Analysis of Corruption from the Ethical and Moral Perspectives

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Abstract

This paper gives a philosophical analysis of corruption from the ethical and moral perspectives. It discusses some of the major causes of corruption as being rooted in our borrowed contemporary materialistic, capitalistic and individualistic philosophical outlook, as well as in the resultant socio-cultural, political and economic situations we have created for ourselves. The paper also sees corruption as being the consequence of the many years of hardship and the high level of poverty that have become the way of life here in Nigeria. It identifies some of the effects of corruption in Nigeria to include: poverty, reduction in economic growth and efficiency, underdevelopment and a general collapse of the social structures that make for a healthy society. As a way out of corruption, this paper put forward principles that draw impetus from ethics and morality, from our traditional African cultural values, from modern socio-economic, political and legal practices that have been of comparative relevance and workability in other developed and developing nations, and subsequently challenges us to be collectively involved in the fight against corruption.

Introduction

Corruption is a global problem and no country of the world is totally free of its menacing grip. However, it is the level of its prevalence on the one hand and the honest, committed readiness of the people in eradicating it on the other hand, that differentiates one country from another in the scale of corruption perception index.

Here in Nigeria, corruption has been entrenched in our national ethos, politics, civil society, public and private sectors of business and commerce. Our educational system, moral preferences and the whole economic machinery of our society stink and ooze with the stench of corruption. Every level of our Nigerian society has been deeply permeated by a pervasive and debilitating culture of corruption. Nigeria has been rated as one of the most corrupt nations in the world.

This prevalence of corruption betrays a latent decay in our ethical values and orientation. It shows our futile attempt to build a political society without a foundational reference to the religious-ethical principles of justice, transparency, altruism, accountability and a service-oriented notion of leadership. It shows a leadership praxis that promotes the selfish interests of a selected few at the expense of the common good which have generally been acclaimed by philosophers as the essence of the formation of political society (Uduigwomen 201).

The effects of this pervasive corruption stare mockingly at our faces. We see them in the bad state of our roads, hospitals, school systems, poor infrastructures, increasing crime wave, looting of the
government treasury etc. Sad enough, there has not been an accompanying readiness and committed effort on our part to stamp out corruption or bring it to a manageable degree. Our many anti-corruption slogans, initiatives and institutions are sterile and empty of integrity, they are also selective and hypocritical.

This paper attempts to give an analysis of corruption from the ethical and moral perspectives, with a view to articulating an ethical road map for an effective reduction or complete eradication of corruption from our societies.

**Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis**

The word ‘ethics’ is derived from the Greek word ‘ethos’ which means “custom”. It shares an equivalent meaning with yet another word “mores”, which means “customs” or “habits”. Sometimes the two words are used interchangeably to mean “customs, habits and acceptable ways of behaviour of an individual or a community” (Uduigwomen 1). Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with the rightness or wrongness of human action. It is for this reason that Ozumba (4) holds that ethics deals with judgments as to the rightness or wrongness, virtuousness or viciousness, desirability or undesirability, approval or disapproval of our action. As part of philosophy, it provides the undercurrent of rationality and logicality in the admissibility of moral codes, mores and behavioural patterns. Ethics has also been called moral philosophy, since it deals with moral problems and moral judgments, and concerns itself with the morality of human action. Uduigwomen (236) has identified the major concern of ethics to be “the regulation of the behaviour and conduct of man as it affects the overall wellbeing of the state or society in which he lives”.

