

Virtue Ethics in Politics: An Imperative for Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

Within the last century, many world nations have found themselves at a crossroad with bad governance. Politics is being operated without principles and values. Many people now are convinced that if good governance must be achieved, politics can no longer reject ethical principles. This makes the cultivation of virtue ethics in politics an imperative. Virtue ethics emphasizes on the character of the acting agent. Good society depends on the virtues of the citizens. When virtuous citizens are elected into the government, they promote good governance. For Aristotle, the virtue of every practice is found within its domain. This goodness is understood in relation to the telos (“end” or “purpose”) of that practice or “that for whose sake everything is done”. For instance, Aristotle treats medicine as a domain whose telos is “health” and military strategy as a domain whose telos is “victory. This paper uses the hermeneutic and conceptual analytic methods to argue that to achieve good governance in a given country like Nigeria, we must understand the telos (end) of politics as justice and common good which then guarantee eudaimonia – human flourishing/wellbeing.

Key words: Ethics, Good, Governance, Politics, Virtue

Introduction

Today, people do not place much trust in politics and politicians. They are often seen as selfish and corrupt power-players, defending selfish interests instead of the common good. In Nigeria and many other African nations, laws and order have been destroyed by some vicious politicians. The absence of the rule of law nurtures political tyranny with despotic leadership. Today, Nigeria is muddled with corruption at all levels: embezzlement of public funds, egoism, nepotism, terrorism, kidnapping, ritual killings, human and human organ trafficking, etc. Unfortunately, some perpetrators of such crimes are indicted to be politicians or their allies who go

away unpunished even when identified. On the other hand, the few citizens making honest efforts are not motivated. This way of living discourages the citizens from patriotism and statesmanship. People have lost hope and confidence in politics and politicians especially in Nigeria, whereas, trust and respect are vital for living together in communities and societies – especially in democracies. With these deficiencies, populist, fascist and dictatorial tendencies grow strongly. The situation is such that in our society, there is no politics of principle.¹ “We hang the petty thieves and appoint the great ones to public office”. This is the bane of Nigeria and Africa at large.

However, since the last century, humanity has found itself at a crossroad. Many world nations thirst for credible politics and good governance. African initiatives call for responsible leadership². The emergence of a multi-polar world calls for negotiated norms rather than strength and muscle-flexing in politics. There is a growing clamour as regards the right and proper way of making politics, without wishful thinking that ignores the realities of politics. Today, questions of sustainability, responsibility towards future generations as well as environmental justice, crimes against humanity, etc., can no longer be ignored. Fair treatment needs to be echoed in institutions, procedures and legislation³. Fresh and radical thinking seek a solid foundation on which societies might find a way of living together. Ethics and justice play a central role in this rethinking. Politics can no longer be business as usual. Politics can no longer reject ethical challenges; however, it may handle them⁴. Granted that politics is a complex and difficult practice, but it is an essential human activity for the building of societies and communities based on rule of law in order to balance conflicting interests. It therefore, requires a high level of responsibility and

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1. Benoît Girardin, “Ethics in Politics, why it matters more than ever and How it can make a difference” *Focus* no. 5, (2012): 21.
 2. Girardin, “Ethics in Politics”, 10 and 11.
 3. John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. (Cambridge MA, Belknap Press, 2001).
 4. Girardin, “Ethics in Politics”, 30

commitment from all and sundry in every human society.⁵

In a country like Nigeria, where politics is operated without principles and values, where there are weblogs of corruption of laws and justice from the top to the lowest strata, virtue ethics theory would be an imperative to guaranteeing good governance. This paper therefore emphasizes the cultivation of virtues, of our excellences and good behaviours in the political sector based on the sense of responsibility, justice and fairness in our individual and public services. This will enhance good governance which will eventually guarantee eudemonia for both the individuals and the society.

