

Corruption in Nigeria as a Negation of Kant's Categorical Imperative

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Abstract

Nigeria, like many post-colonial states in Africa, is mired in socio-cultural crisis. This is, understandably, as a result of the eclipse of African culture by western culture during colonial and neo-colonial contact. That eclipse threw Africans into a struggle of redefining their existence and culture. Thus, the on-going cultural, economic, technological and political transition from traditional society to modern society. This paper brackets cultural transition as the primary and, ipso facto, the most important transition and posits that it is the motor that drives the other transitions to societal development. At the base of the cultural matrix, as construed in this paper, are the moral /ethical values or norms and the habit of compliance with their prescriptions. Habit of compliance with ethical/ moral norms is more exigent in Nigeria where administration of law and justice is in seemingly unbridgeable arrears of legislation. To hold the position as this paper holds that cultural (including moral or ethical norms) development is primary to other forms of development may appear quixotic against the prevailing trend where majority has abandoned the quest for first principles and pandered to superficial interpretation and explanation of Nigeria's manifold problems in terms of structurally unwieldy federation, consumer (unproductive) economy, imperialism, neo-colonialism, internal and external sabotage, and tribalism. These add up to what new-fangled structuralists call environmentalism. This paper argues that even the best economic policies and political engineering will come to naught if subverted by perverse human will which it is the task of ethics or morality to tame. The basic assumption of this paper is that there is an inextricable link between habit of compliance with ethical/moral norms and Nigeria's socio-economic and political conditions. This paper employs Kant's moral loadstar, the categorical imperative both as explicatory and prescriptive tool to solving the countries moral/ethical crisis which is at the core of her development crisis.

Keywords: Breach, Bane, Imperative, Categorical, Corruption

1. Introduction: Basic Concepts and Theoretical Framework.

a. Understanding Kant's Categorical Imperative.

The 'categorical imperative' is Kant's touchstone for evaluating which human action can be described as *moral* or *immoral*. It has two formulations:

- i. "Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law"
- ii. "so act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only" (Jones, 1977)

This paper is exclusively concerned with the first formulation of the categorical imperative, to wit: "Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law". It is proposed, as an aid to better understanding, to introduce the reader to the basic points of Kant's moral philosophy out of which the categorical imperative developed.

Most Greek moral theories before Kant were based on the concept of the *good*. Thus the first question a Greek philosopher asked himself was: what is the good? The next question was: how shall I attain it? Since it was generally agreed that "happiness" was a good, there was no need to show people that they ought to aim at it. In fact, the only puzzle was why so much of the time people did not aim at it. Philosophers like Plato thought the answer was ignorance: men acted wrongly not because their wills were bad but, quite simply, because they did not know what would make them happy. Thus Greek moral philosophy had a means-end form which shaped the moral thought of many Christian philosophers, for instance, St. Thomas Aquinas.

In contrast, Kant's moral philosophy was based on conformity to rule, which, according to him, derives from *a sense of duty*. More than any other thinker, before or since, Kant identified himself with this emphasis on duty and attempted to give it a philosophical formulation. Kant, in his formulation, did not talk about divine commands. He was concerned with ethics, not theology.

As a matter of fact, in a manner that betrays the Enlightenment influence on him, he made *Reason*, not God, the source of moral law. Specifically, Kant adopted from J.J Rousseau the concept of the autonomy of the will as the supreme principle of morality (Meiklejohn, 1934).

Kant did not only disagree with the Greek, Christian and Stoic ethics but also differs sharply from utilitarians in stressing that the essence of morality is to be found in the motive from which an act is done. Utilitarianism had maintained that an act is good if it produces pleasure. It is another thing whether we are to take account of our own pleasure only or other people's pleasure only or the greatest total amount of pleasure regardless of how it is distributed. In criticizing utilitarians for confusing the results of men's actions with the motives of such actions, Kant developed a distinction between 'prudential actions' and 'moral actions'. A man who repays debts because he fears the legal consequences acts from a sense of prudence; he is not a moral person. He could be moral only if he acted from the sense that he has incurred a monetary obligation and thus is "duty bound" to repay it. Thus, the good man in Kant's ethics is a man of "good will," i.e. a man who acts from *a sense of duty*, a man who does his duty (Meiklejohn, 1934).

