

THE ETHICS OF ENDS AND MEANS: A PHILOSOPHICAL DEBATE  
ON CONSEQUENTIALISM IN MACHIAVELLI'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

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**Abstract:** This paper asks the question of whether political ends can be justified by immoral means, and then examines this dilemma in relation to the political philosophies of Niccollo Machiavelli, as expressed in *The Prince*. The doctrine of Machiavelli, which has been summarised as the end justifies the means, is examined as a type of early consequentialist reasoning, where the state exists to remain alive and politically stable regardless of moral restrictions. The paper puts his perspective in a wider context of ethical issues in comparison with Kantian deontology which insists on universal moral obligations and Aristotelian virtue ethics which lay stress on moral character and societal well-being. The particular focus is on the rather unique concept of *virtù* by Machiavelli that redefines virtue not as a moral excellence but as a political one. Using historical precedents and modern Nigerian politics, the paper points out how manipulation of elections, corruption, and dictatorship are practices that indicate Machiavellian consequentialism and degrade long-term legitimacy. According to the analysis, the realism by Machiavelli offers useful insights on the nature of power and the issue of political necessity but fosters normative vacuity because of lack of ethical boundaries on statecraft. The paper proposes that there ought to be a middle way of combining political pragmatism with moral responsibility, referring to both Rawlsian justice and African communitarian ethics as alternative approaches. Finally, the paper concludes that although the wisdom of Machiavelli is still applicable to contemporary times, a viable political order must install a sense of realism into an ethical worldview that promotes justice, honour, and legitimacy.

**Keywords:** Machiavelli, consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, Nigerian politics.

### 1. Introduction

The tension between morality and expediency is one of the permanent characteristics of the history of political philosophy. Since Plato insisted that rulers needed to be bearers of the virtue of justice in *The Republic* and Kant used the categorical imperative to insist on complete moral consistency, philosophers have been in conflict over the limits of moral fidelity in the political sphere. Niccollo Machiavelli, the Florentine philosopher of the Renaissance, in a very radical outburst, proceeded in the opposite direction of this tradition. Machiavelli, in his masterpiece, *The Prince* (1532), seemed to believe that politics should stop being subject to morality because rulers frequently have to resort to deceit, brutality, and manipulation to maintain a stable state. His infamous dictum that was widely summarised into the statement of the end justifies the means has made him one of the most controversial personalities in the history of philosophy.

The argument presented by Machiavelli questions the traditional belief that political power has to be based on morals. When leaders are allowed, or even expected, to do evil in the name of maintaining the state, who takes care of justice, human dignity, and responsibility? This is not only a question with

historical relevance, but it is still a question of relevance in modern politics especially in societies where competition to gain power tends to overshadow competition to act ethically in terms of leadership. In situations like Nigeria, where electoral manipulations, corruption, and authoritarianism are often justified in the name of stability or national security, the doctrine of Machiavelli seems to find real expression. But the philosophical validity of this type of reasoning is disputed.

Ethical theory is all about the problem of ends and means. Consequentialist traditions, including utilitarianism, evaluate actions in terms of their consequences: an action can be morally acceptable as long as it maximises happiness or minimises harm, although the methods of doing so may be dubious. Deontological ethics, especially Immanuel Kant, criticizes such a method as he holds that moral principles are categorical, and that they have to be adhered to without regard to consequences. Another school of thought is virtue ethics, which is based on Aristotle, and it provides an alternative approach to morality by basing it on the development of character and the pursuit of human flourishing (eudaimonia). In the context of this, the pragmatism promoted by Machiavelli brings about a basic philosophical question: should there be such cases when immoral methods could be justified by good political goals?

What is important about this debate is not just its theoretical aspects but also its practical implications to governance. When leaders are allowed to compromise morality in the name of expediency, political legitimacy is destabilised and people become subjects of manipulations rather than subjects of a moral community. On the other hand, the demand to strictly follow moral principles can make politics ineffective during the time of crisis that demands a practical approach. The purpose of this paper is to question this predicament by contextualising the idea of Machiavelli in the philosophical arguments over consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. The main research questions that will underlie this investigation are: How far can the philosophy of Machiavelli about politics be understood in terms of a kind of consequentialism? What does Machiavellian reasoning have to offer in comparison with deontological and virtue-ethical approaches to morality? Is it possible to justify immoral political actions like lying, manipulation, or violence to achieve some stability, order, or common good? What does modern Nigerian politics have to teach us about the morals of ends and means?

