

GAUTHIERS' MORAL CONTRACTARIANISM FOR A SUSTAINABLE POLITICAL ORDER IN NIGERIA

Grace Ogelenya♦
Onos G. Idjakpo♦♦

Abstract: *The Nigerian political system has shown a lack of stability and progress. This development has led to a 'bordering of morality'. This study exposes David Gauthier's moral Contractarianism to demonstrate the foundational role of morality in the erection of the political order in Nigeria. This study employs the philosophical method of analysis. The philosophical analysis will help to unearth that Gauthier's moral contract theory would enhance political order, progress, and the common interest of all if applied by policymakers. The study concludes that the placement of rational morality above individuals will orchestrate a political order and enrich stability, progress, and the attainment of the common good of humankind.*

Keywords: Social contract, Political order, Self interest, Morality, Gauthier's moral Contractarianism

♦ Lecturer, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.
ogenlenyagrace@gmail.com

♦♦ Professor of Philosophy, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. idjakpoo@delsu.edu.ng

Introduction

Presently, Nigeria is faced with socio-political challenges that give rise to internal inconsistencies within its political framework. There exists a pressing necessity for expeditious societal transformation from capitalism to socialism, and subsequently from socialism to a state of social organisation devoid of class distinctions within the Nigerian context. While it may be argued that achieving a completely classless society is not a feasible objective, it is imperative to ensure that private interests do not overshadow the public interest within the Nigerian democratic system.

Moral Contractarianism hold the belief that human beings possess an inherent inclination towards self-interest, and it is this self-interest that motivates individuals to advocate for the establishment of a structured society. This organised society aims to regulate and mitigate the effects of self-interest, facilitating peaceful coexistence among all members of the community. Fromm (2005) posits that selfishness can be likened to greediness, characterised by an insatiable nature. Men are commonly perceived as being perpetually dissatisfied. It is inherent to human nature, particularly among males, to exhibit selfish tendencies, as

these inclinations are deeply ingrained within our inherent makeup.

The majority of issues observed in Nigeria can be attributed to selfishness, as individuals prioritise personal fulfilment without regard for the well-being of others in their vicinity. The prevalence of corrupt practices within our political sphere can be attributed to the inherent self-interest exhibited by individuals.

According to Osigwe-Anyiam-Osigwe (2008), a potential solution to the issue of selfishness in our country is the concept of the group mentality. This approach offers a means to address various problems in our society that arise from the prevalence of individualism. He espouses the principles of promoting collective welfare. This will contribute to the improvement of community welfare and prioritise the collective good of the community over individual self-interest. According to Anyiam-Osigwe (2008), the utilization of the group mind can result in the promotion of people-centred development and the fostering of national unity.

While it is inherent to human nature to exhibit selfish tendencies, the self-interested inclinations of individuals can be channeled towards moral contractarianism, thereby

benefiting the collective welfare of society. According to Achebe (1998), the primary issue plaguing Nigeria can be attributed to a deficiency in effective leadership. The current inquiry pertains to the methods by which Nigeria can be effectively salvaged from its prevailing social and political maladies. Which moral or political theory may be applied to address these complex socio-political challenges? To what extent does self-interest exert influence over the Nigerian political system? Does the political leader predominantly prioritise personal or public interests? Can the differentiation between individual self-interest and the perceived public interest be feasibly achieved?

It is important to acknowledge that numerous political theorists and moral philosophers have put forth various ideas and theories that are regarded to be efficacious in the reorganization and stabilization of a chaotic political system. Machiavelli espouses a political ideology that emphasises the absence of moral considerations. The individual in question espouses a philosophical stance that posits the idea of achieving desired outcomes as a means to justify the methods employed, so serving as the foundation for upholding political equilibrium. It is important to note that the Nigerian political system has been impacted by

Machiavellianism, a concept that posits the separation of morality and politics (Machiavelli, 2003). It is not surprising that several individuals in Nigeria perceive politics as a morally compromised activity. The Nigerian political leadership has embraced the Machiavellian perspective, asserting that in order to achieve success in politics, it is necessary to prioritise pragmatic considerations over moral principles.