From the foregoing, it is quite obvious that Kant cast placed a premium on reason and duty. It is against this anvil, as it were, that he beat out his celebrated principle of categorical imperative with the first element stipulating thus: "Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law". This is technically called Kant's *universalizability principle*. Intuitively speaking, this is not only a noble principle but also a pragmatic formula for social peace and harmony. Of course it is conceded to the critics of Kant that this rule is not infallible. But the criticisms against Kant's principle lose their sting when juxtaposed against the plot of Kant's moral thinking and the message he sought to mediate. He was concerned with developing a humane principle to tame man's riotous and conflicting interests. He was not constructing a logical or mathematical calculus as to make him susceptible to the formidable strictures of David Hume who anticipated Kant in arguing that "you cannot derive an ought from an is" (meaning that an ideal is a mere *opinion* and does not logically *necessitate* it being done). This is a time- honored logical argument that has since become the battering ram of logical positivists who are, as a matter of principle, opposed to any non-analytic truths, non-observable posits or claims such as Kant's universalizability principle. Deploying Hume's argument to counter Kant's universalizability principle will amount to what Gilbert Ryle called 'a category mistake' : In this case, judging a moral principle which is affective and value-laden in its nature by a logical principle which is abstract and value-free will be illogical. Kant's universalizability principle is a moral principle and it is so employed in this paper.

In Kant's moral universe, a moral action must be done from 'principle' (or 'maxim' or 'imperative'), that is, one must have a regular, explicitly formulated and carefully thought-out rule. Now what makes his 'principle' or 'imperative' *categorical*? Kant would reply that it is not enough to act merely on principle or imperative. The principle or imperative must be acted upon from a sense of universally or categorically binding duty to so act. Thus categorical imperative is, as Kant has shown, a universally binding principle which stipulates and guides our moral action. It is what invests our action with morality, no more, no less.

If one asks what is the nature or characteristics of the categorical imperative, the answer one will get from Kant is that its nature distinguishes it from prudential principles or means-end type of maxims. For example, means- end or conditional type of principle (imperative) like "Honesty is the best policy" may not be categorical imperative for every situation; it might be a satisfactory principle, for example, for dealing with steady customers but not for dealing with tourists just 'passing through'. But categorical imperative is the principle that is universally and unconditionally binding irrespective of our personal impulses or inclinations to do otherwise. It is conformity to law in general, an inner respect for the idea of law universally without thought of the effect, whether beneficial or otherwise. In Kant's words: "The pre-eminent good which we call moral can therefore consist in nothing else than the conception of law in itself, which certainly is only possible in a rational being, in so far as the conception, and not the expected effect determines the will...."(cited in Jones,1977)

The hob and attraction of the categorical imperative lie in its generality, the provision of essential moral standards for the development of the individual and the society. We are aware that we tend to make exceptions to general rules when our own interests are involved. We are also aware that every violation of a rule tends to weaken it; hence, we are likely to be very stern with prospective violators. But when we are the prospective violators we tend to shift our ground and emphasize the fact that a single violation hardly matters at all. The point being made here and the message of Kant then is that if before we act, we always ask ourselves: "Do I want this kind of act to become a general rule?, our answer would have to be in the negative; and we might, therefore, abstain from making an exception to ourselves. Thus, as W.T. Jones has rightly opined, the real point of Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative is that in morality we are not to count our own 'I' differently from the way we count the "I's" of other people. Morality entails some degree of self-deprecation, a thought for the other. This intrinsic social character of morality underpins this paper's appraisal and critique of the Nigerian polity from the perspective of the categorical imperative.

The situation in Nigeria today presents a typical, though unfortunate, case of serious breach of the

principle of categorical imperative. The breach is analyzed into the moral, political and economic aspects which will be considered seriatim.

2. Moral Consequences of the Breach of Categorical Imperative

What is intended here is to enunciate how the breach of Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative has brought the Nigerian society to its present moral quagmire which infects and harms both the political and economic life of the country. The society's messy moral environment is even officially acknowledged: Most of the country's heads of state have had to lament the moral deterioration of the society or set up a national agency to fight the malaise. General Gowon denounced the malaise in his address at Ahmadu Bello University Convocation in Zaria (Akinpelu, 1983). General Obasanjo did so in his famous Jaji Declaration and again on his 78th birth day speech. (Daily Sun, March 6, 2015, p.5). President Shagari's Ethical Revolution (Akinpelu, 1983) launched at the Jos University Convocation was meant to tackle the society's moral decay. Buhari – Idiagbon's campaign tagged War Against Indiscipline, (W.A.I.) and General Babangida's MAMSER were official campaigns against moral corruption and decadence in the Nigerian society. And much more recently, President Jonathan, in his address at the 2013 National Conference of Nigerian Economic Society at Abuja, deplored what he described as general acquiescence in corruption when Nigerians see their fellows living above their means and adulate them instead of showing outrage and raising alarm. There are also such institutions as Code of Conduct Bureau, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, and Corrupt Practices Commission which were all set up to tackle ethical breach or corruption in public life.

