

**HUMAN NATURE, DIRTY HANDS AND SOCIAL DISORDER:
A SOCIO-POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE
NIGERIAN SOCIETY**

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Abstract

Contemporary society is replete with myriad social, economic, political problems and various forms of immorality. Every society desires order and peace hence many scholars (Vico, Hobbes, and Machiavelli, to mention a few) have attempted to locate the source of these malaises. A close analysis of some of their arguments indicates that social disorder, which is the hallmark of immorality, is a product of 'dirty hands' rooted in the human condition. A further scrutiny of this view vis-a-vis contemporary Nigerian socio-politics is the imperative of this paper; and we shall conclude that we can manage it by fighting to stop some of its undesirable consequences, but above all we must learn to live with this necessary evil despite the fact that Aquinas maintains that it is contrary to the order of reasonableness.

Whatever is contrary to the order of reason is contrary to the nature being as such, and what is reasonable is in accordance with human nature as such. The good of the human being is in accord with reason, and human evil is being outside the order of reasonableness... so human virtue which make good both the human person and his works, is in accordance with human nature just in so far as it is in accordance with reason, and vice is contrary to human nature just in so far as, it is contrary to the order of reasonableness. (ST, 1-11, g.71, a.2c)

Introduction

Human nature, 'dirty hands' and social order or disorder are so interwoven or intertwined in the world today that it becomes necessary

to refer to them as 'human condition'. Machiavelli explicitly casts doubts upon the unity of the virtues, at one point, when he insists that it is not possible (especially for a prince) to observe all the virtues because human condition does not permit it (Machiavelli, 1988). What is human condition? Is it patterned after human nature? What is human nature? Is it egotistic, as Hobbes, Machiavelli and Vico would want us to believe, or is it virtuous as Aristotle and the other Christian apologists suggest? Today there is greater insistence on the normative scope of ordering the society based on a rather exaggerated elevated conception of human nature rather than on its empirical/descriptive commonsensical aspect. This should not be so.

As the long history of moral conflict now makes clear to us, the idea of a single human function is mistaken. Human beings are not like tack-hammers or pruning knives, any more than they are like pieces of blank paper. Their natural needs do not converge inevitably and harmoniously to single pre-set aim. Instead, the needs tend to conflict, and the various ways of life which different cultures and individuals devise are varying attempts to harmonise them, always imperfect ones. When this imperfection becomes specially glaring, people look behind their traditional morality to find a principle by which to amend it.

In this paper, we shall be swimming against the tide; we shall insist that the ordering of society based on Aristotelian conception of human nature, the good life and virtue does not necessarily lead to the best successful life for the individual as well as the society. Our aim here rather is to show that a patient understanding of Hobbes, Machiavelli, and Vico in the context of commonsensical appreciation of human nature would suggest a better alternative as to how society should be ordered. The philosophies of Vico, Hobbes and Machiavelli, may lead to 'dirty hands' but this is merely the human condition. The social order or disorder has to be dependent on it. This paper therefore divides itself into three sections namely, (1) The human nature in the light of Aristotle's virtue theory, (2) Human nature in the lights of Vico, Hobbes and Machiavelli's moral cum political thoughts, (3) a critique of both Views in the context of politics of "dirty hands" with references to Nigeria socio-political situation.

I. Human Nature in the Light of Aristotle's Virtue Theory.

Presently, virtue theory which is derived from Aristotle's moral philosophy has become increasingly popular as an alternative both to deontological theories such as Kant's and to consequentialist such as Mill's utilitarianism. Aristotle thought that virtues are qualities of a person that help him to flourish or "live well". By this, he meant "in accordance with human nature" (Aristotle, 1980, 38). Human nature is the possession of certain capacities and the value of using them. It does not depend on accepting as binding the intentions of a creator who has put them there (Midaly, 1996, 553). It says nothing for or against the existence of such a creator, but proceeds simply from the existence in the world of a being with certain given natural needs. That beings quest for a hierarchy of aims is then seen as inquiry into those needs and the relation between them.