The Political Problem in Nigeria

With what is happening of recent, the EFCC going after our top government officials and a lot of hidden truth coming out, it buttresses the fact that, Nigerian politicians are really corrupt.⁶

Nigeria has been known as one of the most notoriously corrupt countries in the world.⁷ Statistics confirm that 70% of corrupt practices in Nigeria are from the political sector.⁸ In Nigeria today, politics and politicians are synonymous with materialism and corruption of all types. Historically, there have been unprecedented cases of corruption from the early post-independence years of Nigeria, to the most recent happenings in our political history. It has been alleged that the inefficiency of the first four republics was in connection to political corruption, while the present fourth republic is also seriously engulfed by this trend.⁹ In fact, one can say that

5. Girardin, "Ethics in Politics", 1
6. Oladipupo Ipadeola, *Qualitative Study on the Patterns, Experiences and Manifestations of Corruption in Nigeria*. (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime March 2016), 13. ladiipadeola@gmail.com
7. David Cameron calls Nigeria and Afghanistan 'fantastically corrupt' countries. *BBC News* (10th May, 2016). bbc.com
8. Regina Stets Adrianna Simwa, What are the 10 major political problems in Nigeria today? *Legit.ng*, (Saturday, October 08, 2022) at 6:40 PM. Visited on January 04, 2024, <https://www.legit.ng/1207063-10-major-political-problems-nigeria.html>
9. Ipadeola, *Qualitative Study on the Patterns*, 3.

Nigeria is in this shapeless form today because of the caliber of people we have in the government.¹⁰

Nigerian politicians have become habituated to fraud, corruption, intimidation and violence, as if they consider these the necessary weapons of political winners.¹¹ Corruption is manifested in several ways and forms in Nigeria in the political sector. These include: bribes and kickbacks, favoritism, tribalism and nepotism, god-fatherism, gross embezzlement by government officials (they convert public funds to their personal use), fraud, employment racketeering, double standard, lack of accountability, internet fraud, falsification of results, unauthorized increment in prices of goods and services, impersonation, etc. All these have given a leeway to the main crimes in politics, namely; vote buying and election rigging. The practice of vote buying in Nigeria for instance, has been sustained to flourish due to weak institutional framework on ground: the partisanship of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials, corporate corruption indices of the law enforcement agencies, etc. These aid and abet commercialization and rigging of electoral processes. The regulatory agencies are overtly partisan in all elections in order to secure their jobs and retain their relevant positions in the system. By this way of acting, political elites have seen rigging elections and by extension the acceptance of the votes-trading culture as a norm in Nigeria.¹²

This ugly situation has remained uncontrollable because corruption is very much prevalent among leaders who by their actions and inactions reinforce corruption. Those who are supposed to protect the citizens, the national values, etc., and checkmate abuses and solves all the problems are the most involved in the

10. Ipadeola, *Qualitative Study on the Patterns*, 3.

11. Ebere Onwudiwe, and Chloe Berwind-Dart, *Breaking the Cycle of Electoral violence in Nigeria*. (United States Institute of Peace, 2010), 263

12. Ejikeme Jombo Nwagwu, et. al., "General Elections: Manifestation and Implications on Democratic Development in Nigeria" *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8, no.1, (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1080/233311886.2021.1995237>

corruption. Politicians often put the funds that belong to the public in private, local and foreign bank accounts. They hide billions of naira under different names to prevent the public from knowing their money-stealing practices. Nigerian politicians brandish unmerited wealth and affluence. This is serious corruption, which we assume to be a moral evil because public administrators at all levels have an obligation to establish ethical standards that promote honest and compassionate approach to governance.¹³ The vice displayed here is one of deceit and dishonesty; when the politician takes bribe in secrecy, he hides his true nature from his constituents, and throws away any commitment to transparency. Today, the Nigerian citizens no longer trust this sector with their safety.

Private Citizens are also indicted here as they collaborate with politicians in the process of money laundering. These corruption tendencies extend to the judiciary and law enforcement agencies: the police force, military, customs, etc., as they tend to cover up these crimes and protect the culprits. This problem is one of the foundations of the general crisis in the country. In fact, most people believe that political corruption is a syndrome that every Nigerian is conscious and guilty of.¹⁴ Furthermore, corrupt but non politicians in Nigeria want to make their own money too. This is the reason for the chronic and uncontrolled crime rates: terrorism, murder, ritual killing, kidnapping, human abuse, bullying, human organ and human trafficking, prostitution, etc., in Nigeria and beyond. These and many other untold crimes have become the order of the day and the bane of Nigeria. Who can save Nigeria? The entrenchment of Virtue Ethics can be a solution to the political problems of Nigeria.

