



Individual's Conviction, Rule of Law and the Question of Harmony in Benoit Girardin: A Tool for Political Realization

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a broad exposition and investigative conceptual relevance of Benoit Girardin's moral and political philosophy, depicting the essence and fundamentals for individual's commitment in relation to social harmony. Conviction at the individuals' level plays a significant role that enables accountability, efficiency, limitation of power and justice at every level, required in the shaping of every society as well advocating, for a sustainable outcome. It is however noted that, there is no progress without peace and harmony, the nature and quality of integrity and ethical conduct of individuals at every level of the society is paramount and applauded, if the role of law is very much applicable for when we downplay on our diversity as individuals, the consequences become unavoidable. When the law is fair and treats all equal, it enables to create a binding force, conscious of consequential acts. These elements in Benoit Girardin, constitutes then, a paradigm in shaping the future and the political setting of every society, where a functioning democratic setting warrants as well a free and fair electoral processes. For when the political leadership of a country fails, the institutions of that country automatically fails since there are maintained when the political system is viable to promote justice, limitation and transparency

Keywords: *Individuals conviction, social harmony, Institutions, Political stability, Justice, Democracy*

1. INTRODUCTION

"The unplanned state is no state at all"

For every society to fudge ahead, it requires a dedicated people with a common vision and commitment, who collectively seeks and establish a common path that suits its interest and that of the yet unborn to follow. In this line, mapping out a way forward becomes critical for a genuine and sustainable progress as well stabilizing the society. The individual consciousness/commitment, in particular concerning social issues becomes major. That is, individual's behavior towards others and to what belongs to all, determines the nature of the relationship and fate of that society concerning its realization and aspirations. The rule of law is fundamental for ensuring justice, equity and the protection of citizens' rights. Girardin's focus on the role of law underscores the importance of a legal framework that is fair, transparent and accountable. Strengthening institutions, combatting corruption, and upholding human rights will then be crucial in building a more just and equitable society. A throw back on ancient Greek societies in particular will make us understand why philosophers of this epoch accounts on the natural basis of society, which views man as per Aristotle to be a political and socialized 'animal' by nature, who cannot live in isolation, a self-sufficing life¹. By this political theorization, accounting on the rationality of man, then depicts every individual desires the 'supreme Good'. Accountability, efficiency, limitation of power and justice at every level of the society and more importantly on governance is seen as a model to attaining and maintaining a sustainable outcome.

However, the integrity and ethical implications of all towards the good can no longer shy off ethical values; equity becomes nominal for people to live together. The desirable ethical implication and integrity of individuals towards political and social greatness for its interdependence is possible and is metaphorically a two sides of the same coin. Value enables a common ground to speak of ethics in politics. We can then held of individuals conviction as one's ability to recognise, interpret and act upon multiple principles and values according to the standards within a given field or context, or better still, individuals conviction could equally be referred to "... [as having] a strong and absolute belief that something is right or wrong, moral or immoral"². This in return permits the promotion of social cohesion, respect for diversity and peaceful coexistence among different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Reconciliation, and emphases on dialogue and understanding can contributes to a more stable and harmoniously unified nation/nations. Individuals consciousness is seen as an asset particularly when placed in the position of deciding for others in an egalitarian bases. Nkwameh Nkrumah

¹ M.S.C Okolo., *African Literature as Political Philosophy*, London, New York, Codesria in Association with Zed Books, 2007 p.41.

² Skitka, L.J and Bauman, C.W., *Moral Conviction and Political Engagement*, Article in Political Psychology, Published by Reseachgate, February 2008, [Http://10.1111/J.1467-9221.2007.00611.X](http://10.1111/J.1467-9221.2007.00611.X), p.2.

in developing his philosophical consciencism lay more emphases on promoting individuals' development, but in such a way that the conditions for the development of all becomes the conditions for the development of each; that is, in such a way that the individual development does not introduce such diversities as to destroy the egalitarian basis.³

This piece however is then a reflection on the conceptual relevance and essence of Benoit Girardin's⁴ fundamentals, Girardin's framework however provides a lens through which consider the role of individual agency, legal institutions and social harmony in shaping the political realization and future developments of a society which if encourage can work towards a more inclusive, just and harmonious outcome. It equally establish a foundation to work towards a more aspiring outcome, where a functioning democracy maintain institutional development as well shaping the future and the political setting of the society particularly by guaranteeing a free and fair electoral processes, while laying proper emphasis and contributions for a binding mechanism, which is crucial if people are to live harmoniously in a pluralistic society. The methodology however is to start here from the individual's particular place, focusing on what the individual's specific context can offer for understanding, creating, and investigating concepts.

