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The Hypocrisy of Value and the Fight Against Corruption

Iniobong UMOTONG

Department of Philosophy,

Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria.

Email: iniobongumotong@aksu.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT

Corruption has consistently taken centre stage in conferences and public discourse, and the rationale behind this phenomenon is readily discernible. The pervasive impact of corruption on the stunted development of nearly every sector of the Nigerian economy can be directly attributed to the values that underpin it. It is well established that individuals collectively constitute the government, making it imperative to recognise that issues pertaining to institutional values are inherently linked to the individual values of those who govern these institutions. These individuals are products of the society they inhabit, shaped by the societal influences they are exposed to, and in turn, they influence the institutional values that govern the conduct of citizens. Therefore, there exists a compelling need to overhaul our value parameters. Drawing upon existing literature and the numerous discussions aimed at addressing this multifaceted social problem, it can be deduced that eradicating corruption is attainable. However, this study highlights the paradox of verbally condemning corruption with a plethora of anti-corruption slogans and agencies while concurrently embracing it both collectively and individually. The research identifies the individual as the battleground for the anti-corruption war and advocates a return to a foundational value reorientation, with leaders leading the charge, as an essential strategy for prevailing in the battle against corruption.

Keywords: Corruption; Value; Hypocrisy; Leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption and values are central topics in contemporary discourse, prevalent in various forms of media, including physical, electronic, and print media. It has become exceedingly rare to encounter media content that does not address issues related to corruption. Each day, without exception, news outlets and various platforms incorporate reports or discussions on corruption. Curiously, these discussions overwhelmingly cast corruption in a negative light, highlighting the deep-seated aversion to the subject. Participants in conversations about corruption often display clear displeasure, raising questions about the sincerity of their condemnation, given that these are human-made concepts intrinsic to the conduct and values of their respective communities and societies.

Corruption is not an esoteric or otherworldly concept; it arises from human conditions (Umotong, 2015; Umotong, 2020a). Therefore, the apparent disapproval of corruption coexisting with its persistent growth without a clear solution suggests either insincerity or ignorance among those who claim to abhor it. Many discussions portray corruption as the exclusive behaviour of government officials or individuals in public offices, overlooking its origins and incubation within the family unit. This work contends that the family plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes towards corruption, and addressing its roots within the family may prevent the spread of corrupt practices throughout society.

To ensure a precise understanding of our primary focus in this paper, it is essential to provide working definitions for key concepts employed in the discussion. Recognising that language can be vague and subject to misinterpretation, we aim to mitigate any potential confusion that could impede comprehension. The key concepts under consideration in this article are as follows: value, hypocrisy, corruption, and leadership. Value, as defined by Robinson (2004), refers to “the quality of being useful, the degree of usefulness” (p. 1569). Value encompasses desirable qualities, the degree of importance, and the fundamental principles that shape attitudes and actions (Umotong, 2007; Umotong, 2020b). In this context, hypocrisy refers to the pretence of virtuous or moral character while concealing true beliefs or inclinations, particularly concerning religious and moral principles. It encompasses dissimulation, pretence, and the sham of upholding certain standards of belief (Sassower, 2020).

Leadership, though lacking a universally accepted definition, can be contextually defined as an individual’s capacity to guide and direct others. Leaders are not solely those with high ranks in a given setting but include individuals known for their ethical values, passionate commitment to their endeavours, and the ability to inspire and motivate others who share similar goals. Leaders are those who can propel and energise others to achieve defined objectives (Donaldson, 2006).

THE MEANING OF CORRUPTION

When it comes to defining corruption, there is no single comprehensive and universally accepted definition. The absence of a universally accepted standard definition can be attributed to various legal, criminological, and political challenges faced in countries worldwide. However, significant progress was made in shaping a common understanding of corruption with the negotiation of the *United Nations Convention against Corruption* in 2002. This international agreement focuses on unlawful or improper enrichment, particularly among groups of individuals, such as public officials, and is considered a corrupt practice (Argandoña, 2007).

