



Plato's Theory Of Philosopher King And The Implications For Political Leaders In Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Presently, vices of corruption, indiscipline, misappropriation of public funds, superiority complex, greed, sentimentalism, tribalism, sectionalism, and unhealthy competition among others which are associated with political leaders in Nigeria and which have resulted in economic, political, judicial, technological, infrastructural, educational, moral, and social inequality, marginalization, crises, and deprivation in Nigeria are predicated on their deficiency and ignorance of the principles of philosophy. This is the rationale why Plato in his socio-political philosophy proposes that the knowledge of philosophy is a necessity for any political leader. Leadership is a very sensitive endeavour that requires wisdom. This wisdom entails the knowledge of the principles of philosophy and their application as tools or techniques to one's life and leadership. This paper is intended to expose Plato's theory of the necessity of the guardian (ruler) to be groomed in the knowledge of philosophy in his socio-political philosophy and to analyze its relevance and implications to the Nigerian political leadership. The paper concludes that in line with proposal of Plato, the knowledge of philosophy is very relevant and necessary to Nigerian politicians because it equips them with the metaphysical, epistemological, axiological, and logical tools, techniques, expertise, and approaches to leadership which will usher in unimaginable rapid economic, political, judicial, technological, infrastructural, educational, and social justice, equality, and development in Nigeria. The paper recommends that the study of philosophy should be introduced and made compulsory in all secondary and tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria, any one who aspires to take political position in Nigerian should have at least a Master Degree in Philosophy MA (Phil) or a Master Degree in Philosophy of Education (Med), and qualified lecturers should be employed to teach philosophy. The methods employed in this study include exposition, analysis, application, phenomenology, prescription, and criticism.

Keywords: Axiology, logic, metaphysics, soul, epistemology, rationality

INTRODUCTION

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria gives recognition to three basic structures in Nigeria's federal system: federal government level, the state government level, and the local government level. According to Apologun (2003 p. 85) the constitution plays a major role in the Nigerian federal system by showing clearly delineating the purviews or the subjects on which the different levels of government have respective jurisdictions. Such subjects as matters of defense, external affairs, currency, creation of states, citizenship and naturalization, regulation of political parties, stamp duties, etc fall within the domain of the federal government, that is, the central government. As a result of the exclusive nature with which the above subjects are handled, they are said to belong to what we refer to as the exclusive list. Those subjects that fall within the power and jurisdiction of both federal and state governments are said to belong to the concurrent list. They include subjects like education, health, transportation, housing, etc. Residual list refers to those sectors that fall within the domain of local governments. Matters under residual, list include chieftaincy affairs, customary issues, and all other subjects that are neither, under the exclusive nor concurrent lists cf Apologun (2003 pp 85-86). Regrettably, in spite of the abundances of natural, capital, and human resources in Nigeria, the above

facilities are not adequately provided for, hence not maximally enjoyed by Nigerians. This could be attributed to a deficiency and/or an application of the knowledge of philosophy by Nigerian political leaders as recommended by Plato in his socio-political philosophy as a necessary qualification for any political leader. The lack of knowledge of philosophy by some Nigerian political leaders demonstrated in their inefficient political and administrative delivery is evidenced in dimensions of corruption, injustice, parochialism, myopia, favoritism, partiality, greed, selfishness, lack of respect for the dignity of the human person, fetishism, *illogicalism*, marginalization, etc.

“Philosophy” as a term, is a derivation of two Greek words “Philo” (love) and “Sophia” (wisdom) meaning “love of wisdom” c.f. Blackburn (1996 p. 286). Etymologically, Philosophy is defined as the ‘love of wisdom’. Structurally, philosophy has four major branches, namely: metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and logic. Plato in his socio-political philosophy recommends that the knowledge of philosophy is a necessary condition for any political leader. This paper is intended to expose this philosophy theory of Plato and its implication to Nigerian political leaders. Although, objectively speaking, it does not necessarily imply that someone without the idea of philosophy is incapable of generating good, salient or relevant ideas or lacks common sense, but especially for the political leader, the knowledge of philosophy helps to cultivate their mind, it helps them to be critical, and it equips them with the techniques and nuances of reasoning and of arriving at most reliable knowledge of truth and of shaping and reshaping one’s attitude towards life and leadership, and in making more reasonable decisions for the well being of oneself and of the entire society. Philosophy helps in the axiological, logical, epistemological and metaphysical evaluation and assessment of the implications of one’s attitude and decisions towards life in general, and the entire development of the society cf Enomah (2018 p. 26). To achieve this objective, the study adopted a well designed outline which includes: introduction, Plato’s life and works, Plato’s socio-political philosophy, Plato’s socio-political philosophy and the ideal politician.