Virtue Ethics Theory

The basic concept of virtue ethics is eudemonia which means wellbeing or

13. Thomas D. Lynch and Cynthia E. Lynch, "Virtue Ethics: A Policy Recommendation". *Public Administration Quarterly* 25, no. 4, (2002): 462-497.

14. Ipadeola, *Qualitative Study on the Patterns*, 13.

flourishing. Virtue means arete, a Greek word which signifies excellence. Defining virtue ethics posits difficulties because it covers many variants. Still more, the unrestricted list of virtues and moral demands make it more difficult. Yet, attempts have been made towards articulating its definition. According to L.P., Pojman et al., virtue ethics is a collection of normative ethical philosophies that place an emphasis on being rather than doing¹⁵. The central concern of virtue ethics broadly interpreted is with moral character, that is, with what sort of person one is and should be. This means, in virtue ethics, morality stems from the identity and/or character of the individual, rather than being a reflection of the actions or consequences from the individual¹⁶. Virtue ethics theory emphasizes the character of the acting agent. It stresses the role of one's character and the virtues that one's character embodies for determining or evaluating ethical behaviour¹⁷. According to Hursthouse, Virtue ethics is the view that one should act as a virtuous agent would, if placed in given circumstances.¹⁸

A virtuous agent therefore, is an agent who possesses the virtues, that is, the character traits most conducive to human flourishing. Virtue ethics deems actions right because of how they relate to the virtues which indicate life lived well, as judged not just subjectively, but also objectively.¹⁹ The objectivity here must be very much clarified because humans act according to their own choices responding to their own circumstances, thus, human flourishing partially differs from human to

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15. Louis P. Pojman and James Fieser, "Virtue Theory" In *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong*, 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Cengage, 2009), 146-169.
 16. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by William David Ross. (Oxford University Press, 1980), Book I.
 17. Edmund D. Pellegrino, "The Recovery of Virtue in the Professional Ethics of Medicine", In Elio Sgreccia, et. al., *Le radici della bioetica, Atti del Congresso Internazionale, in Roma, 15-17 febbraio, 1996*. Vita e Pensiero, vol. 1, Milano, (1998): 62-75.
 18. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 999), 8-9; Ruby Shao, *Virtuosity: A Virtue Politics for Liberal Democracy*. (University of Oxford, 2019), 14.
 19. Tyler VanderWeele, *On the Promotion of Human Flourishing*, Publication of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) (USA: University of California, 2017), 149.

human. The good life combines components tailored to its possessor with components benefiting any human.²⁰ In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle begins by observing that every human seeks, as his or her ultimate end, human flourishing, thus, developing into the sort of person who always acts, thinks, and feels rightly, most guarantees living well.²¹ Virtue ethics treats possessing the virtues as both necessary and sufficient for human flourishing. While the virtues are what results in human flourishing, human flourishing is what results from the virtuous living. That the virtues lead to human flourishing is an empirical observation that, given how humans and the world work, any well-lived human life centers on morality.²² Both Hursthouse and Russell agree that for achieving an integral human flourishing, virtues must surpass mere habits. They must exhibit excellences deep-rooted in one's psyche, including one's values, emotions, desires, expectations, and sensibilities that consistently motivate one to act well.²³ Possessing the virtue of, say, honesty transforms one in all respects into an honest person. Possessing these virtues, in virtue ethics, is what makes one moral, and one's actions are a mere reflection of one's inner morality. Virtue ethics is a way of being (as a being is so it acts), that would cause the person exhibiting the virtue to make a certain "virtuous" choice consistently in each situation. The virtues are acquired. They don't come to us by chance. They are based on experience, practice, habit, mentorship, good education and good examples.