Scholars around the world offer diverse definitions of corruption, yet they all converge on the understanding that corruption is a widespread moral transgression committed by individuals globally. The *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, for instance, characterises corruption as a practice that distorts economic decision-making, negatively affecting investment, market competition, stability, and overall economic growth at local, national, regional, and international levels. As a result, the international community is actively engaged in the fight against corruption across various tiers (Persson et al. 2013). *Transparency International*, on the other hand, defines corruption as a precise undermining of the rule of law and democracy. It can lead to human rights violations, diminish the quality of life, distort markets, and create favourable conditions for organised crime and terrorism, ultimately impacting individuals at the household level (Gebel, 2012). The UK *Department for International Development* (DFID) interprets corruption from a power and public resource perspective, labelling it as the misuse of power and resources for personal gain (Kerusauskaite, 2018).

Looking back in history, the perception of corruption has been both “positive” and “negative,” depending on socio-cultural variations worldwide. Understanding the contextual interpretation of corruption necessitates a deep understanding of a country’s history, culture, socio-economic context, and background. Therefore, whether corruption is seen positively or negatively is contingent on these contextual factors. Ancient references reveal that some societies regarded corruption as offering gifts to influential individuals, while ancient Rome characterised corruption with the term “corrupter,” signifying “to corrupt, violate, or break” (Alatas, 2015).

In a broader perspective, the concept of corruption can be analysed from various behavioural standpoints. Corruption, as a concept, lacks a universally accepted definition, primarily due to the absence of a shared ethical standard for such phenomena. As a result, scholars have yet to reach a consensus on the term “corruption” (Adeyemi, 2021). Adeyemi (2021) expands on this argument by stating that:

Because of its nature, it is often challenging to define corruption in a way that is independent of the observer’s ethics or normative values. It raises several problems in the analysis of corruption. Most people would agree that it is undesirable to seek to define the phenomenon in a value-free fashion. Nevertheless, ethical definitions of any phenomenon create problems for scientific analysis; people may not agree on the ethical standard to apply; consequently, it would be difficult to agree on the causes and effects of the phenomenon. This has significantly hindered the development of a scientifically analytical discipline in studying corruption (p. 2).

Nonetheless, the prevailing, albeit not absolute, common understanding of corruption, rooted in common sense, is shaped by a relatively narrow and well-defined concept. This interdisciplinary definition has evolved as a response to the practical and detrimental impact of corrupt practices across various spheres, encompassing public institutions, state-owned enterprises, socially responsible entities, private businesses, charities, and civic organizations. Over time, corruption has ascended to the forefront of the global social, political, and economic agenda. Eugen Dimant and Thorben Schulte (2016) highlight that the common-sense perception of corruption has prompted extensive media coverage, the establishment of anti-corruption laws and institutions, numerous problem-solving research endeavours, and the accumulation of a wealth of micro- and macro-level information. These scholars further emphasise that the severe repercussions of corruption in diverse countries have exerted significant pressure on corrupt governments, with some being overthrown to make way for anti-corruption administrations (Lawson, 2009). Moreover, in recent years, research scholars, as well as international and national research institutions and societies, have converged on a mutually shared recognition of corruption as an adverse phenomenon. Rather than dwelling on cultural disparities, substantial efforts are being directed towards resolving controversies surrounding corruption (Jaramillo, 2020).

Consequently, Adeyemi (2021) delves into the intricacies of the corruption concept, defining it as an unlawful act involving inducement or undue influence on individuals within the public or private domains, contravening established rules and regulations governing work processes. He also underscores that corruption can manifest in various forms, such as bribery—where bribes are solicited and accepted prior to the fulfillment of legal duties—nepotism, misappropriation, abuse of official position, miscarriage of justice, undervaluation of public assets during disposal, tax evasion, sexual harassment, inflation of public contracts, and examination malpractices.

Schulte and Dimant (2016), on their part, expand on their explanation of the corruption concept, portraying it as a formidable threat to humanity across the globe.

They elucidate that corruption distorts economic growth, healthy competition, and innovation, leading to reduced productivity and foreign direct investment due to inefficient contract allocation and bribing of foreign officials and tourists. Corruption curtails voluntary contributions to public goods and services owing to diminished trustworthiness, exacerbates inequality, brain drain, criminal activities, and institutional inefficiencies, while eroding positive societal values and norms. It even spurs illegal emigration of unskilled individuals and exacerbates inequity, thereby resulting in profound economic, moral, and ethical adverse consequences for societal well-being.