For Aristotle, (1980, 38) reason is central to human nature and that is why he defined 'man as a rational animal' or an animal that can at least be rational. But he placed more emphasis on training (rather than curbing) our emotions, so that we automatically react and want to act in the best way. Aristotle argued that there are two types of virtue, virtues of intellect and virtue of character. A virtue of character is a character trait that disposes us to feel desires and emotions 'well' rather than 'badly'; by 'well', he meant 'at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive and in the right way'. Of the different virtues of intellect—such as quick thinking and general intelligences-- the one we are concerned with in the ordering of the human society is practical wisdom, for it is practical wisdom that allows us to know what is right in each case.

A car driver has just deliberately, swerved in front of your friend's car along New Benin-Lagos road. Your friend beeped and the other driver has stopped his car, got out, and has started swearing at your friend. What's the right thing to do? You probably feel angry and a bit scared. Are you feeling these emotions well? Being angry towards a bully who is insulting a friend seems the right thing to do. But your anger could be too strong and motivate you to start a fight, in which case you are not feeling it in the right way. Or if you are too afraid, you might want to say something, but not be able to. To understand the

right way to feel anger and fear, we need to understand the situation more: was this a once-off, or does this driver generally terrorise the neighbourhood? Is this person just a bad driver, or a bully you have come across before on other occasions? And to know what to do, you need to know yourself: if you say something, will you say it in a way that is helpful, or will you just be provocative, making the situation worse? Someone who is virtuous also has practical wisdom, which Aristotle says only comes with experience, and a wise person understands situations and how they develop, and what all the options are.

The claim that is basic to this Aristotelian view is that it comes about because, as human beings, we naturally have certain emotions and tendencies, and that it is simply a brute fact (made up of a vastly complex set of other facts) that given that we are as we naturally are, we can only flourish/be happy/successful by developing those character traits that are called the virtues-- courage, justice, benevolence (Hursthouse, 2004, 178). Clearly, 'virtue ethics' emphasis on the personal nature of the moral life has its appeal. The idea that we should be good people, not just do the right thing, is a nice one, it presents a picture of a world populated by people who are truly pleasant, rather than dutiful but nasty (Hursthouse, 179).

Let us for a moment examine the argument about some of the above mentioned character traits, and what sorts of facts are appealed to. For instance, consider one of the simplest cases--generosity. We are naturally sociable creatures who like to have friends and want to be loved by friends and family. We also like, love and appreciate people who go out of their way to help us rather than putting themselves first, always first. We also are not merely sympathetic but empathetic: the distress of others may distress us and their pleasures may be pleasurable to us. Given that this is how we are, someone who is mean and egocentric is unlikely to be liked and appreciated and hence likely to be lonely and unhappy; someone who is generous is likely to enjoy the benefits of being liked and loved and moreover, in the exercise of their generosity will derive much added enjoyment, for the pleasures of those they benefit will be pleasures to them.

Consider case--honesty. Amongst the relevant facts here are some that are similar to the preceding ones--that we want friends, want them to be trustworthy, want them to trust us--and some that are rather different, for instance, that there are likely to be occasions in our lives when we need to be believed. Folk wisdom, according to Hursthouse (2004, 179) also contains the adage that "honesty is the best policy" and the conviction that "the truth will come out" to the discomfort of those who have lied. The honest person has the advantage of not having to keep a constant guard on her tongue and has peace of mind thereby. One should also note that the honest person can tell the truth effortlessly in circumstance where it would be embarrassing, frightening unpleasant or unfortunately impossible for the person who does not have the virtue. Much more could be said here too about the harm one does oneself through self-deception and how difficult it is to be simultaneously ruthlessly honest with oneself but dishonest to other people.