The thesis that is pushed forward in this paper is that Machiavelli's philosophy does predict consequentialist thinking, but it cannot be used as a proper moral ground upon which political life is projected. By placing greater emphasis on survival and amassing of power in the short term, his framework overlooks the ethical and political costs that may be borne in the long term by immoral government. Although political realism is a necessary redress to naive idealism, a long-term political order must incorporate the element of morale into the statecraft.

The paper makes contribution to the ethical and political philosophy by reconsidering the Machiavellian dictum on the topic of controversies within the framework of philosophical controversies and current political challenges. It claims that although the realism of Machiavelli could be helpful in understanding the essence of the political forces, the denial of the ethical restrictions is philosophically incorrect and politically unstable.

## **2. Conceptual Clarifications**

To assess the stand of Machiavelli on ends and means, it is important to first define the key ethical theories that his thought will be assessed by in terms of consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, and the unique concept of virt but introduced by Machiavelli, namely virtù. These traditions give the intellectual prisms within the framework of which the philosophical sufficiency of Machiavelli claim could be evaluated.

### **2.1. Consequentialism**

The consequentialism theory is a group of ethical theories, which determine the morality of acts by the outcome. The main argument is that whether an act is right or wrong is determined only by the consequences that it brings about. Utilitarianism, created by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, is the most notable variant of consequentialism. According to Bentham (1973), the principle of utility dictates right and wrong morality in that the actions which are right are those which enhance the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Mill (2015) narrowed this perspective by noting the difference between the higher and lower pleasures and that certain types of happiness are qualitatively better.

Consequentialism may be classified into act consequentialism and rule consequentialism. In the latter, an individual action is judged based on its consequences and general rules are judged based on whether they will result in the highest number of good consequences, respectively. The main benefit of consequentialism is that it is flexible and able to respond to the real-life conditions. Critics have said, however, that it can, or even must, allow or demand actions that are contrary to basic moral intuitions, including lying, keeping promises, or killing innocent people, provided that they maximise total utility.

In the political arena, consequentialism gives explanation of a pragmatic decision making. It is possible that leaders can rationalise morally questionable practices like censorship, propaganda, or war as long as these practices bring peace, stability or security. It is in that context that the logic of Machiavelli makes sense: his rhetoric about rulers not being afraid of immoral acts to protect the state predicts consequentialist reasoning, but the focus is not on the happiness of the population; rather, it is on the survival of the state and the acquisition of power.

## 2.2. Deontology

In contrast, deontological ethics judges actions based on the moral rules or duties observed and not on the consequences. In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Immanuel Kant—the most prominent deontologist—developed the categorical imperative that one should act in a manner that would also enable the law to become universal. This value demands universality and necessity of the moral line of thinking.

To Kant, lying, stealing, or killing is wrong in and of itself and does not matter in any beneficial outcome. Morality is based on respect of rational beings as an end, and not a means to an end. Deontology, therefore, opposes the use of people or group of people to serve a political objective. In this light, Machiavelli is politically advising to lie, manipulate, or use cruelty where necessary, which does not apply to the categorical imperative and the moral law.

As applied to politics, deontology poses tremendous challenges. Although it supports the inherent dignity of individuals and demands universal rules of justice, critics believe that strict performance of deontological principles can be unrealistic during a crisis when pragmatic conduct can only ensure survival. However, deontology provides good criticism on Machiavelli since it maintains that no political aim can justify immoral activities.

## 2.3. Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics, which is based on the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle, looks at it in another way. Virtue ethics does not focus on rules or consequences but on the development of the moral character. To Aristotle, human life has a goal of eudaimonia blossoming or well-being through the practice of virtues like courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom. Virtues are the tendencies to do what is morally right, serving as the middle ground between extremes of either excess or deficiency (e.g. courage exists between cowardice and recklessness).

As opposed to consequentialism and deontology, the emphasis of virtue ethics falls less on the solution to specific moral dilemmas and more on the modelling of the moral agent that enables him or her to make good decisions under different circumstances. Invested in politics, it implies that rulers should assume virtues that encourage communal prosperity instead of focusing on expediency in the short run. Aristotle believed that the virtuous man is the ruler who is loyal to the polis and the one who develops the ethical life of the citizens.