The moral malaise is all the more worrisome against the backdrop that before the morally-denuding influences of westernization, urbanization, materialism, and commercialism, the African value system which constituted the Nigerian social and moral ethos was based on human welfare and a vision of a certain moral order built on some intuitive ontological harmony, order and necessity the same way the categorical imperative was an off-shoot of Kantian humanism anchored on his ontology of man as autonomous rational end in himself. Both the African humanistic -cum- ontological ethics and Kantian categorical imperative are based on the metaphysics of social conscience which, though unanalyzable, is the ethicist's touchstone.

Kant's universalizability principle, in particular, is an intellectual account of the time-honored golden rule that 'you do unto others what you would want them to do unto you' which is not only the fountain of social conscience but a rule which every rational mind would wish to become a universal moral law.

Today, in contrast, the idea and sense of an overarching moral order, some categorical moral imperatives have worn thin. The Nigerian society lurches into a road that leads to the nadir of decadence and waste, a road with tragic signpost: from traditional communalism to individualism, and from African spiritualism to materialism. This bears explanation. Hitherto, under the Nigerian traditional value system, whenever there was a conflict between the individual and the society, it was the society or group that had the pre-eminence and the superior claim: there was always the inner perception of a moral order that beckoned; intuitive social conscience was binding at its highest; the individual was motivated to action by the interest of the community to which he belonged. In the progress of the community the individual realized his interest; there was private conscience but it served public morality. All this has changed. In contemporary Nigeria, there is crass individualism with its maxims of 'survival of the fittest' and 'everyone for himself and God for us all'. What is worse, the 'logic of the fish' which is the logic of individualism now reigns whereby the big ones would eat up all the little ones. This is the first tragic axiological shift in post-colonial Nigeria.

The second tragic axiological shift is that which we see in the movement from spiritualism to materialism in Nigeria today. The mind has been turned away from humane interests, from the imagination of acceptable minimum human conditions for all based on intuitive common moral order. Human development is now distorted and relegated to the back of material development. The emphasis when talking about development is often fixed on things, on the exploitation of nature; perhaps it is assumed that all that it takes to be fully-developed human beings was to amass material infrastructure. This is unfortunate for a third world country like Nigeria. Development, it must be emphasized does not begin and end with industrialization associated with big business. Instead, development is primarily a humane concept and as such it is a function of a people's education, organization and discipline creatively harnessed towards making both man's physical and social environment conducive to man's happy existence (Udo Etuk, 1998). This yields a holistically- developed society in which the spiritual and material concerns of man cooperatively drive the society. A Buddhist philosopher, Daisaku Ikeda provides a refreshing insight and support to this idea of holistic development view with his proposition that the welfare of the citizens of a nation ought to be put ahead of mere production indices:

"The Gross National Product (GNP) is probably a valid indication of the economic power of a state, but I think it is time to give precedence to what I call Gross National Welfare (GNW). Instead of knowing how much a country produces in a year, it is far more important to know how well product serves the need of the citizens." (Arnold Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda, 1989)

The two tragic axiological shifts in post-colonial Nigeria considered above do not only constitute a lamentable breach of Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative, but also betray the poor inner life of many; a condition which has resulted in a culture of cynicism among many against fundamental moral principles. The endemic and pervasive nature of the country's ethical crisis is such that it has invaded the public consciousness and gained recognition as expressed in the popular parlance "the Nigerian factor". A popular commentator, Mike Ikhariale (The Punch, December 1, 2013) plied his literary skill to the problem when in an article titled "The Nigerian Factor" he defined the Nigerian factor as a syndrome that is illustrated by "incapacity or unwillingness to play by the Rules". Thus many have fallen hostage to the tyranny of natural instincts and parochial interests. It is no surprise that under such instinctive parochialism and survivalism majority have become unable to rise to the pedestal where they can discern the moral obligations they owe to their fellows. This national of moral crisis occasioned by breach of Kant's categorical imperative is also gnawing away the fabrics of the political and economic life of the nation as can be seen in the following sections.