In general, while a universally accepted and standardised terminological definition of corruption remains elusive, it is undeniable that a substantial majority has significantly contributed to the discourse on the pervasive destructive nature of corruption across the globe. Notably, the post-Cold War era witnessed a paradigm shift, where even prominent nations that championed democracy and free markets turned their attention to addressing corruption as an impediment to development. It is worth noting that the reference to “except for a few” serves to highlight the views of a select group of functionalist psychologists and political scientists who have posited the importance of corruption. However, their arguments have been met with challenges and have left unanswered questions. Contrarily, the prevailing perspective is one of rationalists who perceive corruption and its various manifestations as problems rooted in the misalignment of incentives within organizations. They regard corruption as a cooperative problem, akin to a principal-agent or prisoner’s dilemma scenario, necessitating alterations in the organisational incentive structure. Additionally, they view it as a coordination problem where manifestations of corruption are deeply embedded as societal norms, requiring information dissemination and exchange to replace these corrupt norms with new, ethically sound ones (Geddes, 2023).

THE CONTRIBUTION OF CORRUPTION TO BAD GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

Owoye and Bissessar’s (2014) empirical analysis underscores the enduring presence of poor governance and corruption practices in post-independence African countries. While acknowledging the historical context of colonialist exploitation and expropriation, characterised as “international abuse of official power,” the authors shed light on the prevailing dynamics in this region. They observe the behaviour of autocratic dictators who perceive legislators as self-interested agents, often disregarding the welfare of their constituents. This atmosphere also nurtures a culture of unrestrained rent-seeking among entrepreneurs, who consider it a routine aspect of economic activity. Moreover, the prevalence of corrupt government officials distorts the normal functioning of markets, resulting in aberrant transactions.

The authors’ analysis reveals a concealed network of illegal activities within many African leadership and government structures, where they collaborate with corrupt entrepreneurs and covert facilitators to plunder public resources, betraying the trust vested in them through elections. This underscores the deficiency of institutional and leadership qualities in Africa, including Ethiopia, which contributes to poor governance rather than fostering its improvement. This is manifested in the absence of mechanisms for citizen participation and accountability and the progressive escalation of corruption over time, highlighting the need for virtuous leaders. Ultimately, the entrenched weaknesses in institutions and leadership exemplify the challenges of applying scientific public policy theories within the country.

Hassan Seid and Kye-Woo Lee’s (2012) study employs inductive reasoning methodology to unveil the predatory nature of state capture corruption within the Ethiopian state. The author delves into the tactics employed by the country’s elites and ruling parties to exploit foreign aid for their own self-enrichment at the expense of the

Ethiopian populace. This form of state-capture corruption, characterised as grand corruption, is perpetrated by influential individuals, political and economic factions, as well as social, ethnic, and regional groups capable of extracting rent-seeking benefits. It is a means for consolidating power and political dominance, as evidenced by the utilisation of aid to secure their positions (Hassan, 2018; Umotong, I., & Udofia, 2021; Ishamali, 2022). Alemayehu's (2013) analysis further underscores the structural nature of corruption in Ethiopia, describing it as a pervasive malignancy that has permeated all levels of society. This exacerbates the existing challenges related to poor governance observed in the country.

In contrast to the perspectives of IMF and World Bank economists, specialists on Africa argue that the roots of corruption on the continent trace back to colonial practices (Harrison, 2004). Corruption has become deeply ingrained as a self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating institution, significantly affecting governmental bodies in sub-Saharan countries. Colonial administrators played a pivotal role in dismantling traditional checks and balances, centralising power in their hands and the hands of a select few, which included local chiefs, colonial appointees, and elites educated under the colonial system (Yeh, 2011).

The consequences of this system were profound. Local chiefs exercised unchecked authority, requisitioning personal servants, appropriating women, and extorting forced tribute for personal gain. Colonial practices institutionalised favouritism, personal enrichment, and despotic rule, effectively training African elites in these methods. This legacy had dire repercussions in the postcolonial era when these elites replaced colonial administrators and applied the lessons they had learned about the exercise of power. A notable feature of postcolonial Africa is the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of each head of state. This concentration of power, a legacy of French and British colonial practices, had disastrous outcomes upon achieving independence. African autocrats quickly discovered they could exploit their combined economic and political power to control economic activity, enrich themselves, reward supporters, punish rivals, and suppress opposition (Yeh, 2011). This control allowed African ruling elites to amass wealth and dispense patronage to secure political support.