On the one hand, it is possible to talk of a very close affinity between ethics and morality. On the other hand, some subtle distinction between these two concepts can also be inferred. We all act in a moral way, that is, every human act has a moral value and can be adjudged to be either morally good or morally bad. Sometimes we do not explicitly reflect on what makes our actions good or bad or what undergirds our moral judgments. Ethics as a moral science, or as a branch of Philosophy, comes in then to provide us with the principles and fundamental reasons or yardsticks for our moral judgments. Omoregbé (5) sums this up when he says, that “ethics presupposes that we already have a sense of morality and it is the systematic study of the fundamental principles underlying our morality. Hence, morality is the basis of ethics, the later is an explicit reflection on, and the systematic study of the former”. In other words, while morality tells us that an action is either good or bad, ethics gives us the principles and the reasons why an action is good or bad. It is from this point of view that we say that ethics and morality are fundamentally related. This, no doubt is a very broad understanding of ethics as a branch of philosophy. However, it must be stated immediately that in trying to state these ethical principles underlying the morality of an action, many ethical systems and theories have been propounded by many philosophers. Among these systems, mention could be made of Deontologism, Teleologism and Contractarianism. Apart from these ethical systems, and found imbedded in them are a plethora of ethical theories. Uduigwomen, in his book *Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems and Perspectives*, gives an excellent treatment of these theories and has classified them under the Classical Theories and Contemporary Ethical Theories. It is interesting to note that among these various Ethical Theories, some, argue for the possibility of moral argument – that is, for the universality of the moral principle or of morality. Others argue against the existence of such universal moral principle, alluding only to subjective moral principles. In the former group, mention can be made of philosophers like Kant, Plato and St. Thomas Aquinas. Among the later group are philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, Nietzsche and many empiricists and positivist philosophers (Ochulor 300 – 316). Though we generally acknowledge the relationship between ethics and morality, emphasis is also placed on the distinction between these two concepts. Ethics can be used in a narrow sense to mean the code of conduct, the guiding principle of behaviour peculiar to a people, an organization, or a professional body. This is what is referred to when one talks of the ethics of the Legal and Medical Professions, or the work ethics guiding a people in an office or company. From this point of view, ethics is
particularistic in nature. Morality, on the other hand, has a universal applicability by virtue of the fact that for an act to be moral, it must be based on a universally acceptable standard. The term ethics does not necessarily always carry this note of universality, in the sense that it may only refer to an individual’s viewpoint as when we say Christian Ethics, Bergsonian Ethics, Humean Ethics and Aristotelian Ethics etc. or when we refer to the code of conduct of a particular profession or establishment. From this narrow point of view, therefore, while morality talks of a universal standard by which our actions could be adjudged good or bad, ethics refers to an individual’s point of view about the goodness or badness of an action which may not generally have a universal applicability.

In ethics and morality, we often hear of such words like moral, immoral and amoral just as we hear of words like ethical action, good, bad, moral agent, choice, value, human action, acts of man etc. It may also be worthwhile to establish some subtle distinction between some of these commonly used words, like moral, amoral and immoral. The term moral can be used in two ways. This equivocation gives it the following contrasts: **moral vs amoral** and **moral vs immoral**. In the first usage, **moral** means when a being or an action is liable or subject to a moral law or responsibility. For this to take place, the being in question, in our context man, must be rational and free, that is to say that the action must be done with deliberation (knowledge) and free will (volition). An act has a moral value when it can be adjudged good or bad, because of the presence of some ultimate conditions like rationality and freedom. An action or being is **amoral** when there is no rationality and freedom in the being or about the action. When we say for instance that a man is a moral agent, we mean that man, in so far as he is rational and free is morally responsible for his action, in accordance with an existing moral law. Animals are amoral beings, likewise infants. An action is moral if it is done freely and advertently or with deliberation. An action is amoral if it is done inadvertently, that is without deliberation and under coercion, e.g. the act done instinctively, unconsciously or under compulsion.

The other pair **moral vs immoral** have to do with the rightness or wrongness of an action respectively. An act is moral if it is good, praiseworthy and in line with universally acceptable moral standards. A moral person likewise is one who has the habit of doing good acts. On the other hand, a person is said to be immoral if his/her actions contravene acceptable moral codes. From this perspective, we can classify corruption or acts of corruption as immoral acts and a corrupt person as an immoral person (Uduigwomen 6 – 10).