2. INDIVIDUALS CONVICTION: OVERCOMING DIVERSITY TOWARDS GREATNESS

Basically, Benoit Girardin by laying emphasis on individual's conviction clearly did so on the bases that, harmony and prospect of every society starts with the individuals' conscious mindset. It is however noted that conviction on the part of individual plays as a drive, since personal beliefs and values drives political actions. In a context of crises, individual consciousness could encourage citizens to be actively engaged in shaping the future of their society, advocating for their rights, and participating in democratic processes. In exploring Immanuel Kant, Girardin caution on the importance for individuals to: "act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature."⁵ To this fact, Benoit Girardin thinks such a basic principle lay the basis for a cosmopolitan culture, peace and trade.⁶ Where a diversity of individual can live, given that, diversity has become more and higher on the political agenda. However, Girardin maintains that, a state that wants to steer its own ship has to show a solid ability to manage a diversity of cultures and behaviors as a social asset, within a set of social reference values that keep society together, coherent and united.⁷ Traces of socially oriented societies remains and continues to be traced within thinkers. Kwame Nkrumah on the one hand held that, "when the plurality of men exists in society, and it is accepted that each man needs to be treated as an end in himself, not merely as a means, there transpires a transition from ethics to politics."⁸

Moreover, the last third of the twentieth century has seen fresh and radical thinking aiming to lay a solid foundation on which societies might find a way of living together. This could be attributed to the socialized nature of man, which like an organism, enables each and every part performing its unique role contributing for the smooth functioning of the whole to reach its goal. As like the United Nations 1948 declaration, "Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible"⁹ They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in the spirit of brotherhood.¹⁰ This at the same time recognizes the inherent dignity of every human being seen as free and responsible.¹¹ It is not to be forgotten that, when we downplay on our diversity as individuals, the consequences become unavoidable. A clear set of agreed principles provides a sound basis to accommodate the diversity of faiths, customs practices as long as they do not undermine social coherence.¹²

³ Nkrumah, K., *Consciencism*, in, *I Am Because We Are: Readings in Africana philosophy*, revised edition, edited with introductions by Fred Lee Hord, (Mzee Lasana Okpara) and Jonathan Scott Lee, Amherst and Boston, University of Massachusetts press, 2016, P.68.

⁴ Benoit Girardin is a Swiss philosopher of the contemporary and author of several scientific works. His political philosophy is centered in viewing the world as a global village so as to promote humanity through the politics of sustainability and reconciliation thereby promoting justice as a fair system through democratic values, encouraged by what he called the three foundational fold (efficiency, accountability and limitation to power) though *ethics in politics* to him does not strive for an ideal or perfect [politics] but merely optimal politics (Benoit Girardin., *Ethics in Politics: Why it Matters More Than Ever and How It Can Make a Different*, Geneva, Globethics.Net, 2012, p.156.) This is because ethics to him adds a decisive value to politics by securing fair treatment of political stakeholders, stressing equity and fairness, reminding us that the limitation of power is essential in politics, and adding a long-term perspective. By contrast, impunity, arbitrariness and cruelty cannot count on wide support, either in individual societies or in the community of nations (*Ibid.* pp.156-157). In this his must outstanding scientific work entitled *Ethics in politics* translated in 2014, happens to be one and the most supportive pillar of this research paper.

⁵ Immanuel Kant., cited by Girardin, B., in *Ethics in Politics*, p.31.

⁶ *Idem*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.67.