According to Nietzsche (1961), political power can be attained and maintained by both moral and immoral methods. This has impeded the nation's ability to engage in authentic representative democracy and establish a resilient governmental structure. Plato (1982) posits that in order to establish harmony and stability within a society, it is imperative to adhere to Socrates' principle that equates knowledge with virtue and ignorance with vice. Consequently, Plato advocates for the governance of a nation by a philosopher-king, whose virtuous disposition is derived from their extensive knowledge and educational background. Plato's recommendation is constrained by the evident reality that a significant number of informed political leaders exhibit behaviours and acts that are more characterised by viciousness rather than virtuousness.

Therefore, it can be concluded that not all actions of virtue can be attributed to knowledge, and conversely, not all acts of vice can be attributed to ignorance. The establishment of a stable and progressive political order cannot be based on the Socratic-Platonic paradigm.

According to St. Augustine, advocating for moral leadership is a reliable means to achieve political stability. St. Augustine's articulation of the essence of morality and its potential to establish a stable and progressive political system was found to be insufficient (Osigwe-Anyiam-Osigwe, 2008). Prominent figures such as Mahatma Gandhi (1958), Luther King Jr. (1958), Locke (1997), among others, have advocated for civil disobedience as an optimal approach to address political inequities within society. The inadequacy of this theory stems from its failure to incorporate the principles of moral Contractarianism in its approach to addressing the contemporary political dilemma. This study focuses on the moral and political philosophy developed by David Gauthier, specifically examining his concept of morals by agreement.

Philosophical Foundations of David Gauthier's Moral Contractarianism

The social contract theories proposed by prominent thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, J. J. Rousseau, John Rawls, and others exhibit notable similarities to David Gauthier's perspective on moral contractarianism. The aforementioned study allows for an examination of David Gauthier's contractarianism as a potentially suitable moral theory upon which the Nigerian political system might be established. In his seminal work *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes presents a depiction of existence in the state of nature characterised by self-interest, hostility, brevity, and savagery, whereby individuals are driven by their innate needs and emotions. Therefore, within this particular context, the absence of security, social order, and protection of life and property was evident.

The situation was characterised by a state of disorder and confusion. Hobbes postulated that individuals, driven by their inclination towards order and self-preservation, made a deliberate choice to establish a social compact wherein they willingly relinquished their rights and liberties to a governing authority. This arrangement aimed to facilitate self-preservation and safeguard their interests within the

framework of society. According to Hobbes, this phenomenon resulted in the establishment of a ruling authority referred to as Leviathan. Moral duty is situated within the framework of the Leviathan. According to Hobbes, the social compact is the mechanism through which individuals are liberated from the perils of the state of nature. It is imperative to acknowledge that Thomas Hobbes' idea of the social contract posits that the obedience of the Leviathan is in the best interest, well-being, and benefit of the populace.

According to Hobbes (1651), morality is contingent upon the act of obeying the Leviathan in order to promote the welfare of society as a whole. The aforementioned aspect holds great significance within the context of this study, as it provides insight into the fundamental characteristics of the social contract. The social contract refers to a mutual agreement among individuals who voluntarily relinquish their power, rights, and privileges to the Leviathan without any conditions or reservations, with the primary objective of promoting peace and ensuring preservation. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates that David Gauthier's interpretation of the social contract surpasses Thomas Hobbes' in terms of its advancements.

Gauthier posits that morality is the subject of a comprehensive rational agreement, wherein all individuals consent to limit their self-interest by adhering to a principle that generates an alternative outcome advantageous to all parties involved.

This study examines Gauthier's interpretation as being more resilient and, thus, utilises it as a feasible ethical basis for a progressive political structure. In a similar vein, John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1663) is founded upon egalitarian principles, with liberty and equality serving as its two fundamental concepts. In contrast to Hobbes, John Locke espoused a distinct perspective of the inherent characteristics of the state of nature prior to the establishment of the social contract. As per his perspective, the condition of the state of nature was relatively favourable and pleasurable, however marred by the absence of civil law or governing body to enforce penalties for transgressions against natural rules, so compromising the security of properties.