The centralization of both economic and political power in African states has turned them into coveted sources of wealth. Power is captured to amass personal fortunes, reward loyalists, punish adversaries, and maintain prolonged rule (Umotong, 2004; Umotong, 2008). Ruling elites infiltrate and subvert key governmental institutions, such as the civil service, judiciary, military, media, and banking. Positions in these institutions are handed over to the president's loyal supporters, undermining meritocracy, the rule of law, property rights, transparency, and administrative capacity. Strategic positions in the police and military are filled with personally loyal individuals, as political defeat could lead to exile, imprisonment, or worse. Economic reforms that would remove state controls and reduce scarcity are opposed because such controls are sources of rent extraction for the ruling elites. Those excluded from power often resort to violence, insurgency, and civil war.

The root of Africa's corruption problem can be traced to the colonial policy of dismantling traditional checks and balances on rulers' power (Umotong, 2013; Umotong, 2021, Ishamali, 2023). Colonial governments extracted wealth from their colonies, and this unchecked power was transferred to African rulers upon independence, leading to its widescale abuse (Antwi-Boasiako & Okyere, 2009). Corruption persists due to a lack of accountability among the ruling elite, who exploit their unchecked discretionary power for personal gain. Public officials act without fear of being held accountable, resulting in corruption becoming an endemic and routine aspect of administrative processes, causing substantial revenue losses for states (Antwi-Boasiako & Okyere, 2009).

Corruption in Africa is widespread and entrenched, affecting institutions responsible for providing checks and balances. Elites obstruct the development of transparent, participatory, and democratic accountability structures to safeguard their monopolies on governmental services and privileges. Despite the introduction of free elections, African leaders resist IMF reforms that challenge the patrimonial system that keeps them in power. Consequently, the control of corruption is fundamental for the sustainable transition to a market-oriented economy. Democratic reforms, privatisation, and IMF-style policies alone do not provide effective checks and balances against the abuse of governmental power. Barro summarized the evidence and concluded that:

Even if a poor country could beat the odds and sustain democratic institutions, there is no reason to believe that this accomplishment would help much in the quest to escape poverty... An increase in democracy is less important than an expansion of the rule of law as a stimulus for economic growth and investment. In addition, democracy does not seem to have a strong role in fostering the rule of law. Thus, one cannot argue that democracy is critical for growth because democracy is a prerequisite for the rule of law... If a poor country has a limited amount of resources to accomplish institutional reforms, then they are much better spent in attempting to implement the rule of law . . . Even if democracy is the principal objective in the long run, the best way to accomplish it may be to encourage the rule of law in the short run (p. 230).

The enduring challenges faced by Africa, despite the implementation of democratisation, privatisation, and IMF-backed reforms, present a perplexing issue that becomes comprehensible when examined through the lens of the logical outcome of the absence of checks and balances. Recurrent fiscal and balance of payments crises emerge as predictable repercussions of corruption, uncontrolled expenditures, and rent-seeking activities that deplete government revenues, causing a deficit relative to expenditures. The persistent absence of transparency, accountability, and a cadre of honest and highly efficient civil servants can be interpreted as the logical outcome of allowing ruling elites, through a lack of checks and balances, to utilise patronage networks to consolidate their power and, consequently, undermine the principles of good governance. The ongoing pursuit of detrimental economic policies that would ordinarily be curbed by their consequences can be explained as the logical outcome when substantial amounts of foreign aid supply the resources that enable African ruling elites to perpetuate these policies. In the absence of checks and balances, aid from foreign countries is squandered, and aid donors inadvertently hinder genuine reform, the establishment of robust institutions, and the rule of law.

The assertion that corruption is the fundamental issue underlying Africa's hardships is hardly a contentious one. These statements posit that corruption will diminish over time as the role of government diminishes and the private sector and civil society become more robust. The IMF and the World Bank endeavour to reduce the government's role and bolster the private sector by imposing conditions on their financial assistance, advocating for the privatisation of government assets, price deregulation, and heightened competition in product and service markets.

