

The “End Justifies the Means” Principle as A Negation of the Concept of Ezigbo Mmadu in Igbo Land

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Abstract

Niccolo Machiavelli's political philosophy, as articulated in his widely referenced magnum opus, 'The Prince', fundamentally transformed modern political thought during its era. Machiavelli's famous assertion that "the end justifies the means" encapsulated his arguments on political ethics, marking a significant departure from the prevailing moral frameworks of his time. This statement, which challenges conventional ethical standards, was met with considerable resistance in an era predominantly shaped by Christian values, which found such a perspective troubling due to its inherently negative implications. In contrast, the moral framework of the Igbo people aligns more closely with traditional ethical values, positing that both the end and the means must be ethically sound. This principle is foundational to their understanding of 'Ezigbo Mmadu' (a good person) or authentic person-hood. An 'Ezigbo Mmadu' embodies honesty and sincerity in all interactions and dealings within the community, rejecting any semblance of duplicity. This paper aims to explore the Igbo conception of 'Ezigbo Mmadu' and juxtapose it with Machiavellian political philosophy. In this context, it seeks to address the following critical questions: What constitutes the Igbo understanding of 'Ezigbo Mmadu'? How does the Machiavellian principle serve as a negation of this conception of authentic personhood? To answer these questions, the paper employs a descriptive-analytical methodology, relying extensively on secondary sources, including books, online journals, and internet resources, to elucidate how Machiavelli's principle fundamentally contradicts the Igbo notion of 'Ezigbo Mmadu'.

Keywords: *Ezigbo Mmadu, Authentic Personhood, Conventional Morality, Machiavellian Political Philosophy.*

Introduction:

In modern philosophy, Niccolo Machiavelli's political cum ethical principle "the end justifies the means" captured in his monumental work, "The Prince" can neither be ignored nor tossed away like an uninteresting book. The maxim introduced into modern philosophy a new way of thinking about morality as it relates to politics, which at then was intertwined with religion. The principle underpinned his major argument that the morality of religion, which is conventional is distinct from that needed in the state or from that of a ruler. Thus, his principle was a fundamental break from conventional morality which upholds that both the means and ends of endeavours should be morally upright. Machiavelli's introduction postulation that "the end justifies the means" argued that when it comes to ruling the state, the leader (the prince) must do whatever it takes to retain power and maintain stability. It does not matter the means adopted to achieve this as far as the result ensures he retains power and maintains stability in the state. In other words, if it takes cheating, lying insincerity or killing to maintain power or bring about public good, then the leader should go ahead. The leader must be able to adapt to whatever situations come up and take action regardless of how dirty it might be as far as it preserves power and public good.

This position aligns with the assertion that adherence to conventional morality can lead to self-destruction within the political sphere. This argument was central to Machiavelli's philosophy and provoked considerable dissent among his contemporaries. Proponents of traditional moral frameworks opposed Machiavelli's views, concerned about the potential for significant negative repercussions. They feared that his principles could reduce individuals to mere instruments for achieving goals or justify the use of unethical means to attain ostensibly noble ends. Consequently, Machiavelli advocated for a flexible moral perspective that adapts to situational demands, even at the expense of one's personal ethics. Under this framework, a ruler might choose to act dishonestly in interactions with others to fulfill the needs of the state. Here, situational contexts dictate the appropriate means of action, reinforcing Machiavelli's assertion that personal morality diverges from the ethical considerations necessary for governance. In the political arena, the principle of "the end justifies the means" is perceived as a pragmatic approach to maintaining power and stability.

While the Machiavellian principle is traditionally situated within the context of statecraft, this study will apply it to the moral ethos of the Igbo people to analyze their concept of Ezigbo Mmadu (a good person) or authentic personhood. The moral framework of the Igbo community is firmly rooted in the belief that both the means and the ends must be morally sound; hence, the end does not justify the means. Consequently, an Ezigbo Mmadu is evaluated based on their character and integrity within the community. The Igbo worldview emphasizes a communal bond, transcending blood relations, where an individual deemed a good person is characterized by sincerity and honesty in their dealings, refraining from using others as mere means to an end, even for altruistic purposes. For instance, practices such as money rituals and fraudulent financial schemes are condemned in Igbo society, irrespective of their potential to alleviate poverty or fund community development initiatives. The source of wealth is subject to scrutiny; an Ezigbo Mmadu exemplifies integrity and aligns their conduct with legal and ethical standards, reflecting the community's values. The will of the community supersedes individual desires, and the means employed must

adhere to communal expectations. Thus, in the Igbo moral framework, Machiavellian ethics are rendered inapplicable.

In light of this, the present paper aims to explore the Igbo conception of Ezigbo Mmadu (a good person) or authentic personhood and contrast it with Machiavellian political philosophy. This exploration raises crucial questions: What constitutes the Igbo conception of Ezigbo Mmadu? How does the Machiavellian principle negate the Igbo understanding of an authentic or good human being? To address these questions, the paper adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology and relies heavily on secondary sources, including books, online journals, and internet resources, to elucidate how Machiavelli's principle contradicts the Igbo notion of Ezigbo Mmadu. This study is structured into two main sections. The first section will examine Machiavelli's political philosophy, his unconventional moral principles, and their origins. The second section will dig into the Igbo concept of personhood, focusing on Ezigbo Mmadu (a good person) or authentic person-hood, and elucidate how the Machiavellian principle contradicts this understanding.

It is also important to clarify that the terms Ezigbo Mmadu and authentic person-hood will be used interchangeably throughout this study, as they convey the same concept. The term Ezigbo Mmadu, as articulated by Agulana (2011) and Ukpokolo (2011), represents the notion of a good person, while Obioha (2020) has framed this idea within the context of authentic person-hood. In this study, both terms will be regarded as synonymous.

Historical Origin of the Machiavellian Political Philosophy.