According to Locke, the imperative to safeguard private property compelled individuals to engage in a social contract, thereby relinquishing the state of nature. The underlying suggestion in this statement is that the

establishment of a civil society through the social compact allowed individuals to address the deficiencies present in the state of nature. This is primarily due to the presence of an unbiased arbiter possessing the requisite authority to uphold and enforce the law. According to Locke, the fundamental objective of government and law is to safeguard the inherent rights of individuals. As long as the government effectively upholds this objective, the laws it establishes retain their legitimacy and enforceability. However, if the government fails to satisfy this duty, it forfeits its existence. The government's authority is derived from the voluntary consent of the people, who have agreed to relinquish a portion of their inherent rights and liberties to the governing body.

According to Locke (1963), the aforementioned structure serves to resolve the challenges associated with the state of nature. It is imperative to acknowledge that Hobbes conceptualises the state of nature as a condition of perpetual conflict, whereas Locke posits that individuals are inherently endowed with freedom and equality in the state of nature. Locke, in contrast to Hobbes, repudiates the notion of an absolute monarch and instead posits the concept of a civil government and civil rules. It is important to

acknowledge that Locke's contract theory holds significance in this study due to its inherent democratic principles. This is evident in the reliance on the consent of the governed as the basis for public policies, which is determined by the majority of society's members.

Nevertheless, in light of the fact that the prevailing opinion is not always correct, Locke's intriguing idea faces significant challenges. Therefore, Gauthier's moral contractarianism addresses this evident gap by proposing that, due to their capacity for rationality, it is advantageous for individuals to establish a mutual agreement or compact, as it is more beneficial to behave in cooperation with others without solely prioritising one's own self-interest.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, another proponent of social contract theory, presents a variant of contractarianism that merits examination. His depiction of the condition of nature differs from Hobbes' pessimistic portrayal and Locke's optimistic portrayal. According to Rousseau, the concept of the social compact should be understood as a hypothetical creation of reason rather than an actual historical event. According to the author's perspective, the initial condition of humanity, commonly referred to as the state of nature, was characterised by a state of contentment and egalitarianism

among individuals. However, this idyllic state was disrupted with the introduction of the concept of property, leading to a decline in the moral standing of mankind. This phenomenon resulted in men relinquishing their individual rights to the collective entity known as the community, as coined by the term "general will."

According to Rousseau, the concept of general will pertains to the collective will of the majority of citizens, to which unquestioning adherence was expected. Therefore, it can be argued that contemporary civilization is responsible for the erosion of the initial notions of freedom, happiness, and equality that were prevalent in the state of nature. The emergence of civil society, which aimed to safeguard human rights, freedom, and equality, can be attributed to the establishment of the social compact. Rousseau's rendition of social contract theory posits that the establishment of the state and formulation of civil laws are contingent upon the collective volition of the populace, necessitating their alignment with the popular will to avoid obsolescence. According to Rousseau (1762:15), each individual contributes their personal resources and abilities to the collective effort, guided by the general will. In this

collective capacity, every member is welcomed as a distinct component of the overall endeavour.

In contrast to the perspectives of Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau posits that individuals do not relinquish their rights to the state or delegate them to the state, as they themselves constitute the state. Hence, entrusting sovereignty to an individual would result in the dissolution of the state. In the context of state governance, it is imperative that the opinions, desires, and personal interests of a leader are subordinate to the general will or collective will. The significance of Rousseau's account is pertinent to our inquiry. The act of conforming to and obeying the public will can be considered a reasonable approach to morality, aligning with David Gauthier's theory of morals by agreement. This theory posits that such conformity and obedience can contribute to the establishment of a peaceful and progressive society.

The contract theory proposed by John Rawls exhibits a closer alignment with David Gauthier's rendition, in comparison to the three preceding scholars that have been examined. John Rawls reintroduced the concept of the social compact in the 20th century with his seminal work, *A Theory of Justice*. According to the individual's perspective,

the attainment of an ideal contract necessitates the establishment of an original position. In the initial state described by Rawls (1971), individuals of the male gender lack awareness of their own capabilities. They find themselves situated behind a metaphorical veil of ignorance, which serves to prevent any purposeful endorsement of principles that would grant them disproportionate advantages over fellow members of society.

