures, among others, are debilitating factors against good governance in Nigeria. Now, what is the way out of this quagmire? First, it is worth noting that contrary to the popular opinions of some scholars, Nigeria and many countries in Africa look up to Western models and paradigms for viable solutions to challenges and crises that plague development and impede the practice of good governance. This section adopts an endogenous paradigm and models within the socio-cultural context of Africa as essential ingredients for the practice of good governance.

The problem with good governance in Africa is largely premised on the failure of leadership. The essence of any rational and functioning government, and by extension, public officials, is to render services that are beneficial to the people as a whole, and not to satisfy and enrich the estate and grandiose lifestyles of some political elites. Conversely, political leaders in Africa, through the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes, demonstrate self-interested tendencies and attitudes that impede good governance for the benefit of all. The ethics of relations and interconnectedness embedded in Africa's communal living deepened the sense of the collective mode of relations, rather than an individualistic mode of relations, as demonstrated by African leaders who worsen and exacerbate bad governance, endemic corruption, insecurity, and decrepit socio-economic infrastructures, among others. The ethics of relations and interconnectedness as understood within the context of the African communal domain is for political leaders to commune and harmonize their interests with those of others in society, they must consider themselves as part of the whole, sharing a way of life, belonging, and experiencing oneself as bound up with others, and

⁷⁰ Joseph Omoregbe, "Recognising ethics as a path to national greatness", *Philosophy and Politics: Discourse on values, Politics and Power in Africa*, M. Dukor (ed.), Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 2015, 348.

⁷¹ Omoregbe, "Recognising ethics as a path to national greatness".

achieving the good of all, advancing the common good, serving the community, and being committed to the good of one's society.⁷² For clarity, virtue ethics in Africa advocates for the flourishing of the community through harmonious and cooperative relationships among members of the society. Bringing this to proper perspective, political leaders and public officials must be ethically guided not for their own sake, but for the sake of the common good.

The people enjoyed the dividends of good governance when political leaders compete for power not as a means to siphon and enrich their pockets, but as a means to deliver to the people services and governance that improve quality of life, eradicate poverty, combat corruption, and improve social infrastructures. Kwame Gyeyke is right when he accentuates that the fundamental meaning of community is the sharing of an overall way of life, inspired by the notion of the common good.⁷³ Putting this in a practical perspective, when political leaders exhibit a discordant relationship of "us" versus "them" by implementing policies that push people to suffer and abject poverty, they resort to all sorts of criminal and heinous crimes, such as kidnapping, armed robbery, thuggery, cyber fraud, pipeline bombings, prostitution, and so on, as means to survive. Hence, untrained and idle vibrant young people on the street with no jobs constantly disrupt social peace and orderliness in the society, such that the security of life and property of people will be fragile and not guaranteed. The point here is that the incompetence and immorality of political leaders in delivering good governance will come back to harm society. This affirms the popular Yoruba adage that says *adiẹ tó bá lé òkùn, ara ò rọ òkùn, ara ò rọ adiẹ* (A hen perched on a rope leaves neither the rope nor itself at rest).

Basic to Afro-communal virtue ethics is the respect and value it has for the nobility of human character. The nobility of characters in the domain of African moral systems cannot be bargained or compromised for a pot of porridge. These noble characters include: integrity, honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, and impartiality. The point being made here is that with the inculcation of these noble characters in the dispositions and behaviours of political leaders and public officials, the prospect of good governance in Nigeria will be a reality. For instance, integrity among political leaders in Nigeria will ensure that promises made during electioneering campaigns are meant and fulfilled to the people who voted them into power. This further reinforces the significance of Kant's categorical imperative that prescribes respect for human dignity as the ultimate moral ideal by which humans are to be treated, not as *mere* means but as an end in itself. This suggests that political leaders should not manipulate the people with lies and mendacious

⁷² Thaddeus Metz, "An African Theory of Good Leadership", *The International Journal of Ethical Leadership*, 7(7), 2020: 45. <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/ijel/vol7/iss1/7>.

⁷³ Kwame Gyekye, *Beyond Cultures: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, Vol. III. (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2004): 16.

promises just to have their vote and support, only to get to power and inflict on them pain, suffering, fear, hunger, a poor health system, poor education, and depleted social infrastructures through the formulation and execution of inhumane policies and programmes that are antithetical to social and human development. In another instance, honesty is characterised and built on the virtues of accountability and transparency. In simple terms, an honest person is transparent and accountable. As such, it is argued in some quarters that the government must be transparent in the management of public funds, and public officials must be accountable to the citizens of their countries in their official capacity.⁷⁴ We may ask, to what extent are political leaders in Nigeria accountable and transparent? Political leaders in Nigeria are morally deficient to the point that during the electioneering period, they deceived the people by declaring false assets. It is not surprising to say that the actual remuneration of lawmakers and some key public officials in Nigeria is not open to the public. The import of this to good governance is that the absence of accountability and transparency in government fosters endemic corruption and an exclusive political system where citizens are non-participants in decision-making on matters that affect them. However, the virtue of accountability cannot be effective in checking and evaluating the activities and policies of the government if citizens are not tenaciously and vehemently holding the government responsible and accountable for their actions. The inability on the part of the citizens to hold their leaders accountable contributes to unabated corrupt practices and regressive policies.