In virtue ethics, a system of virtue theory is only intelligible if it is teleological: that is, if it includes an account of the purpose (*telos*) of human life. Obviously, strong claims about the purpose of human life, or of what the good life for human beings is, will be highly controversial. Virtue theory's necessary commitment to a teleological

20. Daniel C. Russell, "Virtue Ethics, Happiness, and the Good Life," in *The Cambridge*

21. *Companion to Virtue Ethics*, (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12, 20-21.

22. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.4, 1095a16-20.

Shao, *Virtuosity*, 5.

23. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 11-12; Russell, *Virtue Ethics*, 17.

account of human life puts the tradition in sharp tension with other dominant approaches to normative ethics: deontology and consequentialism. For deontology and consequentialism, the place of the acting agent is not important. What is more important is the duty performed and its outcome, but who performs the action remains insignificant. This way of acting not only renders the acting person and his personality obscure but also pushes the responsibility of actions, whether good or bad, to obscurity. This lack of responsibility in human actions has been the undoing of Nigerian politics and politicians which virtue ethics aims at correcting.

Virtue Ethics in Politics

Virtue Ethics in politics seems to many, a contradiction in terms.²⁴ Many think that interaction between virtue and politics has always been and would still be difficult to come by. This created sceptic attitude about the relevance of ethics in politics. The consequence of this is the widely and age-long shared conception that politics is a virtue-free-zone. Some well-known sayings support this scepticism. These include: “Morality has nothing to do with politics.” “Ethics and politics are poor bedfellows.” “Even worse, in political matters, ethical considerations can but compound problems, worsen processes, derail policies, they are rarely part of solutions.” “Morality in politics means naivety and naivety is dangerous.”²⁵

Despite this skepticism, virtue ethics was venerated in antiquity through the Middle Ages. Many philosophers, both ancient and contemporary students: Plato, Aristotle neo-Aristotelians, Hursthouse, Holland, etc., mentioned that Virtue Politics and its potential may be more successful at the law and policy making aspects of the task of practical ethics. Politics and policy making is a legitimate sphere for the use of Virtue Theory. In fact, Slote asserted that Aristotle deemed democracy as the most effective way to tackle tyranny²⁶.

24. Anthony Chiwuba Ibe, *Virtue Ethics: The Recourse to the Problem of Rectitude and Civility in Africa*. (Owerri: Uzopietro Publishing Company, 2017), 60

25. Girardin, “Ethics in Politics”, 20.

26. Michael Slote, “Virtue Ethics and Democratic Values” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 24, no. 2, (1993): 5-37. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j/1467-9833.tb00506.x>

The founders of democracy (politics) like John Locke, Montesquieu, David Hume, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville, etc., emphasized that good governance depends on citizens exercising some degree of virtue. This will motivate citizens to act rightly. In the same way, the government must cultivate virtues for moral governance.²⁷ This means that political institutions must cultivate a set of values to ensure good governance. The political institutions include; the rule of law, the separation of powers, representative offices, and independent courts.²⁸

Virtue ethics has been the practice of many traditions around the world, including the figures of Confucius, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and St. Thomas Aquinas, as well as the religions of Judeo-Christian traditions, Buddhism and Islam. Ancient kingdoms of the world, from the earliest centuries, saw the need for virtue ethics in the political sector. The sole aim was to ensure that peace and order reigned in the state among the citizens. Some of these world traditions are: India, China, Africa, and Western Europe. In India, Nikaya identifies famous beliefs in Buddhist politics. One of them states that “When the ruler of a country is just and good, the ministers become just and good, the people become just and good”²⁹. In China, Confucius (551-479 BCE) highlighted the exemplary virtues of kings as: just, clever, sincere, patient and detached; those hopefully, will inspire people³⁰. According to Confucius, “the requisites of government are that there be sufficiency of food, sufficiency of military equipment, and the confidence of the people in their ruler”.³¹ But questioned by his disciple Tse-kung (Zigong), he makes a stunning statement on trust as a key political value. This is the dialogue:

If it cannot be helped and one of these three must be dispensed

27. Shao, *Virtuosity*, 12.

28. Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 33; Shao, *Virtuosity* 12.