Even more than honesty, courage is a character trait one needs to arm oneself with, given that we are as we are- subject to death and pain and frightened of them. It is not so much that we need courage to endure pain and face death as ends in themselves, but that we are likely to have to face the threat of pain or danger for the sake of some good which we shall otherwise lose. One might imagine that someone in the position of the person(...) who had the opportunity to save someone's life by donating the bone marrow and did not do it, was someone who saw this as a wonderful opportunity to do good but lacked the courage to do it. This might as well be a source of deep regret, and how much more better the regret would be if one's cowardice led to the death of someone one loved. If we have managed to make ourselves courageous we are ready to save our children from the burning house or car at whatever risk to ourselves, to stand up to the terrorists who threaten our friend's lives and to our racist neighbours who are trying to hound us and our families from our homes.

Now all the above is schematic, we do not pretend to have shown conclusively that generosity honesty and courage are necessary for ordering the society or if one is to flourish/be (truly) happy/successful, and of course much of what we discussed is open to disagreement.

Aristotle virtue theory is not without difficulties and we shall treat some objections to it. Contrary to what has been claimed, the virtues are surely neither (a) necessary nor (b) sufficient for flourishing/being (truly) happy or successful. Not necessary because, as we all know, the wicked may flourish like the green bay tree, not sufficient because our generosity, honesty and courage for examples might, any one of them, lead to our being harmed or indeed to our whole being ruined or ended. It is quite possible to say that it is obviously the case that having virtue of generosity, we might fall foul of a lot of people who exploit us and rip us off, or find ourselves poverty stricken. There are some sudden financial disaster which might befall many of us, leaving the generous in dire straits, where the mean do much better. Just as, in the past, people have been burnt at the stake for refusing to lie about what they believed, so now, under some regimes people are shut in asylums, and subjected to enforced drugging for the same reason, while the hypocrites remain free, my courage may lead me to go to the defence of someone being attacked in the street but to no avail and with the result that I am killed or maimed for life while the coward goes through her life untouched. Given these possibilities, how can anyone claim that the question 'How am I to flourish?' is to be honestly answered by saying 'Be virtuous'? (Hoursthouse, 2004, 180).

Power is just as good a bet as virtues, if not a better one, for flourishing. If you have power, people will, as a matter of fact, love you for that, you will be respected and honoured- and all despite the fact that in order to get and maintain power you will undoubtedly have to be selfish, dishonest, unjust, callous.... to a certain extent (Lacewug, 2005, 57). So the answer to 'How am I to flourish?'' should not be "acquire virtue" but "acquire power".

Another objection to ethics of virtue is that it encourages us to neglect ourselves for the sake of others. For women in particular, the ethics of virtue/care may endorse the stereotype of self-sacrifice which has led women to neglect their own lives in the service of others, or to feel guilty, (or perhaps worse, that they are not real women) if they do pay more attention to their own projects. While the development of character central to virtue ethics is a good thing, critics seem to think, developing the wrong virtues will lead to the subjection of the self to the demands of others rather than its flourishing. The development of a

virtue is a matter of habituation, not just an occasional exercise, and so the occasions upon which moral self-scrutiny is appropriate are many, it is not just occasional actions we need to review—did I give enough money to the poor in front of St. Albert’s catholic church? Should I have told my friend about his wife’s infidelity? Am I truly generous, or do I just do what convention dictates? Am I nice, or just unwilling to make waves? Even if one of the virtues you want to pursue is tranquil acceptance of the self, introspection is appropriate—am I too concerned about my own character, or insufficiently critical? The cultivation of virtue is a moral task from which there is no respite.

Is this increased evaluation bad? Yes, in two ways. First, the practice of evaluation may be alienating. Subjecting yourself to scrutiny about what you should want can alienate you from what you do want, in a way which makes you lose spontaneity, enjoyment, and self knowledge. It is not clear to us whether this is what we do want or what we think we should want, whether this is what we are or what we think we should be.