⁸ Kwame Nkrumah., *Consciencism*, in, *I am because we are: Readings in Africana philosophy*, revised edition, p.68.

⁹ United Nations (Un), *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Right 1948*, Published at <http://www.jus.uio.no/lm/en/manifest/un.universal.declaration.of.human.rights.1948>, Copyright(C) 1949 United Nations (Un), p.8.

¹⁰ United Nations (Un), *United Nations Universal Declaration Of Human Right 1948*, p.3.

¹¹ Benoit Girardin., *Ethics in Politics*, p.42.

¹² *Ibid.*, P.68.

Mondoue Roger, Professor at the University of Dschang and head of department at the philosophy department of the University of Douala opines from a Marxist and egalitarian perspective that “*Pour nous, l’individu doit prendre conscience qu’il n’est pas seulement un être-pour-soi; il est aussi un être pour-autrui*”.¹³ When an individual acknowledges the fact they are not a being for themselves, by themselves but for others, it eventually creates a sense of belonging and self-realization which is attainable within the group / whole in which the parts relies. For knowing thyself, entails a balance within the whole for an eminent realization.

3. POLICIES/ JUSTICE AND EQUITY: MUTUAL COOPERATION FOR SOCIAL BALANCE

Everyone deserves the good irrespective of their background in every society, and as such, a society which has objectively set a clear path, will eventually enable a sustainable atmosphere through favorable policies, just and equitable. When the law is accountable, efficient and appropriate, it creates a bond among the people, pertaining to the smooth functioning of the society. In this regards, faire-play enforces and see to it that, everyone is equal before the law for equity is essential if people are to live together peacefully in a pluralistic society.¹⁴ A well-ordered society is then founded on the principle of justice according to which is aim to work on the traditional conception of justice, which will lead to self-development and realization.

To liberal and political thinkers like Girardin and John Rawls in particular, talking on mutual cooperation entails a cover behind the veil of ignorance, an original position which charge out individuals to work out on certain fundamental principles of justice. Under the veil of ignorance, decision taking is void of aspects that might have brought in disintegration emanating from egoism or self-interest from some individuals. Citizens are then regarded by the fairness of justice to engage in social cooperation. Which in turn pave individuals to pursue certain shade values and ends¹⁵ within a fair system of cooperation between free and equal citizens.¹⁶ However, political decisions or politics as a whole “...is the realm of uncertainty. Political decisions and policies may result in unexpected or adverse consequences. Leaders are expected to think through the full implications of what they decide as well as how they handle the unexpected.”¹⁷ Taking a critical look at the recent uprising in Kenya, emanating from the 2024 Financial Bill, voted by parliament and approved by president William Ruto, was received by the Kenyan masses with a mixed feeling which eventually lead to a wide spread violence and confrontation between the police and angry protester in the streets, resulting to a dozen death, prompting president Ruto to take a U-turn concerning the Bill. That is exactly the consequences we get particularly when we adopt as laws without reaching or making a proper consultative.

Policies taken or about to be adopted should be able to reflect a mutual and cooperative outcome for political effectiveness also requires some closeness between citizens and decision-makers.¹⁸ That is, laws should be at the service or benefit of everyone for as Girardin clearly states, “Experience shows that many laws are better accepted if civil society organizations (social associations, professional organizations, trade unions, political and religious movements, etc.) have been involved in a consultative process and their views and practices taken into account.”¹⁹ Jiewuh Song on the other hand in an article *Justice and Cooperation* points on mutual cooperation as a base for self-realization within the whole that realizes the full individual within the whole in a way they wouldn’t have without the cooperation. In the authors words,

“Cooperation as mutual advantage, or interaction through which each participant is better off than she would be without the interaction; cooperation as reciprocity, or interaction in which all participants receives their fair share; and cooperation as productive interaction, that is, interaction that produces a different pattern or sum of benefit and burdens than would obtain without the interaction”²⁰

Here, productive interaction that produces a sum of benefit emphasizes on both the economic well-being of the citizens, which is made a priority and not an option of deliberation. Girardin fully stood on the point that ethics in politics considers economics and in particular economic limitations and resources as essential reference points for any political priority claiming to be realistic. It seeks also to highlight sound choices related to economic policy and establish true costs²¹. It was at this juncture that, the author of ethics in politics: why it matters and how it can make a change, concluded of Politics as an essential human activity-essential in building societies and communities based on rules, laws and a balance of conflicting interest.²²

¹³ Mondoue, R, *Nouveaux Philosophes et Antimarxisme : Autour de Marx est Mort De Jean-Marie Benoist*, Yaoundé, L’harmattan, 2009, p. 141.

