

**A CRITIQUE OF SELFISHNESS AMONG NIGERIAN POLITICAL LEADERS
IN THE LIGHT OF JOHN STUART MILL'S UTILITY PRINCIPLE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE AND SECURITY**

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Abstract

This paper examines J. S. Mill's utility principle in order to show why it should be embraced as a guiding principle in Nigeria to control selfish attitudes among leaders in Nigeria. My interest in the application of Mill's utility principle to the Nigerian situation is provoked by the incessant selfish attitudes of Nigerian leaders which manifest themselves in various ways such as: embezzlement of public funds, vote buying, ballot box snatching, militarization of electoral processes and so on. Nigerian leaders involve themselves in these acts for their own selfish interests at the expense of the welfare of the general public. These selfish attitudes of political leaders in Nigeria and their apparent manifestations have posed serious threat to peace and security in Nigeria. Mill's utility principle lays emphasis on the promotion of the general interest. It is Mill's belief that those who are happy are only those who have their mind fixed on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind and some other ideal ends other than their own happiness. Mill's utility principle recognizes man as a social being; hence, it controls man's selfish tendencies and make man become conscious of the well-being of others. This paper argues that if political leaders in Nigeria embrace Mill's utility principle, it will enable them to pursue things that will favour general interest such as building quality hospitals, schools, roads, water supply and creating job opportunities for all. When leaders in Nigeria become selfless and provide these necessary amenities for the general interest, there will be peace and everyone will feel secured. However, in this paper, one does not say that Mill's utility principle is perfect; thus, one makes promise to pinpoint some of the weaknesses of this principle to enable us take some cautions in its application.

Keywords: Selfishness, Nigerian leaders, John Stuart Mill, Utility principle, peace and security.

Introduction

Kolawole (2019) observed that Nigeria marked the 'world water day' on march 22, 2019 with over 60 million people without access to safe drinking water; but some

days after the world water day, the federal executive council (FEC) met and approved ₦35 billion to build an office (12 storey building for the department of petroleum resources), plus ₦1.4 billion allocated to design it. Concerning this, the Minister of state for petroleum, Dr. Ibe Kachikwu told Nigerians that such an amount was the lowest cost. We must note that this is just an office, not a factory and also it is good to point out that no one said anything again about the 60 million Nigerians drinking unsafe water. We should also recall that between 2018 and 2019, there was a huge tug of war between federal government and the labour union over the approval of ₦30, 000 as minimum wage; but not quite long, the same government comfortably approved ₦37 billion just for the renovation of National Assembly building. Speaking on this, the Senate deputy chief whip, Senator Sabi Abdullahi had the courage to tell Nigerians that their outcry was irrelevant because the building was 20 years old and therefore needed to be renovated with such an amount.

The above mentioned scenarios no doubt raise some concerns and questions. How can a country that is named 'poverty capital of the world' approve ₦37 billion just for renovation? How can a country that its roads are decorated with potholes; a country where unemployment rate is on the increase due to infrastructural deficit; a country where minimum wage is a disgrace; and a country with no well-equipped public schools and hospitals approve ₦35 billion for building just an office and ₦1.4 billion for its design? What do all these things tell me? They simply tell one that we have selfish political leaders who only think about how to sustain their extravagant lifestyles and what benefits them at the expense of the lives of the common people. I have no iota of doubt that one of the reasons we always experience lack of peace and security in Nigeria is because our political leaders are selfish. They take decisions that favour their interests at the expense of the general well-being. This is why I want to argue that Mill's Utility principle should be embraced and be made a guiding principle so as to control the selfish attitudes of our political leaders and make them become sensitive to the well-being of the general public. The aim of this research is, therefore, to prove that Nigerian political leaders are selfish. We shall, however, make an attempt to show many ways in which selfishness among them manifests itself. The implications of such selfish attitudes on peace and security will be pointed out; and why John Stuart Mill's Utility principle should be embraced as a guiding principle.