The primary purpose of the veil of ignorance is to restrict individuals from possessing knowledge about how other alternatives will impact their specific interests, hence reducing bias in their decision-making process. According to Rawls, in the context of this particular circumstance, justice and equitable distribution of goods will ensue, so benefiting all individuals involved. Consequently, this will facilitate the establishment of a politically stable, harmonious, and forward-thinking society.

While Rawls's conceptualization of the social compact may give rise to moral deliberation, the rationality of making such a choice or conclusion becomes a subject of scrutiny. When the logic of making such a choice is uncertain, it becomes challenging to assert that the behaviour was morally justifiable. In order to surmount

these evident problems, David Gauthier puts forth a more comprehensive and resilient explanation. While there are similarities between his idea and Rawls's, there are also notable differences. Despite sharing Hobbes' belief that humans are inherently self-interested, the individual in question maintains that this characteristic does not preclude the formation of a social contract. This is mostly due to the individual's assertion that humans possess rationality, enabling them to recognize and pursue actions that serve their own self-interest.

As per Gauthier's analysis, the moment at which the social contract is established is sometimes referred to as the beginning bargaining point. The early bargaining phase is not akin to the chaotic condition of nature, as posited by the majority of contractarian theorists. The preliminary negotiation is of a hypothetical nature, akin to the original position concept proposed by John Rawls. In contrast to Rawls, he refrained from implementing a veil of ignorance. All parties to the contract possess a comprehensive understanding of their respective roles and interests. Indeed, the individuals in question are verifiable human beings. According to Gauthier, the act of maintaining isolation from others is deemed irrational and fails to align with our

collective welfare. Therefore, according to his perspective, it is the faculty of human reason that enables individuals to recognize the necessity of reaching consensus with others.

Individuals can benefit from engaging in cooperative behaviour with others, irrespective of their own self-centered motivations. It is crucial to acknowledge that the multitude of moral challenges confronting Nigeria is attributable to excessive projection and the prioritization of self-interest inside the nation. Each person, including those in positions of authority, often prioritises their own self-interest when making decisions, neglecting to consider the negative impact these acts may have on the collective welfare or the interests of the nation. The Nigerian society is now grappling with a multitude of challenges.

The narrative surrounding Nigeria has been characterised by a series of negative elements, including greed, excessive behaviour, corruption, oppression, crises, discrimination, miscarriage of justice, and maladministration of justice, alongside both legal and socio-economic injustices. The country's law enforcement, criminal justice system, and judicial systems have demonstrated a persistent pattern of underperformance along an extensive and uninterrupted historical timeline. Consequently, these

institutions are progressively losing credibility as effective tools for societal regulation in the eyes of the people.

Gauthier's Morals by Agreement

The concept of morals via agreement, as proposed by David Gauthier, embodies his theory of moral contractarianism. According to the author, it is proposed that morality be conceptualized from a contractarian perspective. This perspective entails considering morality as the result of a universal rational agreement, wherein all individuals willingly limit their pursuit of self-interest by adhering to a principle that would lead to an optimal outcome.

In this context, the optimal outcome refers to a scenario in which all parties involved benefit, thus promoting the well-being of everyone (Author, 2003). David Gauthier endeavours to provide a defence for the conventional understanding of morality, wherein it is regarded as a logical and impartial limitation on the pursuit of individual interests or benefits. He perceives morality as a rational subset of self-interest. According to Gauthier (1991), the act of maximising utility necessitates the agent's recognition of the necessity to engage in cooperation or reach agreements with others.

The interplay of cooperation dynamics then leads self-interested agents to rationally limit their pursuit of utility maximization in order to promote the collective good. The concept of morals by agreement, as proposed by David Gauthier, can be succinctly summarized by the statement "rational choices necessitate moral choices." This implies that individuals within a given community, possessing a clear understanding of their own identity and inherent capabilities, will willingly adhere to the ethical obligations imposed by society and engage in morally upright behaviour (2003). According to David Gauthier, the notion of rational cooperation holds a prominent position in the realm of morality.