¹⁴ Girardin, B ., *Ethics in Politics*, p.71.

¹⁵ Rawls, J., *Justice As Fairness: A Restatement*, P.20.

¹⁶ Rawls, J., *Political Liberalism*, Expanded edition, New York, Columbia University Press,1996, p.22.

¹⁷ Girardin, B., *Ethics in Politics*, pp.51-52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*,p.62.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.49.

²⁰ Jiewuh, Song., *Justice and Cooperation*, Ryuichi Yamaoka and Anonymous Reviewers Journal, the National Foundation of Korea, 2017, 263-290, Pp.266-267.

²¹ Girardin, B., *Ethics in Politics*, p.158.

²² Girardin, B., *Ethics in Politics*, p.9.

4. INSTITUTIONS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE, A DEMOCRATIC SETTING FOR POLITICAL REGULARIZATION

Institutions remain a beacon by which good governance and justice are manifested through. Institutions "...are rules that govern people's behavior in complex social interactions...institutions are rules that people are motivated to follow".²³ The stabilization/ realization of every society therefore depend on the strength, by which its institutions command, for a country becomes strong through its institutions and not necessarily through a government. To enable social living together, a regulatory framework is required that allows and protects social ties interactions, contacts, solidarity, status, clans and social identities.²⁴ Under a democratic system as held by the author, laws are fundamental elements of governance which are indispensable to a political institution. Democracy here assures and accords to citizens a certain number of fundamental rights which no other system except democratic one will assure them²⁵ since all men are naturally equal in the state of perfect freedom to order their actions and the pose of their possession.²⁶

Girardin's overall frame work provides a passage or road through which the individual role, legal institutions and social harmony enables in shaping the political realization of a society by promoting principles that can work towards a more inclusive, just and harmonious society. Girardin considers and link institutions to what he calls ethical tree. By this ethical three, the roots are link to efficiency, accountability and limitation which enables its stability on the ground, while the trunk is seen as justice, branches to sustainability and leaves to solidarity, rule of law, equity, responsibility, freedom, peace and security, identity and diversity

Considering and linking the trunk to justice speaks volume since, justice or perceived justice, to the author nurtures trust in the people in to authority and political power and binds citizens to each other, and once they feel that the rule of law will equally apply to all²⁷ justice acts as cement binding a society together.²⁸ Institutions are then created to regulate the behavior and actions of the plurality of men in society in such a way as to conserve the fundamental ethical principle of the initial worthiness of each individual.²⁹ Institutions need some consistency between their core mission and, their competences. Their organizational structure processes, their resources and their culture.³⁰ This enables that; no power is unlimited for "several schemes are possible and not exclusive. Executive powers may be limited by legislative power and both by an independent judiciary"³¹

Moreover, to the author of *Ethics in Politics* Benoit Girardin, the ethical dimension of governance has to do with effectiveness and accountability, and the philosophy of delegation pays tribute to limitation of power.³² Thus, the three ethical prerequisites are taken into account. Good governance aims at reflecting justice in the public sector, the rule of law, equity and equitable access to resources, capacities and opportunities. It can therefore not ignore security, sustainability and solidarity. Good governance therefore necessitates the services of "a good leader who respects the fundamental basic rule of life."³³ Explaining why democracy is seen by the author as being better able than other systems to take into account the ethical requirement of politics for a functioning democracy is accountable and cannot but listen to citizen expectations.³⁴

Institutions however helps to guarantee equality before the law and civil liberty, ensuring freedom of speech, expression and association, and against arbitrary treatment by the state and this is further enhance by the constitutional separation of power between executive, legislative and judiciary.³⁵ When power is checked and limited, it tends to be effective and accountable. The size of institution is critical to their effectiveness. Girardin, thinks a massive and bureaucracies one collapses under their own weight. That is, offices that are too small have no weight and remain in the role a gadfly in other word, too complex or badly designed institutions dilute responsibility so that the buck or chain never stops anywhere fragmenting institutions may result in

²³ Guala, F., *Understanding Institutions, Science and Philosophy of Living Together*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2016, p. xvii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.52-53.

