

A Re-Examination of the Legitimacy of Governance in Nigeria Using Thomas Hobbes' Political Philosophy as a Paradigm

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Abstract: Legitimacy is the belief that a rule, institution, or leader has the right to govern. It is a judgment by an individual about the rightfulness of a hierarchy between rule or ruler and its subject and about the subordinate's obligations toward the rule or ruler. The task of this paper therefore is to re-examine the reactions/belief of the citizens of Nigeria state towards the system of governance seen in Nigeria today using the political theories of Thomas Hobbes as a benchmark for assessing that. It is the opinion of this paper that Nigerian state is presently shifting to the level of the state of nature where life is brutish, nasty, short and that the citizens have lost partial (if not total) interest in the social contract that brought them together. Using the methods of hermeneutics and critical analysis the paper synthesised the socio-political theories of Hobbes in line with the present condition of Nigerian showing its relevance and shortcomings. It is the conclusion of this paper that Nigerian state lacks a serious support (Legitimacy) from her citizens and therefore suggested for a change in system of administration in other to better the lots of the common good.

Keywords: Re-examination, legitimacy, governance, hobbies and paradigm.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Legitimacy can be defined as the recognition and acceptance which the citizens give their leaders to rule them [1]. For a government to rule successfully in a state, it must enjoy the full support and popular acceptance of the electorates or citizens. When shared by many individuals, legitimacy produces distinctive collective effects in society, including making collective social order more efficient, more consensual, and perhaps more just. Tom Tyler says that if authorities "are not viewed as legitimate, social regulation is more difficult and costly" [2]. This accounts for the interest rulers show in legitimating their rule.

On the other hand, Thomas Hobbes has been described as one of the most influential philosophers of modern times from the epistemologico – political point of view. According to Ekpoudom, "Thomas Hobbes, who was born in the era of civil war and was also nurtured during the war, has been renowned mostly because of three of his works "*The Element of Law* (1640), *The citizen* (1641), and the most popular, *Leviathan*, lived between 1588 – 1679 (27). While it is the case that Hobbes played a major role in epistemology, he is renowned for his contributions in the area of political philosophy. Many writers like Sabine, and Walsh maintain that Hobbes was probably the greatest writer on political philosophy that the English – Speaking people produced [3].

With regard to Hobbes' background, Collins writes that "because he was born premature at the coastal town of Westport in Malmesbun on the eve of the projected invasion of England by the Spanish Armada, Thomas Hobbes reported that his mother conceived him and fear as twins" [4]. Hobbes' concern was about the dangers of democracy and about solitude and general shortage which arise from civil war. He preferred the monarchical system of government to Democracy. His works include *the Element of Law (1640)*, *De Cive (1642)*, *Human Nature (1650)*, *De Corpere Politico (1656)* *Leviathan (1651)*, *Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance (1656)* and *Behemoth (1668)*. Sabine, in his understanding, has this to say about Thomas Hobbes:

Hobbes' political writings were intended by him to exert influence upon the side of the king. They were designed to support absolute government and in Hobbes' intention this meant absolute monarchy, all his personal interests attached him to the royalist party and he sincerely believed that monarchy was the most stable and orderly kind of government [5].

This quotation shows that Hobbes advocated for the monarchical system of government as the best form of government. It needs be noted too that Hobbes lived in the days of civil war (1679) – 1651). This fact is significant in explaining the nature of his political thought, for as we observed, Hobbes was inclined towards absolutism [6].

II. HOBBS' POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Granted that Hobbes is regarded as the greatest writer on political philosophy in the English world and the first of the modern philosophers who attempted to bring political theory into intimate relation with a thoroughly modern system of thought, we therefore set out to discuss his political philosophy [7].

Hobbes on the State of Nature

It is the Leviathan, more than any other writings that contains the bulk and the hub of Hobbes' political ideas. Hobbes discusses the natural law theory as natural rights. For Esikot;

Hobbes starts by giving us a picture of the state of nature, which is the original condition on man before the advent of the state. Hobbes draws attention to the fact that nature had made men equal, in the facilities of body and mind. For, as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength to kill the strongest, either by secret machinations or by confederacy with others that are in the same danger with themselves [8].