Niccolò Machiavelli was a prominent 15th-century Italian diplomat and political theorist, born on May 3, 1469, in Florence, Italy, and passing away on June 22, 1527, in the same city at the age of 58. His most renowned work, *The Prince* (Italian: *Il Principe*), is a political treatise that emerged in the 16th century and has become a defining text in political philosophy. During Machiavelli's lifetime, the Italian peninsula was characterized by intense political strife among various dominant city-states, including Florence, Milan, Venice, and Naples, alongside the involvement of external powers such as the Papacy, France, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire. These city-states often sought to safeguard their interests by maneuvering against larger powers, leading to a landscape rife with political intrigue, blackmail, and violence (Onwunyi, 2019).

According to Reborn (2003), *The Prince*, can be interpreted as a series of reflections addressing the crises Machiavelli experienced during his lifetime, including the fall of the Florentine republic in 1512, as well as broader issues in Italian and international politics, the theoretical conception of the state, and the nature of rulership (p. XXI).

Machiavelli lived in a time when political power was predominantly held by the Medici family in Florence. Throughout his life, he observed the usurpation of power from the Medici by Savonarola, followed by the Spanish Army's conquest of Florence and the eventual restoration of Medici authority. During this tumultuous period, a stark divide existed between the wealthy and the impoverished, as rampant corruption plagued both the church and political institutions. The interests of the affluent and powerful often overshadowed those of the less fortunate, leading to widespread discontent. Many among the impoverished population, disillusioned by the

ostentatious lifestyles of the elite, harboured hopes for a regime change that would replace the Medici with a more representative government. Thus, it was not surprising when Savonarola, a leader favoured particularly by the poor, ascended to power following the flight of Piero Medici from Florence during the French invasion of Italy. Savonarola's rise was met with enthusiasm from the lower classes, as he sought to restore a government that represented their interests (Nnamdi & Ogan, 2019).

The aforementioned context illustrates that Machiavelli was raised in an environment where the raw exercise of power primarily served the interests of the ruling elite and their affiliates, while simultaneously enforcing the subjugation and oppression of the impoverished (Nnamdi & Ogan, 2019). As a diplomat, Machiavelli travelled extensively, observing how various states fell despite the presence of formidable armies. One notable episode from his travels, as recounted by Plamenatz (n.d.) and cited by Nnamdi & Ogan (2019), involves Machiavelli witnessing Pope Julius II entering Perugia unarmed to confront Giovanpaolo Baglioni, who, despite being armed, refrained from resistance (p. 35). It is also crucial to note that corrupt politicians among both the state and church colluded to abruptly end Savonarola's reign. In 1512, Spanish troops invaded Italy, conquered it, and reinstated Medici authority, leaving Machiavelli without a political position. Instead, he faced arrest, torture, and imprisonment for his steadfast support of the popular government, of which he had served as Head of the Council and Secretary to the Council of Ten (Nnamdi & Ogan, 2019).

Machiavelli's various positions afforded him profound insights into the intricacies of power politics, particularly regarding how to strengthen one's grip on the state, subdue adversaries, and cultivate loyalty among subjects and military forces. Thus, his most influential work, *The Prince*, opens with an examination of the different types of principalities, whether hereditary or mixed (Nnamdi & Ogan, 2019). He analyzes the qualities and dispositions a ruler, or prince, must embody to achieve success, as well as the characteristics of the individuals who should surround him. Machiavelli posits that a ruler must evoke both fear and admiration among enemies, neighbors, and followers alike. Furthermore, as Nnamdi & Ogan (2019) note, in Plamenatz's terminology, Machiavelli seeks to identify "what qualities (what capacities and dispositions) rulers, leaders, or ordinary citizens must possess for a state to endure, gain respect from its neighbors, and be formidable to them; and also what qualities a ruler or leader must have to restore a corrupt state or establish a new one" (p. 35).

Machiavelli's experiences provided the foundational context for the philosophy encapsulated in *'The Prince'*. Having observed the frequent conquests and cessions of power during his time, Machiavelli delineates several strategies that leaders should implement to prevent such occurrences and establish stability within the state (Nnamdi & Ogan, 2019). The first of these strategies is *'virtù'*, which Machiavelli considers essential for a ruler aiming to establish a republic or principality. *'Virtù'* signifies the skill, wit, and ingenuity required by a ruler to acquire power and foster a stable, vigorous, and well-ordered political environment (Nnamdi & Ogan, 2019). Moreover, he emphasizes the necessity for a ruler to embody the bravery and strength of a lion alongside the cunning and cleverness of a fox. According to Machiavelli, politics reveals

various shades of human character, necessitating that a ruler master political skills to navigate the intrigues and deceptions inherent in political life (Nnamdi & Ogan, 2019).

Consequently, Machiavelli argues that a successful leader must possess the flexibility of a double-edged sword, adept at adjusting his demeanour to suit varying situations. A leader must be ruthless when the circumstances require it, yet also embody honesty, clemency, generosity, and loyalty when the occasion calls for those traits. He further posits that a ruler can solidify his grip on power and earn the unwavering support of his subjects by skillfully articulating what they wish to hear whenever the situation demands it (Nnamdi & Ogan, 2019).

Commenting on the significance of character traits a ruler should cultivate in relation to his followers, Machiavelli (as quoted in Nnamdi & Ogan, 2019) asserts, “for the mob is always impressed by appearances and by results, and the world is composed by mob” (p. 36). In this statement, Machiavelli underscores that cleverness and deceit are vital attributes for maintaining and enhancing one's hold on power in both politics and business. He contends that a ruler or leader who neglects to adopt this deceptive principle in their interactions with subjects or followers is destined for ruin (Nnamdi & Ogan, 2019). Thus, he articulates the rationale behind his assertion that a ruler should not consistently adhere to goodness, maintaining that:

For the manner in which men live is so far removed from the way in which men ought to live, that he who leaves the common course for that which he ought to follow will find that it leads him to ruin rather than to safety. For a man who, in all respects, will carry out only his professions of good, will be apt to be ruined among so many that are evil. A prince therefore who desires to maintain himself must learn not always to be good (p.36).

