



## Machiavellian Philosophy of Wealth Acquisition in Contemporary Nigeria: A Critique

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Received 19 February 2013; accepted 20 April 2013

### Abstract

This paper argues in defence of the thesis that the Machiavellian principle of the “the end justifies the means” is the philosophical basis of wealth acquisition for some Nigerians. The paper strongly argues that the philosophy of wealth acquisition currently in vogue for some Nigerians today is the philosophy of “steal and grow rich but don’t be caught” and maintains that this is a direct offshoot of the Machiavellian principle of “the end justifies the means”, where the end is made a justification of any means to the end in question. Our paper argues that the Machiavellian philosophy of wealth acquisition is the bedrock on which corruption (the cankerworm that has eaten deep into the socio-economic fabrics of Nigeria) is built. This is so because the principle of “steal and grow rich but don’t be caught” which is a reformulation of the Machiavellian principle of “the end justifies the means” strongly propels the actions of corrupt Nigerians. This Machiavellian philosophy, our paper insists, makes some Nigerians to think that it is almost impossible for anyone to acquire wealth in Nigeria today without getting involved in one shady deal or another. As a result of this Machiavellian philosophy of wealth acquisition, some Nigerians today believe that moral uprightness and wealth acquisition are two parallel lines that can never meet. Consequently, in their distorted opinion, those who want to be morally upright must give up the ambition of becoming wealthy because, according to them, it is for the corrupt. And those who want to be wealthy must give up the possibility of moral uprightness because, according to them, it does not promote wealth. Our paper strongly argues for a total rejection of the Machiavellian

philosophy of wealth acquisition. In its place, the paper emphasizes and recommends principles for the acquisition of morally upright wealth in Nigeria.

**Key words:** Machiavellian Philosophy; Wealth acquisition; Contemporary Nigeria; Critique; Morally upright wealth

Ochulor Chinenye Leo, Metuonu Iheanacho Chukwuemeka (2013). Machiavellian Philosophy of Wealth Acquisition in Contemporary Nigeria: A Critique. *Canadian Social Science*, 9(2), 56-61. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/j.css.1923669720130902.2559> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.css.1923669720130902.2559>

### INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest problems confronting national development in Nigeria today, is the absence of an adequate philosophy of wealth acquisition acceptable to all Nigerians. The philosophy of wealth acquisition in vogue for some Nigerians is Machiavellian and inadequate. The Machiavellian philosophy of wealth acquisition currently in vogue for some Nigerians has made the game of wealth acquisition for such Nigerians too criminal for an upright man. The process of acquiring wealth in Nigeria has taken different dimensions as some people now consider wealth not as a means but as an end. The corrupt practices that Machiavellian philosophy of wealth acquisition initiated, have reached a point where some Nigerians now accept corrupt practices as a way of life. It has affected such Nigerians so adversely that they now think of morality as a concept that cannot be found in business, politics, religion and socio-cultural relationships. As a result, bad values are greatly upheld by corrupt and greedy people who fill many facets of the national life of Nigerians at the expense of the good values that should move the nation forward to the level of socio-economic and technological development. The book *Corruption in*

*the Leadership Structure of Nigerian Polity* captures this clearly when it states thus: “in Nigeria, corrupt political elites, working hand in hand with greedy business people and unscrupulous investors, are putting private gain before the welfare of citizens and economic development of the nation” (Mamadu, xiii - xiii)

Is there no moral implication for the acquisition of wealth, with reference to the means to such wealth? Is it true that for one to get wealth, one must do away with moral uprightness? In what ways can moral uprightness and wealth exist as two complementary values? These are issues this paper sets out to investigate.

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## 1. SOURCES OF WEALTH IN NIGERIA

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Nigeria is a very wealthy nation and the wealth is spread across the geopolitical regions of the country. All tribes and groups in Nigeria are providentially blessed with one form of resources or another. The term “wealth” is associated with prosperity, well being etc and is likened to valuable possessions of any kind such as riches, honours or distinct positions of trust, knowledge, money etc. Wealth, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, is “a large amount of money, property, etc that a person or country owns... the state of being rich”. It is in this sense that a wealthy man or nation is said to be a very rich person or nation that directs a large amount of financial and other resources. These include natural resources, inheritance, and investment.