Ethics and morality are the life wires of every society. This is because society is composed of moral agents who make choices everyday and engage in daily social interactions, influenced by their individual desires, tendencies and preferences. Without a generally acceptable, just and solid principle of morality, the human society would soon degenerate into the Hobbesian state of nature where man becomes wolf unto his fellow men, thereby making life to be nasty, brutish and short. Apart from this, every facet of the human life comes under the purview and searchlight of morality because every human action (done freely and with deliberation) not only has moral value but also affects positively or negatively the life of the individual himself, those around him, the society at large, and his ultimate destiny or end. Whether these actions are on the political, religious, socio-economic, interpersonal or cultural levels of man’s life in the society, they all have a moral value and can be termed either good or bad, just or unjust, cruel or kind. Ethics aims at elucidating the grounds for the morality of our actions and the scope of ethics practically covers every action of human life, so long as these actions are morally responsible actions. We can, therefore, talk of Biomedical Ethics, Environmental Ethics, Legal Ethics, Political Ethics etc. The ethics of these areas of human endeavour provide the scientific study of the principles and bases of the morality of the actions and decisions we make in these areas of human life, as well as the norms that serve as guiding principles, laws and standards to regulate decisions in these areas.

Ethical principles are based on the metaphysical presuppositions of man as a being imbued with rationality and freedom; a being with an ontological propensity to goodness, moral self actualization and perfection; a being with an inherent teleological orientation towards God; a moral agent imbued with an inner moral principle – an in-built conscience open to divine and human positive laws; a social being who fulfills himself only within the context of unceasing dynamics of social interaction with
other beings. Now, because ethics touches all these metaphysical issues about man, the foundational importance of ethics for man’s complete and authentic self-fulfillment cannot be over-emphasized. It is because corruption hits at these foundational issues that corruption is ontologically inimical to the life of man and his society and his ultimate purpose in life. This necessarily brings us to our core question, the question of corruption.

**Corruption**

Etymologically, the word corruption comes from the Latin word “corrumpo” which literally means to decompose, or to disintegrate, to loose value, to become putrid and useless. In other words, corruption simply means to lose purity or integrity. This broad understanding covers both objects and things – animate and inanimate. However, when applied to human actions, or to a free moral agent, the word corruption assumes an added meaning. The Advanced Oxford Dictionary defines corruption as ‘an act of dishonesty or an illegal behavior aimed at using public office for one’s private gain’ (261). Maurice Coker shares this view when he states that corruption is the “misuse of power for private benefit or advantage. This power may, but need not reside in the public domain. Besides money, the benefit can take the form of promotion, special treatment, commendation, or the favours of women or men… In ordinary parlance corruption simply means asking, giving or taking a fee, gift or favours as a condition for performance of one’s legal or assigned responsibility” (91).

This definition brings out the fundamental link between bribery and corruption. These two are twin concepts always associated with each other.

Corruption is a universal human practice and no known society exists without some form of corruption. However, the incidence of corruption seems to be more prevalent in some societies than in others. Though minor differences exist as to what constitutes corrupt practices or the extent of repugnancy of corrupt practices among different nations, there is a universal agreement to the fact that corruption itself is an anti-social behaviour that portends danger to the cohesive fabric that holds a society together and to the integral growth and development of any society. It is, therefore, immoral and harmful to engage in corrupt acts. According to Uduigwomen “The effects of corruption are legion: It… induces unlawful accumulation of personal wealth, causes inequitable distribution of goods and services… all to the detriment of the people’s welfare and national unity” (199).

Victor Dike’s analysis of *Corruption in Nigeria: A New Paradigm for Effective Control*, gives us an added insight into the meaning and scope of corruption. According to him, one is corrupt when one’s behaviour goes contrary to established rules or deviates from the formal duties of a public role, because of private gains – gains which could benefit the individual, his/her close family, private clique and could be in form of pecuniary, physical or status gratification. Such behaviour may include bribery – the use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust; nepotism – bestowal of patronage by reason of ascriptive relationship rather than merit; misappropriation – illegal appropriation of public resources for private use (www.africaeconomicanalysis.org). These corrupt practices are not exclusive to Nigeria, they are human realities and as such are known to exist in other countries as well.