Through the above analysis, Machiavelli delineates the personality traits essential for a ruler to maintain power. Biagini (2009) succinctly summarizes the emergence of Machiavelli's philosophy, stating, “Machiavelli was a product of his times, and the times were full of turbulence and stratagem. In Machiavelli's day, the powerful and the wealthy created their own standards, irrespective and disrespectful of the laws of church and state” (p. 4). This context led Machiavelli to conclude that the state must assert its authority to effectively manage the inherent selfishness of individuals and uphold law and order. In this light, Reborn (2003) remarks on Machiavelli's concept of ‘raison d'état’ —translated as “reason of state”—asserting that it is “morally unimpeachable” and has the potential to justify even the most egregious acts (p. XXIII).

He elaborates that this notion implies that “sometimes the prince must do evil simply because he cannot gain or preserve power otherwise, but as long as he succeeds and people benefit from it, they will not be upset” (Reborn, 2003, p. XXIV). Machiavelli's philosophy, therefore, emphasizes a pragmatic approach to governance, wherein the ruler's primary objective is to maintain power and stability, even at the cost of moral considerations. This perspective invites a critical examination of the implications of such a philosophy, particularly when juxtaposed with ethical frameworks that prioritize moral integrity over political expediency.

Towards an understanding of the Machiavellian Principle of “the end justifies the means”.

The concept of "end" signifies the ultimate aim, goal, or intention behind any human action, while "means" refers to the methods or ways through which that end is achieved or realized. The phrase "the end justifies the means" has become a hallmark of Machiavelli's political philosophy and has served as a foundational principle of Machiavellianism throughout history (Onwunyi, 2019). Notably, this phrase did not originate from Machiavelli himself; rather, it stems from the assertion made in his book, *The Prince*, specifically after Chapter XVIII, where Machiavelli states:

In the actions of all men, especially of princes, where there is no court to appeal to, one looks to the end. So let the prince win and maintain his state: the means will always be judged honourable and will be praised by everyone (Bull, 1981, p.101).

A corresponding statement in Machiavelli's *Discourses*, Book I, Chapter IX, goes thus:

A prudent order of a republic, who has the intent or wish to help not himself, but the common good, not for his own succession but for the common fatherland, should contrive to have authority alone; nor will a wise understanding ever reprove anyone for any extraordinary action that he uses to order a kingdom or constitute a republic. It is very suitable that when the deed accuses him, the effect excuses him; and when the effect is good, as was that of Romulus, it will always excuse the deed; for he who is violent to spoil, not he who is violent to mend, should be reprov'd (Mansfield, 1996, p. 29)

Thomson's translation of *Discourses* renders the above statement thus:

For this reason, the wise founder of a commonwealth who seeks to benefit not himself only, or the line of his descendants, but his state and country, must endeavour to acquire an absolute and undivided authority. And none who is wise will ever blame any action, however extraordinary and irregular, which serves to lay the foundation of a kingdom or to establish a republic. For although the act condemns the doer, the end may justify him; and when, as in the case of Romulus, the end is good, it will always excuse the means; since it is he who does violence with intent to injure, not he who does it with the design to secure tranquility, who merits blame" (1883, pp. 66 – 67).

The phrase "the end justifies the means" originates from Jesuit writers, reflecting several passages in 'The Prince' and 'Discourses', where Machiavelli "advocates for violence and cruelty" due to their beneficial outcomes (Germino, 1966, p. 804). According to Onwunyi (2019), this concept is a rephrasing of ideas from ancient writers that have appeared in classical literature. For instance, the Greek playwright Sophocles stated in 'Electra' (circa 408 BC) that "the end excuses any evil," and this thought was later echoed by the Roman poet Ovid, who wrote in 'Heroides' (circa 10 BC), "the result justifies the deed" (Sophocles; Ovid, in Onwunyi, 2019, p. 81).

To the Jesuits, Machiavelli's ideas indicate a disregard for moral and religious ideals, focusing solely on the achievement of political ends, regardless of whether violence or cruelty is employed. Consequently, they believe that Machiavelli's ethical and political philosophy is rooted in the notion that the "end justifies the means" (Onwunyi, 2019). Indeed, Machiavelli's statements appear to support the Jesuit perspective that "the end or outcome justifies whatever means the prince might use to achieve it—in other words, that a good end makes even the most wicked means morally acceptable" (Rebhorn, 2003, p. XXIII). Rebhorn further explains that Machiavelli implies that people will consider a prince's means justifiable as long as he succeeds and the outcomes are favorable to them (Rebhorn, 2003, p. XXIII).

However, Rebhorn emphasizes that by not explicitly stating that the end justifies the means for the prince, Machiavelli does not provide a convenient escape from the moral dilemmas he faces. These dilemmas arise from the reality that to gain and retain political power, a prince may have to commit morally reprehensible acts that cannot be justified by the ends he pursues (Rebhorn, 2003, p. XXIII). Rather, it suggests that a prince's actions should be justified if undertaken "simply in order to bring about some greater good—defined as, for example, political stability or economic welfare" (Rebhorn, 2003, p. XXIII). Thus, for Machiavelli, as a utilitarian thinker, a prince should not hesitate to take actions that promote the well-being of the state (Onwunyi, 2019).

Machiavelli is acutely aware that politicians often attain power through deceptive, violent, and cruel methods. In Chapter VIII of 'The Prince', he praises such actions if they serve the interests of the state. He provides two comparable examples—one from antiquity and one contemporary—to illustrate individuals who ascended from ordinary citizens to rulers through cunning and malevolence. In both instances, these would-be rulers murdered the existing leaders to seize control of their cities. The first example is Agathocles of Sicily, who rose from a lowly status as a private citizen to become the king of Syracuse. Despite Agathocles's overtly cruel actions, Machiavelli commends his ability to confront danger and his courageous spirit in overcoming adversity (Bull, 1981, p. 63).

The second example involves Oliverotto of Fermo, a fatherless boy raised by his maternal uncle, Giovanni, a soldier with grand ambitions. Oliverotto conspired with fellow citizens to seize power and become the ruler of his city (Bull, 1981, p. 65). Machiavelli lauds Oliverotto's skillful deception, which he considers an essential political aptitude. In 'The Discourses', Book II, Chapter XIII, Machiavelli asserts that the art of deception is vital for those who aim to "mount to great heights from low beginnings" and should not be condemned if it is "skillfully conceived" (Thomson, 1883, p. 291). He believes that any prince who wishes to "accomplish great things" must learn how to deceive (Thomson, 1883, p. 289).