3. Political Consequences of the Breach of Categorical Imperative

This sub-title presupposes a nexus between politics and morality both theoretically and practically. Practically, such a nexus is evident in the history of political revolutions: political regimes have often collapsed due to moral or value deficit in the body politic which usually brought other problems in their wake. Theoretically, politics and morality are bound by the strings of political philosophy which, as an applied ethics, seeks to identify and clarify the ultimate justification for the acquisition and exercise of political power and authority, among other questions of political and ethical import.

In Nigeria, regrettably, one does not see any such interface between politics and morality in our national culture and national life. This explains the general acquiescence of most Nigerians in the anomaly that there is no ideology-based politics in Nigeria which is a euphemism for politics without overarching or, as Kant would say, universalizable principles. A well-known Nigerian poet and social critic, Professor Niyi Osundare poignantly denounced such dearth of overarching principle or categorical imperative in his essay "Matter of Principle 2" in the following words:

"Let us face the fact, respect for principle has never been a factor in Nigerian politics. The basic truth is that that standard of behavior which generates a consistency of disposition and stability of character has never had much of a place in Nigeria which is why the country has no moral centre, no stable mottos (perish those inane MAMSER jingles), no consistent system of values. There is

no policy that abides save that of opportunism, expediency and adhocism. This is why instead of solid purposive governments, Nigeria is always afflicted with contraptional apologies such as 'child of necessity,' 'government of compromise', etc all perpetuated under an insulting alibi called 'the national interest'. As a result, in Nigeria, there is motion without movement" (The Guardian on Sunday, May 8, 1994, p. A4).

Professor Osundare's words are as emblematic as they are an indictment of the Nigeria's national psyche and political life which have been characterized by primitive accumulation of wealth, bribery and corruption, official profligacy, tribalism, nepotism, class oppression, political opportunism and expediency. The endemic nature of these evils has resulted in the average Nigerian being socialized into accepting them as ineradicable problems of social existence that one has to learn to live with.

Corruption which is a breach of Kant's categorical imperative has become so entrenched in the national psyche and political life to the extent that studies conducted by the global ethical watch-dog, the Transparency International, have shown that corruption both at the highest levels of government and in ordinary people's daily lives is the core problem underlying the country's other challenges, from poverty to security. Specifically, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index showed Nigeria has not made any appreciable progress in her much-vaunted anti-corruption campaign with her 139th position out of 176 countries in 2012 from her 30th position out of 180 countries in 2009. The conclusion that corruption is the core problem underlying the country's other challenges, from poverty to security, is supported by the UNDP's Human Development Report (HDR) of 2013. The HDR is annual report issued by the United Nations Development Programme that gives details of each country's Human Development Index. The latter is itself a term that gives far more expansive and accurate measurement (than the Gross Domestic Product) of the total well-being of the populations of the countries of world. Nigeria is placed at the 153 position out of 187 countries in the Human Development Report and this is calamitously low for a country that is the 6th world largest producer of crude oil and hosts the largest conglomeration of black people in the world.

The former Secretary of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Mr. Ayo Opadokun has also regretted the moral bankruptcy in the country's politics which this paper conceives as a breach of Kant's categorical imperative in the following words:

"Since Gen. Babangida first and Gen. Abacha in succession monetized, commercialized and corrupted the political landscape, the chemistry of Nigeria Politics has been transformed negatively; no matter the quality of your personal profile, you must be very wealthy to buy your

way through in order to win"(Sunday Punch September 17, 2000, p.14).

And one may add to the quote that, when you win, you will trade your office, privileges and opportunities so as to recoup your *capital*, your election expenses as elective offices are seen as trading posts and means of rapid enrichment in Nigeria.

The resulting normative paralysis is symbolized by flagrant scandals in the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government. It will only be possible within the limited space of this paper to mention the recent and most notorious examples of such scandals. One may start with the case of the former president Obasanjo who, while in office, organized a fund-raising in 2005 for his personal library, Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library (OPL) and netted a whopping N6 Billion naira. Big players in the private sector who have been enjoying government patronage used the occasion to pay back. The outspoken Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, in outrage, described President Obasanjo's fund-raising while in office as immoral. In the words of Soyinka, it was "executive extortion". Soyinka's outrage was a symbolic expression of national outrage. If one may excuse Obasanjo on the ground that after all the fund-raising is for educational purposes, one is mistaken because it is his personal project and as such presented a clear case of conflict of interests.