From the foregoing, it is glaring that Hobbes' proposition is that every man in the state of nature is born with innate natural right of self-preservation, a right to do whatever one likes. According to Mayer, "In colourful terms, Hobbes described the state of nature. To him, it was not an ideal society. The state of nature is one of constant war in which man's condition is solitary, wolfish, brutish, and nasty" [9]. It is a state where man is wolf to man (*homo hominis lupus est*), a state where there were no laws, no authority, no morality, no justice and the life of men was solitary poor, brutish, nasty and short. McClelland too presents the Hobbesian state of nature thus

In the state of nature, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereby is uncertain and consequently no culture of the earth, no navigation, nor use of commodities that may be imported by sea.... no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time, no Arts, no letters; no society and which is worst of all, continual fear, and dangers of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short [9].

It is observable from the above the Hobbesian standpoint with regard to the state of nature, order to secure their own self-preservation, Hobbes says men had to surrender their individual rights to an absolute ruler, a sovereign, who, in entrust was to be responsible in maintaining peace in the society. This agreement is between subject and object [10]. "I, authorize and give up my right governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition that thou give thy right to him, authorize all his action in like manner" [11].

The only right recognized in the state of nature is that of every man to seek his own good without hindrance. It recognizes that one's self-prevention depends upon securing the minimal conditions of peace. But, then, is doubtful if what Hobbes proposed could be practiced. In the words of Ekpoudom, "If men surrender their right to the sovereign in order to enter into contract, the sovereign then becomes a dictator taking decisions alone on behalf of his subjects" [2].

Writing further on the laws of nature, Walsh maintains that the fundamental law of nature is to endeavour peace. The second law is that each directs himself of the liberty to another's right to peace. To achieve this, each and all enter a covenant of mutual trust in which each trusts the other to perform his part at some determinate time thereafter. The third law is that 'men perform their covenant made'; not to do is injustice" [6]. There is no gainsaying the fact that the Hobbesian state of nature has brought to human awareness the fact that there is a contract between the citizen and the sovereign, whereby the citizen surrenders his rights entirely to the sovereign. And so, unlike thinkers with democratic leanings, Hobbes believed that the social contract gives all the power to the sovereign, who enforces the contract and is the final arbiter of laws and the source of all authority".

On the Commonwealth

Another interesting aspect of Hobbes' political philosophy is his discussion of the commonwealth. Hobbes, according to Mayer, made a very clear analysis of the weaknesses of a commonwealth. There are six in number.

- First, weakness arises when a ruler is content with less than absolute power. If the ruler is content with merely relative power, he said, there is constant danger of chaos, and the security of the commonwealth cannot be maintained.
- The second weakness is the belief that every man can be a judge of good and evil actions. Good and evil, according to Hobbes, ought to be established by the state. The third weakness comes from trusting in individual conscience instead of the laws of the state. The fourth weakness arises when the sovereign is subject to civil laws. Hobbes declared, and his will must be absolute and unchecked by any courts.
- The first source of weakness is the concept that every man has absolute control over his own material goods. But, Hobbes mentioned, the rights of the sovereign extend to man's natural possessions just as much as to his beliefs. The six and final source of disorder in the state is divided sovereignty. When several groups fight for dominance, civil war inevitably breaks out. Hobbes showed again and again that state must have a common, invisible, central authority if it is to remain strong and rigorous [7].

Instinctive Self Preservation

Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* in a special way, specifically delineates what may be termed as *Scientific Naturalism*. This term simply summarizes Hobbes' entire project in his philosophical psychology. His intention however, is to show the place of natural law (generally) and of humans nature (specifically) in the schemes of politics and morality. Thus, he first analysis the law of human behaviour and consequently, formulates the conditions upon which a stable society is possible [8]. In the light of the foregoing, Hobbes holds that every man is naturally characterized by instinctive self preservation. Man craves for power, wealth, security and continuation of his biological existence. Thus, what matters to him is only as it affects his existence, and not that of others. His concern about other men is dependent upon how the existence of other men serves to secure his own life.