This section suggests that, in the African context, checks and balances against the misuse of governmental power are insufficient. Consequently, privatization, electoral processes, deregulation, and the introduction of competition are frequently manipulated by those in positions of authority in ways that favor their allies and penalize their rivals. The reforms endorsed by the IMF and the World Bank are often distorted in ways that undermine, rather than advance, the private sector and civil society and erode the struggle against corruption and underdevelopment. Paradoxically, economists affiliated

with the IMF and the World Bank persist in advocating privatisation, elections, deregulation, and the introduction of competition as the primary mechanisms for combating corruption and promoting economic development in sub-Saharan Africa.

TRIGGERS OF CORRUPTION

Corrupt practices manifest within the context of one's professional obligations, and an individual's conduct is deemed corrupt when it deviates from established standards or expectations (Dalton, 2005). Actions undertaken in a manner that implies an underlying motive other than the originally intended purpose are labelled as corrupt. Any duty fulfilled with incentives or inducements not explicitly stipulated in the terms of engagement is also categorised as corrupt. This prompts the question: should we abstain from productive activities to avoid corruption, given that corruption often arises in the course of one's duties? The resounding answer is a resolute "no." While it is natural to engage in social and value-enhancing activities, it is imperative to remain vigilant about our integrity during the execution of these responsibilities.

Dishonesty stands out as a key catalyst for corruption (Schuchter & Levi, 2015). Dishonest acts transpire when personal gains take precedence over the greater good. It is commonplace in both public and private spheres to encounter individuals making insincere promises they know to be false and unattainable. Such dishonesty reflects a focus on personal benefits with little regard for the long-term impact on societal ethos. This prompts the question: Why do people engage in dishonesty? It appears that dishonesty in both public and private life can be attributed to the fear of the unknown. Addressing these fears can contribute to reducing lies and dishonesty. Public officeholders often embezzle funds to secure their lifestyles after leaving office.

Another driving force behind corruption is individual orientation (Karmann et al., 2016). As diverse as our backgrounds and convictions may be regarding what constitutes wrongdoing or evil, these differences do not undermine the objectivity of values. However, an individual's conviction regarding the extent of a particular value plays a significant role in determining its importance. Consider any socially censured behavior and place it within a given context, and one will observe that judgments about that value vary among individuals, influenced by the environments they have been exposed to. A child growing up witnessing their parents' daily morning prayers may find it inconceivable that any responsible adult would leave home without similar devotions. Similarly, an individual who grows up in proximity to Nigerian politicians may come to believe that services are rendered not out of goodwill but through the exchange of money or other favors, as negotiated by the parties involved.

Selfishness is yet another impetus for corruption, where values are dictated by self-interest, leading to corrupt practices (Dungan et al., 2014). Arguments concerning the value standard of egoism apply here, as this standard cannot be accurately measured by individual pleasure or convenience. When self-interest governs value determination, the ambiguous nature of what is deemed good or bad becomes pronounced. This egotistical approach aligns with both Biblical teachings and conventional standards in many contemporary societies (Luke 10:27 and Mark 12:31).

In this context, Vorster Schalk (2013) asserts that "the relationship established by an act of corruption shifts the focus to the expected duties as defined by the governing laws, the actions of the relevant parties, and the corrective measures contemplated by the responsible authorities" (p. 56). This juxtaposes what is prescribed as an acceptable norm, what should have been done in a given situation, and what was actually carried out. This introduces a distinction between the "ought" and the "is," raising questions about normative values and unveiling the corruption issue from both utilitarian and deontological perspectives. Utilitarians evaluate an act as good if and only if its

consequences generate the maximum or greatest overall benefit, often measured by the degree of happiness it imparts to the majority or a larger segment of those affected by the act (Nas et al., 1968).

CONTRADICTIONS IN PERSPECTIVE

The concept of corruption, regardless of the specific definition one adopts, becomes a relative matter if certain actions in certain contexts are not deemed reprehensible. In this context, criticisms directed at the relativity of values are pertinent, as there is no universally accepted standard for assessing or disapproving of actions contingent upon the circumstances in which they occur.