Contextual Clarification

What is selfishness? Generally, selfishness is the condition of putting one's own interests before those of others. Aristotle (1985) calls selfishness a bad form of self-

love. He attributes this bad form of self-love to people who award themselves the biggest share in money, honours and bodily pleasures. However, selfishness has negative connotation and this explains why Aristotle (1985) maintained that it is justifiable to punish a selfish person. Ewelu (2004) describes selfishness as a kind of love of self which makes one to seize material things for oneself.

Who are political leaders? King, Massoi, Milanzi & Kyando (2015) aver that definitions of political leaders can be presented in many different ways. They, therefore, define political leaders from three categories: (a) those who assume offices through the votes of the people and are addressed as councillors, parliamentarians, governors, prime ministers, and presidents; (b) those who assume offices through direct appointments made by national leaders (the presidents and prime ministers). Political leaders in this category answer names like ministers, ambassadors, regional commissioners and district commissioners (these names might vary from country to country); (c) those who come from political parties of any level. It does not matter if the political party is the ruling or opposition party. However, it is the function of the political leaders to ensure adequate management and development of material and human resources. Political leaders also play vital role in advancing peace and as well can make the advancement of peace very difficult (King et al., 2015).

What is peace? Peace as the absence of war has been challenged by a good number of scholars. For example, Aarne ((2005) opines that peace is not entirely the absence of war but the presence of justice, law, order and government. According to Coretta (2008) Martin Luther King Jr. had also said that peace is not wholly an absence of tension but presence of justice. It has been also pointed out that peace as the absence of war is of little value; hence peace can only endure where there is respect for human rights, where the well-being of people is catered for and where people and nations enjoy freedom (Irwin, 1995).

What is security? Security could be defined as an absence of potential harm caused by others (Wikipedia). Baldwin (1997) describes security as a low possibility of harm to acquired values. Krause and Nye (1975) defines security as the non-existence of intense danger to the minimal acceptable levels of the necessary values that individuals consider vital to its survival.

Exploring the Selfishness of Nigerian Political Leaders through their nefarious activities and extravagant lifestyles

Ijewereme (2014) confirms that Nigeria has never been ruled by selfless political leaders since it gained its political independence in 1960. Ogbeidi (2012) observed

that Nigerian political leadership class has been that of self-service as almost all the leaders came to power with the only aim of enriching themselves and their friends rather than giving selfless services to the citizens. Akubor (2018) opines that Nigerian politics has become a theatre where political leaders meet to compete for selfish goals.

Nigerian political leaders (from 1960 to the present) were or are so selfish and this is evident in the manner in which they embezzled or are embezzling public funds. The funds that would have been used to build quality roads, hospitals, schools, Infrastructures, power supply were siphoned into their private pockets for their private projects.

There are so many examples to substantiate this claim but it will be fine to mention a few. General Sani Abacha who governed Nigeria between 1993 and 1998 stole Nigeria blind. Ijewereme (2014) notes that within a space of five years, General Abacha was able to amass excess wealth for himself and family while poor masses were dying of hunger. It was revealed by Oluwasanmi (2007) that Olusegun Obasanjo came to power in 1999 poor with only 20,000 in all his bank accounts. But eight years later, he has poultry farm at Ota worth hundreds of millions of naira; he owns educational institutions which include primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Obasanjo has over two hundred millions of shares in many conglomerates mostly from Transcorp Nigeria Limited and sold government property to himself and friends. Out of selfish desires, Olusegun Obasanjo wanted to extend his tenure in office by seeking for third term of tenure. Oluwasanmi (2007) says that while infrastructures were deteriorating, Obasanjo was busy trying to amend the constitution to enable him remain longer in office. During the administration of Goodluck Jonathan, political leaders embezzled public funds with arrogance and impunity to satisfy their selfish ends.

Selfish desires of Nigerian political leaders to possess power and sustain it has become one of the reasons we have continued to witness vote-buying, ballot box snatching and militarization of elections in Nigeria. Political leaders carry out their political malpractices such as vote-buying and ballot box snatching through the help of security forces. Azeez (2015) points out that militarization of elections in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon; it has always been part of Nigeria's post-colonial elections. He also avers that the manner in which security forces are involved and how they carry out their duties have become part of the major causes of violence and insecurity during elections in Nigeria. For instance, it was recorded by Adenyi (2019) that during 2019 general elections, thugs assisted by soldiers invaded polling units and carted away ballot materials in Ajaokuta, Kabba/Bunu,

Olamaboro, Ijumu. In Umudo/Umuwala area of Owerri, thugs assisted by soldiers killed an opposition party agent (Adenyi, 2019). Nigerian political leaders during elections use security forces to jeopardize the lives of the innocent people. They value their political survival more than the lives of the citizens.