Being that man struggles for accumulation of wealth (which is grossly insufficient to meet the needs of every man), man must do everything possible to meet his ends which inevitably permits the termination of life of man by man. In a strict sense "Since individuals are roughly equal in strength and cunning, none can be secure, and their conditions, so long as there is no civil power to regulate their behaviour, is a "war of everyman against everyman" [6].

Hobbes uses the above passage to point to the fact that man's instinctive self-preservation is characteristic of man's life in the state of nature. This, according to him, renders the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". The underlying cause is the absence of right and wrong, justice and injustice, on the fact of the absence of a civil society. This informs the need for a revitalization and rational self-preservation.

Rational Self – Preservation

It must be recalled that the nature of man, according to Hobbes, is characterized by two basic disciplines; desire and reason. While the former leads men into antagonism due to self-preservation, the latter leads men to self-preservation as a negotiable outcome. This is basically to say that reason serves as a regulatory principle to man's desires. This is of course, the underlying principle by which Hobbes is able to lay a perfect dichotomy between the pre-social and the social states. Hence;

The raw material of human nature from which a society must be constructed consists, then of two contrasted elements; primitive desire and aversion, from which arise all impulse and a notion and reason, by which actions can be directed intelligently towards the end of self-preservation. Upon this regulative power of reason depends on the transit – from the savage and solitary to the civilized and social condition [6].

The nature of as a unique animal is a fact that he alone enjoys the capacity to reason and to will. For this reason, man is endowed with limitless inventing fitness to create and recreates positively and negatively.

Relevance of Hobbes' Political Philosophy to Nigerian State.

The place of Hobbes' political philosophy in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Hobbes' political philosophy relates to Nigeria in that he is regarded as the first modern philosopher to offer exact knowledge of justice, sovereignty and citizenship. A critical consideration of Hobbes' political philosophy directly opens the concept of political obligation and brings to fore the essence of the state. He regards the state as an artificial construct necessitated by the need for a total surrender of man's will to the states. The state therefore exists to protect lives and property. This is of course, the only ground upon which obedience to the state is realizable.

The above being the case, Nigerian state must face interrogations as to why it exists and for whom it exists. What is the essence of the Nigerian state? What value does the Nigeria state accord to her citizens who have voluntarily submitted their will as members of the Nigerian commonwealth to the power of the state personified in the laws of the Nigeria state? What is the nature and content of the ends of Nigerians as citizens in terms of personality of life and security of property? How does the said constitution guarantee the existence of justice, fairness and peaceful coexistence in a violent and notice commonwealth could Nigeria? These are pertinent questions that Hobbes' political philosophy raises against the Nigerian state as a contract of Nigerian men (citizens) [9].

In the main therefore, having had a thorough comprehension of the underpinning of Hobbes' political philosophy, its relevance to Nigerian state contract remains a re-enforcement of the *raisonde'tre* of the Nigeria state. Hobbes' political philosophy is a decry against unjust laws, ethnic bigotry, religious antagonisms and political party prejudices. All these vices are non-contractual and cannot secure the life of Nigerian citizens as rational beings seeking self presentation through the state.

The state must therefore rise to her duty of securing lives and property, provision of basic needs of man. Even though Nigeria operates Democracy, Hobbes' monarchical politico, philosophical postulation are not anti-democratic per se. It re-invigorates the necessity of a total restructuring of the Nigeria political institutions to meet the terms of the contract (through Fiscal Federalism). Otherwise Hobbes would discharge allegiance to such a state. The consequence is of course, a civil war [10].

III. CONCLUSION

The paper discussed Hobbes' political philosophy and its implications in Nigeria. It is the case that his philosophy meaningfully has implications for Democracy in Nigeria. Lawhead was right when he submitted that "It was Hobbes' political theory that brought him the most fame" (224).

Hobbes deserves our commendations for his political philosophy, especially his analysis of the social contract theory, liberty and commonwealth. He played a major role in the gradual establishment of political science as an independent naturalistic signs. The history of modern philosophy is not complete without Thomas Hobbes. Although critics may perhaps argue that Hobbes existed in a different century and his philosophical writings may have been influenced by the culture of his time that it would therefore be unnecessary to assume that his ideas and discussions on political philosophy still have relevance in our contemporary society, it is the case that Hobbes' philosophy, as pointed out earlier, has a place in contemporary Nigeria.

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