Immanuel Kant proposed that the morality of any action could be assessed based on the principle that the actors would desire it to be universally applicable, making the act suitable for all situations and circumstances. He termed this concept the “categorical imperative”—the idea that actions should be conducted in such a way that they could be recommended for universalization, regardless of one’s position as the actor, recipient, or victim (Pogge, 1998).

Conversely, utilitarians contend that the ethical worth of an action should be judged by the extent of pleasure it generates for the individual promoting it in comparison to the number of individuals adversely affected. The focus is on maximising overall well-being and happiness for the greatest number of those impacted. The ontological perspective, on the other hand, evaluates value based on adherence to established rules governing the action in question.

In contrast to these philosophical perspectives, egoism asserts that the individual should serve as the measure of what is good. According to egoism, personal comfort, personal inclinations, and individual enjoyment should be the standards by which one assesses what is good (Graham, 2011). In light of these various philosophical underpinnings, every instance of corruption is evaluated in relation to the expectations and responsibilities imposed by diverse stakeholders. In situations where strict adherence to established rules would harm oneself, following the prescribed course of action should be abandoned.

Consider a practical example: a police officer on road patrol who has just been informed of his father’s urgent medical expenses while having zero funds in his bank account. His father, who supported him through education, is facing a life-threatening illness that requires immediate medical attention with a minimum financial deposit. In such a scenario, the police officer might, without hesitation, accept a financial inducement while on patrol, as the alternative—adhering to the rules of his engagement by rejecting a bribe or inducement in any form—would mean his father’s death. What the rulebook or others may label as bribery or corruption would be viewed as a life-saving act, as the financial inducement would enable him to promptly secure his father’s medical treatment. Consequently, the act that appeared to compromise his judgement at the time could ultimately lead to greater societal harm than preserving his father’s life. This same rationale applies to other frameworks for assessing the rightness or wrongness of actions, underscoring the understanding that corruption is generally considered undesirable.

ETHICAL THEORIES

Numerous ethical theories seek to provide rationales for accepting or rejecting specific laws or judgements regarding actions or inactions. Some of these theories include egoism, utilitarianism, the categorical imperative, and hedonism.

Egoism is an ethical theory designed to guide society in determining permissible and prohibited behaviour within various cultural contexts. Egoism centres around self-

interest as the underlying motivation for actions or inactions (Puffer & McCarthy, 1995). It represents one of the considerations for endorsing or disapproving of values in any given context. Egoism posits that self-interest is the primary determinant influencing what individuals perceive as good or evil. It challenges the notion that morality should not be self-centered. While selfishness is often regarded as an undesirable moral standard, it is a common practice in daily life, with certain religious sects endorsing and advocating for it. To classify actions as wrong, bad, evil, or good, there must be some intrinsic quality within these actions that justifies such categorization. The Bible, in Matthew 22:37–39 and Leviticus 19:18, promotes self-love as the standard for love, and philosopher René Descartes likewise establishes the self as the foundational measure of good. Descartes' epistemology is grounded in self-realisation as a thinking being before establishing a basis for other truths, thus providing a framework for certainty in claims to knowledge (Dean et al., 2006). Self-preservation and self-interest play significant roles in human behaviour, and what one may consider an act of corruption could align with the Bible's perspective, considering the act as a gift that paves the way (Proverbs 8:16–18). The practice of giving gifts to gain access and influence is widespread in Nigeria and globally.

Utilitarianism, associated with British philosophers Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill, is an ethical theory holding that an action is morally right if it produces at least as much overall good (utility) for all individuals affected by the action as any alternative action that the person could perform instead. John Stuart Mill introduced the concept of the greatest happiness principle. According to this theory, an action is considered good and desirable if it generates a significant amount of happiness for those affected by it (Mill, 2003). This happiness should be so extensive that, when compared with an alternative action in a similar context, the chosen action must exhibit the greatest capacity to satisfy those affected. A fundamental challenge in utilitarianism lies in the measurement of the magnitude and scope of happiness, as happiness is an emotional concept subject to individual experiences and interpretations.