Comparing that to Machiavelli's position displays an astounding difference. To Machiavelli, the term *virtù* does not pertain to moral excellence but instead pertains to the pragmatic attributes of cunning, boldness, decisiveness, and ruthlessness that allow a ruler to gain power and keep it. In this way, Machiavelli transforms virtue into a purely political and instrumental concept, which no longer has any ethical essence.

## 2.4. Machiavellian Virtù

The principle of *virtù* proposed by Machiavelli is the primary one behind his breakage with the classical traditions of morality. Contrary to the virtues of Aristotle that are arranged in order to achieve moral flourishing, *virtù* refers to virtues that guarantee political efficacy. It incorporates flexibility, tactical deception, and capacity to use force when it is needed. Machiavelli (1532/1998) states in *The Prince*

that a ruler does not have to be good but must seem to be good and that the practical is over and above the ethical.

This redefinition represents the more general distinction of politics and morality by Machiavelli. To him, the maintenance of the state is the supreme good and any act that will achieve this end despite their questionable morality is justified. *Virtù* is therefore a political and not an ethical concept, which is aligned with the consequentialist focus on consequences rather than with deontological obligation or the Aristotelian personality.

### **3. Machiavelli and Consequentialism**

The expression “the end justifies the means” has been attributed to Machiavelli. Although it is not a quotation, it sums up his political advice. In *The Prince* (1532/1998), Machiavelli repeatedly points out that princes should be ready to use the means of deception, cruelty, or violence, in order to win and preserve political authority. This is a consequence of focusing on ends instead of values and serves to make his thinking consistent with the consequentialist reasoning where actions are mainly judged by their consequences (Skinner 1983; Berlin 1980).

The most radical innovation introduced by Machiavelli is the fact that he believed that politics should be viewed as an independent domain, which should not be subjected to traditional morality and religion. Although other classical philosophers, like Aristotle, viewed politics as the continuation of ethics (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 350 BCE/ 2009), Machiavelli maintained that political necessity demanded rulers to behave in a way that would be immoral to other individuals in their personal lives. He teaches the princes that it is safer to be feared than loved should one of the two things be wanting (*The Prince*, Ch. XVII), and the preeminence of the useful over the virtuous. Isaiah Berlin (1980) has called this severing of politics to the moral as the most radical contribution that Machiavelli made to the politics of the Western world because it foreshadows modern conceptualizations of political realism.

Utilitarianism, one of the forms of consequentialist ethics, uses a theory to determine whether an action is good or bad based on its ability to maximise happiness or minimise harm (Bentham 1973; Mill 2015). Machiavelli, on the other hand, judges actions based on their success in maintaining political power and state stability. As an instance, in Chapter XVIII of *The Prince* he says: “A wise prince cannot and must not maintain his word where it would be against his own interest, and where the causes which induced him to affirm it are taken away.” This is obviously a value of political expediency over moral fidelity. As Strauss (2020) notes, Machiavelli has redefined political virtue in purely instrumental terms, which puts him in neither the deontological nor the virtue-ethical traditions.

Despite the similarities in the reasoning of Machiavelli and consequentialism, it differs from utilitarianism in some fundamental aspects. Bentham (1973) and Mill (2015) are utilitarian philosophers who defend actions in terms of collective welfare aimed at the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Machiavelli, on the other hand, does not care much about the maximisation of individual well-being but rather assures the survival and the glory of the state (Skinner 1983). The fact that he talks of well-used cruelty explains this point: well-used cruelty (had one the right to speak well of the evil) is done in a single act, out of necessity. It is never repeated but turned, where possible, to the advantage of the subjects (*The Prince*, Ch. VII). Although it might seem similar to a utilitarian calculation, the standard of moral assessment is not the general happiness but the necessity in politics (McCormick 2018).

The normative weakness of Machiavelli’s proto-consequentialism is that it has no normative constraints. Consequential theory has been widely criticised by allowing morally dubious actions as long as they produce positive results (Smart and Williams, 1973). Machiavelli goes further in making this issue more severe, in that he homogenises the benefit as limited to the survival of the state and power of the ruler. The framework provided by Machiavelli, without the appeal to such universal values as justice, human dignity, or others, is prone to legitimise tyranny, corruption, and arbitrary violence (Viroli 2013). This instrumental logic, as McCormick (2018) cautions, can be too easily taken by those in power and used to legitimise oppression in the name of political necessity.