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli states that princes who have achieved remarkable success are those who "have given their word lightly, who have known how to trick men with their cunning, and who in the end have overcome those abiding by honest principles" (Bull, 1981, p. 99). This implies that, for Machiavelli, the long-term security and prosperity of the state always take precedence over how a ruler comes to power or maintains it. What sets Machiavelli's political philosophy apart is his indifference to the means employed to achieve political objectives, placing greater

emphasis on the prosperity of the state. He contends not only that politicians must sometimes commit immoral acts in the name of the public good but also that they should not be troubled by these actions (Onwunyi, 2019).

The Catholic Church condemned Machiavelli's principles, supporting this stance with various sanctions, including the prohibition of 'The Prince' in 1559 and the decree for the destruction of all of Machiavelli's works in 1564. The Church viewed these principles as immoral and ungodly, branding Machiavelli as an atheist and anti-Christian. This condemnation stems from the belief that his principles are grounded not in scripture but in pragmatic politics. The Church was particularly appalled by Machiavelli's separation of theology from politics, noting that he did not incorporate Christian values into his advice to rulers (Onwunyi, 2019). The Church concluded that if individuals could advance their interests by committing injustices in this life, they would ultimately face divine retribution in the afterlife. This aligns with the Christian belief in eternal life following our temporary existence on Earth (Skinner, 1981, p. 41; Onwunyi, 2019).

According to Onwunyi (2019), any reader of 'The Prince' will recognize that it engages with serious moral questions, leading many to regard it as a moral treatise. Two interpretations warrant examination: the first considers 'The Prince' in light of conventional morality, while the second views it as proposing a new form of morality. Our focus will be on the former. From this perspective, 'The Prince' embodies immorality; proponents of this view argue that its ideas are unacceptable because they contradict conventional moral assumptions. Previously, political theories were framed within the context of conventional morality, urging political actions to adhere to these established principles (Onwunyi, 2019).

During Machiavelli's time, it was common for political guides known as "mirrors for princes" to be presented to rulers as gifts. These guides typically encouraged rulers to act in accordance with Christian morality, emphasizing kindness and virtuous deeds as a path to prosperity. In stark contrast, 'The Prince' advised rulers to act "good" or "bad" based on situational demands. Recognizing that leaders were primarily motivated by the pursuit of glory and honor, Machiavelli chose not to advocate for ruling according to popular Christian ethical ideals. Instead, he prescribed deception, treachery, and cruelty as necessary tools in their political arsenal (Onwunyi, 2019). This understanding serves as the foundation for the subsequent sections of the paper.

The Igbo concept of Personhood.

The term "Mmadu" refers to a person or human being in Igbo, without specifying gender. The etymology of this word is particularly fascinating. It can be broken down into MMA-DU, which translates to "let there be goodness" or, more aptly, "let goodness be." In this context, "MMA" signifies goodness, order, beauty, and peace, while "DU," derived from "DE" or "DU," functions as the imperative form meaning "to be." Thus, the word is pronounced as MMADU, representing a call for the presence of goodness, order, beauty, and peace (Esomonu, 1982, in Ezedike, 2019). Otakpor (2006) interprets Mmadu as "the beauty that exists" or "the beauty that is," reflecting Ukpokolo's (2011) assertion that Mmadu represents the peak of Creation in the Igbo worldview. Humankind, as the zenith of beauty and creativity, stands unparalleled among all creatures created

by the Supreme Being, embodying beauty, goodness, and comeliness in their entirety (Ukpokolo, 2011).

Obioha (2020) argues that personhood in Igbo and, more broadly, African thought is primarily a moral consideration rather than an ontological or metaphysical one. This perspective contrasts sharply with Western conceptions, which often isolate specific psychological features to define an individual. According to Menkiti (1984), this approach represents what he terms the "minimal definition of the person." In contrast, a more comprehensive understanding, termed the "maximal definition," encompasses a broader view of human existence, particularly within the community context.

In Igbo thought, the human person is defined in relation to their community. An individual's identity is intricately linked to their life experiences within the community ethos, rendering their existence inseparable from their social environment. While physical or psychological traits are acknowledged, they do not solely determine personhood in Igbo understanding (Obioha, 2020). For instance, an imbecile or an insane person may be dismissed with the saying, "hapu onyegah, na oburo mmadu" ("leave that person, he/she is not a human being"). This highlights that personhood in Igbo thought is fundamentally a moral judgment, made within the framework of community values. In this context, Menkiti (1984, in Obioha, 2020) emphasizes the significance of moral considerations in defining personhood.

As far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be competent or ineffective, better or worse. Hence, the Africans emphasized the rituals of incorporation and the overarching necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives, so that what was initially biologically given can come to attain social self-hood, i.e., become a person with all the inbuilt excellences implied by the term (p. 116).

Personhood, in this context, may not be ascribed to certain individuals such as fetuses, infants, imbeciles, the insane, or the comatose, not because they lack specific psychological features, but because moral judgments—such as assessing the rightness or wrongness of their actions—are not applicable to them. This is because, in Igbo thought, personhood is primarily a moral concept rather than an ontological deprivation. These individuals are fully human and entitled to community rights and privileges by virtue of being human, but the moral evaluation that defines one as 'ezigbo onye obodo' (an authentic person) does not necessarily apply to them. The focus is not on whether they attain "full personhood" but rather whether they meet the criteria of being considered an authentic person. Once it becomes possible to evaluate the rightness or wrongness of an individual's actions and character, then that person can be judged as 'ezigbo onye obodo' or not (Obioha, 2020). However, Obioha offers a nuanced perspective that slightly differs from Menkiti's conception of personhood. In his own words:

Bearing in mind that personhood or authentic personhood is what one can fail at, then one's long existence in the community may not matter. Therefore, Menkiti's claim that, "full personhood ... indicates straight away that the

older an individual gets the more of a person he becomes” is not completely true. This is because whereas a youth may be judged an *ezigbo onye obodo* due to his/her consistency in moral soundness or rectitude, it may be said of an older adult that *onye a aburo mmadu* or *onye a aburo ezigbo onye obodo* – this is not a(n) (authentic) person or this is not a good community person respectively. These two (moral) statements mean the same. Again, an elderly person may be called, *okenye na aza Beenu*. The Igbo people of Akokwa in Imo State use Beenu as a derogatory name for unacceptable character. Okenye means an elder. So Okenye na aza Beenu is an elder who indulges in unacceptable behaviour, another name is *okenye na agwo ofe*, *okenye no n’ulo ma ewu muo n’ogbu*. These names show that an elder despite his/her age can be a social misfit (p.117).