Plato’s Life and Works

Omeregbe (1991 p 38), presents a comprehensive biography of Plato. According to him, Plato, the most intimate friend and devoted disciple of Socrates was born around 247 BC to a wealthy family at Athens. He admired Socrates and became his pupil at the age of twenty. His life’s ambition was to become a politician, but he was so disappointed by the way his master, Socrates was treated by the politicians in Athens that he gave up the idea of becoming a politician. He was very grieved by the treatment of Socrates received from the hands of the Athenian authorities. He could not understand how a man like Socrates, such a good man, such excellent philosopher and moralist could be put to death by the Athenian authorities. He became convinced that the politicians are suffering from ignorance and that the only remedy for the ills in the society was to educate future politicians to become philosophers. For this purpose he founded his famous academy which is now considered to be the first European university. Here future politicians were to receive a sound education in philosophy. For, Plato believed that only philosophers could be good rulers. Besides philosophy which was the main discipline studied at the academy, mathematics, astronomy and the physical sciences were also studied. According to Njoya (2007 p 1), Plato was celibate, and that he is said to have spent most of his professional years sold to the endeavors of philosophy and politics, and he died in the year 347.

Plato’s works, according to Omeregbe (1991 p 38) are in the form of dialogue. Some of them (*Apology, Crito, Euthyphron, Phaedo*) are about Socrates’ last days. Some others are not directly about Socrates, but Socrates is made the chief speaker in the dialogues, the speaker who expresses Plato’s own views and doctrines. These include: *Protagoras, Geogias, Meno, Hippias, Symposium, Phaedrus, and Republic*, the most famous of Plato’s books. For Njoya (2007 p 2), there is now general agreement about the broad division into three groups: the earlier, minor “Socratic” dialogues; the artistic master-piece of Plato’s maturity; the less dramatic and more technical works of his old age.

Plato’s Socio-Political Philosophy

From the exposition of the socio-political philosophy of Plato by Omeregbe (1991 p. 45-56), some Plato’s political theories can be categorized into the following themes.

Composition of the State: In his famous book, the *Republic*, Plato proposes an ideal state in whose citizens are divided into three classes, namely the guardian, the auxiliaries, and the common people in correspondence to the three parts of the soul (the rational part, the spirited part, and the appetitive part, respectively) in Plato's psychology.

Functions of the Respective Classes of Citizens: The three categories of citizens of the state, according to Plato, have their respective functions. The guardians are the rulers of the State, the auxiliaries (soldiers) are to defend the State, and the common people (artisans) are to provide the material needs of the State.

Academic/Educational Requirements for the Guardians (Rulers): The guardians, the rulers, are to be philosophers. They are to undergo a long and rigorous educational programme until they are thirty-five years old before taking up any official assignment. The guardians (the ruling class-who must be philosophers) correspond to the rational part of the soul, i.e. reason which should rule the whole man.

Discipline and Sacrifice for the Guardians: The guardians are to own no private property and none shall have a wife of his own. They are to live in communities like monks in monasteries or soldiers in barracks, and they are to practice common possession of things with nobody claiming anything as his own. Here, Plato proposes not only the abolition of private property but also of the family for both the guardians and the auxiliaries. There should be no families among the guardians and the auxiliaries, no private properties, no individual wives. They should have wives in common, and marriages should be arranged on eugenic principles. In this way, the guardians and the auxiliaries will be completely dedicated to the state; their loyalty to the state will be undivided, uncompromised, and undistracted. Embezzlement of public funds by citizens should be punished by death. Class distinction should become hereditary, that is the children of the guardians become guardians themselves, the children of the artisans (common people) also become artisans to supply the materials and economic needs of the state.

Plato's Social Political Philosophy and the Nigerian Ideal Politician

Plato's idea of the ideal state in his socio-philosophy in averteedly specifies the criteria for both incumbent and aspiring Nigerian political leaders. Of the three categories of hierarchy in the state the guardians (rulers) which in our contemporary can be referred as the political leaders carry out the major and most sensitive functions of coordinating and organizing the other two classes of people in the state (the auxiliaries and the artisans). In other words, in the mind of Plato, political leaders are entrusted with the most sensitive responsibilities of the state. Plato strongly recommends that the rulers (political leaders) must be groomed in the knowledge of philosophy. This is an indisputable fact considering their respective sensitive functions at the federal, state, and local government levels of government in Nigeria. Therefore, applying the socio-political philosophy of Plato, any political leader or anybody who aspires to become a political leader in Nigeria should be well groomed in philosophy and should possess the following philosophical stance, mind-set, or approach to leadership. In other words, the socio-political philosophy of Plato has metaphysical, axiological, logical, and epistemological implications for Nigerian political leaders.