### **4. Kantian Deontological Critique**

Although Machiavelli is a political realist, given the nature of his thought, he is closer to consequentialist reasoning as opposed to deontological ethics. Deontology, which is most developed in the

work of Immanuel Kant, does not consider an action based on its consequences but rather on its moral obligation. The categorical imperative that a person should do everything according to the principles that one follows must enable the establishment of a universal law, as expressed by Kant in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785/1997): (Kant 1785/1997, 31). This formulation requires that it be universal and consistent and that it does not allow exceptions due to expediency or self-interest.

The advice by Machiavelli to the rulers to lie, promise, and use cruelty when it will be beneficial to them in politics, is a direct violation of the categorical imperative. To Kant, lying is inherently wrong, since it is not something that can be universalized: in a world of liars, no one would be able to trust anyone and communication would not be possible (Kant 1797/1996). Machiavelli, however, applauds princes who manage to be deceitful, and states that any prince has accomplished great things who has assigned his word cheaply, and who has known how to cheat men with his wives (*The Prince*, Ch. XVI-II; Machiavelli, 1532/1998). This truth instrumentalization in Kantian terms destroys the very terms of political legitimacy, because it does not regard citizens as ends, but only as the means to the existence of the ruler (O'Neill 1989).

One of the key principles of the moral philosophy of Kant is the so-called Formula of Humanity: to this end, behave in such a way that you treat humanity, both in yourself and in another person, never as a means but as an end (Kant 1785/1997). This principle is flouted by the advice of Machiavelli who turns citizens into political strategy tools. The standards he has provided justify deception, manipulation and even violence not because it honours human dignity but because it brings about political order. This, as Korsgaard (1996) observes, is a basic conflict between consequentialist pragmatism and deontological ethics, where Kant would demand that moral obligations are beyond question, and Machiavelli authorises their dispensation in the name of necessity.

Machiavelli defenders may say that absolutism expressed by Kant is not practicable in political life, especially during crisis. Politics, as Williams (2009) notes, is usually faced with dirty hands dilemmas where no option presented before the leaders yields any moral integrity. In that sense, it might seem naive of Kant to strictly forbid lying or bloodshed, in relation to Machiavelli and his realism. However, Kant would insist that the loss of moral principles in favour of expediency attacks even the very sources of moral political community. A state founded on lies and force cannot be given any form of real legitimacy because the essence of legitimacy lies in treating the citizen as a free agent who can make a rational decision (Rawls, 1971).

The Kantian attack is on the dangers of Machiavellian consequentialism in the long run. Even though unscrupulous methods can guarantee a short-term stability, they erode trust and respect on which political legitimacy is based. According to Habermas (2015), the social order demands communicative rationality among rulers and the ruled to be open, honest, and justifiably interact with one another. The advice given by Machiavelli makes this unlikely by making manipulation and coercion become normative. In the Kantian perspective though, it is not only that the Machiavellian model is flawed in its moral sense but is self-contradictory in terms of politics, because long term legitimacy is impossible by means of the systematic breach of the moral law.

### **5. Virtue Ethics and Machiavellian Virtù**

In addition to consequentialism and deontology, the virtue ethics also provides an alternative philosophical framework through which one can examine the political thinking of Machiavelli. Virtue ethics is based on Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle; it focuses on how moral character can be developed and the way human flourishing (eudaimonia) can be achieved. The concept of virtù as discussed by Machiavelli, however, redefines virtue in a radical way politically speaking. Virtù as opposed to moral excellence are those traits that help a ruler gain and retain power such as decisiveness, cunning and ruthlessness. This chapter discusses the difference between Aristotelian virtue ethics and Machiavellian virtù and reveals the consequences of Machiavelli abandoning the conventional ethical systems.

To Aristotle, the primary purpose of human existence is eudaimonia or flourishing which is attainable by exercising virtues like courage, justice, temperance, and prudence (phronesis) (Aristotle 2009). Virtues are tendencies to do right things, which exist in the golden mean between the extremes of too

much or too little, the way courage is between cowardice and recklessness. Notably, virtues are not a means to end but they are part and parcel of good life; to be a good person is to live well.

In politics, Aristotle saw the work of the rulers as creating an environment that would help the citizens develop virtue. Moral responsibility could therefore not be separated from political authority. The virtuous ruler is he who rules on behalf of the society and whose actions are the perfect example of justice and moderation (Aristotle 2009; Kraut 2002). According to Aristotle, politics is a continuation of ethics, which is geared toward the greatest good of the polis.