Authentic personhood, therefore, resides in one's character; it is this character that defines authentic personhood, as it reflects consistent dispositions and behaviors (Obioha, 2020). In this view, a person's character serves as the embodiment of their personality. The Igbo saying ‘*agwa bu mma*’ or ‘*agwa bu mmadu*’ (“it is one's character that defines him or her”) encapsulates this understanding. Similarly, the phrase ‘*nma nwanyi bu agwa ya*’ (“a woman's beauty lies in her character”) emphasizes that beauty refers more to a woman's personality than her outward appearance. It is important to note that in Igbo, the word ‘*mma*’ signifies both beauty and goodness, making the phrase adaptable to mean either “a woman's beauty lies in her character” or “a woman's goodness lies in her character.” Consequently, the terms beauty and goodness can be used interchangeably in this context, such that the expressions ‘*nwanyi mara nma*’ or ‘*nwanyi oma*’ can denote either a beautiful woman or a good woman. This linguistic and conceptual analysis of beauty and goodness is essential for understanding how these notions relate to the concept of authentic personhood within Igbo thought (Obioha, 2020). With this understanding in mind, we can now explore the concept of ‘*Ezigbo Mmadu*’ (the good or authentic person) in Igbo philosophy.

Towards an Understanding of Ezigbo Mmadu

Every human society operates within a framework of principles, values, and norms by which individuals are morally assessed and categorized. These societal templates serve as the foundation for evaluating actions and thoughts as good or bad, right or wrong. On this moral scale, individuals and groups are differentiated, with each placed within the broader moral context of the society. This categorization is rooted in what a society considers the model of a good person, someone worthy of emulation, which in turn influences the nature and direction of interpersonal relationships. In the Igbo culture, this moral model is personalized in the concept of ‘*ezigbo mmadu*’ (the good or authentic person) (Ukpokolo, 2011). Building on this understanding, Agulana (2011) contrasts the concept of ‘*ezigbo mmadu*’ with its opposite, ‘*ajo mmadu*’ (a bad person). Through this comparison, Agulana highlights the qualities that define a good person and the societal values that shape these moral judgments. In his words:

The Igbo term for a good person is *ezigbo mmadu*. It is a term that is descriptive of good character or positive moral conduct in a person or group of persons. Among the Igbo, a person is referred as *ezigbo mmadu* who possesses good conduct or moral fiber – qualities that are worthy of emulation by others. But *ezigbo mmadu* is not merely descriptive of a person's character or conduct; it is also expressive of a person who is equable, unflappable, even-tempered and levelheaded. *Ezigbo mmadu* has as its converse, the phrase *ajo mmadu*. *Ajo mmadu* is a term used to describe a bad man or woman, where the word *ajo* means 'bad', that is, the opposite of 'good'. A person is *ajo mmadu* who is flawed or defective in character. With particular focus on *ezigbo mmadu*, the Igbo identify some special qualities of life a person must possess before he or she can be so described. In the pre-colonial setting, for example, apart from the possession of good moral conduct, a person was considered *ezigbo mmadu* who respected the customary laws of community and was loyal to the preternatural forces that ruled in the cosmic order (139).

To fully understand the concept of 'ezigbo mmadu' (good or authentic person) in Igbo thought, it must be examined in relation to Igbo morality and its dimensions of social recognition and responsibility (Ukpokolo, 2011). The word 'ezigbo' or 'ezi' signifies what is correct, good, or acceptable. In human relationships, 'ezigbo' encompasses traits such as sincerity, truthfulness, self-respect, trustworthiness, fidelity, genuineness, fairness, dependability, loyalty, faithfulness, and integrity. Its opposite, 'ajo' or 'njo', refers to what is ugly, bad, wicked, or evil—not in terms of physical appearance but in reference to one's character, behavior, or conduct. The term 'mmadu', which means "beauty exists," reflects the Igbo belief that beauty is inherent in every human being. However, this beauty can be lost through bad conduct, transforming an individual into an 'ajo mmadu' (bad person). This idea emphasizes that the beauty given by the Supreme Being is not permanent but must be cultivated and nurtured. Failure to do so leads to a loss of the essence of humanity, causing one to become a social misfit or deviant within the community.

In the Igbo worldview, human beings are moral agents accountable for their actions, and losing this inherent beauty through immoral behaviour can result in severe consequences, including social ostracism. In extreme cases, individuals may be excommunicated from the community. To regain their standing, a person who has committed an abomination must follow a process of confession and restitution, acknowledging their wrongdoing and adhering to communal procedures for reintegration (Ukpokolo, 2011).

When the Igbo people say, "O bughi ezigbo mmadu"—meaning "He/she is not a good person"—or "O bu ajo mmadu", meaning "He/she is a bad person," such statements carry profound social consequences. These declarations do more than describe behaviour; they effectively exclude the person from the moral fabric of the community, determining their access to social resources and influencing their social standing. To deny a person's goodness is to assert that they lack essential qualities such as sincerity, self-respect, trustworthiness, and integrity. In other words, their humanity is compromised (Otakpor, 2006). The expression "Ajo mmadu bu ajo ofia"—"A bad

person is an evil forest"—in Igbo cosmology further illustrates this social exclusion. The 'ajo ofia' (evil forest) was historically a place where the bodies of those who had committed grave offences or abominations were discarded. Such individuals were ostracized in life and denied proper burial rites after death, separating them not only from human social life but also from the spiritual world. In a culture where burial rites were essential for ushering the deceased into the ancestral realm, being cast into the evil forest was akin to eternal damnation. This comparison resonates with the Christian concept of Hell, where the condemned rot alongside the Devil (Ukpokolo, 2011).