Self-knowledge is essential for the nobility of character considered above as an ingredient for good governance. This suggests that political leaders and public officials must have a deep understanding of what values, virtues, and commitments are if they are to put them in order.⁷⁵ This conforms to Socrates' philosophy that echoes the significance of self-knowledge as a veritable means to harmonise desires for man's development. To achieve good governance, and by extension human, social, and capital development, political leaders and public officials must have an understanding that self-interest cannot prevail over community desires. Political leaders and public officials must be guided by reason to suppress their desires and appetites, such as accumulating state resources for personal aggrandisement, rather than pursuing the collective interest of members of the society. Likewise, self-knowledge enhances political leaders' and public officials' commitment to uphold the values and ethics of relations and interconnectedness that bind everyone together as a collective whole and not as atomistic individuals. This commitment pursues policies and programmes that engender good governance through the practice of inclusive, participatory, fair, impartial, and egalitarian systems that accord respect to all members of the community while also distributing and allocating resources fairly without nepotism and tribalism.

⁷⁴ Dipo Irele, "Accountability and Transparency in Government", *Ethics and Public Affairs*, F. A. Adeigbo, D. Irele, and A. Udefi (eds). Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 2014, 117.

⁷⁵ Dwight Furrow, *Ethics: Key Concepts in Philosophy*. Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2013, 137.

Ethics of relations and interconnectedness are explicit in expressions and phrases that exemplify “complementarity” in African understanding of leadership, and by extension, good governance. In southern Africa, the expression that exhibits complementarity and mutual interdependence is *Ubuntu*. This is translated to mean “I am because you are”.⁷⁶ The value of *Ubuntu* expresses dignity, compassion, harmony, reciprocity, and humanity in the best interest of the development of society. The understanding of one’s limitations and incapacity without the support of others is the basis of the virtue of *Ubuntu*, such that the meaningfulness and humanness of man are evaluated on his ability to commune and relate with others in society. The importance of this on the issue of governance is that political leaders and public officials are to use their office as a matter of duty to promote the welfare of the people and the flourishing of the society. Any act contrary to what makes life worth living for the people is condemned as inhumane. Political leaders or public officials who use their political office to cause harm and pain to others are not different from animals because they lack the humanness that binds them with others in society. This suggests that public officials and political leaders must work and relate with others outside of their self-interest to promote the interest of the common good. Very essential to the value of *Ubuntu* is the cooperation and solidarity between the rulers and the ruled. Just as it is expressed in one Yoruba proverb that *igi kan kò lè dá igbó ṣe* (a tree does not make a forest), the citizen must work cooperatively with the government if they desire to achieve good governance. Some citizens willingly hoard goods only to create artificial scarcity and to sell when the price goes up. Citizens, expecting the government to deliver services that will alleviate poverty and construct and upgrade social infrastructures, must also help the government by being law-abiding and shunning criminal activities that could threaten social peace and development. Another African value worth mentioning is *Ujamaa*. The values of respect and the common good, as embedded in *Ujamaa*, are viable constructs for Africa’s path to good governance and development.⁷⁷ This reiterates the point earlier made that Afro-communal virtue ethics, such as integrity, respect, dignity, kindness, compassion, fairness, accountability, and transparency, must be imbued in the characters and behaviours of political leaders, public officials, and citizens if they genuinely desire good governance that promotes the interest of the common good.

⁷⁶ Metz, “An African Theory of Good Leadership”, 41-56; Metz, “Replacing Development: An Afro- Communal Approach to Global Justice”, 2017a, 111-137; Metz, “Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa”, 532-559; Ujomudike, “Ubuntu Ethics”, 2869-2881; Mokgoro, “Ubuntu and the Law in South Africa.” *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 1, 1998: 15–26.

⁷⁷ Gussai H. Sheikheldin, “Ujamaa: Planning and Managing Development Schemes in Africa, Tanzania as a Case Study”, *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 8(1), 2015: 82.

Conclusion

This paper has critically examined the challenge of good governance in Africa, with particular reference to Nigeria, identifying persistent problems such as poor leadership, corruption, and defective political structures as major impediments. It argued that sustainable solutions cannot be achieved solely through imported models or institutional reforms detached from African realities. Rather, the pathway to genuine transformation lies in Afro-communal virtue ethics as an endogenous moral framework capable of reshaping political culture and public life. By foregrounding the ethics of relationality and interdependence—expressed through values such as respect, dignity, integrity, honesty, transparency, accountability, and compassion—the study maintains that good governance must be rooted in shared moral commitments that bind leaders and citizens alike. These virtues are not merely abstract ideals but practical norms capable of fostering responsible leadership and active citizenship. Ultimately, the paper contends that while government remains a central actor in the realisation of good governance, its efforts alone are insufficient. Good governance becomes attainable only when both leaders and citizens consciously collaborate, guided by communal moral values, toward the collective pursuit of societal needs, aspirations, and authentic development.

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