The cases of two former governors Diepreye Alamieyeseigha and James Ibori of Bayelsa State and Delta states respectively stand out as symbolic examples of executive corruption and recklessness in Nigeria. While Ibori was made to forfeit houses and sleaze funds in America, Alamieyeseigha was on September 15, 2005 (Sunday Vanguard, August 5, 2007, p.37) arrested at the Heathrow airport London by the Metropolitan police for laundering \$3.2m but later escaped to Nigeria where he received light sentence of two years which he did not serve because, according to the Lagos high court judge, he had spent two years in detention. He was not made to refund the looted funds. Alamieyeseigha's case, in particular, provoked public outrage because he was soon after given state pardon by Nigeria's president, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, in March 2013 understandably to allow him to be re-cycled back into the ring of the political cabal which has seized and manipulates the Nigerian political system to their advantage (The Nation on Sunday June 2, 2013, p..2).

Ministers of government live in opulence like oil sheiks, increase waste in government and go home in the end with humongous severance package. The recent cases of mindless waste of public funds by the ministries of petroleum and aviation provoked public outrage despite the legal and administrative legerdemain mounted by the government to cover up the sleaze and corruption. The Nigeria media in the first quarter of 2014 was awash with gory stories of powerful officials of the

ministries who cultivated mania for armored BMW cars and for traveling in private jets both for private and official purposes. In one case an officer hired private jets of Challenger 850 aircraft and Express XRS air craft at 500,000 Euros (about N130m) and 600,000 Eros (N136m) per month respectively for two years and incurred a total spending of N13.120 billion (The Nation on Sunday March 30, 2014, p.15).

In the heat of public outcry and investigation by the Federal House of Representatives, the embattled officer went to the Federal High Court, Abuja to get orders to prevent an investigation by the National Assembly. When such orders were refused by the court the official resorted to making strange legal pontification to the effect that there was no way the investigation could be legally done without the approval of President Jonathan (The Nation On Sunday, June 1, 2014, p.2). What is more, the Presidency frustrated efforts of the House of Representatives to investigate the official and even facilitated the officer's election in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The official remained in government until the last day of the government on May 28, 2015 and went home with plum severance package.

In another case, a very senior aviation ministry official procured armored BMW cars at inflated prices of N255 Million and when preliminary investigation by the House of Representatives revealed that the cars were bought without budgetary approval, the government of President Jonathan eased the flamboyant minister off the cabinet and made it up for her by offer of the ruling party's senatorial ticket to her. The otherwise morally embattled minister is now a senator making laws for the morally beleaguered country.

The legislative arm is equally hobbled by corruption which often results in leadership instability and fights in the floor of the supposedly hallowed parliamentary chambers. The rot in the parliament assumed a sinister dimension when the 2.5 trillion naira oil subsidy scam ironically bred another scam: the chairman of the House Adhoc Committee investigating the scam admitted receiving \$620,000, from Mike Otedola, an oil baron to cover up the investigation. (The Nation on Sunday, June 10, 2012.:2). There was also the EttehGate scandal which involved extra-budgetary spending of N628 million for renovation and furnishing of two official quarters (Sunday Vanguard, September 2, 2007, p.5).

A strong moral question is also raised by the humongous salaries and jumbo allowances which members of the National Assembly enjoy while over 70% of Nigerians live below the absolute poverty line of \$2 (or 400 naira) per day (The Nation On Sunday, May 25, 2014,p.17). Corrupt and purblind political class brought to Nigeria the queer reputation of being the second country in the world, after Kenya, with the highest salaries and allowances of N240m and N204m per annum paid to senators and members of the House of

Representatives respectively. What is worse, the 469 parliamentarians (109 Senators 360 members of the House of Representatives) receive constituency projects funds of N500 million each per tenure of four years. This is in a country with one of the lowest per capita income in the world and 24% unemployment rate. Graduate unemployment is so acute that the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) recruitment exercise in 2014 in the National Stadium center could not contain the mammoth crowd of the unemployed and 36 people died in the resulting stampede. There were deaths in other centers around the country.