**Corruption as Ethical and Moral Problems**

In the words of Uduigwomen

Ethics is the study of moral values and conduct. It deals with morality, though it is not the same as morality. However, morality is the subject matter of ethics. Morality consists of the standards that an individual or a group of individuals have about what is right or wrong, good or bad. Moral standards themselves are ideals that people try to live up to concerning what is right or wrong, good or evil (*A Companion* 33).
Man is a moral being. His actions, when done out of deliberation and volition carry with them a moral status that make them either good or bad, depending on whether these actions conform to the natural law or the human positive laws, which have a universal applicability. Corruption as a human act, done by a morally responsible agent carries with it a moral guilt, because it goes contrary to established moral standards accepted generally or by a particular society. The question of corruption then assumes a status of philosophical importance, first because it proceeds from the metaphysical nature of man as a being imbued with rationality and freedom. In other words, it proceeds from man as a moral agent. Corruption, because of its social effects hits at the very foundation of the human being seen as a ‘homo socialis’ – social being. It threatens the very life of man in the society. For man, to be is to be social, being human is to be social. Shankar Rao has rightly opined that “Man is a social animal. He lives in social groups, in communities and in society. Solitary life is unbearable for man. Man is biologically and psychologically equipped to live in groups, in society” (155).

Since corruption works against the common good, any act of corruption is a war against society and consequently a war against man and the metaphysical fabric of his existence. Ochulor (330) underscored this same point when he held that “the practice of amassing wealth through fraudulent means is an act of sabotage against men, women and children and touches on their fundamental rights to enjoy good wealth made through legitimate means”. Many philosophical systems have characterized man’s Weltanschaung (World view) throughout the history of man’s philosophical enterprise. The two most dominant views are materialism and idealism. Materialism, even in its hedonistic, epicurean and pragmatic expressions, holds that all that exists is matter or that matter is the basis of all reality. The materialists deny the reality of mind and spirit and subsume these under the pervading power of matter. This materialistic tendency sees man’s material well being as the guiding principle of human actions. A more nuanced version of this is found in hedonism and epicureanism or in what has been termed a materialistic mentality and outlook about life.

In this outlook, what counts is what a man owns, being is equipped with having. ‘To be’ is ‘to have material things’ and a man’s worth or integrity is evaluated by the amount of money he has or in quantifiable material possession. Human and societal values are judged only from the point of view of their ability to add to one’s personal possessions, wealth and social status. This outlook and philosophy of life molds man’s preferences, choices, interests and actions. Since there are no other ultimate values to be pursued than the merely material, and human life has no intrinsic value than being a bundle of self-propelling matter, capable of some socially acceptable behaviour called rationality, man can be disposed of at the will of the strongest, be cheated by the smartness of the more astute and impoverished by the greed of the more courageous. At the root of corruption, is this materialistic conception of reality and understanding of the human life and the place of man in the universe. This materialistic conception of reality is the guiding principle behind what Ochulor (317 – 331) calls the “Machiavellian philosophy of wealth acquisition”. It stops at nothing and uses every available means to reach its desired end, even the use of corrupt means. What matters for the materialist, imbued with this Machiavellian mentality is the end, and any means is acceptable provided it helps one to achieve ones purposes. This materialist philosophy is also the philosophy behind bourgeois capitalism and the unbridled quest for property in all its exploitative, dehumanizing and enslaving forms. Private ownership of property and the unending quest for its increase, is the driving force of capitalism. In his Social Contract, Rousseau criticized this capitalistic quest for private property as being the source of the state, the origin of civilization and the source of corruption. Gonzales (24) shares this view when he rightly opined that “Rousseau recognizes the fact that man is made by society, needs it, and is only happy within it. But at the same time, it is within society that the human being is corrupted… it is not true what the rest of the enlightened think, that man is cruel by nature and needs civilization to tame him. Civilization can also make man crueler”. The civilization of modern society, according to Rousseau (Second Discourse Part II, 60), is founded on this concept of private ownership of property and liberty. According to him “the true founder of civil society was the first individual who, having
enclosed a piece of land, had the idea of saying, “this is mine” and found people sufficiently naïve to pay attention to him”. For Rousseau, if this first man was stopped, the world today would have been spared the many crimes, wars, murders, miseries and horrors. Unfortunately, this was not done as people began to imitate this first man and began to associate private property with prestige. He continued by saying that:

Each one began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself, and public esteem had a value and as soon as men had begun mutually to value one another and the idea of esteem was formed in their minds, each one claimed to have a right to it and it was no longer possible for anyone to be lacking it with impunity (Social Contract, Second Discourse. Part II, 64).

The dynamics of human activities, economic, religious, social, political and cultural aspirations in the society are characterized by a perennial quest for property and thus recognition. This quest has turned man into wolf towards his fellow man; he enslaves and impoverishes others while seeking for freedom and riches for himself. Rousseau thus concluded that society itself is that which makes man greedy and deceitful in order to try and appease the desire for esteem and recognition that the social bonding itself has awakened and nurtured. Primitive man lived within himself, while man in society does not know how to live except only in the opinion of others. For Rousseau, therefore, it is the society with its capitalistic emphasis on private property that corrupts man. For Rousseau, the primitive man or man in the ‘state of nature’ is the ideal. He has not been contaminated by civil society. He is virtuous, innocent and good. Though Rousseau idealizes the state of nature, he alludes also to the irreversible process of civilization, which in spite of its corrupting influence on man, is however necessary and inevitable. Commenting on this, Mukherjee and Ramaswamy hold that for Rousseau there would be no going back to the state of nature. Society was accepted as inevitable for human life and was not possible without it. He spoke of the golden past with virtually no hope of recapturing it. In the Emile, he distinguished between the state of nature and civil society and stated his preference for the latter (222).

It has to be stated, however, that Rousseau was not completely right to have seen the quest for private property as a corrupting agent. There is in every man an intrinsic desire to own property, especially that which has been gained by his own sweat. It is injustice and against his nature to deprive him of this right. What is wrong, however, is to seek for this property in a way that disrespects the rights of others to equally own and use property. Besides, no matter how corrupting the civil society is, Rousseau paradoxically also holds that man needs the society and the laws that govern it. In a community of men, it is this social sentiment of brotherhood that is crystallized into laws prohibiting greed and selfish individualism which corruption epitomizes. In his Emile, Rousseau deals considerably with education as a process of bringing about the human value of solidarity and social cohesion. Education for Rousseau is not just a transmission of knowledge, but more importantly the inculcation of the values of solidarity and equality. For this to come about, religion plays a fundamental and indispensable role. In many respects Rousseau was right to say that society with its undue emphasis on private property and the respect it brings, exercises a corrupting influence on man, forcing him to want to adopt any means to own his own property and thus earn the respect of his fellow men. For this reason, Rousseau felt that in the social contract that brings people together under a sovereign, laws could be made that advocate equality through solidarity, brotherhood and a perennial awareness of the divine obligation which religion brings to our consciousness. Religion basically has to do with man’s relationship with a transcendent being. In this relationship, man is obliged to believe in certain truths as revelations of this transcendent being, and use these truths as standards for what is acceptable and unacceptable. These religious norms and values form the standard of morality for the adherents of the religious faith.