Natural resources can be defined as the gifts of nature to identifiable places within given localities. These resources vary from place to place and from people to people. The presence or absence of these resources definitely determine the economic atmosphere of a given state. For instance, the Northern Nigerian climate favours the cultivation of food crops such as rice, groundnut, beans and onions. The availability of livestock like cow, carmel, horses and sheep add economic strength to that locality and people. The Niger Delta is sumptuously blessed with crude oil. Enugu area of Enugu State is generously blessed by nature with coal. Akamkpa area of Cross River State is blessed with rock, limestone and wild forest. These natural resources when extracted or cultivated accordingly will become sources of wealth. The standard of living of the people will be enhanced and poverty will be drastically reduced. Hence natural resources form one of the fundamental sources of wealth in Nigeria.

Inheritance is another source of wealth in Nigeria. Inheritance here underscores the availability of land, estates, industries and cultural heritage that have been transferred from one generation of a people to another within a given cultural or traditional setting. Some people have become wealthy because of the goods and services they inherited from parents, families, friends and

benefactors or benefactresses. These transitional goods and services become dynamic sources of wealth for the future generation. This explains why the children of the rich and wealthy often continue to swim in wealth like their parents before them. Those who insist on maintaining the status quo are advocates of this philosophy of compensatory inheritance.

Investment is yet another source of wealth in Nigeria. Investment is the process of manipulating the available resources and manpower, at one’s disposal, to maximize profit for sustainable growth and development. In the country Nigeria, it is possible to grow rich by buying shares in companies that are investing in capital markets either locally or internationally. These shares at maturity will become functional sources of wealth without tears. One can invest whatever capital one has into business and gain so much at the turn of time. A certain man in Calabar grew from a local kerosene seller to an owner of multi national petroleum companies today. Many spare parts dealers are now millionaires, thanks to their ability to invest.

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## 2. WEALTH ACQUISITION AND THE QUESTION OF MORALITY IN NIGERIA

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The current philosophy of wealth acquisition for some Nigerians can be expressed as “any thing goes”, “steal and grow rich but thou shalt not be caught”, “employ whatever means available to achieve your ends”. For all these philosophies, the underlying basis is that “the end justifies the means” and not vice versa. Most Nigerians are determined to take their share of the national cake; and so they struggle for the proceeds from oil resources and for political posts where money can be acquired inordinately and indiscriminately. Some Nigerians today make use of spiritual powers such as occultic powers, charms and ritual killings as means of acquiring wealth. Some have gone to rituals and offered human heads, blood and other things in their attempts to acquire wealth. A certain man (name withheld) had to undergo madness for seven years to come back to sanity and become a billionaire. Another had to be sleeping with mad women to gain power to multiply money. To some Nigerians, the only thing that matters is money or wealth. Any how you get it is nobody’s business. Some have caused road accidents to gain blood for sacrifices that will give them wealth. Murder has been committed in addition to several uncountable crimes in the name of making money. The economy of the nation has been paralyzed because of atrocities of the agents of any-how wealth. Some Nigerians who want to become overnight millionaires have variously vandalized the pipelines. Others embark on foul businesses. Others embark on opening churches in every nook and cranny, not really for purposes of evangelization but as money making ventures. A glance at the number of churches that spring up daily in Calabar alone, will clearly explain our

point. There are rampant cases of cultism in and outside some institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. A good number of youths who are jobless embark on such evil ways as stealing, prostitution etc to make their living and others function as hired assassins. Some Nigerians in government offices have become professional pen robbers. Corruption has become a normal way of life for some Nigerians in order to survive. Many people employ whatsoever means available to achieve their ends.