²⁵ Dahl, R.A., *De La Democratie*, Paris, Nouveaux Horizons, 1998, p.49

²⁶ Locke, J., *Two Treaties of Government*, London, New Edition Corrected, Vol V, Printed for Thomas Tegy, 1823, p.269.

²⁷ Girardin, B., *Ethics in Politics*, Pp.64-65.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.64.

²⁹ Nkrumah, K., *Consciencism*, in, *I Am Because we are: Readings in Africana Philosophy*, revised edition, p.68.

³⁰ Girardin, B., *Ethics in Politics*, p.101.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.60.

³² *Ibid.*, p.99.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.141.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.159.

³⁵ Held, D., *Models of Democracy*, United Kingdom, third edition, Polity Press, 2008, p.153

reduced consistency and efficiency, same as over centralizing them may demotivate those working at the lower levels and slow down the flow of information so that it becomes neither reflective or imitative.³⁶

Some institutions that were first of all useful could later turn to lose their usefulness over the years and rather stand as a job provision centers amounting from its unwillingness to meaningful reforms. Political systems may employ constitution and laws to establish rules that set limits through institutions, governed by checks and balances and with this, we may then say that limitation of power is then no longer a matter of goodwill but of compulsory basic rules and legally binding provisions, which such regimes to the author achieves greater stability and predictability, although it will or maybe never be complete.³⁷

Institutional diversification makes political power more credible, acceptable, and long lasting and secure.³⁸ When roles and responsibilities in a political decision making process or institutions remain unspecified or are left to individual influence, and power games, then the door is open to concealed decision making and endless blame game.³⁹ Institutions for public management and unbiased trials are therefore needed together with, power and lawful force.⁴⁰ Rules and institutions are then created that will bind and limit power and provisions in case of abuse, excess or infringement are specified.⁴¹

5. CONCLUSION

Summarily, this piece had as objective to investigate the conceptual relevance of Benoit Girardin's moral and political philosophy which through a practical approach, reflects reality and how it could come about change, depicting the essence and fundamentals for individual's commitment to social harmony. To the author, individual rightful doing creates ground for an effective and smooth governing, enabling accountability, efficiency, limitation of power and justice at every level of the society and more importantly on attaining a more sustainable outcome. It is however noted with the author that, the nature and quality of integrity and ethical conduct of individuals at every level of the society is paramount and constitutes a paradigm. Girardin's overall frame work provides a passage through which the individual role, legal institutions and social harmony enables in shaping the political realization of a society by promoting principles that can work towards a more inclusive, just and harmonious outcome. The rule of law is fundamental for ensuring justice, equity and the protection of citizens' rights. Girardin's focus on the rule of law underscores the importance of a legal framework that is fair, transparent and accountable. Strengthening institutions, combatting corruption, and upholding human rights will then be crucial in building a more just and equitable society. Since the desirable ethical implication and integrity of individuals towards political and social greatness for its interdependence is possible and is metaphorically a two sides of the same coin. Value enables a common ground to speak of ethics in politics. This in return permits the promotion of social cohesion, respect for diversity and peaceful coexistence among different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Reconciliation, and emphases on dialogue and understanding can then contributes to a more stable and harmoniously unified nation/nations.

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³⁶ Girardin, B., *Ethics in Politics*, p.102.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.60.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.59.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.48-49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.53.

⁴¹ Girardin, B., *Ethics in Politics*, p.61.

Guala, F. (2016). *Understanding Institutions, Science and Philosophy of Living Together*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press.

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