Agulana (2011) notes that certain fundamental qualities of life and character are required before someone can be considered an 'ezigbo mmadu' (good person). In Igbo society, a communitarian ethos prevails, meaning that to achieve the status of an 'ezigbo mmadu', one must align with the community's values and moral thought system. Thus, it is within the communal context that individuals are judged to be either good or bad (Ukpokolo, 2011). This understanding leads to an exploration of the specific qualities that define a good person in Igbo society.

Qualities of Ezigbo Mmadu in the Igbo Worldview

Agulana (2011), in a schematic pattern, outlines the essential qualities that make one an 'ezigbo mmadu' (a good person) in Igbo traditional thought. These qualities, as noted by Obioha (2020), also form the foundational elements of authentic personhood or 'ezigbo nwaafu' (a good son of the soil) in Igbo thought. According to Obioha, authentic personhood is deeply rooted in an individual's character and adherence to the moral and communal values that the Igbo society upholds. He further explains:

The essential structures of authentic personhood not only describe a good person (ezigbo mmadu) but also enhance personhood and wholesome human relations and makes possible the realization of a good human community. No community will thrive without these essentialities. Without these essential structures, life (ndu) and existence (obibi ndu) may slip into the Hobbesian state of nature where life is nasty, brutish, short and poor. In a community where individuals do not exhibit these moral essentialities and responsibilities, ndu and obibi ndu will become a case of misery, pain and suffering(p. 118)

We explore these qualities as outlined by Agulana and Obioha, hereunder:

Community Consciousness and Respect for Social Norms or Customs

Among Africans, it is a common belief that no one can live successfully outside the social setting or human community. In Igbo culture, from birth to death, individuals are consistently reminded of the value and importance of the communal group, emphasizing their dependence on the kin group and the interconnectedness of social life. A person is considered a "good person" (ezigbo mmadu) only when they adhere to social customs and norms. For the Igbo, what defines right and wrong is intrinsically linked to these social customs, with an individual's actions judged based on community approval or disapproval.

In this context, "community" refers to people of a shared kinship or lineage, regardless of their geographical location. This is why we can speak of Igbo communities in America, Yoruba communities in Brazil, or Hausa communities in Senegal. Across African cultures, the community is believed to possess redeeming qualities, meaning that individual antisocial behaviours can be corrected through a renewed sense of communal contact and solidarity. This sense of communal belonging underscores the belief that the community is supreme over the individual, a belief that distinguishes the African conception of community from that in the West. Abraham (1992) highlights this distinction, arguing that while Western cultures often view the community as a secular institution, in Africa, it is conceived as having a sacred unity. This unity encompasses not only its living members but also the dead (who exist in a less substantial form) and the yet-unborn children, reflecting the enduring continuity of African communities.

In this conception, members of the community who exist in a more substantial form are believed to be in constant communion with the deceased members through shared kinship. Mbiti (1990) emphasizes this point by stating that Africans believe the individual "does not and cannot exist alone except corporately." This belief is reflected among the Igbo in the saying: "No man, however great, can win a judgment against his clan or community." This underscores the deeply ingrained communal values within African societies, where the individual is inextricably linked to the collective. However, this raises a critical question: How are the norms of the community transmitted from one generation to the next, ensuring they remain socially acceptable and binding on members? The answer is both simple and clear. In non-literate societies like the pre-modern Igbo, cultural norms and social customs were predominantly transmitted orally. This oral tradition allowed for the continuous passing down of communal values, ensuring that the younger generation adhered to the same principles that guided their ancestors. Through stories, proverbs, rituals, and communal interactions, these norms were preserved and perpetuated, forming the backbone of social cohesion and identity.

At times, these norms and values were conveyed through other means, such as pithy sayings, religious indoctrination, or moralistic teachings. Over time, these social customs became deeply revered by the community and eventually attained the status of religious dogma. Disobedience to these established norms often came to be seen as a sacrilege or abomination against the preternatural forces that held the society together. This explains why, in ancient cultures, social misdemeanours were met with the most severe sanctions or penalties. In Igbo society, the word for social custom is 'Omenala'. 'Omenala' is derived from three Igbo words: 'Ome' (meaning "that which obtains"), 'na' (in), and 'ala' (society). When combined, these words express the idea of "that which obtains in society," referring to cultural values and norms that are upheld by the community. In the words of Okorocha (1987), "omenala" represents those norms and practices that define and regulate the social life of the Igbo people. It is through these customs that individuals are integrated into the communal fold, with any breach of them seen as an affront to the community and the spiritual forces that underpin its existence. In his words:

The moral code of Iboland commonly spoken of as omenala defines various aspects of behaviour and social activities that are approved while at the same time indicating those aspects that are prohibited (p.101).

In its traditional or pre-modern context, Igbo society was governed by a detailed system of rules, guidelines, and sanctions, many of which continue to exist today. These rules encompass various aspects of social life, such as marriage, family structure, burial rites, and initiation into secret societies. Additionally, traditional sanctions exist to penalize those who violate community norms. Central to Igbo cultural and moral life is the concept of 'nso ala', or taboos. Violating 'nso ala' brings upon oneself a severe curse, often invoking the wrath of invisible or malevolent forces. Certain acts, such as incest or bestiality, are regarded as egregious violations of 'nso ala' and are seen as capable of bringing calamity not only upon the individual but also upon the entire community. A responsible Igbo citizen, referred to as 'ezigbo nwa afo Igbo' (a good son or daughter of Igbo land), is expected to uphold societal values and avoid any actions that could disrupt the social order or tear apart the fabric that binds the community together. The Igbo place significant emphasis on maintaining societal harmony and respect for traditions, as these are seen as essential to both individual and communal well-being.