In such a situation, what becomes then of a morally upright Nigerian who wants to acquire wealth through upright, sincere and just means? What are the challenges he is going to face amidst the high rate of crimes, corrupt practices and immoral acts in the society? No doubt, the challenges are enormous. He will contend with various corrupt practices in the society. There will be attacks from those in authority that celebrate corruption as their way of life. He will contend with open attacks from colleagues who are neck deep into corrupt practices in the society. These challenges are so stiff that any upright man who cannot strongly uphold his values will quickly be forced to join the corrupt people on the argument that “if you cannot beat them, you join them”. The upright man who does not strongly uphold his values will, if care is not taken, gradually begin to acquire wealth through embezzlement and other corrupt and fraudulent practices. An upright politician who sees that rigging of elections, hijacking of ballot boxes, political assassination and so on have characterized the political structure, would also want to employ the same evil means in order to achieve his ambition of winning a political post. He can only continually say no to these practices if he strongly upholds his values. A student who sees himself in a very poor condition but is faced with the challenges of passing his examinations, buying textbooks, typing assignments, securing accommodation and feeding allowances may be tempted to see the evil means as the only alternative through which he can make ends meet. He can only continually say no to evil practices, if he strongly upholds his values. Due to the corrupt nature of Nigeria, and the great challenges faced by the morally upright Nigerian, how can one teach corrupt Nigerians that it is possible to acquire wealth on a clean slate, through upright and just means? How can Nigerians make it possible for the values of wealth and moral uprightness to complement each other? Uduigwomen’s book *Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems and Perspectives* defines morality as: “The quality of human behaviour by which we call it right or wrong or evil. It is a term commonly used to cover the goodness or badness of a human act without indicating which one of the two it means”. The term morality is derived from the Latin word “mores” which means “customs” or “human acts”. Fagothey thus on his part defines morality as “the quality in human acts by which we call them right or wrong, good or evil. It is a common

term covering the goodness or badness of a human act”.

Morality has to do with value or disvalue. The morally upright person becomes then one who upholds his values to a very large extent. The term value, as analyzed by Ozumba can be used as a noun or a verb. As a noun, it is sometimes used in abstract or concrete terms. In concrete terms, value is used to represent things that are tangible and of utility to us, e.g. cars, books etc. As an abstract noun, it designates the property of value or of being valuable e.g. happiness, beauty, pleasure etc. Value when used as verb denotes a certain mental act or attitude of valuation. Here, what happens is that value is seen in the light of an activity, which either is an end itself or is a means to an end. Value system thus is considered as the desirableness, goodness or worthness of a thing. So when we talk about the moral implication of wealth acquisition, we mean the goodness or badness of a particular act of wealth acquisition. Morality and wealth acquisition are not two parallel lines, which can never meet. They are interconnected. Both are essentially concerned with relations between men-how they ought to behave towards one another in financial dealings. However, it is disheartening to note that although morality and wealth acquisition are naturally two faces of the same coin, the present Nigerian mentality on wealth acquisition has little or no place for morality. Even the religious institutions whose major function it is to uplift the moral standard of their adherents, are guilty of this immorality. One wonders at a situation in which the religious bodies accept all kinds of money in the name of offerings and tithes without questioning the sources of wealth of the donors.

### 3. OBJECTION TO MACHIAVELLIAN PHILOSOPHY OF WEALTH ACQUISITION

In line with the Machiavellian principle of “the end justifies the means”, no one has an iota of trust for another, as one is served with swindle in diverse shades and colours even with pomp and pageantry. This explains why slogans like “shine your eyes”, “wake up”, “how far” are common slangs in vogue in Nigeria. How many have entrusted a close relative with a responsibility involving money without stories to tell? Asouzu captures this situation thus: “It has become almost impossible to do business with anyone based on trust. Fundamental confidence, which is the basis of human cohabitation, is almost a scare commodity within the Nigerian interpersonal context”. To a large extent, Nigerians know what it means to win and execute contracts in Nigeria today. It is now impossible to win a contract without “kickbacks” in Nigeria. It is a common practice these days to resell contracts many times over. Many contracts involving public utility are often awarded without contract tender boards and project



monitoring units. These contractors are chosen not because they have the requisite expertise but because of their connections. As a matter of fact, Nigerians know the usual revelation of this form of episode; it is either the job is badly done, partially done or not done at all (Asouzu, 13). This brings to mind the boxing show of shame of Thursday 30th September 2007 in which members of the House of Representatives threw caution and dignity to the winds in a fight over the N628 million contract scam. In a report titled "Scandals without End" published in the Week, October 2007, it was stated that: The Assistant Director, registry, in the Corporate Affairs Commission CAC, Abuja, Mrs. Chinwe... revealed that the companies that handled the N628 million contract are not registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission" (The Week 18). The Magazine further revealed that: "Two of the three companies that bided and won the N628 million contracts have the same surname of their Chief Executive; they have same address, same telephone number and relevant documents" (The Week 18).

The report further reveals that a fictitious contractor was reportedly paid N525.5 million in Kebbi State. In what appears to be a summary of the moral decadence in Nigeria, *Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems and Perspectives* says:

It would be merely over stressing the obvious to mention that Nigeria is a corrupt nation. That Nigeria is a country with a dirty record of unmitigated incidents of bribery, nepotism, naira trafficking, smuggling, avarice, graft, unbridled sexual promiscuity, favouritism, embezzlement of public funds, willful destruction of public property, electoral malpractices, is an indisputable fact (194).