Machiavelli is a complete breaker of this ethical tradition. *Virtù* in *The Prince* does not mean virtue but practicality in reaching political objectives. A prince might be required to develop what is traditionally regarded as vice-like qualities, including cruelty or lying, provided that such behaviour would help the prince maintain the stability of the state. Such is the fate that Machiavelli (1532/1998, Ch. XV) declares: When a man wishes to attempt to do good in all things, he is bound to fall into woe among so many who are not good. To him, the rulers should be ready to do things contrary to traditional virtues when the situation dictates.

Quentin Skinner (1983) sees virtues in the ability to influence luck (fortune) by acting bravely and decisively. The values of moderation as advocated by Aristotle are not in the political sense of the term and, instead, Machiavelli praises audacity and cunning. This was infamously referred to by Leo Strauss (2020) as a lowering of the sights of political philosophy where moral virtue is replaced by pragmatic effectiveness.

The difference between virtuousness in Aristotelian morality and virtuousness in Machiavellian morality has a great moral connotation. Within the context of Aristotle, it is the virtues and the rulers that foster justice and flourishing of humans, whereas within the context of Machiavelli, it is the virtues and the rulers that guarantee survival and rule. Therefore, Aristotle focuses on the intrinsic and Machiavelli focuses on the instrumental worth of the political dexterity (Kraut 2002; McCormick 2018).

The question brought up by this contrast is the following: Is it possible to support political leadership without moral virtue? Aristotle would respond negatively by saying that a polity that is devoid of justice and virtue becomes tyrannical. Machiavelli, on the other hand, asserts that the rulers who abide by the old virtue may lose power in a corrupt world. It is not just a matter of philosophy but a matter of practicality: it is a question of morality versus politics.

Virtue and virtuosity are a conflict that is found in politics which existed in the past and the present. As an example, the Roman rulers who were hailed as virtuous by Machiavelli, like Cesare Borgia, were able to exemplify virtue in deeds due to their decisiveness and their cruelty (Machiavelli 1532/1998). On the other hand, leaders who live according to Aristotelian virtue and fail at using cunning in politics tend to be powerless against betrayals or overthrow.

In the Nigerian context, the dichotomy is manifested in the discussions about whether leaders should be moral or politicians. Politicians tend to use pragmatism as an excuse to corruption or manipulation, claiming it is something necessary to maintain stability. However, according to Gyekye (1997) of the African communitarian view, political legitimacy rests on the ability of leaders to possess virtues of justice, responsibility, and community interest. This implies that a Machiavellian vision of leadership only destabilises the ethical basics of political power.

## **6. Political Dilemmas: Case Studies**

Apparently, the ethical argument of whether the end justifies the means or not is most vivid when brought to face value in terms of practical political dilemmas. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli advises rulers to lie, manipulate or use violence in order to obtain or retain political authority, as long as deceit is warranted. In this section, three common dilemmas — deception, violence, and corruption — are discussed using historical and contemporary cases with special focus on Nigeria.

Machiavelli always applauds the leaders who understand how to use deception efficiently. In Chapter XVIII of *The Prince*, he says that a prince should hold no faith when by doing so he would make himself unprofitable (Machiavelli 1532/1998). This is indicative of a consequentialist ethic in which truth telling is put in second place to political expediency.

In the past, deception served as a statecraft tool. World War II made leaders like Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill withhold and distort information to keep the morale up and gain a strategic edge (Walzer 1973). In the context of Machiavellian view, the need to survive as a nation took precedence over these actions.

Political deceit in Nigeria comes in the form of promises of electoral gains that are hardly realised, propaganda, and distortion of ethnic or religious identities to gain political advantage (Omotola 2010). Election campaigns are such an example of when politicians usually make promises of reforms or even infrastructure development that are forgotten after coming to power. Although these measures can guarantee political victory in the short term, they undermine the trust of the people resulting in political instability in the long term (Aiyede, 2008). It would be denounced by Kantian ethics but justified by Machiavelli since it is required in the political context where few people can be trusted.

Another dilemma faced with political ethics is that of violence. Although Machiavelli admits the necessity of cruelty, he believes that this cruelty is only justified when it is well-used, i.e., when it is used decisively and then abandoned to avoid chaos (The Prince, Ch. VIII). He gives the example of Cesare Borgia's brutality in eliminating his competitors as an instance of cruelty which brought about stability (Machiavelli 1532/1998).

Nowadays, Machiavellian logic is often used by leaders to defend the violence of the state. Examples include the defence of the drone strikes in counterterrorism operations due to their necessity to national security even though they cause civilian deaths (Ignatieff 2004). Critics have claimed that these acts undermine international law and human rights provisions.