29. K Sri Dhammananda Maha Thera “Buddhism and Politics”: www.sinc.sunysb.edu/Clubs/buddhism/dhammananda/229.htm, visited 16/10/2015, Cf. Girardin, *Ethics in Politics*, 24.

30. Tao texts, trans., Barfour Confucius, 551-479 BCE

31. Tao texts, trans., Barfour Confucius, 551-479 BCE.

with, which of the three must be foregone first? “Military equipment,” said the Master. He was again asked: “If it cannot be helped and one of the remaining must be dispensed with, which of them must be foregone? The Master answered, “Part with the food. From of old, death has been the lot of all men; but if the people have no faith in their rulers, there is no standing for the state”³².

In the Roman Republic, during the transformation into an Empire, Tacitus conceived that power and luxury can corrupt individuals and destroy liberty. He therefore espoused that virtue ethics should be a shield against this sort of corruption and a means to preserve the good life one has.³³ The Judeo-Christian tradition condemns the abuse of political power. For them, justice and solidarity are key political values. These traditions maintain that not only is politics limited by ethics, but also social hierarchies are turned upside down, since the greatest shall be the servant (Matthew 23:11). In the Islamic tradition, power is answerable not to law but to wisdom and ethical virtues that rulers are asked to reflect. For them, the individual ethical qualities of political leaders help them in taking and keeping power³⁴.

Many philosophers³⁵ have pointed out the indispensability of virtue to any liberal society. We have already indicated above that when the government is virtuous, it helps individual citizens to become virtuous and vice versa. Politics must develop a mechanism for generating virtue. When governments refrain from cultivating morality, they lack the social arrangements that would guide their ethical choices. This will make the citizens turn more individualistic as they never identified how to foster virtue.

In the Western world, virtue ethics infused antiquity through the Middle Ages,

32. ANALECTS, XII, ch.7.

33. Pellegrino, *The Recovery of Virtue*.

34. Girardin, *Ethics in Politics*, 30.

35. Cf. Stephen Macedo, William Galston, Will Kymlicka, etc.

before fading with modernity during the Renaissance and early modern periods. Virtue ethics lost its place as Aristotelianism fell out of favour in the West.³⁶ During this time, virtue ethics declined under prevailing forms of liberalism. Liberalism prohibited privileging any reasonable conception of the good over alternatives. Virtue ethics lost the continuity assumed by the ancients between ethics and politics. While other normative ethics prioritizing themselves at the cost of others, virtue diminishes, perhaps never to resurge. Paradoxically, then, liberalism saps the virtue it requires.³⁷

It became a great worry that virtue politics cannot reenter a world largely stripped of traditional beliefs.³⁸ The liberalists argued that no longer can political theorists assume that humans should strive to flourish by becoming virtuous, or that citizens live in a relatively homogeneous society with a shared conception of the good, or that the government may interfere with the choices of citizens just to prevent harm to their souls. Liberals, expecting the government to let them pursue their own conceptions of the good, suspect virtue politics of being incurably paternalistic, elitist, and anti-democratic.³⁹

Philosophers like Michael Slote, Roger Crisp, etc., however, insisted that virtue politics must resurface so as to moderate the more dominant normative ethics: deontology and consequentialism, since they have yielded political theories relevant to modernity.⁴⁰ G.E.M. Anscombe's article "Modern Moral Philosophy" renewed interest in virtue ethics starting from 1958.⁴¹ Thus, in the 20th century, virtue ethics theory returned in Western philosophical thought and became a

36. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 1.

37. Shao, *Virtuosity*, 8.

38. Jerome Borges Schneewind, *The Misfortunes of Virtue, Ethics 101.1*, (The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 62–63; Shao, *Virtuosity*, 9.

39. Nancy E. Snow, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Virtue*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 99; R., Shao, *Virtuosity*, 9.