This brings us to another very important philosophical implication of the materialistic mentality of the modern society and the corruption that has sprung from it. If Marx had built on this presupposition of Rousseau, namely attack on private property and the overriding need for equality, maybe there would have been nothing wrong with his socialism. However, his undoing was his
Marx had predicated the whole of reality on matter, and history for him was the unfolding of the inner working of matter in its economic manifestation. This summarizes his theory of historical and dialectical materialism. Marx envisaged a time when the dialectical tension or class struggle between the economic factors of capital, crystallized by the bourgeoisie, and labour, owned by the proletariat, would bring about the over-throw of the bourgeoisie and the enthronement of a classless society marked by equality, solidarity and state of ownership of property. These are no doubt noble ideas to be pursued by any society that wants to check the corrupt tendencies of capitalism and unmitigated liberalism. However, the failure of Marxism was its repudiation of the foundational importance of religion in the life of man and society. Marxian socialism was predicated on a Godless materialism, and this was the cause of its down fall. Ochulor (333 – 346), rightly called our attention to this when he opined that, Marx made the greatest mistake of his life by rejecting religion – both its spirit and its practice – as the opium of the people. Marx noticed serious exploitation in the practice of religion and his desire to overthrow all exploitative and oppressive structures led to his complete rejection of religion as the opium of the people. “It was Marxist socialism’s attempt in Russia, to liberate man from exploitation and oppression without the cooperation of religion that led to the failure of socialism in Russia”, Ochulor argued. Marx was right in castigating capitalism and the religion that affiliated itself to it as being the cause of corruption in the society, but Marx’s socialism was flawed on the count of repudiating religion and also advocating for a complete state ownership of all property.

Ethical and Moral Implications of Corruption

Corruption as a human act, has moral and ethical implications and so can be analyzed from the ethical and moral perspectives. We can achieve such analysis against the background of the three dominant ethical systems – Deontologism, Teleologism/Utilitarianism or Consequentialism and Contractarianism.

Deontologism as an ethical system holds that some acts are naturally obligatory and binding on us. The natural and universal obligatory dimension of such acts give them their moral status. An act is moral if there is a universal sense of duty or obligation attached to it. To do it makes one morally good and to refrain from it is morally bad, e.g. the act of sharing one’s bread with the hungry. This is on the positive side. On the negative side, some acts naturally carry with them negative obligation like the acts of adultery, cheating, lying, giving or taking bribe, embezzlement of public funds etc. We have the natural obligation not to do them. To do them makes one morally bad and to refrain from them makes one morally good. In relation to this ethical system one, therefore, sees that corruption is a morally bad action or an immoral act. It goes contrary to right reason that one should appropriate what is meant for the public to assuage one’s private interest or that one should use his position as a public servant for self aggrandizement or for private gain, at the detriment of the common good. Right reason cannot also tolerate this type of action because it goes contrary to the natural law enshrined in the universal human moral sensibility. Going by the Kantian moral philosophy on which this ethical system is built, corruption is seen as an immoral or morally bad action because it goes against the supreme moral principle and the natural sense of duty that goes with it. Corruption cannot be used as categorical imperative or a supreme moral principle which can be universally applied or acceptable. The reason for this is because corruption contravenes the three maxims that should guide all human actions that have moral value. These maxims according to Kant as enumerated by Ochulor (307) are: “Act only on the maxim through which you can, at the same time, will that it should become universal law”. This is the formula of universal law. It is obvious that nobody would want corruption to be adopted and practiced as a general principle of action. While we may like to defraud others, nobody would want to be defrauded or cheated. The second categorical imperative requires all to: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end”. This is Kant’s formula of the end in itself.
implies the usurpation and subsequent use of the sweat or the rights of others for one’s selfish ends. It implies a total neglect and repudiation of the dignity, sensibility and socio-economic rights of others. In carrying out any corrupt act, what the corrupt person is saying is that, others can go to blazes for all he cares. The third categorical imperative states that “a moral agent is subject only to laws which are made by himself and yet are universal”. This is Kant’s third formula, the formula of autonomy. It must be stated immediately that the autonomy in question here means the freedom of the will which the individual enjoys, a free will molded, directed and informed by reason. When thus informed and guided by reason, the will in turn feels obliged towards the particular action and sees it as duty, a moral imperative. Thus Ochulor further remarks:

“In observing that man serves as a judge of moral law and of course the sole agent of moral laws, Kant postulates that man is endowed with practical reason and freewill, which also makes him to choose actions that are directed by his reason for the sake of duty or obligation. Kant believes also that man has conscience which enables him to act in terms of duty” (306)

As morally responsible agents, we know that corruption is bad, and deep within us, in the sanctuary of our consciences, we know what we are doing is wrong. We are free to choose to be corrupt and to choose to be honest. In freely choosing corruption, we freely go against our consciences, yet without wishing that such acts of transgression be universalized. It is here then that we see that corruption is evil and morally unacceptable.