One result of self-scrutiny may be to show you don’t have a virtue. You do the beneficent thing, but without feelings of sympathy or good will- you are dragged by the sense that you have to, not by fellow-feeling. As the ethics of virtue is construed, you here lack a requisite virtue if, on the other hand, you do have all the virtues you think a good person should have, your problems may only be beginning. Conflicts between virtues can lead us into fragmentation and guilt, and such conflicts are likely in all but the most narrowly focused life. In a case where the promptings of two virtues conflict, I will be moved to act by both. And when I act, in this case of conflict, I will fail in light of one virtue even if I succeed in light of the other. Loyalty can require we stick up for our friends if I get angry with the driver who insulted my friend, is that “too much” anger but the right amount of loyalty to my friend? But if I don’t get angry, is that “too little” loyalty to my friend? Even if we can resolve this apparent conflict of virtues, will all such conflicts disappear? For example, when someone had done something wrong, and we are putting it right, can we show justice and mercy, or do we have to choose? (Lacewui, 2005, 57)

Insofar as the ethics of virtue has been prompted to provide a picture of agency which we can use as a realistic moral model, it fails; it fails because the ordering of the society for the common good cannot be based on the ethics of moderation. Happiness, most often than not, does not result from moderate behaviour. There are instances where only 'immoderate' behaviour is proper behaviour. A man who is temperamentally passionate and romantic may find that "moderate" behaviour does not suit him. He cannot be happy if he is forced to control himself in all situations of life (Popkin and Stroll, 1974, 22). For people of this temperament, the Aristotelian ethic is not an appealing one. No wonder, most attempts to extend this to the area of ordering of society (Politics) have not met with success.

2(a). Human Nature in Giambattista Vico's New Science

Vico's description of human nature is apt. His treatment of human behaviour is exact. That men's corrupted nature places them under the tyranny of self-love cannot be doubted. This nature compels them to make private utility their chief guide, seeking everything useful for themselves and nothing for their companions. They cannot even bring their passions under control to direct them towards justice.

Vico cites the examples of man in his early bestial state to corroborate his description. He desires only his own welfare having taken wife and begotten children, he discusses his own welfare along with that of the family, having entered upon civil life, he desires his own welfare along with that of his city, when its rule is extended over several peoples, he desires his own welfare along with that of the nation, when the nations are united by wars, treaties of peace, alliances, and commerce, he desires his own welfare along with that of the entire human race. In all these circumstances, says Vico, man desires principally his own utility (Sasa, 2001, 160).

It is clear from all the above that man's nature is corrupt and he acts only for self-love and for his own utility (Sasa, 161). What he takes to be his utility in this case would largely depend upon the various and ever changing institutional roles he assumes. Thus:

- (1) When he is father, (i.e., the quasi-monarchical leader of a primitive tribe or family) he identifies his interests with those of his kin;

- (2) When he is a citizen , he identifies them with those of his city; and
- (3) When a national; he identifies with those of his nation (Vico, 1988, 175).

In Vico's view legislation considers man as he is in order to turn him to good use in human society. He spots three vices which run throughout the human race. They are

- (a) Ferocity
- (b) Avarice
- (c) Ambition

Out of these three vices, legislation creates the military, merchants and governing classes. Dangerous as these vices are still, therein laid the strength, riches, wisdom of common wealth. This is not the only paradox in this case; Vico also notices that legislation makes civil happiness out of these same three great vices which he concludes could certainly destroy all mankind on the face of the earth. Here it is pertinent to point out that Vico seems to contradict himself here, in that he seems to suggest that legislation is an extra-human agency compelling man to live in society against his nature and thus, that it is contingent that man should live in this way.