The history of Nigeria depicts this dilemma very well. The use of violence and intimidation to effectively suppress opposition was practised by military regimes like the General Sani Abacha regimes in the 1990s, which in most cases justified the use of force as necessary to maintain unity in the country (Welch 1999). Although such tactical measures could have helped stabilise the situation in the short term, they further undermined the legitimacy of the state in the long term and increased the level of resentment among the population. Thus, the Machiavellian justification of violence as a method of politics clashes with the deontological demand that human dignity can never be at stake and the virtue ethic of training justice and moderation.

Corruption is an especially controversial way of doing things, which can be explained by the necessity of politics. Although Machiavelli is not overtly pro-corruption, his consequentialist model allows us to justify the need to engage in corruption to gain political allegiance or retain the loyalty of alliances among the elite. It can therefore be seen that patronage networks and rent-seeking are essential evils in weak political regimes (Bayart 2009).

In Nigeria, corruption has often been pragmatized. Politicians justify the allocation of patronage as one of the ways of ethnic stabilisation, safeguarding stability, or avoiding civil unrest (Joseph 2014). As an example, the ethnic grouping of political offices is through zoning which is justified as a requirement to national unity though reducing the concept of meritocracy. However, such practices, despite proving useful in the short term, propagate inequality and erode democratic institutions (Agbiboa 2012).

In Machiavellian terms, corruption can be legitimised as a means of gaining power and stability. In the vision of the ethics of virtue and deontology, however, it destroys the moral fabric of the polity and fails to build justice and trust.

One common theme between these dilemmas is a trade-off between long-term legitimacy and short-term effectiveness. Machiavelli believes in survival and stability in the short run. However, as modern critics have observed, a government that practices deception, violence, or corruption compromises the basis of political trust and legitimacy (Viroli 2013). Nigerian politics offers a good example: although Machiavellian strategies can bring short-term success, they more likely result in periods of instability, mistrust by the people, and corruption in institutions.

### **7. The Nigerian Context**

The postcolonial Nigerian political life echoes the Machiavellian dogma that political rulers should be ready to indulge in immorality in the name of power. Nigerian politics have been characterised by military dictatorships, electoral fraud, corruption, and patronage since independence in 1960. Such prac-

tices are often explained as necessity in politics following the consequentialist reasoning of Machiavelli that stability of the state or the continued existence of ruling elites demand morally dubious methods. This part looks at the way Machiavellian thinking is applied in the Nigerian political culture and governance and its implications to the legitimacy and democratic consolidation.

Electoral manipulation is one of the most intractable aspects of the politics of Nigeria. Elections during and before the First Republic have become characterised by fraud, ballot stuffing, intimidation, and violence (Suberu 2007). Political actors make such practices justified, as they need to win in an environment that is competitive and divided. This is a Machiavellian approach: power should be acquired at all costs, as power loss leads to being excluded in the access to state resources.

As an illustration, the 2007 elections, which were largely criticised by the international community, were marked with huge irregularities but excused by the ruling elites as a necessity to ensure political stability (Omotola 2010). Regarding Machiavellian account, continuity of a regime was a priority instead of morals or legal principles. However, the long-term impact has been to damage the confidence the people have in the democratic institutions which reflects the moral cost of putting the integrity of elections in the service of political expediency.

In Nigeria, corruption is mostly justified as the need to be political. Politicians use patronage networks and prebendal practices as means of winning loyalty and balancing the ethnicity (Joseph 2014). This is similar to the advice Machiavelli gave that, in some cases, rulers should give favours or gifts to cement power.

An example here is the so-called undemocratic practice of zoning the presidency between the regions of Nigeria, which is justified by the need to maintain national unity in a highly polarised polity (Suberu 1996). Likewise, patronage politics provides the elite with mutual aid and lessens the chances of a conflict. But such strategies also institutionalise corruption, weakening institutions, and accountability (Agbibo 2012). Like in the thought of Machiavelli, corruption is not only condoned, but even promoted when it keeps the stability, despite the costly consequences for democratic consolidation in the long run.

Military dictatorships in Nigeria (1966,1999) were illustrations of Machiavellian logic as they made use of violence and coercion. This is because leaders like General Sani Abacha consolidated power through repression, arbitrary arrest, and intimidation which they justified as the need to maintain national unity (Diamond 2000). This would have been a classic of well-used cruelty in the eyes of Machiavelli (The Prince, Ch. VIII).