The teleological system predicates the goodness or badness of an act on the effect or consequence of that action or the utility value of the particular action. Another name for it is Utilitarianism. It holds that an agent performs a morally right action if such an action will maximize good and minimize evil, in terms of the number of people who benefit from that particular action or the degree of pleasure the particular action causes on people. In other words, if an action gives happiness to the greatest number of people affected by it, it becomes morally right (Uduigwomen 27). Even here too it is easy to see how corruption goes against the principle of morality. Corruption, as we can see, has bad effects on the society, jeopardizes the common good and ultimately inflicts pain on a very large number of people, if not the whole nation. In this regard, it is also pertinent to note that corruption, no matter the temporary benefits it brings to the individual and those around him, can neither constitute nor contribute to man’s summum bonumum. There has never been a time that man was completely satisfied or happy because of his wealth. The very rich also have other desires which keep them anxious. They are not even satisfied with the amount of money they have. Given the opportunity, they will still embezzle more. As a matter of fact, because corruption is a morally depraved and condemnable act, it can even jeopardize man’s attainment of his summum bonumum, that is, his highest good.

The third ethical system, the contractarianism or justice system, predicates moral responsibility on acts that are based on rational choice, done with empathy, without any dint of partiality and motivated by a sense of justice and fairness towards the other person. Our actions are good as long as they respect the right of others and maintain the cohesiveness of the social contract on which society is based. If we go by the simplest understanding of justice as giving someone his due, then we will easily see that since corruption deprives people of their due, their due in terms of the good roads and other facilities the money corruptly embezzled would have provided for them, then corruption is morally wrong. Corruption does not, in any way, promote social cohesion or the social contract that binds people together, but rather threatens it. Corruption does not allow one to be fair in one’s dealings with others, (going by the Rawlsian definition of justice as fairness). On all these counts, therefore, corruption is morally bad. It is, therefore, the prerogative of ethics or moral philosophy to establish normative principles that not only make corrupt practices morally bad but also command people to desist from them.
Corruption and the Individual: Personal Involvement and how to Protect Oneself from being Corrupted

Man, the individual man, is the origin of every moral action whether good or bad. Corruption begins first in the individual’s heart, first as thoughts and then these thoughts are translated into concrete actions. When these acts are repeated over time, they become habits, these habits in turn become character and almost one’s second nature. One can become involved in acts of corruption through a variety of ways: personally carrying out corrupt acts, associating oneself with corrupt people through whom one can be influenced negatively, or participation in the use or enjoyment of the booties of corruption. At this personal level, one can protect himself from corruption by the formation of good conscience, a conscience that warns you ahead of time, and condemns or praises the individual depending on whether his actions are good or bad. Apart from this, there is need to convince one’s self that corruption is a morally bad act. Without this personal conviction, it will be difficult to get the individual to steer clear of corruption. For the individual to protect himself from corruption he or she must also respect the laws of the land, be satisfied with one’s means of livelihood, while looking for honest ways to improve on one’s lot. Maintaining a high standard of morality and refusing to comprise these standards, no matter the pressure around one, would certainly contribute to the individual’s attempt to protect one’s self from being corrupted. Avoiding the company and advice of those who are corrupt, is of utmost importance.

Ochulor (326 – 330), gives us six very salient points that can help the individual acquire wealth in a moral way while also protecting himself from corruption. These include “self knowledge, the mind as a propelling force, specialization and education, seizing every opportunity, diligence and persistence plus self discipline”. It is our belief that if the individual studies and knows the implication of these principles and applies them, he or she can protect himself or herself from corruption and still make genuine wealth.