No less symbolic of Nigeria's normative anomie and weird moral universe is the case of a sitting President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, who declared during his September, 2013 Media Chat that he does not 'give a damn' about declaring his asset publicly. He had even as Vice President refused to declare his assets publicly. (Sunday Vanguard, August 5, 2007, p.5) The recent defeat of the ruling party, PDP, in the general elections is traceable to the level of corruption and impunity in country which the party could not tackle. It was a demonstration of the frustration of majority of Nigerians with the party as against the opposition party which put forward a disciplined and anti-corruption crusader, General Mohammed Buhari as its candidate. Even the emergence of Buhari as President did not allay people's fears about the persistence of corruption as it is believed that corruption had become so entrenched in the polity that he may not tackle it alone in the country's fledgling democracy with no strong institutions as in other climes. The judiciary which ought to be bastion of hope and arbitrator of both legal and social justice is, unfortunately, involved in the executive and legislative normative paralysis. The patently scandalous case between the former President of Court of Appeal and the former Chief Justice of Nigeria on the Sokoto state gubernatorial election petition and the lame-duck approach of the National Judicial Council to the case stand out as ominous signs of the moral and professional rot in the judiciary despite the fat salaries and plum allowances regime introduced since 2007 to discourage impunity and nonchalance on the Bench. The case of two chief judges and three judges who were investigated by the country's anti-graft agency, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and found to have sleaze funds lodged in their accounts attracted newspaper headlines in 2012, but has since been swept under the carpet as nothing has been heard again about it. (The Nation on Sunday September 16, 2012, p.2)

The cumulative effect of the country's normative anomie is the prevalence of languid and lax social institutions. Social institutions are forged on the anvils of national ethos and national character and, since Nigeria is a country without a definite and definable value-orientation, it is no surprise that the process of institution-building which is the hallmark of democratic

modernity is not yet in the country's national agenda. Perhaps what qualifies as a stronger testament to the degree of impunity and corruption in public affairs in Nigeria comes from World Bank's former technocrat, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iwealla. She said in an article in a British newsmagazine that she would be quite satisfied if by the end of her term as the country's finance minister and the coordinating minister of the economy she would be able to reduce the scale of corruption and mismanagement in the country by 4% (The Economist, March 2012)

The country's moral crisis and the resultant political problems are due to dearth of an overarching general principle of probity in her body politic as stipulated and enunciated by Kant's universalizability principle. The economic sector of the country also depicts a wanton breach of Kant's universalizability principle with ominous consequences for the sector.

4. Economic Consequences of the Breach of Categorical Imperative

The economic effect of the country's now proverbial disregard for overarching normative order, some categorical moral imperatives as stipulated and enunciated by Kant's universalizability principle is that in the Nigerian economy, regulations governing trade (both local and foreign), foreign exchange market, manufacturing and banking are not observed as a matter of principle: Nigeria is not reputed for having national value-orientation and character of rule-following. Thus, majority of the players and stake holders in the country's economic sector trample on ethical rules founded on intuitive perceptions of the golden rule implicit in Kant's universalizability principle. Such impunity is fed by tardy enforcement framework and the tacit conspiracy between the political elites and patrons of Big Business. Yet, it is indisputable that no economic policy, no matter how lofty and well-thought out, can succeed in the absence of ethical framework which fosters and inspires the legal framework and its enforcement. A practical example will cast the point being made in sharp relief.

During the Buhari-Idiagbon military government there was perceptible honest effort by the government to instill a sense of respect for general and unconditional ethic or ideology in the Nigerian society as was encapsulated in that government's War Against Indiscipline (WAI) Ideology. This ideological campaign re-invented the Nigerian character so much that wherever one turned there was a kind of brooding presence of candor, public probity, morality and honor. It was akin to what Chinua Achebe, in his book, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, described as 'social miracle' in his evaluation of the magical social impact of General Murtala Mohammed's Revolution of February 13, 1976. According to Achebe (1983), in the morning of February 13, 1976 the notorious and intractable Lagos traffic snarl automatically eased off because General Mohammed, the leader of the

Revolution, was well-known for his integrity and ruthless efficiency.

The WAI ideology brought about a tremendous attitudinal change in the Nigerian psyche which in turn impacted positively on all facets of the society. For example, the country stopped being a dumping ground for every imaginable product. The local industries were thus protected against foreign competition and were thereby encouraged to grow; for instance, the Oku-Iboku Newsprint Manufacturing Company became a going concern and produced newsprint for the Nigerian print media. Foreign wheat was banned and the ban was strictly enforced. The result was that local industries went into some production pact with local wheat producers and in no time bread which disappeared from the markets at the beginning of the ban on foreign wheat re-appeared on the shelves again. These two examples of the Nigerian newsprint and local wheat production served as veritable indices of how the country's economy was revived by attitudinal change occasioned by a national ethic embodied in the WAI Ideology and campaign.