Categorical Imperative and Universalization Principles. The concept of the categorical imperative, also known as the ontological ethical theory, underscores the importance of distinguishing between actions driven by a sense of duty and those motivated solely by personal inclination. Ontological theorists, such as Immanuel Kant, contend that actions rooted in a sense of duty are obligatory, while those arising from personal inclination are driven by the agent's preferences or desires for such actions over alternatives. In this framework, morality is intrinsically linked to one's sense of duty (Stern, 2015). The categorical imperative posits that every action bound by duty should be universally applicable and that genuinely good actions are motivated by a "good will." In this context, a good will requires no external motivation beyond the intrinsic willingness to do what is morally right.

Hedonism, another ethical theory, associate the concept of good with happiness. Hedonists argue that happiness is derived from pleasure and undermined by pain (Veenhoven, 2003). Consequently, anything that brings pleasure and happiness is considered good, acceptable, recommended, and desirable, serving as a standard for evaluating ethical conduct.

THE WAR ON CORRUPTION

Not long ago, precisely from August 22 to 24, 2023, the 15th Annual BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) Summit occurred in Johannesburg, South Africa, and prominently featured discussions on matters related to corruption (Sjøli, 2023). During the summit, heads of government of member countries, including Russia, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa, gather to discuss economic, peace, and business corporations around the globe and among member states. Beside insecurity, which is a global threat, corruption was top on the agenda for deliberation. Against all odds—climate change and the wars ravaging the world at this time in our history—corruption was at the top of the agenda. The BRICS anti-corruption working group also discussed the need to have a road map for the recovery of stolen assets (Sjøli, 2023).

In every society, there are certain attributes that are inherent in humans, yet they are ignored while handling such attributes as alien (Ishamali & Ibiang, 2023). One of these inherent human attributes is the tendency towards corruption, its open abhorrence, and its secret embrace by all. It is a common feature around us that value has been so degraded to the point that a leader can boast of his inordinate acquisition as an achievement. It is on record that a member of the ninth national assembly in Nigeria boasted publicly in his valedictory speech how he influenced judiciary proceedings to favour his friends and colleagues. This is the extent to which corruption has eaten deep into our system, and this is so blatantly done because what matters most now is the end, not the means. Everyone seems to see nothing wrong with this trend, which suggests that all are guilty. The use of all in this context may seem superfluous, but on closer look, one will realise that everyone in private or public life embraces corruption in some form.

This paper has highlighted the human tendencies and hypocrisy underneath the acclaimed fight against corruption. Going by the definition of corruption, one can conveniently and rightly conclude that it is in the humane gene to do things the wrong way, provided it guarantees self-comfort and interest. It is believed that once the root of corruption is identified honestly, it may shed a hopeful light on how to approach it without sounding or looking hypocritical in the fight to stamp it out in our societies. And stamping it out may then be possible, or at least it can be reduced to a level less fatal than what it is today, where it is fast assuming a legal and official lifestyle, especially for our public office holders.

From the above, it is obvious that corruption is part of human deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), the molecules that carry genetic information for the development and functioning of an organism of its kind. We pretend to abhor it, while practically we are inseparable from all that can be classified as corrupt practice. Wedging the war on corruption should start with oneself. The war on oneself does not need a seminar or conference. It does not need such an expensive jamboree in any given location in the guise of trying to find a solution to the problem of corruption. We are aware that the fabric of our society is its individual components. Every individual brings to the table the real him, and the real him is the picture we project to the outside world. When the world sees the collective corruption, then it is as good as concluding that the individual component of society is basically corrupt people. Let's take a practical instance of all the known instances: how can we explain when someone who has defaulted on the provisions of the law is trying to bribe his way out of trouble? When his bribe is rejected, he tags the officer as wicked and inhumane, but where the officer accepts his inducement, such an officer is a good man and is adjudged to have approached his job with a human face. Where a political office holder amasses unexplainable wealth and is able to give peanuts to his cronies, he is seen as "*ano agwo mkpo*" (Annang/Ibiobio dialects: the generous giver). In the midst of these accolades for corrupt practices, we are shouting war against corruption; one then wonders if we are waging the war against the inner self or an unknown enemy.