The concept pertains to a rational agreement or negotiation between individuals. Gauthier's *Morals by Agreement* effectively addresses the inherent issues encountered in the social contract ideas put forth by prominent thinkers such as John Locke, John Rawls, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his work, David Gauthier demonstrates how an individual who bases their actions and behaviour on a logical moral framework can achieve a state of harmonious coexistence with others, simultaneously pursuing the common good and

maximising their self-interest. Hence, any political structure or order that is founded upon such a moral framework would likely exhibit both stability and advancement. This study illustrates the incorporation of David Gauthier's moral theory, which prioritises morality over individual and political interests. Consequently, this theoretical framework lays the groundwork for a stable and progressive political system in a nation such as Nigeria.

According to Gauthier (1987), his stance is that morality should be conceptualized from a contractarian perspective, wherein it is regarded as the subject of a universal rational agreement. This agreement entails all individuals voluntarily limiting their pursuit of self-interest by adhering to a principle that would result in a mutually beneficial conclusion for everyone involved.

Conclusion

The study's central argument revolves around the applicability of David Gauthier's moral contractarian theory, as presented in his work "Morals by Agreement," as a suitable moral framework for establishing a foundation in Nigeria. By employing David Gauthier's political principles encompassing deliberative strategic interaction, civic friendship, and the notion that laws and the constitution

serve as manifestations of the collective desire of the populace, the government are endowed with authority and legitimacy. This statement supports the assertion made by David Gauthier, which posits that reason is the driving force behind the imperative to engage in moral actions.

The author's study has demonstrated the importance of incorporating morality into the domain of politics. It is our contention that a judicious application of these findings can contribute to the reinstatement of moral principles within the Nigerian political system. This study examines the interconnectedness of rationality, politics, and morality, aligning with the views of Gauthier. Gauthier's moral principle presents a viable framework for political adaptation in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. The study additionally illustrated, based on Gauthier's assertions that the deficiency in the Nigerian context lies in the reluctance of political leaders to prioritise the welfare and well-being of the populace over their own self-serving goals, as individuals stand to accrue greater benefits when they take into account the interests of others.

Furthermore, in accordance with Gauthier's moral contractarianism, it can be argued that the absence of morality in politics is detrimental to the Nigerian political

system. This is evident through the prevalence of various moral transgressions, instances of cruelty between individuals, inconsistent policies, a lack of progress, and an unequal socio-economic agenda that primarily benefits a select few. Therefore, it is in the utmost advantage of any sensible Nigerian individual, including both citizens and leaders, to engage in cooperation with others as well as among themselves. This is due to the inherent self-interested inclination of humans, which motivates them to establish alliances and mutually agreeable arrangements and then adhere to them. Instead of prioritising self-interest, it is conceivable to establish a stable political system by engaging in logical deliberation regarding the interests and well-being of others within society. By doing so, individuals will be motivated to promote the welfare of others rather than solely pursuing their own selfish desires.

References

- Achebe, C. (1998). *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Gauthier, D.P. (1986). *Morals by Agreement*. Oxford University Press.
- Gauthier, D.P. (1970). Morality and Advantage. In *Morality and Rational Self-interest*. Prentice Hall Press.

- Gauthier, D.P. (1989). *Constituting Democracy*. The Lindley Lecture, University of Kansa.
- Hobbes, T (1651). *Leviathan*. Clarendon Press.
- Locke, J. (1997) Two Treatises of Government. In Peter, L. (Ed.), *Cambridge Texts on the History of Political Thought*. C. U. P.
- Luther, M..K. Jnr (1958). *Stride Towards Freedom*. Harper and Row.
- Machiavelli, N. (2003). *The Prince*. Benttam Dell.
- More, M. (1991). Review Work: Morals by Agreement *NOUS* , 25(5), 707-714.
- Nietzsche, F. (1961). *Will to Power*. Penguin Books.
- Plato (1982). *The Laws*. Penguin Books.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Harper and Row.
- Rousseau, J. J. (1762). *The Social Contract*. Prentice Hall Press.