In sum, Vico is concerned about man's crude and selfish nature. While it is true that man wants to live in society, he wants it so because he needs others to realise himself. He observed that in his limitations, man is selfish and self-centred. Law (man-made) is therefore to assist him (man) to harmonise his behaviour in accordance with the common interests of the society. If man were left to himself, he would hardly think of others. He could over-claim his rights, forgetting sometimes that others have some rights too. Vico's citation of the three vices is an example to demonstrate this. Law, in his case, is not an extra human but human agency to assist man fit into society where there are varied and diverse interests. It is all an internal arrangement. This does not mean that there is nothing good in man. Certainly, there is, but it is heavily coated with, selfish interests. Vico therefore concludes: "...To be useful to the human race, philosophy must raise and direct weak

and fallen man, not rend his or abandon him in his corruption" (Vico, 176).

2(b). Human Nature in the Light of Hobbes' Thought

Thomas Hobbes is best known as a philosopher of Human Nature and Human Society. He is famous for maintaining that the natural condition of people is one of war, in which life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short', and he was an early social contract theorist: he believed that the state could be understood as the outcome of an agreement between free human beings to submit to Government.

'De Cive' was published in 1642, two years after the elements of law, and nearly nine years before appearance of Leviathan. It opens with a strong denial of one of the cardinal principles of Aristotle's politics, that humans are by nature cut out for life in the 'polis'. According to Hobbes, human beings are not naturally made for the political life.

They think too much of themselves, put too much values on present gratification, and they are bad at predicting the consequences of their actions. One effect of these tendencies is for people to come into conflict with one another, especially when they feel that they are undervalued in other people's eyes (Sorell, 1966, 531).

The conflict can consist of the denigration of one person in the conversation of another person, or it can take the form of outright quarrelling and even violence. And if these are familiar patterns of behaviours when there is law and custom and good manners to restrain people, how much more extreme must the hostility be when these things are absent and naked human nature is allowed to express itself without interference? For Hobbes, left to do what comes naturally, human beings would quickly find themselves in a state of war or as Hobbes puts it, life in the state of nature is war –the anti-social condition par excellence (Sorell, 532).

Hobbes solution is strong government, strong laws and transfer of the right of nature to a sovereign power. Most countries in the world

today, have strong government and strong laws but the question is has human nature been changed? From the reality on the ground, politically and socially speaking, attempts to change human nature for the better through imposition of education, right conduct and rule of law have not met with success. What seems to characterise all nation-states presently is a return to the state of nature where politics is synonymous with "Dirty hands" and man's inhumanity to man.

2(c) Human Nature and Machiavellian Challenge

Politics, in the sense of ordering of the state, has always posed threatening questions about the scope and authority of common understandings of morality. It is politics that Thrasymachus has foremost in mind, in Plato's Republic, when he challenges Socrates to refute his startling definition of justice as "the interest of the stronger". In a similarly deflationary spirit, some modern political theorists and advisers seems to think that political realism implies that moral considerations have no place at all in politics. Those who refer to the necessities of politics have, at least since Machiavelli, often thereby signified not only necessary risks of an apparently immoral kind but necessary lies, cruelties and even murders. Taking their lead from Sartre's play of the same name, modern philosophers tend to talk of the necessity for "dirty hands" in politics, meaning that the vocation of politics somehow rightly requires its practitioners to violate important moral standards which prevail outside politics.

It is not clear that Machiavelli would have disagreed. He is writing for and about rulers and their advisers, and so his emphasis is heavily political, but, at least sometimes he writes as though the need for 'dirty hands' is part of the human rather than the political condition.

Notoriously, there is a great deal of controversy about the interpretation of Machiavelli's own views. We believe that his advocacy of 'necessary immorality' is perfectly serious, and that, although he has in mind the need to override Christian morality, the point has wider application to moral codes and virtues that are recognised in secular and other contexts beyond Christianity. When Machiavelli says` a man who wishes to profess goodness at all time will come to ruin among so many who are not so good. Hence it is

necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain his position to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge or not to use it according to necessity (Machiavelli, 1513, 52). Thus he is genuinely challenging a very deep and compelling picture of morality. According to this picture, we can understand what it is to lead a good life in terms of virtues and/ or the duties of a moral code, and such an understanding provides us with final, authoritative guidance on how to act. Moral reason may not always have something to say to us about our choices and decision but when it does intervene seriously and relevantly it must carry the day against all competing considerations. This picture is however, challenged by Machiavelli because he thinks that there are powerful reasons which can and should overrule the moral reasons. Machiavelli explicitly casts doubt upon the unity of the virtues, at one point, when he insists that it is not possible (especially for a prince) to observe all the virtues because the human condition does not permit it (Machiavelli, 52).