Humans cannot win any war where the battle grounds are not ascertained and delineated and the weapons drawn for the war are not drawn. In fact, everything concerning the war should be sketched; otherwise, the war is lost before it begins, and that accounts for the failure of all the government agencies saddled with the responsibility of combating corruption. For instance, in Nigeria, the agencies: the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), military and paramilitary agencies, and the judiciary, along with other associate and affiliate agencies of the government, fail woefully in the discharge of their responsibilities, especially as they relate to corruption. They failed because we have refused to recognise ourselves as agents of corruption. Every battle should be waged on the appropriate battlefield. The constituents of these agencies are members of the same society that cries foul against corruption; they are shaped and groomed by the values of the society in which they live; they are not from another planet; as such, the general attitude of their immediate environment has greatly influenced their acts.

MUTED WEAPONS AGAINST CORRUPTION

Many social influencers have suggested several ways and weapons that can best be deployed in the fight against corruption, the latest being the suggestion made by the president of the Tenth Senate, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Godswil Akpabio, and his counterpart, Rt. Hon. Tajudeen Abbas, the Speaker, House of Representatives. Chief Akpabio at the National Polity Dialogue on Corruption, Social norms, and Behavioural Change in Nigeria, organised by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) in Abuja on August 15, 2023. Where he suggested reorientation as one of the weapons that can defeat corruption is his highly placed personality, having served at various levels and capacities in government ranging from state commissioner for several years in Akwa Ibom to becoming the governor of the state for eight years, having been a minister, and today the Senate President. I am of the opinion that he has seen it all. Our discussion about corruption is basically based on institutional corrupt practices, especially as they concern government functionaries and the institutions they manage. But one may wonder: how then have we so woefully failed in the war against corruption, given that these weapons suggested have been in use for decades yet we are as deep into corruption as ever?

The argument may be that if the government recognises reorientation as the solution, then the agency for reorientation has failed and should itself be reoriented on its responsibilities or reorganised to have the needed muscle to properly handle the responsibilities. On the other hand, the Speaker, Rt. Hon. Tajudeen Abbas, in his speech at the 63rd Independence Day lecture and symposium, identified the leaving wage as the fundamental weapon that can be deployed in the fight against corruption. He posited that if workers were paid enough to take care of their bills—children’s school fees, rent, and transportation—the rate of corruption would have been drastically reduced. On this note, one may then ask, if volume of earnings can stop corruption, why then do our national assembly members engage in corrupt practices at every instance, given their fat salaries, yet they are the Czar icon of corruption?

RECOMMENDATIONS

For a successful war on corruption, human values must be reordered; there must be individual and organisational change as the harbinger of victory in the war against corruption. The president of the tenth Nigerian senate, Godswil Akpabio, advocated behavioural change as the pivotal instrument for the successful war against corruption. He is of the opinion that the issue of behavioural change is a precursor to winning the

war against corruption. Undoubtedly, behavioural change is a deeper issue that, if contextually understood, could be our single biggest instrument in addressing corruption and the progressive destruction of social norms in our communities. To effectively pursue behavioural change, we must first admit a certain attitude as being proactive in the battle ahead. We cannot change anything unless we accept the fact that these changes may come with some discomfort at the initial stage but will guarantee general good at the end.

We must accept the negative effect of retarded growth individually or collectively, irrespective of the gains we got from the corrupt system. The steps to behavioural change start with awareness of the necessity of the dangers of continuing in corruption. To facilitate that change willingly and wholeheartedly by the citizens, certain parameters must be put in place. Reorientation is a basic factor; the acquisition of skills or meaningful engagement with the hope of goal attainment is the next; and refocusing on moral rectitude as a parameter for accolade in society. These, among others, will reengineer the social value system in order to make corruption unattractive.

CONCLUSION

The reconfiguration of values emerges as a crucial remedy for the restoration of our societal well-being, as it has been deduced that attitudes constitute the foundational elements for a more virtuous community. The collective effort to combat corruption must be a focal point, commencing with the transformation of our mindset concerning the pursuit of material gain at the expense of integrity.

I firmly believe that we can achieve triumph in the campaign against corruption in Nigeria through unified action. This involves a heightened awareness of the perils associated with the prevalent adoption of egoistic value theories. Such commitment should extend beyond mere rhetoric to encompass a resolute dedication to fostering change, commencing with self-reflection at the individual level and setting a precedent for corruption-free leadership in all aspects of life, from family settings to public roles as government or organisational leaders across various strata.

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