Philosophy has an important place in the life of every individual, society and nation. Though it does not directly put bread on our tables, it disposes us to adopt a worldview that helps us to understand that man does not live on bread alone. There is more to life than meets the eyes. A man’s life is not made secure by what he has, even when he has more than he needs. Though matter enters into the very composition of man, and though the material aspect of reality readily meets our physical experience, yet man is not only a material entity. Reality is also composed of spiritual and idealistic principles that are as real as the material. It is only an integrated emphasis and appreciation of all these principles existing in a mutually complementary and symbiotic manner, that can guarantee man an authentic existence and that constitute an authentic representation of the true nature of reality. It is the undue emphasis on the material over the spiritual and the resultant materialistic spirit which is as greedy as it is hedonistic that has accounted for the prevalence of corruption not only in Nigeria but also in many countries of the world. Closely related to this, is the liberal capitalism that has predominated modern socio-political and economic policies, exciting the individualistic and selfish sentiments of man. People should be educated on the dangers of excessive materialism and the culture of ‘get rich quick’. We must change our materialistic, capitalistic, egocentric and hedonistic philosophical outlook. This must give way for a new outlook that gives the right emphasis to the spiritual, encourages attitudes that promote social cohesion, brotherhood and the common good.

Traditional African society was rich with many values which could be integrated into our plan for nation building, values which when inculcated can help curb corruption. The values of truth and honesty were highly extolled in our tradition and are symbolized among the Igbo in the sacred staff of Ofor-na-Ogu. These were anchored on a firm religious foundation, with the gods as witnesses ready to punish anyone who was dishonest in his dealings with others. The virtues of respect for public property, respect for the laws of the land were also common place. Thieves were publicly disgraced so as to deter others, and a life of virtue was rewarded with chieftaincy title and qualified one not only to join the Council of Elders during one’s life time but to be named among the ancestors and protectors of the community at death. There were instances where corrupt kings and chiefs were deposed and sometimes banished from the land. There was, therefore, a reward system that served to promote hard
work, honesty and transparency in the affairs of men, particularly the kings, the elders and those in authority.

Conclusion
Like in any other society, corruption thrives in Nigeria. This is because of our collective derailment onto the philosophical lane of excessive materialism, selfish individualism, exploitative capitalism and atheistic humanism. Our moral values have thus been eroded and we have removed morality from the arena of our socio-political life. God too has been thrown overboard from our daily lives and when we do remember him, we do so hypocritically. We have sacrificed the common good on the altar of our insatiable selfish desires, and our ultimate happiness (summum bonum) has been confused with the merely temporal, ephemeral and transitory. In Christian religious terms, we may say we have abandoned the living spring and dug up cisterns for ourselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Our nation lies in ruins because of our collective mistake. Unless we retrace our steps along the path of morality, the path of high ethical standards, and allow these to permeate our everyday lives, both as individuals and as a nation, we can never rise above the pit of our underdevelopment.

There is, therefore, an urgent need for an indebt and thorough going ethical re-orientation and education particularly in Nigeria. Apart from reinstating the place of moral education in the educational curriculum, there is also the need to carry out mass enlightenment campaigns through the print and electronic media, through plays, the entertainment industries, government sponsored television shows, fliers, articles on papers, newspapers and even books. Ethical standards should be insisted upon in every sector and aspect of the people’s lives and those making efforts should be singled out and rewarded, especially those who have the public responsibility entrusted to them. The first people that come to mind are policy makers and implementers – those in Government – since their actions and inactions, in this regard, have a lot of influence on the crusade against corruption. Victor Dike has rightly remarked that

To win the war on corruption, adherence to ethical standards in decision-making must be the foundation of the nation’s policies. Without ethics in the conduct of the affairs of the nation (public and business), the apparent wars on corruption in Nigeria will not be successful. In other words, without ethics, any money budgeted towards fighting corruption in Nigeria is a thing cast to the wild cat. Nigeria has to make laws and implement them to the letter. As Aristotle insists the aim of ethical philosophy is practical – to make us better men (www.africaeconomicanalysis.org).

What this means is that our much desired economic recovery and national development cannot be achieved unless we eschew corruption from our individual and national lives and embrace the virtues of honesty, patriotism and altruism.
Works Cited