The WAI ethic sufficed as a categorical moral imperative quite on the same logical pedestal with Kant's universalizable principle: it was not only universalizable but indeed *universalized* in the Nigerian moral universe. The Nigerian who joined the queue, urinated only in the designated public toilets, refused giving or taking bribes, refused to dodge taxes and customs duties, and so on expected that other Nigerians should do so, that such should become a *universal law*. Consequently, The WAI ethic or ideology became the fountain of public morality and order. Under its compulsive aura, laws and policies were adhered to with near religious ardor. But when the self-styled military President, General Babangida seized the reins of power in an infamous palace coup d'état, the national fervor of spiritual, cultural and economic revival inspired and sustained by the WAI ideology of Buhari-Idiagbon Revolution began to be reversed.

Babangida regime had no general moral norm or commitment to guide it or the country. The country lurched into a normative free fall. Opportunism and expediency were the hallmark of both his person and regime to the extent that he was nick-named '*Maradona*' (The Guardian, August 6, 1997) after the Argentinean football hero, Maradona, who was famous for his deft and unpredictable dribbles. As Maradona of Nigerian politics, General Babangida had no moral scruples nor paid heed to any general moral norm or ideology and even much less to Kant's universalizable principle. Like a typical votary of Protagoras's philosophy, Babangida conceived himself to be the measure of everything, whatever was good or bad was determined by his desires. He was to add to this hideous egoism the deviousness and ruthlessness of the Machiavellian Prince and became a consummate 'evil genius' as the Nigerian media christened him after he annulled the June 12, 1993 election regarded as Nigeria's freest and fairest election.

It then follows that in Babangida's weird universe of ruthless duplicity, opportunism and expediency, which was also assimilated into his regime's character, there was no thought or place for an overarching moral order envisioned and enjoined upon the individual by Kant's universalizable principle. A universe in which no one wished or expected his moral acts emulated by his fellows because he does not wish or expect any of those acts to become a universal maxim (universalizable principle) is indeed a universe reeling in *anomie*.

Such normative free fall and the resulting anomie also unleashed ethical deregulation in economic-cum-financial and political activities and hampered the economic and political governance of the country. The effect was the unthinking adoption of World Bank and IMF Structural Adjustment Program by the Babangida regime against the grain of the country's socio-cultural and political experience. The economic and cultural devastations caused in the Third World countries by the Structural Adjustment Program are well-known and are better treated under western imperialism and neo-colonialism against the Third World which is beyond the scope of this essay.

The normative paralysis and social anomie and the SAP-induced economic and cultural devastation fed and reinforced one another and brought in its wake a revaluation of values akin to the Nietzschean tooth-and-claw existence of will-to-power scientifically validated by the Darwinian principle of survival of the fittest of the species. The cumulative effect of this normative meltdown on the economic sphere was the bank crisis of 1996 which fell within a period described as the locust years of General Abacha regime. Abacha dictatorship, unparalleled in its venality and brutality was a political symbol of the national cultural decay. The Abacha dictatorship was historically a creation of Babangida's political brinkmanship necessitated by the latter's annulment of June 12, 1993 general election.

The bank crisis of 1996 was a culmination of a process which started in Babangida regime when the latter's Machiavellian dissembling and duplicity became a damper to potential industrialists and turned them into merchant bankers trading on foreign currency. So it is correct to say the languid economy inherited by Obasanjo's presidency in 1999 had its roots in the Structural Adjustment Program-ravaged economy which the stop-gap regimes of General Abacha and General Abubakar were not able to mend. The Babangida years of normative disorder were a national nemesis and the country still reels under it as she has had no historic and redemptive regime to halt the *normlessness* which has been the bane of corruption and underdevelopment in Nigeria.