Once again, like in other settings, the dependency on violence negated legitimacy. Although repression brought a temporary stability, it strengthened feelings of resentment among people, undermined the legitimacy of the state and preconditioned the recurrence of instability (Adebanwi & Obadare 2013). This is the Machiavellian political paradox: the ethically corrupt methods can guarantee survival in the short term but the morality and the political principles of the state can be destroyed.

Machiavelli encouraged those who ruled to use religion as a means to control rather than a means to the truth of religion thus employing it to maintain order (Machiavelli 1532/1998). In Nigeria, they tend to exploit religious and ethnic identities to an electoral advantage. Campaigns often tap into sectarian affections and politics is seen as a struggle between Christians and Muslims or ethnicities (Mustapha 2006). As this approach is a way of mobilisation, it is the division that is created, violence that is fueled, and national unity is compromised.

This instrumentalization of identity is also Machiavellian in the very best sense: the morality and unity are placed in the backseat with the practical aim of electoral victory. However, it was demonstrated in the course of Nigerian history that the long-term outcome is a further fragmentation, and the system of governance becomes weaker.

The case of Nigeria illustrates the main flaw of the Machiavellian consequentialism. Although immoral tactics like election manipulations, corruption, and oppression can be used to ensure a stable government in the short term, it destroys the legitimacy in the long term. According to Viroli (2013), legitimacy cannot be achieved through coercion and manipulation only, but citizens must think that political institutions are just. The politics of Nigeria is a prime example of how Machiavellian politics, once institutionalised, destroy trust, instill inequality, and create instability loops.

Philosophically, this implies that the Machiavelli model cannot be used as a guideline to governance in Nigeria. His realism is indeed insightful on the rationality of power but the Nigerian experience points to the importance of addressing moral principles of deontological or communitarian values into the political practice. In the absence of such integration, the state will always be involved in expediency without legitimising it.

### **8. Philosophical Evaluation**

The philosophy of politics of Machiavelli holds a contradictive position in the history of both ethics and politics. On the one hand, his realism gives useful information on how power works, how human nature is restrained and how pragmatism is needed in governance. Conversely, his denial of moral restraint is highly unethical and political as far as sustainability of expediency-based leadership is concerned. This part will be assessing the positive and negative aspects of Machiavelli and his consequentialism together with discussing the potential options that would unite the political and the moral.

One of the strengths of Machiavelli's approach is its realism. Machiavelli based politics on bare reality of human nature and history, whereas classical and mediaeval theorists tended to see politics in terms of virtue or divine justice. His awareness of the fact that rulers cannot always dare to be morally right because others are often morally wrong is nonetheless a brisk correcting force over naive idealism (Berlin 1980).

Machiavelli pays importance to flexibility, as well. His *virtù* does emphasise decisive action, guile, and stamina in reaction to chance (*fortuna*). To this extent, Machiavelli foresees the contemporary political theories which emphasise contingency and pragmatism in statesmanship (Skinner 1983). His demand of the independence of politics has also impacted the tradition of realism in the international relations, starting with Hobbes to the modern theorists of power politics (Flynn 2014).

However, Machiavelli has some flaws with his consequentialism, despite its brilliancy. To start with, it does not have normative protections. Machiavelli is putting himself at risk to justify tyranny, corruption, and arbitrary violence by constituting what is considered good based on political necessity alone (Viroli 2013). In contrast to utilitarianism, which calls on aggregate welfare, Machiavelli does not give any principle to restrict power abuses beyond what the ruler may calculate to be necessary.

Secondly, Machiavelli fails to appreciate the cost of immoral rule in the long run. Whereas deception, violence, or corruption can bring a short-run stability, the practice will erode trust, legitimacy, and institutional resilience in the long run. Kantian deontology has it that citizens are not treated as objects to political ends as this reduces their dignity and the moral substance of political community (Kant 1785/1997; O'Neill 1989). This weakness is clearly demonstrated by the experience of Nigeria, where Machiavellian politics have brought short-term success but further deteriorated the cycles of instability (Joseph 2014; Omotola 2010).

A defence of Machiavelli is that politics always faces dirty hands issues, whereby leaders need to make morally questionable choices (Walzer 1973). In this view, Machiavelli is a realist by necessity, not by virtue. But as Williams (2009) points out, the implication of regarding dirty hands as an inevitable part of our lives does not excuse leaders of moral responsibility but calls on them to be critically introspective and answerable. The framework presented by Machiavelli, in turn, stands the danger of turning immorality into a normal practice and not a necessity.