40. Slote, "Virtue Ethics and Democratic Values", 5–6, 32–33.

41. Snow, *The Oxford Handbook of Virtue*, 1–2.

normative ethical theory in line with deontology and consequentialism.

However, during the modernity crisis, virtue ethics was never annihilated. Although it receded into the background, yet, it remained current and operative during the period, and in fact appeared prominently in the classical tradition of republicanism and liberalism. Virtue ethics also was present in the intellectual life of 16th-century Italy, as well as 17th- and 18th-century in Britain and America. In fact, the works of some philosophers in that period employed the term virtue.⁴² The term virtue was also current in the works of prominent figures among the Scottish Enlightenment and the American Founding Fathers.⁴³ All these facts point at the importance of virtue ethics in politics.

Furthermore, the aretaic turn influenced other philosophical disciplines. In epistemology, for instance, a distinctive virtue epistemology was developed. Likewise in political theory, there arose a discussion of “virtue politics” and in legal theory too. We have today, some literatures on virtue jurisprudence. One most outstanding example here is the presence of the aretaic turn in American constitutional theory, where proponents argue for an emphasis on virtues and vices of constitutional adjudicators.⁴⁴

Yet, today much still is left to be desired in human politics. The revival of virtue ethics has failed to extend to political theories of many countries especially in Africa. Many societies have virtue ethics without virtue politics. Here another gap anchors the problem for virtue ethics. Our emphasis here is that virtue ethics should connect with virtue politics.

Virtue Ethics and the Telos of Politics

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (c. 350 BC) is traditionally seen as the founding text

42. Works of Niccolò Machiavelli and David Hume frequently employed Virtue Ethics Theory.

43. Ibe, *Virtue Ethics*, 15.

44. Robert Louden, “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 21, no.3 (July 1984): 227–236; A. C. Ibe, *Virtue Ethics*, 18

of virtue ethics. For Aristotle, virtue ethics theory begins with the idea that within any “practice” or domain of life, goodness is understood in relation to the *telos* (literally meaning: “end” or “purpose”) of that domain or “that for whose sake everything is done”. For instance, Aristotle treats medicine as a domain whose *telos* is “health” and military strategy as a domain whose *telos* is “victory”⁴⁵. In relation to a given domain, an acquired character trait is a virtue to the extent that the person who possesses it is thereby better able to contribute to the *telos* of that domain. The underlying idea is that human happiness or flourishing (*eudaimonia*) requires that people are oriented towards their various activities in ways that respect the intrinsic ends of the domains to which those activities belong. According to MacIntyre, to identify the *telos* of a practice, one must discover the meaning of that practice within the community of practitioners. In this view, a claim about the *telos* of any practice is not just the expression of a personal value judgment; it involves some (perhaps creative) interpretation of what is already there⁴⁶. As cited by Wilson, Sandel puts it that, we identify the norms appropriate to social practices by trying to grasp the characteristic end, or purpose, of those practices⁴⁷.

Sequel the above clarification, Aristotle sees politics as a domain whose *telos* is to create laws and a society that helps people live satisfying and virtuous lives. According to Aristotle, “the end or good in politics is justice and the common good.”⁴⁸ It is in living virtuously that human beings can give meaning to their social life and existence. With particular reference to traditional African life, it was a general consensus that a life of rectitude will help build up society and guaranteed

45. Michael Stocker, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” *The Journal of Philosophy* 73, no.14 (1976): 453–466.

46. Other philosophers and theologians of Virtue ethics agree on this position: Stanley Hauerwas, Rosalind Hursthouse, Roger Crisp and Michael Slote.

47. Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1980).

48. Aristotle, *Politics*, III.12, 1282b17. Cf., Simpson, L. Peter., *The Politics of Aristotle: Translation, Analysis, and Notes*. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1997)

the individuals a good place in the preternatural or ancestral world.⁴⁹

Virtues of Political Domain

Aristotle listed out a few fundamental virtues/values in politics: limitation of power, effectiveness, accountability and justice.⁵⁰ It is the expectation that wherever these virtues attain a satisfactory level, the quality of politics is improved. Let us here briefly discuss the importance of these values in politics.