Metaphysical Implications: Metaphysics, according to Philips cited by Enomah (2018 P.136) considers immaterial beings that are not tangible or perceptible to the senses. Metaphysics is the science of being as being; it is the study of the most abstract realities. Such immaterial entities or realities are spiritual and they transcend the realm of sensible experience and data. God, spirits, mind, souls, heaven, hell, angels, freedom, justice, etc, could be grouped into this category of Enomah (2018 P. 136).

Plato's social political philosophy has metaphysical implications for the political leaders. The politician must understand the metaphysical dimension of the state and political leadership. First he should realize that he has the same human existence and nature in common with the citizenry. In other words, between himself and his subjects, there is no superiority and inferiority in nature since he shares the same substance with them. Ontologically, essentially, intrinsically, and substantially the political leader is equal with everyone in the society. Leadership therefore is an accident of position or status, an opportunity and privilege to service the society. This unequivocally rules out the question of dictatorship, tyranny, and superiority complex among politicians.

Again as a human being, every man is essentially composed of soul and body. While the body is mortal the soul is intangible and incorruptible. This necessarily implies that the soul of man cannot decay but lives on after the death of the body. This necessarily implies that the existence of the soul continuous after the death of the body. This demonstrates the reality of life after death. The law of karma is not limited to mortal life on earth but also to life after death. With this metaphysical understanding of the duality of the nature of man and the immortality of the human soul, political leader sees the necessity of good governance.

Metaphysically, man is a religious being. It is the nature of man to pay homage to the Supreme Being or Spirit (God) to whom he owes his existence. This metaphysical dimension of Plato's social political philosophy also spurs the political leaders to unconditionally embrace religiosity and respect religion. The awareness of his existence prompts the political leaders to accept the fact that he owes his existence to a Supreme Being (God) who must be believed in, worshiped and obeyed, and who will demand accountability of his political stewardship. He therefore, will not only become religious but also promote religiosity and freedom of religion of citizens. The political leader's knowledge of metaphysics enables him to understand the equality of all people irrespective of age, religion, culture, gender, or language. This will induce him to avoid partiality, marginalization, favoritism, tribalism, and oppression; rather it will motivate him to be objective, fair, and just in his administration of the affairs of the country or state.

Axiological Implications: Plato's social political philosophy also has axiological implications for the ideal politician. Axiology is the appreciation of beauty. Axiology has two dimensions, namely ethics and aesthetics of Enomah (2018 P. 27). While ethics is the appreciation of beauty of character, and hence the study of study of human conduct, or of morality from the perspective of good or bad, right or wrong, ought or ought not, aesthetic is the study and appreciation of art of Blackburn cited by Enomah (2018 p. 27).

Plato's social political philosophy sees morality as a *conditio sine qua non* for a successful leadership. Moral uprightness is predicated on discipline and sacrifice. The various forms of discipline such avoidance bribery and corruption, restraining from immoral, unchaste, occult, and clandestine activities, etc are ingredients for moral excellence. The recommendations for the political leader mentioned by Plato are the values for morality. Such could be what the classical Greeks refer to as life lived according to reason or end-in-view proper to human striving or the best possible fulfillment of the individual in the society, which is attained through the techniques of the behavioral sciences, according to the naturalists; or the good life leading to union with God; the authenticity of an individual taking his life and his commitments seriously and with full responsibility, i.e. what determines value is meaning and purpose, according to the existentialists of Enomah (2016 p 78).

Moral excellence on the part of the leader also entails cultivation of virtue. Virtue is the power for moral action that enables man to act with ease and order in some area of his life. Virtues are the excellent good qualities in man.. In the Nichomachean Ethics chapters four and six, to have moral virtues (of temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence) in a man, according to Aristotle cited by Enomah (2016 p.79), such a man will always have to behave well. If a man has the moral virtue of temperance, and sees food, he will behave well by not rushing at it and eating voraciously. To run away immediately at the sound of a gun is to lack the moral virtue of courage or fortitude. To do things wisely and accordingly is prudence, and acting accordingly is justice, a sense of fairness. Prudence presupposes having all other virtues. Prudence is the queen of all other virtues. To acquire these moral virtues a political leader needs education and practice.

Another key issue in morality is obligation or duty. Obligation is the claim made upon us by reason that some things are to be done and deserve praise whereas others are to be avoided and deserve blame. Its synonym, duty is referred to by Omoregbe (1993 p.118) as what a person has an obligation to do or what a person ought to do, what he is obliged to do. Plato itemized the various duties of a leader. These could be categorized as duty to self, duty to family, duty to peer groups, duty to the community, and civic duty of National Board for Technical Education (2008 p 102). The political leader has the moral obligation to carry their duties conscientiously. The socio-political philosophy also has aesthetical importance for the political leader Blackburn (1996 p. 8) defined aesthetics as "The study of the feelings, concepts, and

judgements arising from our appreciation of the arts or of the wider class of objects considered moving, or beautiful, or sublime". From the perspective of aesthetics, the political leader should possess initiative, creative, and visionary quality. He should also encourage creativity, initiative, and vision of the masses. This he can achieve through the study of the creative arts and creative writing, and the establishment and development of creative arts and creative writing in academic and educational institutions. The aesthetic quality of the political leader annihilates identity crises, enhance hygienic life, create employment for the working class, and effect tremendous structural, entertainment and literary development.