Talking about corruption in Nigeria Adeyemi, according to Uduma, indicates that Nigeria lost more than \$400 billion to corruption between 1960 and 1999. A former chairman of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Mallam Nuhu Ribadu has it that Nigeria recovered \$458 million from some Swiss bank accounts linked to Nigeria's late former Head of State, General Sani Abacha. Nuhu Ribadu's successor Mrs. Farida Waziri revealed that EFCC recovered \$975 million between June 2008 and March 2011 (Uduma, 18). With this state of corruption and moral decadence in Nigeria, as a result of the infamous Machiavellian philosophy of wealth acquisition in vogue for some Nigerians, it becomes highly probable that many of the wealth acquisition sources of some Nigerians are morally questionable. This paper, therefore, argues for a total and unconditional rejection of the Machiavellian philosophy of wealth acquisition currently in vogue for some Nigerians.

## 4. PRINCIPLES FOR THE ACQUISITION OF MORALLY UPRIGHT WEALTH IN NIGERIA

The picture painted above about the moral decadence of some Nigerians, appears to give little room for the possibility of acquiring upright wealth in Nigeria. It is the view of this paper that no matter how gloomy the sky appears, there is always a silver lining. Thus, in the face of the corrupt nature of the Nigerian society, there is still the possibility of acquiring morally upright wealth in Nigeria and there are many morally upright wealthy Nigerians. That is to say that the values of morality and wealth still exist simultaneously in Nigeria when certain principles are religiously adhered to. These principles include, among others, the following:

### 4.1 Self Knowledge

Not a few philosophers have argued that the development of an authentic self is the central lifelong project for each of us. Socrates, the father of moral philosophy, happens to be the first to call man's attention to himself. Socrates chose as his motto the inscription on the temple at Delphi: "know thyself". The examined life and examined beliefs lead to lives that are responsible and fully awake. Socrates' thesis is that making oneself as good as possible is the true goal in life and the key to genuine success. In line with this thinking, the book *Philosophy: An Introduction to the Art of Wondering* says: "... from becoming an individual no one at all is excluded except he who excludes himself by becoming a crowd".

The practical implication of these philosophical insights is that to become wealthy in a morally upright manner, an individual must first and foremost define himself. He must be able to locate in himself the unique gift that makes him different from others. *How to Become A Godly Millionaire* captures this thus: "By a careful analysis of yourself, your talents and capabilities, determine within you what you can offer to society..." (59). Thus the only thing that can stand between a man and his goal in life is the man himself. It is important to note that nothing is more wonderous than a human being when he begins to discover himself. The accurate, realistic assessment of self makes possible the use of self as a dependable, trustworthy instrument for achieving personal wealth.

### 4.2 The Mind as a Propelling Force

The human mind is extremely creative. Like a sophisticated computer, nature has written a data processing programme in the mind, which recognizes the inputs from the sense and organizes the sensory information for practical use in daily life. The mind is an extraordinary factor of production. It accepts information as raw materials, processes them and helps the brain to decide on what action to take. Likewise, in building a life of success or failure, the mind takes in information,

processes same and then consciously and subconsciously tells one what to do. So in one's attempt to acquire morally upright wealth, one must feed one's mind with right information in this respect. It should be noted that what one allows to dominate one's mind determines one's thinking and one's thinking determines one's response to situations in life. This explains why the Bible in Proverbs 23:7 says, "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he". For a changed life, one needs a changed thought, because one's life is what one's thoughts make it. Whatever one allows to rule one's mind, definitely rules one's life. One's thought is a reflection of who one is. It determines one's destiny and destination. Everyone must fill his or her mind with a burning desire to acquire morally upright wealth, as this will drive one towards achieving this aim.

### 4.3 Specialization and Education

In order to ensure that one's desire to acquire wealth in a morally upright manner becomes realizable, two items are of great value, namely specialization and education. Success and great achievements belong to 'specialists' and not 'generals'. Resist any attempt to follow the crowd, because those who follow the crowd are never recognized, heard or celebrated. One must have a particular chosen career, for success cannot come without a chosen profession. In addition, one must seek appropriate knowledge in one's chosen field. Creative intelligence without knowledge can be likened to a building without foundation. So never embark on any business or vocation without acquiring necessary skills. Skills are fundamental to one's ability to succeed in whatever endeavour one undertakes.