Limitation of Power:

The problem of power is how to achieve its responsible use rather than its irresponsible and indulgent use – of how to get men of power to live for the public rather than off the public.⁵¹

Political power should be always limited. Power limitation makes political power more credible, acceptable, longer, lasting and secure. According to Lord Acton (1834-1902), “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”.⁵² Despotic power is always accompanied by corruption of morality. Absolute power demoralizes. Structural limitations on power help in handling conflicts and making them negotiable. Governments nowadays cannot claim absolute and unquestionable sovereignty. Limitation of power is no longer a matter of goodwill but of compulsory basic rules and legally binding provisions⁵³. Limited political regimes achieve greater stability. Another key need for limitation of political power relates to the widespread expectation that politics can or should “change life” by

49. Damian Ukachukwu Anyanwu and Jude C. U. Aguwa (eds.), *The Igbo and the Tradition of Politics*. (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1993), 92.

50. Girardin, *Ethics in Politics*, 60.

51. Robert F. Kennedy, “I Remember, I Believe”, in: *The Pursuit of Justice*, 1964, in Girardin, *Ethics in Politics*, 65.

52. Lord Acton (1834-1902), Comments in letter. Lord Acton Quote Archive, <https://www.acton.org>

53. Vincent Ujumadu, Kanu's lawyer writes Buhari over alleged disobedience of court order. Nigeria, Vanguardngr.com, March 23, 2017.

solving every human problem. Politics has to resist such a “utopian” or “messianic” expectation, which it cannot fulfil.⁵⁴ Furthermore, devolution or decentralisation sets institutional limits to central power. This is very much urgent in Nigeria, where it seems that the Executive controls both legislative and judicial arms of the government. The principle of subsidiarity stipulates that the central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level. Everything better handled by local or intermediate powers should be devolved to them.⁵⁵ Political mandates must be time bound and their renewability set limits to power corruption. Although considerable energy and money are devoted to campaigning, this is still preferable to unlimited or indefinitely renewable mandates.⁵⁶ African nations and their leaders must learn this lesson.

Effectiveness: Governments aim to be effective. No rulers are happy to frustrate their own political purpose and destroy their ambitions. Political goals once set are supposed to be achieved. Efficiency is a basic political requirement, and effectiveness is reaching relevant targets at a reasonable cost. It belongs to political responsibility to secure effective systems, set-ups, and traceable processes and to bear the costs attached. Effectiveness should not ignore the living conditions of the majority or the bottom half. Political effectiveness also requires some closeness between citizens and decision-makers. In regimes based on regular elections, incumbents should try their best to show how promises made have been fulfilled and explain why and how external factors have hampered implementations.⁵⁷

Accountability: Accountability means that political power is answerable for

54. Girardin, *Ethics in Politics*, 61.

55. Edmund Aku, *Solidarity, Subsidiarity and Common Good: Fundamental Principles for Community and Social Cohesion*, (USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 21-45; Article 3 of the Swiss Constitution.

56. Girardin, *Ethics in Politics*, 62.

57. Girardin, *Ethics in Politics*, 63.

decisions taken, policies defined and implemented, in front of the whole nation. No political power can live in isolation. Reporting is a must. Those who have taken the decision are accountable. Quality accountability is critical in any political system, culture and life.⁵⁸ Good governance presupposes that responsibility and traceability are given high priority. Political risks are much higher in a culture of clouds and obscurity.⁵⁹ Our leaders must be held accountable. Transparency is a hallmark of accountability.