Logical Reasoning Implications: Bello (2000 p.1) defines logic as the study of the principles and techniques of distinguishing good arguments from bad arguments. The political leader is a logician who is has the ability to differentiate good reasoning from bad reasoning. This implies that that a political leader should be able to detect falsity in propositions or statements and invalidity, unsoundness, and fallacies in arguments. With his expertise in logical the political cannot be fooled, deceived, misled, dissuaded, misdirected, or defrauded. The understanding of logic by the political leader will enable him to critical and objective in his approach to issues. This will enable him to avoid

Epistemological Implications: Nyong (1996 p.7) describes epistemology as the theory of knowledge concerned with knowledge as a whole, ranging from the sources of knowledge, the grounds in which an aspect of knowledge may be held to be true or false, the relationship between knowledge and belief, or knowledge and truth. For him, epistemology is also an enquiry into the nature of knowledge, truth and certainty. Upon the recommendations for political rulers made by Plato in his socio-political philosophy, a political leader should have the knowledge of epistemology. He should have the knowledge of the various ways of acquiring knowledge, the criteria of determining the certainty of knowledge and the various theories of truth. The knowledge of epistemology will also afford the political leader to understand the nature, sources, theories, and criteria of knowledge. This unequivocally will enable the political leader in avoidance of parochialism, myopia, rash conclusions, and rash decisions. Rather it will acquaint the political leader with techniques and tools for easier and reliable solutions to problems of Enomah (2018 p. 37).

Criticism of Plato's Theory of the Ideal State in his Socio-Political Philosophy

Although Plato's theory of theory the ideal state in his socio-political philosophy is laudable there some elements in it that are outrageous and impracticable, and if applied could usher in dictatorship, tyranny, insensitivity, slavery, revolution, suicide, frustration, and pessimism. For instance, not having families and children of their own could make the guardians (political rulers) become dictators, tyrannical, and insensitive, rather than applying compassion, discretion, and caution in certain circumstances. The experience of family life is valuable and unique and no amount of philosophical knowledge can supply for it or alternate with it. Virtues of compassion, discretion, justice, mercy, e.t.c. that are indispensable variables for excellent and successful political leadership are better acquired through informal family experience rather than any formal education. Similarly, Plato's proposal of hereditary class distinction can lead to slavery, violation of fundamental human rights, revolution, suicide, frustration, and pessimism. For instance the children of the artisans (common people) becoming artisans themselves is a mark of injustice to them and the denial of their fundamental right to self esteem, dignity, and growth. Hereditary class distinction will inevitably lead to disastrous consequences of revolution, slavery, pessimism, frustration, and suicide. Rather every person should be given the opportunity to rise to leadership or any higher position in the society.

CONCLUSION

Leadership is a very sensitive endeavour that requires wisdom. This wisdom entails the knowledge of the principles of philosophy and their application as tools or techniques to one's life and leadership. Vices of corruption, indiscipline, superiority complex, greed, sentimentalism, tribalism, marginalization, and unhealthy competition among others associated with political leaders which consequentially have resulted in economic, political, judicial, technological, infrastructural, educational, moral, and social inequality, marginalization, crises, and deprivation in Nigeria are predicated on their culpable deficiency and

ignorance of the principles of philosophy. This is the rationale why Plato in his socio-political philosophy recommends that the knowledge of philosophy is a necessity for any political leader. The exposition and application Plato's theories of the ideal state and the necessity of the guardian (ruler) to be groomed in the knowledge of philosophy in his socio-political philosophy which this paper has done is very relevant to Nigerian politicians because it equips them with the metaphysical, epistemological, axiological, and logical tools, techniques, expertise, and approaches to leadership. This unequivocally will create unimaginable rapid economic, political, judicial, technological, infrastructural, educational, and social justice, equality, and development in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATION

Due to the enormous relevance of the knowledge of philosophy to the Nigerian political leaders against the background of the proposal made by Plato in his socio-political philosophy that the guardian (ruler) should have the knowledge philosophy to enable him possess the necessary wisdom to carry out successfully his sensitive responsibilities to the state, the paper makes the following recommendations.

1. The study of philosophy should be introduced and made compulsory in all secondary and tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria;
2. Anyone who aspires to take political position in Nigerian should have at least a Master Degree in Philosophy MA (Phil) or a Master Degree in Philosophy of Education (Med); and
3. Qualified lecturers should be employed to teach philosophy in secondary and tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria.

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