The resulting economic situation is so gloomy that the World Economic Forum (WEF) ranking of economic performance of African Countries placed Nigeria in the 20th position, ahead only of four other African countries

of Burkina Faso, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Madagascar. (The Guardian on Sunday, July 10, 2000, p. 14), The Transparency International poverty index puts the size of Nigeria's population living below the poverty line at over 60 percent. The Manufacturers Association of Nigeria in its half-year economic review for July-December 1999 revealed that over 130 member companies had closed shop in the review period alone due to lack of working capital and dumping in the economy. Corruption is to be blamed for this parlous state of the manufacturing sector. The situation lamented by the manufacturers' association in 1999 has not improved as Nigeria, indeed Africa, remains a consumer economy. It is against this corruption-induced culture of consumerism that President Obama of the United States harped on in his admonition to African youths on the way forward for Africans during a Town Hall meeting with young African students and leaders in Soweto, South Africa in 2013. In President Obama's words,

"We are in a global economy with a global chain. And I don't want Africa to continually be at the bottom of the supply chain. You produce the raw material so cheap and then all the way up the chain somebody else is making all the money and creating jobs and the value. So, part of your generation's challenge will be making sure that first of all, you have a transparent, accountable, non-corrupt, open government because economic development is not going to happen in the absence of that kind of certainty" (The Nation on Sunday, June 30, 2013, p.5)

Things are no better in the banking sector. Bank fraud is now regarded as one of the entrenched crimes that cannot be eradicated despite the regulatory interventions of the Central Bank and Nigerian Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC). The country's bank crises of 1996 and 2009 which saw the collapse of many banks despite the so-called consolidation via the raising of their share capital was brought about by the erosion of ethical principles that were supposed to regulate banking practice. All imaginable and unimaginable sharp practices are perpetrated in order to declare astronomical profits to feed the concupiscence of their directors and the insatiable financial expectations of their share holders. The cases of Mr. Akingbola and Mrs. Cecilia Ibru of the defunct Inter-Continental and Oceanic Banks respectively stand out as abominable watersheds in the history of bank corruption in the country. Along with other 14 bank chiefs and 68 debtors, Akingbola and Ibru are facing trial for banking fraud that has had many of the banks collapsed with thousands of the employees spewed into the already crowded column of the unemployed (The Nation on Sunday, August 30, 2009. Pp.1&8). The trials began in 2009 and no conviction has been had and it is a good a guess that the trials may be abandoned by the anti-graft agency like many other cases before them as the operatives do more arrests and releases, keeping a façade fighting of corruption.

The net effect of the rot in the banking sector is the paradoxical situation where banks declare big profits and are yet too weak to perform their key-role of financing production in the economy. Consequently, Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) which are the engines of wealth creation in any economy are almost completely cut from their most important source of sustenance: short and medium term credit from banks. Our banks are indeed odd examples of their type on account of unethical practices which runs against the grain of Kant's universalizability principle and have impeded their viability. This has been lamented by Mr. Pascal Dozie, the founding chairman of Diamond Bank PLC in a paper titled "Ethical Canons in Banking" in the following words:

"If any issue strikes a continuing cord of concern about the future and orderly development of this important vocation, it is the need for banking to be practiced on a defined set of immutable moral rules of engagement... During the decade of the 90s, some 50 banks in the country were forced to close shop for various reasons directly or indirectly related to ethics. The result was a debilitating distress in the financial industry. In the process, the ability of the industry to create wealth was curtailed, while individual health and related damages and business collapsed." (The Comet, August 28, 2000, p. 21)

Mr. Edozie, an economist and professional banker, has made an indisputable point in the above quote, to wit: absence of universal moral imperatives as stipulated and enunciated by Kant's categorical imperative are the bane of banking and related economic activities in Nigeria. There is weak moral centre in our economic activities. This is because what is supposed to be such moral core in the form of *professional ethics*, elicits only intellectual assent other than practical adherence. Hence, economic production is not driven by humane concerns but by overweening drive of maximization of profit and optimal returns to the shareholders.

Conclusion

The prevailing trend of materialism and philistinism both in business and politics relegates ethical /moral questions to the background and focuses on structural analysis, explication and prognosis of the Nigerian socio-economic performance. The pundits of this school of thought organize seminar and workshops and harp on efficient economic management, strong social institutions, economic empowerment, skill acquisition, entrepreneurial training and wealth creation. They maintain a studied silence on wealth distribution and corruption because they know this would involve fundamental ethical /moral questions. But history has shown that no civilization has ever run rough shod on its ethical /moral foundations and survived. Nigeria cannot be a queer exception here. The country's leaders, policy makers and implementers at the various levels of

governance have a duty to work to create a normative order that can forge a national culture capable of inspiring and sustaining a humane state. That the modern world celebrates such moral leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. Nelson Mandela, Julius Nyerere, Thomas Sankara, San su Chin among others is a testament to the primacy of moral order to political and economic order. As, Lord Devlin reminds us in the famous homosexual debate, a society is constituted by the agreement of its members.

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