Hence, doing "the right thing" in politics will really sometimes mean cultivating what is a genuine human vice. Some contemporary political philosophers argue in favour of their view that there is something special about politics that licenses Machiavellian conclusions, the modern Machiavellians urge or assumes several considerations. Here are a few considerations gathered from their writings. The 'necessity' to manipulate, lie, betray, steal or kill may arise in private life occasionally but it is much more frequent in politics.

The political arena involves choices and consequences of much greater weight than does private life. Actors in political life are representatives and so need to be morally assessed in a different way. This point is often underpinned by some appeal to role morality. Relatively, much is made by some writers (Thomas Nagel comes particularly to mind) of the dominance of considerations of impartiality in the morality appropriate to politics. Nagel thinks that this fact underpins the legitimacy we accord to the state's resorts to violence in contrast to the way we frown upon such resort by the individual citizens. Nagel here is in accord with Machiavelli who stated it point blank in the Discourses that it is legitimate in political arena to use an immoral means to achieve a good end. However, the

end which Machiavelli has in mind is the security and the welfare of the state. The case of violence, as distinctive of the political, may serve as an illustration. It is often suggested that where it would be wrong for citizens to use violence or the threat of it in their dealings with other citizens, it can be right for their political representative to use it on their behalf. One of the most plausible routes to the legitimacy of the state's employment of violence is through 'the domestic analogy' of an individual's right to self-defence but the implication may be weaker; certainly, state agents are entitled to use or authorise violence where an individual isn't.

Thomas Nagel puts this frequently in discussing the issues of taxation and conscription. As he says of taxation: "if someone with an income of \$2,000 a year turns a gun on someone with an income of \$100,000 a year and makes him handover his wallet, that is robbery. If the federal government withholds a portion of the second person's salary (enforcing the laws against tax evasion with threats of imprisonment under armed guard) and gives some of it to the first person in the form of welfare payments, food stamps, or free health care, that is taxation" (Nagel, 1978, 55). He goes on to state that the former is morally impermissible and the latter morally legitimate, claiming that this is a case in which public morality is not 'derived' from private morality but 'from impersonal consequentialist considerations'.

Nagel's general position is that political morality differs from private morality in allowing much more weight to consequentialist thinking whereas private morality is more agent-centred. The interpretation of this idea, in 'strict sense', involves "dirty hands" implications. And Machiavelli's view may not be acceptable to us today, theoretically speaking, but following the epiphany of human nature 'hic et nunc', the reality on the ground seems to justify his views.

3. Evaluation: Implications for Nigerian Socio-Political Situation

Our country Nigeria and the continent of Africa at large, is ravaged by socio-political, economic and religious problems stemming from false ideological foundation of our polity. In the first place, there is false

interpretation of human nature in the sense of elevating it to a pedestal where it does not belong, secondly, there is too much insistence on the normative role on how to order the society so that the common good could be realised, contrary to the normal manifestation of human condition as condition-sini-qua-non for social order. Thirdly, attempts so far to employ various methods towards solving the problem of governance and fellowship have not met with success as human nature continues to manifest its ugly cum beautiful faces on daily basis.

It is pertinent to observe, that there is no law greater than the Ten Commandments and yet people break them on daily basis with impunity. The prisons are overflowing with citizens whose human nature could not be checkmated by social conventions of the state. Some are by nature psychopaths, neurotic, and kleptomania and recently we have started hearing stories of people who lay claims to lesbianism and gay on grounds of nature (this certainly is going to change our definition of marriage institutions and its interpretation).