Loyalty to Ancestors

It is important to note that the Igbo worldview is imbued with a variety of spiritual forces, encompassing both benevolent and malevolent entities. In practice, the distinction between these two realms is often blurred. It is generally expected that every rational and level-headed member of the community acknowledges the existence of these preternatural forces. The spiritual realm is believed to hold as much if not more, reality than the physical world; events occurring in the tangible world are often seen as reflections or manifestations of occurrences in the spiritual realm. This connection prompts the living to seek communion with beings from the spiritual domain. McVeigh(1974) highlights the nature of African cosmogony, noting that the sense of dependence on the mysteries of life fosters awe and reverence, compelling individuals to connect with the unknown. The belief in the potential for humans to engage with metaphysical forces in the chthonic realm carries social advantages. It encourages individuals to aspire to a life of moral virtue within their social contexts. Such a virtuous life is deemed necessary for establishing relations with the preternatural forces of the underworld.

A well-known Igbo proverb encapsulates this sentiment: 'nezie, nezie, ezigbo nwa Igbo nhujuru ara nne ya afo ga asopuru ndichie', meaning that a well-nurtured Igbo child will show reverence to their ancestors. Here, being "well-nurtured" implies having a thorough understanding of 'omenala' (social customs). This knowledge guides individuals toward leading a life characterized by high moral standards and social responsibility. The focus here lies not in the validity of beliefs regarding the chthonic realm or the preternatural forces inhabiting it, but rather in the recognition that traditional Igbo society possessed a sophisticated understanding of certain concepts, such as the value of breast milk for infant nourishment and health. This knowledge aligns with contemporary findings in health and nutritional medicine, suggesting that the assertions made by some European scholars during the colonial era—characterizing traditional Africans as having a pre-colonial or prescientific mentality—are indeed inaccurate.

To return to the point on the role of ancestors in the social life of Africans, the Igbo, like other Africans, see the ancestors as maintaining a beneficent relationship with the living. The ancestors

play such crucial roles as helping to ward off evil from the living members of their old communities. They also help procure good fortunes for their erstwhile family members, as well as ensure that social amity prevails in the human community. However, the relationship between the ancestors; the living dead as Mbiti (1957) calls them - is a reciprocal one. In his highly popular book, *African Religions and Philosophy* Mbiti (1957) describes the living dead as “a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who know him in his life as well as being alive in the world of the spirits.”

A comparative illustrative example can be found in the Christian Bible, specifically the account of Lazarus the beggar. In this narrative, Lazarus, although deceased, is depicted as alive in Abraham's bosom, engaging in conversation with the inhabitants of Paradise, illustrating the notion of continued existence and interaction beyond death. In the African context, the relationship between humans and the spiritual forces residing in the underworld is characterized by mutual exchange. People often offer ritual sacrifices or offerings to the deities, expecting reciprocation in the form of protection from misfortunes or malevolent forces. When a deity fails to uphold its end of the agreement, it may be abandoned by its worshippers, who will then seek a more responsive god that aligns with their immediate needs or desires. This dynamic might clarify why, in traditional cultures, adherents often felt unencumbered when shifting their allegiances from one deity to another or engaging with multiple divinities simultaneously. This fluidity in worship reflects the pragmatic approach many communities adopt in their spiritual practices, prioritizing the efficacy of their relationship with the divine over rigid adherence to a single faith.

Good Moral Conduct

In addition to devotion to the gods and adherence to customary laws, the Igbo people place a high value on morality and sound character among their members. Within the traditional Igbo society, prior to the influences of Christianity and European colonialism, an individual's worth was largely determined by their conformity to the moral codes of the community. In essence, a person could only be deemed an ‘ezigbo mmadu’ (a good person) if they adhered to the norms that bind the community together. The prevailing belief, which remains relevant today, is that moral goodness fosters mutual healing and enhances social harmony among community members. Consequently, a good person, in Igbo understanding, is someone who consistently engages in morally admirable actions, embodying decency, honour, and justice. It is important to note that merely abstaining from immoral acts is insufficient; an ‘ezigbo mmadu’ is also expected to detest and actively oppose socially reprehensible behaviours.

Among the pre-modern Igbo, actions such as stealing, incest, adultery, and suicide were strongly condemned. These moral vices were believed not only to generate social discord but also to offend the preternatural forces that govern the community. To articulate their disdain for such behaviours, the Igbo utilize various terms and phrases, including “nso ala” (abominations or desecrations of the land), “ime aru” (moral pollutions), “agwa ojoo” (bad conduct), and ‘ihe ojoo’ (a bad act). As in many moral communities, appropriate sanctions or punishments were imposed on social deviants who violated societal norms. In cases of transgressions, ritual sacrifices or propitiatory offerings (‘ichu aja’ in Igbo) were typically performed to avert any ensuing evils. While numerous

socially approved actions and qualities distinguish an ‘ezigbo mmadu’, a comprehensive discussion of all these attributes is beyond the scope of this text. Nevertheless, it suffices to assert that a good person, according to the Igbo worldview, is characterized by justice, honesty, and hospitality. Such an individual also shows respect to elders and actively collaborates with others to maintain social order within the community.

Conscious of the Dignity of the Other and Respects it

Respect is a fundamental human attitude that involves recognizing and valuing the worth or significance of someone or something. This attitude necessitates acknowledging what others consider valuable, regardless of whether we agree with them. When our views align with theirs, the respect we express is positive, fostering their cause and supporting the subject of our respect. Conversely, if we disagree but still maintain a respectful demeanour, we engage in negative respect, which, while less affirming, does not undermine the individual but rather tolerates their existence. In the Igbo language, the term for respect is ‘nsopuru’. The prefix “nso” denotes holiness or sacredness. In this context, ‘nso-ala’ refers to communal entities or values deemed sacred, which must not be violated or desecrated. Therefore, ‘nsopuru’ embodies the attitude of refraining from violating or desecrating the human person, recognizing that every individual (‘mmadu’) is sacred. This sacredness is founded on the belief that each person is a creation of God. As beings made in the image of God, humans represent the beauty of life, expressed in the phrase ‘mma-ndu’ (‘mma’ meaning beauty or good, and ‘ndu’ meaning life). The Igbo aphorism ‘Mmadu bu onyinye si n’aka Chineke bia’ translates to "man is a gift from God." This acknowledgement establishes that every individual possesses inherent worth, and deserves respect and dignified treatment. An authentic person recognizes this dignity and treats others with respect, not based on their material possessions, wealth, or social standing, but solely on their humanity. Thus, everyone, regardless of socio-economic status or societal position, is entitled to respect and dignity. An Authentic individual embodies these values in their relationships with others, fostering harmonious and peaceful coexistence. This environment is essential for human well-being, as genuine well-being cannot thrive in an atmosphere of rancour and intolerance. Consequently, within Igbo thought, a person regarded as authentic or ‘ezigbo mmadu’ refrains from using others merely as a means to an end, valuing each individual for their inherent worth.