Nigeria's political leaders live extravagant lifestyles. They drive SUV and armored cars and tell us that they do so because there are bad roads and insecurity. They fail to understand that solutions to bad roads and insecurity are not SUV and armored cars but building roads and infrastructures for the benefit of everyone.

Our political leaders import foreign goods and services and insist that citizens must patronize Nigerian made-goods. They care less about funding public schools but send their children abroad to study. They refuse to build or fund government hospitals because they can easily fly abroad (UK and America) for medical treatments. They refuse to invest in local industries and choose to buy foreign made goods. While our political leaders must import and enjoy foreign goods and services such as foreign medical treatments, SUV cars, armored cars and so on, poor citizens continue to suffer.

Implications of Selfishness among Nigerian Political leaders on peace and security

Selfishness is, indeed, the bane of good governance in Nigeria and the apparent implication is absence of peace and security. As Ewelu (2004) rightly said, when one who governs stops seeking for the welfare of the people he or she governs, the people will turn against the government. He emphasizes that because the centre does not hold again, everyone will resort to fighting for their survival and the situation will turn out to be what Thomas Hobbes calls 'the state of nature', that is, a situation where everyone is at war with everyone else. In a similar way, the implication of everyone fighting for his or her selfish interests is that there would be absence of peace and security. I have continued to ask this question: how can there be peace and security in a country where political leaders are only interested in stealing public funds for selfish ends at the expense of the general welfare? While Nigerian political leaders enjoy extravagant lifestyle, poverty rate continues to rise; unemployment rate surges; and people continue to die of hunger and diseases that can easily be prevented. There is no doubt that the direct implications of all these things would be high increase of crimes such as kidnapping, arm robbery, ritual killing, internet fraud (Yahoo Yahoo), 419 activities and so on. In other words, the implications of selfish attitudes among Nigerian political leaders

on peace and security are high increase of crimes; high increase of poverty; social disorder; and high rate of unemployment. We must also, not forget that most of the violence and insecurity we experience during elections are caused by the political leaders who want to possess power at all cost. However, Niger Delta crises, Herdsmen/Farmers crises and Boko Haram crises are still not solved. All of these crises can be solved if our political leaders should stop being selfish and channel Nigeria's abundant wealth towards the service of the country and citizens.

John Stuart Mill's Principle of Utility

Who is John Stuart Mill?

John Stuart Mill was a British philosopher who was born in London, May 20th 1806. His father, James Mill was a Scottish philosopher and economist, who moved in important intellectual circles. John Stuart Mill was educated by his father. His father taught him Greek at the age of three; he started arithmetic and Latin at the age of eight, logic at the age of twelve, and political economy at the age of thirteen. Until he was fourteen, he saw no one of his age, and mixed only with his father's utilitarian friends. He was also required to teach his younger brothers and sisters as much as possible of what his father taught him. Mill (1874) said in his *Autobiography* that he had one object in life, and that is to be a reformer of the world. In a letter to E. Bulwer Lytton in 1836, Mill spoke of a program for a utilitarianism of the whole of human nature, in which feeling was to be as valuable as thought, and poetry as valuable as philosophy.

Mill's Principle of Utility

It is no doubt that the principle of utility is much more identified with Jeremy Bentham, but this is not to say that Bentham is the originator of the idea of utility. Mill (1874) believes that he was the first person who brought the word 'utilitarian' into use to denote the recognition of utility as a standard in ethics and politics. He acknowledges that he did not invent it but got it from one of Mr. Galt's novels, *The Annals of the Parish*. However, the principle of utility expresses utilitarian or greatest happiness principle. He claims that in all ages of philosophy, one of its schools has been utilitarian - not only from the time of Epicurus, but long before. Mill thinks that the imperfect notion formed about the meaning of the principle of utility is the chief obstacle which impedes its reception; hence, Mill's aim, in his *Utilitarianism*, is to contribute something towards a better understanding and appreciation of the utilitarian or happiness theory. According to Mill (2003, p. 186), "the principle of utility holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to

promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness". He defines happiness as an intended pleasure, and the absence of pain, while unhappiness would mean pain and the privation of pleasure.