Within the context of politics in Nigeria and most countries of the world, 'dirty hands' politics has become its major characteristics. For instances, public officials are no longer particularly circumspect about the giving and receiving of gifts, rulers do take money from citizens, by threat of violence if necessary on grounds of money laundering or economic financial crime. In Nigeria today, we have cultivated the culture of 'ten percent; family patronage, encouragement of the advancement of political friends or cronies, exploitation of political position for personal profit, encouragement of cult of mediocrity. It is true that the exploitation of political position for whatever reasons is strongly disapproved of in many cultures (though consistently practised in both direct and indirect ways). Furthermore, there is the recalcitrant fact, for the impartiality thesis, that Nigerian politicians are widely regarded as being correctly influenced by considerations of partiality that differ only in scale from those of the private citizen.

Political leaders are thought to have special obligations to their nation, their ethnic race. The impartiality thesis based upon the application of rigorous moral principle is not convincing (Lafollette, 2007, 328) and if we may add a figment in the imagination of those who are not interested on 'real-politik'.

A more general difficulty confronts all of these arguments as they rely upon common features of political behaviour, and that is the way in which any thesis about “dirty hands” and the special nature of political morality has to come to terms with the fact that political environments are so often morally corrupt. The Psalmist warns against putting one’s trust in princes (Ps.146:3) and the prophet Micah speaks for many when he says; “that they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward, and the great man he uttereth his mischievous desires (Micah 7:3). The point is not just that ‘power tends to corrupt; though it does, but that the values which politicians find themselves driven to promote , and others find themselves driven to endorse, may be the product of degraded social circumstances and arrangements (Coady, 1992, 379). Both Rousseau and Marx have pertinent remarks to make here, as well as the prophets of an earlier day. This may suggest that philosophers and other theorists have in fact been too complacent in their acceptance of the neutrality and immutability of the back ground circumstances which generate ‘dirty hands’ choices. Roberts Fullinwider once remarked that we need politicians just as we need garbage collectors, and in both cases we should expect them to stink but, once upon a time, we needed the services of the collectors of what was euphemistically called ‘night soil men’ and, in many parts of the world, human ingenuity has eliminated the need for that very malodorous occupation.

Conclusion

The insights from Aristotle, Vico, Hobbes and Machiavelli have given us a deep understanding of human nature and why and how men behave the way they do and its implications on the “Politics and the problem of dirty hands” on the social order or disorder in the society. Machiavelli emphasises on what he calls the moral isolation, though often ignored by his commentators, and it is of considerable independent interest for discussion of collaborative action. It is the problem posed by the demands of virtue in a world or context dominated by evildoers. He <and later, Hobbes> thought it folly to behave virtuously in such a situation.

The insight behind the accusation of folly is that there is some fundamental point to morality which is undermined by the widespread non-co-operation of others for both Machiavelli and Hobbes; it is a kind of survival. The survival of the state and all it stands for (including a sort of glory) is pre-eminent in Machiavelli, where as the individual's self-preservation is Hobbes principal focus, though each shares something of the others concerns. There are obvious advantages in various virtuous acts, in various informal conventions, for instance, that dictate waiting in queues (or line) for the availability of certain goods and these advantages are sufficiently important for most of us to keep conforming in the face of the occasional queue jumper. When, however, civilization has so deteriorated that the majority are queue jumpers the advantages can no longer be achieved for anyone by continued minority compliance. We must look to other methods, such as laws or violence, to protect the ill, the weak and the non-assertive.

We must stress finally that the conceptions of human nature differ, how society can be ordered equally is not one-dimensional, but the politics of 'dirty hands' has become part and parcel of the human condition; and this is particularly true of contemporary Nigerian socio-politics. We can manage it, we can fight to stop some of its undesirable consequences, but above all we must learn how to live with this necessary evil despite the fact that Aquinas maintains that it is contrary to the order of reasonableness.

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