THE “END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS” PRINCIPLE, AS A NEGATION OF THE CONCEPT OF EZIGBO MMADU IN IGBO LAND

A panoramic view of our discourse reveals that Niccolò Machiavelli's morality stands in stark contrast to the Igbo conception of ‘ezigbo mmadu’ or authentic personhood. The definitions of ‘mmadu’ and ‘ezigbo mmadu’ elucidate this distinction clearly. The criteria that define a good person within the Igbo worldview are intricately linked to communal values. Any inclination towards Machiavellian morality—which advocates for deception, treachery, and cruelty when deemed necessary in interpersonal dealings—contradicts the foundational principles of authentic personhood. In Igbo thought, as outlined earlier, being a good or authentic person is not situational or circumstantial. Unlike Machiavelli’s principles, which may condone duplicity under certain

conditions, Igbo ethics demand a consistent commitment to honesty and straightforwardness in interactions with others. Adherence to the laws of the land, a community-oriented mindset, respect for the will of ancestors, and an acute awareness of others' humanity and dignity all highlight the in-applicability of Machiavellian principles within the Igbo framework of morality.

Each action taken within the Igbo community is executed with a consciousness of its potential impact on others; actions are never taken in isolation. This inherent consideration underscores why crimes such as money rituals, fraud, theft, and other acts rooted in cruelty and dishonesty are vehemently condemned by traditional Igbo laws. The potential for such actions to bring about significant change within the community does not justify their practice; they remain outlawed and indefensible in Igbo thought. Thus, this examination illustrates the profound incompatibility between Machiavelli's principles and the Igbo conception of 'ezigbo mmadu'. In light of this, Ukpokolo encapsulates the Igbo understanding of 'ezigbo mmadu' in the following way:

A good person is one who abides by the principles of communal interests and must necessarily exhibit those non-material qualities associated with goodness. Such a person stands for the common good and when self-interest conflicts with the common good, the overriding consideration is to promote the common good. Ezigbo mmadu is that person to whom the members of the community can entrust responsibility knowing fully well that he/she is responsible, honest, trustworthy, and dependable. An ezigbo mmadu does not cheat or defraud people of their belongings and dues. An ezigbo mmadu does not relegate his role as husband, father, wife, mother, daughter, son, brothers and their children, and the in-laws but carries out the social roles and responsibilities as demanded of him/her by the customs and traditions of the people. He recognizes the power of the gods and ancestors and gives them their dues. He does not pretend that humankind is completely self-sufficient. As the head of the family, an ezigbo mmadu was also the priest of his household. The Ezigbo mmadu is sought after whenever the need for third-party consultation arises. It could be for the purpose of conflict resolution, peacemaking, or leadership. It could also be for choosing marriage partners, business associates or arranging for the apprenticeship of one's children. He is the epitome of fairness and justice. As a businessman he settles his apprentices when the time is due; he does not deprive the poor and the underprivileged of their rights and is courageous enough to stand for that which is right. For one to be ezigbo mmadu he/she must live a socially acceptable life, a life of integrity. A good person must not smear his hands with blood, that is commit murder or be an accomplice. He must, therefore, not be involved with homicide for punishment is from both the living and the ancestors. (pp.40-41).

Indeed, for the Igbo, the concept of good is inextricably linked to their social life. Issues of moral significance and value arise from the communal principle of morality that governs relationships among individuals. Consequently, behaviours that undermine these values are met with

disapproval. For instance, when an individual embezzle public funds, cheats a neighbor, or fails to honor agreements with an apprentice, such a person is deemed ‘ajo mmadu’, the antithesis of ‘ezigbo mmadu’. Morally bankrupt individuals are excluded from leadership roles within the community, which embodies the collective existence of the people. This understanding reinforces the awareness among individual Igbo persons that their actions are evaluated based on the social and moral standards established within the community’s belief system. Furthermore, their conduct significantly influences their ability to navigate human relationships. As noted by Ukpokolo (2011), this consciousness compels individuals to act in accordance with the community’s moral expectations, reinforcing the collective ethos. Given this context, we can confidently conclude that the Machiavellian principle represents a stark contradiction to the Igbo concept of ‘ezigbo mmadu’ or authentic personhood in Igbo thought.

Conclusion

In this study, we have thoroughly demonstrated, through descriptive analysis, that the Machiavellian principle of “the end justifies the means” fundamentally contradicts the Igbo concept of an authentic person, or ‘ezigbo mmadu’. However, it is crucial to recognize that the Igbo society, like any other, is not utopian; it is not inhabited exclusively by perfect individuals or ‘ezigbo mmadu’. While there are certainly individuals in Igbo land who exemplify the ideal of ‘ezigbo mmadu’ or authentic personhood, numerous instances exist where individuals of Igbo descent have acted in ways that starkly reflect the Machiavellian principle. For example, issues such as money rituals, drug trafficking, kidnapping, and theft permeate Igbo society today, standing in sharp contrast to the very laws and customs upheld by the people. These realities indicate that Igbo society is home to imperfect individuals. Thus, this study should be interpreted within the context of its intent: to illuminate the Igbo people’s conception of an ideal good person and how this ideal diverges significantly from Machiavellian principles. Moreover, the Igbo ideal of ‘ezigbo mmadu’ embodies a broader human aspiration for a certain perfection that fuels the foundation of a good society. Through this exploration, we underscore the value of striving for ethical standards that foster communal harmony and moral integrity, ultimately enriching societal well-being.

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