The basic Ingredients of Mill's Principle of Utility

a. The Distinction between Higher and Lower Pleasures

Mill (2003) recognizes that some kinds of pleasures are more desirable and more valuable than others. He disagreed with Bentham that the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone; but rather the estimation of pleasures must be considered based on quality and not just on quantity. He associates higher pleasures with beings of higher faculty, while lower pleasures are associated with beings of lower faculty. He also attributes higher pleasures as those pleasures enjoyed by intelligent being, instructed being and being with high sense of feeling and conscience.

b. The Cultivation of Nobleness of Character

Mill (2003) emphasizes that utilitarianism could only attain its end (happiness) by the general cultivation of nobleness of character. He is of the view that even if it is possible to doubt that a noble character is always the happier for its nobleness, it cannot be doubted that it makes other people happier and that the world in general is immensely a gainer by it. He is of the view that a noble act makes everyone happy, including the agent who performs such a noble act. In this sense, every noble act of the individual promotes general happiness, including the agent's own happiness. The cultivation of nobleness of character should be to the individuals a paramount end, simply because the existence of nobleness of character would go farther than all things else towards making human life happy (Mill, 1882).

c. The Search for General Happiness

Mill (2003) confirms that the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct is not the agent's own greatest happiness but the greatest amount of happiness altogether. The greatest amount of happiness altogether simply means the sum of the happiness of everyone. This goes to say that the more each person is happy, the bigger amount of total happiness will be obtained. In a similar way, the more everyone suffers, the more the greatest amount of happiness is decreased.

Mill emphasizes the need for the promotion of the general happiness. Those who are happy are only those who have their mind fixed on the happiness of others, on

the improvement of mankind, and some other ideal ends other than their own happiness (Mill, 1874). To explain further, Mill (2003, p. 194) writes: "As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator". He suggests that if it be true belief that God desires, above all things, the happiness of his creatures and that this was his purpose in their creation, utility is not only not a godless doctrine but more profoundly religious than any other. The principle of utility cares for the happiness of all, and Mill is confident to say that we can read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility in the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth which advises one to do as one would want others do to one, and to love one's neighbour as oneself. Mill (2003) is of the view that treating one another in accordance with the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth constitutes the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality.

d. Man as a Social Being

Mill's (2003) principle of utility recognizes man as a social being who lives in a social state and has social feeling towards others. He describes man's natural sentiment as the social feelings of mankind and the desire to be in unity with his or her fellow creatures. However, he asserts that man's natural sentiment towards others makes him to be conscious of himself as a being who must pay regard to others, and care for the good of others just like he would naturally and necessarily care for the good of his own survival. Mill (2003) believes that to be in harmony with one's fellow creatures is the natural tendency of every man as a social being.

The need to embrace Mill's Utility Principle as a Panacea to the Selfish Attitudes of Nigerian Political Leaders

Mary Warnock points out that Mill's contribution to utilitarianism influenced greatly English public life. She stressed that in the time of Mill, the utilitarian spirit led people to ask of their institutions not whether they were familiar, venerable, and Picturesque but whether they worked well and contributed to the welfare of everyone and also whether they were framed in such a way that it could secure concrete benefit for the society (Mill, 2003). In Nigeria, our leaders, instead of asking and caring for the welfare of the citizens, spend extravagantly on buildings and cars that are not necessary for the survival our country. One, therefore, questions: is it not necessary that our political leaders should imbibe this utilitarian spirit to enable them utilize Nigerian abundant resources in a way that will benefit every Nigerian citizen, and not just only those at the hem of affairs?