Justice: Justice is at the heart of ethical politics and policies. It embraces equity which is equal access to resources, information, influence or equal capabilities, fair distribution of common and public wealth, assets, services, etc., This embraces same rules for everybody, impartiality, fair proportion between the gravity of crimes and their punishment, and compliance with laws⁶⁰. A reasonable level of justice works like a cement binding a society together. Justice or perceived justice nurtures trust in the people into authority and political power. It also binds citizens to each other once they feel that the rule of law will equally apply to all. In the absence of minimal justice, a society may fall apart physically or morally. In that case, basic respect will be gone. Trust will be vanished. Common goals will be subverted by particular, vested interests. Such society is close to suffocation and death. Hursthouse believes that the implicit link between the political emphasis on justice and other more concrete or substantial virtues which give the notion its meaning, such as honesty or charity, show that virtue ethics and politics are interlinked⁶¹. Justice is a central civic virtue required in an account of virtue politics.⁶²

58. Ibe A.C., “Ethical Dilemma in Development Funding: Possible Pitfalls to be avoided” in Faith and Human Development: National Lenten Campaign Guide. (Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria (CCFN), Abuja, 2013), 38.

59. Girardin, “Ethics in Politics”, 64.

60. Girardin, “Ethics in Politics”, 65.

61. Rosalind Hursthouse, On Virtue Ethics, <https://moralmusings21.wordpress.com/category/virtue-ethics/>, visited 16/07/2017.

62. Rosalind Hursthouse, Virtue Theory Ethics and Politics, in Philosophy, Virtue Ethics. (January 24, 2010), <https://moralmusings21.wordpress.com/category/virtue-ethics/>, visited 16/07/2017.

Girardin described the entire virtues of politics as the ethical tree. Whereas limitation of power, effectiveness and accountability are the soil, justice as the trunk sinks its roots⁶³. This trunk expands into six clusters of values. These are: identity and diversity, peace and security (along with liberty), freedom and responsibility, equity and the rule of law, solidarity without dependency, and sustainability versus productivity. These ethical hexagon of Girardin, otherwise known as the ancillaries of justice are basic political requirements for social coherence, which politicians must apply in politics.

Conclusion

Good society depends on the virtues of the citizens. Likewise, when the government is virtuous, it helps to promote the good behaviour of the individuals and vice versa. The aim is to achieve happiness as individuals and the wellbeing of the society. This can be achieved by cultivating personal and societal virtues.

Once political powers accept the limitation of power as positive and essential, once our political systems are effective and solution oriented, once decision-makers are made accountable, then the road is open for some kind of ethical politics.⁶⁴ Political leaders who are committed to ethical values may be the engine of long-term vision, lucidity, and tolerance. Virtues are political asset for leaders. In this work, we have shown that virtue ethics in politics is possible and relevant and it pays off. It can make a difference in politics. It is not a naive dream. Working with the ethical virtue does not suppress political dilemmas but it helps us to work them out in a responsible manner.

Responsibility is the most distinctive feature of ethics in politics. Since politics is a realm of uncertainty, politicians must be ready to bear full responsibility for the consequences of policies, laws, decisions they make and/or support. Virtue in

63. Girardin, "Ethics in Politics", 65.

64. Girardin, "Ethics in Politics", 65.

politics is advantageous. It is more readily action guiding, especially in terms of practical policy decision making which affects the actions of everyone within the society.

Virtue ethics in politics is not limited to top political rulers – presidents, ministers, or state secretaries. It extends to parliamentarians, the judiciary and civil servants, businesses, civil society organisations, the media, and last but not least, the citizens. Virtue ethics in politics is consolidated as a point of convergence between rulers, associations and citizens. Good governance is a product of virtuous living. In other words; no society can subsist or continue to flourish without a solid ethical or moral foundation. Societies that encourage good ethical conduct are the ones that have the capacity to survive whereas the ones that encourage moral laxity or rapaciousness are likely to break down or go into extinction like was the case of many ancient kingdoms of old. Good moral conduces to the good of society as a whole – among those who lead and those who make up the human community. Moral thinking is also concerned with the creation of a humane social environment without which those who live in society would hardly realize their goals and aspirations in life. It is for this reason that the leaders as well as the populace are constantly exhorted to lead morally excellent lives. The human community can only function properly if it is built on a good moral foundation.

Politicians must know that virtue politics goes beyond political parties so as to provide common ethical platforms on which other parties or institutions may stand together and join hands. Virtue politics accommodates some part of magnanimity. Thus, a tit-for-tat politics driven by revenge does not lead to sound and sustainable developments.

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