There are a number of philosophical frameworks which provide a compromise between expediency and morality. The theory of justice by John Rawls is based on the principle of fairness and equality as the basis of legitimate institutions that demand political arrangements to be explainable to everyone in a state of fairness (Rawls 1971). Although Rawls admits that stability is necessary, he insists that such stability should be based on justice and not just the power.

Likewise, the African communitarian moral as defined by the works of such philosophers as Kwame Gyekye (1997) and Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984) focuses on interdependence of people and the moral duty of leaders to serve the people. In contrast to the individualistic concerns and emphasis on power of Machiavelli, communitarian ideology is more about the well-being of the people and the responsibility and ethical nature of leadership. The Nigerian setting is very much similar to this framework in which the loss of communal trust has been a significant outcome of Machiavellian politics.

The analysis indicates that although the knowledge that is provided by Machiavelli in terms of power and necessity cannot be ignored, his worldview has to be complemented with moral values. Such a medium course would acknowledge the facts of political contingency and limit expediency within the constraints of ethics. Leaders might encounter a dirty hands dilemma but they need to perceive immorality as a sad necessity and not as a normal strategy. Having combined the aspects of deontology (respect to human dignity), consequentialism (focus on the consequences), and virtue ethics (development of rightful leadership), a more sustainable philosophy of governance can be developed.

### 9. Conclusion

The debate on whether the end justifies the means has been a burning dispute in political philosophy since ancient times and the contribution of Machiavelli is one of the most controversial. In *The Prince*, he reinterpreted politics as an area that is not regulated by morality but necessity, in which he mentions that princes must be ready to be immoral to maintain power and assure the state. This inclination makes him consistent with the consequentialist reasoning, but his concern with the state survival and the effective ruler is not consistent with the utilitarian emphasis on the welfare of the group.

This discussion has indicated that Machiavelli's realism provides useful information regarding the role of power, as well as the necessity of political compromise; however, his framework has been found to be deficient in ethics and politics when compared to other traditions. Using a Kantian deontological lens, Machiavelli would be wrong to advise to lie, cheat, and use violence, because it is against the categorical imperative and would disrespect human dignity. In terms of Aristotelian virtue ethics, his reinterpretation of *virtù* turns virtue into a matter of efficiency, which breaks the connection between virtue and good governance. The analysis of political dilemmas and case studies of Nigeria is another indication of the perils of Machiavellian politics: a combination of deception, violence, and corruption can bring immediate success in the short run, but it will undermine trust, legitimacy, and institutional stability in the long run.

Machiavelli is guilty philosophically of what can be called normative vacuity—a lack of restraint to what a ruler can do in the name of need. Lacking the appeal to universal moral principles or to the development of moral character, Machiavelli exposes politics to abuse and tyranny. But to reject his thinking would be to disregard its permanence. His acknowledgement of the ugliness of human nature, the vagaries of fate, and the demands of necessity is an essential redress to idealistic attitudes to politics.

The Nigerian case shows how practical and how dangerous Machiavellian logic can be. Other institutional practices like electoral manipulation, patronage politics, repression and identity manipulation have commonly been explained as needed to achieve stability, yet have contributed to undermining legitimacy and reproducing instability cycles. This indicates that Machiavellian framework is descriptively valid in some aspects, but it cannot form a normative basis of governance in pluralistic and weak democracies.

A political philosophy that is more sustainable has to balance between realism and morality. It should be aware of the dilemmas and compromises that come with politics but limit them within the ethical realms. Other frameworks that combine pragmatism and morality include approaches like the Rawlsian justice approach which focuses on fairness and the African communitarian approach which focuses on collective well-being and collective responsibility. Using these three approaches of consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics, political leaders can negotiate on the need without compromising moral accountability.

To sum up, the Machiavellian aphorism that the end justifies the means is the reflection of the good truth of the circumstantial nature of political life but falls short as a moral philosophy. Unethical ways can bring short-term survival but they eat through trust, dignity, and justice on which legitimacy can be based over a long period of time. The challenge of modern political philosophy and practice, especially in the case of Nigeria, is to recognise the realities of power and place them in a moral context that is both stable and just. It is only at that point that politics will no longer be mere expediency. Instead, it will become an ethical endeavour.

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