However, Mill (2003, p. 187) affirms that “no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base”. In this light, we can suggest that our political leaders has no fellow feeling and conscience, and that is why they are so selfish. Instead of showing concern for the plights of many Nigerians, they embezzle public funds that would have been invested in infrastructure and development projects for selfish gains at the expense of the general welfare. Sequel to this, the cultivation of nobleness of character which Mill’s utility principle emphasizes becomes necessary in the lives of Nigerian political leaders. This is because as Mill opines, it is only a cultivated mind that is capable of having conscience and fellow feeling. A cultivated mind, for Mill (2003), is not necessarily a philosopher but any mind that has been educated to exercise his or her faculties in a way that he or she will find sources of inexhaustible interest in everything; be it the achievements of art, imaginations of poetry, in history, and in everything that concerns mankind.

Nigerian political leaders lack nobleness of character, and this shows why they live extravagant lifestyles even when it is obvious that many Nigerians are suffering and dying of poverty. Their lack of nobleness of character manifests in the way they render citizens jobless and poor by stealing public funds that would have been used for development projects. The way they choose to build expensive offices at the expense of building factories proves that they lack nobleness of character; hence, if the cultivation of nobleness of character is embraced, it will impact positively on the lives of Nigeria’s political leaders. It will subdue their reckless and selfish tendencies. Moreover, it will help them in taking the right actions at the right time. More importantly, it will help them to become sensitive to the well-being of Nigerian citizens. Suffice it to say that one of the ways out of this selfish attitudes of our political leaders is by the cultivation of nobleness of character.

With respect to the promotion of general happiness, Mill (2003) insists that individuals should be taught that not only they may forgo their own happiness when their conduct is opposed to the general good, but also that a direct impulse to promote the general good may be, in every individual, one of the habitual motives of action. The promotion of general happiness is another ingredient that Nigerian political leaders should take from Mill’s principle of utility. It is high time Nigeria political leaders started promoting general happiness because it will go a long way to reducing insecurity and ensuring peace. Nigerian political leaders in the past had stayed in power for their own selfish gains with little or no interest in general good, and this has never helped Nigeria as a country to progress as it should have progressed. Consequent upon this, it becomes urgent to espouse the

promotion of general happiness which Mill's utility principle presents. Promotion of general happiness entails improving the lives of the people through provision of social amenities, job creation and so on.

However, promotion of general happiness in Nigeria is possible and can be done when our political leaders begin to improve the lives of the citizens through building roads, hospitals, schools, infrastructure, power supply, and creating jobs. From the point of view of Mill (2003), human improvement is one of the ingredients of happiness. He emphasizes that the improvement of mankind should be pursued as an ideal end because happiness is found in improving the general well-being of mankind. In the same way, once the lives of Nigerian people are improved, lack of peace and insecurity will hugely reduce and then, general happiness would be largely found.

Given the present situation in Nigeria, we need a principle that recognizes man as a social being. Mill's principle of utility reminds man that as a social being, who lives in a social state, he ought to care for the interest of others. With this in mind, Nigerian leaders should begin to pursue the interests of their fellow citizens in the manner in which they would want to care for their own interests. In this way, peace and security could be achieved.

Conclusion

The above ingredients of Mill's utility principle, if embraced, will go a long way to ensuring that our political leaders work towards the promotion of the welfare of everyone in Nigeria. One insists that if our political leaders cater for the welfare of every citizen of Nigeria through the provision of social amenities and employment, peace and security, to a large extent, would be restored. But notwithstanding the strengths of Mill's utility principle, it can easily compromise happiness of individuals for the benefit of the general interests. Mill (2003) affirms that in the urgent need for social expediency, individuals will cease to have equal right to happiness. This means that some individuals may be made to sacrifice their happiness to increase the overall happiness. An example is a situation that presents the need of saving a life. In this case, Mill (2003) would argue that it may be one's duty to steal or take food or drug by force to save a life. The implication of this is that although, there would be general happiness because a life is saved, the individual whose medicine is stolen or taken by force will not share equal happiness with the rest of others. However, despite this defect of Mill's utility

principle, one has good reason to say that its application will sufficiently reduce the selfish attitudes of Nigeria's political leaders.

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