### 4.4 Seizing Every Opportunity

Many Nigerians complain of lack of job opportunities or lack of capital to start a business and they see these obstacles as justification for remaining in abject poverty. The fundamental problem is the poverty of ideas. A poor man is one who lacks ideas. A person suffering from poverty of ideas is the one who lacks in the midst of plenty. Opportunities abound everywhere but most people look while only a few see. Where a poor man looks and sees nothing, a successful man looks and sees opportunities. *Reallionaire: Nine Steps to Becoming Rich from the Inside Out* opines that: "The world is all gates, all opportunities, strings of tension waiting to be struck". These gates of opportunities in Nigeria include investment in capital market, recognition of societal needs, realization of one's unique talents as means of wealth acquisition, and the ability to create new ideas or ways of doing things. It should be noted that no opportunity is too small as small opportunities are often the beginnings of great enterprises. One has to start from somewhere. No investment is too small especially when it involves all sincerity of purpose.

### 4.5 Diligence and Persistence

Success has never and will never be a game of chance. It will always belong to the diligent. One must throw away all acts of laziness, idleness and procrastination. And in the course of one's vocation or business one must always be ready for challenges. One must form the habit of not quitting a project because of mistakes and failures. Challenges are stepping-stones to success.

### 4.6 Self Discipline, Positive Attitude and good Communication Skill

Without discipline, no one can go far on the ladder of success and achievement. Discipline ensures living righteously. Success requires a good measure of financial and moral discipline. In line with this thinking, *How to Become a Godly Millionaire* argues that: "Whoever cannot control himself cannot control his business. Self-mastery, which is a difficult thing to achieve, leads to effective mastery of one's business". Attitude accounts for about eighty percent of successes or failures in life. Poor attitude is like a foul odour and scars people away, while good attitude is like a sweet smelling perfume, which attracts others. Furthermore, good communication skill is a necessary tool for success. The quality of communication determines the quality of response. One gets the right people interested in one's product when one possesses a good communication skill.

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## CONCLUSION

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Nigerians must cultivate the habit of desiring only what is right and just. The book *Think and Grow Rich* emphatically puts it thus:

When men first come in contact with crime, they abhor it. If they remain in contact with crime for a long time, they become accustomed to it, and endure it. If they remain in contact with it long enough, they finally embrace it and become influenced by it (169).

There is nothing which belief plus burning desire cannot achieve whether the thing is right or wrong. No wealth or position, however, can long endure unless it is built upon truth and justice. To have real wealth in life, Nigerians must cultivate the habit of acquiring wealth without violating the rights of others. Many of the things many people consider the keys to wealth can only lead to death. Such things as cheating, stealing, bribery and corruption of various kinds can only destroy those who use them. Those who embezzled Nigeria's national wealth during the First Republic, what and where are they today? Those who are embezzling Nigeria's national wealth today, where and what will they be in the next thirty years? The most painful thing about Nigerian history is that Nigerians have refused to learn from their national history. The only genuine key to wealth is that which does not inflict any form of injustice on the other person. Education, properly acquired, teaches one how to get whatever one wants in

life without violating the rights of others. The practice of amassing wealth through fraudulent means is an act of sabotage against man, woman and children and touches on their fundamental rights to enjoy good wealth made through legitimate means. God has given man power to acquire clean wealth and achieve great prosperity without violating the rights of others. Many people have made it to great heights while still respecting the values of truth and social justice.

Nigerians must be determined to take better and more acceptable steps towards acquiring wealth. Nigerians must protect the fundamental rights of man to good wealth. Those who acquire wealth in society through evil and corrupt means are indulging in the regrettable venture of flexing muscles with the God of truth and justice. The fool says in his heart that there is no God. Only a fool can engage God in a battle. Any and every form of wealth can and should be acquired using means that presuppose truth and justice. The time to put a full final stop to the Machiavellian philosophy of wealth acquisition currently in vogue for some Nigerians is now. The principles for the acquisition of morally upright wealth, emphasized and recommended by this paper, should be embraced by all and sundry for the collective interest of Nigerians. This paper strongly argues for a collective and total rejection of the Machiavellian philosophy of wealth acquisition currently in vogue for some Nigerians. We firmly advocate that it be replaced with the principles for the acquisition of morally upright wealth, as articulated by this paper.

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