

Plato's Philosopher Rulers: Lessons for Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The current state of affairs in Nigeria is the reality of the state of nature portrayed by social contract philosophers. The Nigerian state has failed to provide security for lives and property. The basic necessities of life are luxuries in Nigeria. The legislators enact selfish laws while the judiciary is being emasculated by the mighty and the executive formulates and implements self-serving policies. The government has become of men rather than of laws. This is due to the failure of leadership, which is predicated on the quality of the rulers, most of whose level of education cannot afford them the acumen for statecraft. The matrices of the problem are: colonist influence; manipulations by the cult of the uneducated; and the political aloofness of educated Nigerians. Plato's political ideology for an ideal state remains a classic reference for many generations after his death. In the instant case, his theme on the qualifications of the philosopher rulers (guardians) after rigorous educational training could serve as a paradigm for Nigeria. Therefore, the work recommends that the minimum educational qualifications for Nigerian rulers be reviewed upward to a university degree, which not only equates with the rigorous educational training for the guardians in Plato's ideal state but also sufficient to broaden the horizons of the rulers to comprehend, analyse and reach decisions on complex issues. Thus, ss. 131 (d), 177 (c) of the CFRN 1999 (as amended) should be amended. Finally, educated citizens should be involved in the political affairs of Nigeria in order to fill the quality gap in the quality of rulers. Or else there would always be square pegs in round holes and the ship of state would wreck.

Keywords: Philosopher Ruler, Education, Statecraft, Government.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerians are experiencing an unprecedented degree of “ungovernance” or misgovernance, marked by a high degree of insecurity, hunger, corruption, among others. The operations of the Boko Haram insurgents have become sophisticated with the use of weapons that even the Nigerian military does not seem to possess. They have invaded, killed, and displaced communities, among many other atrocities. They have become a threat to both internal and international security as their activities have now stretched beyond Nigeria and her neighbours (Amalu, 2015). It has been a period when herdsmen, who hitherto tended their cows, have taken to banditry, kidnapping, rape, and killing of victims. As the roads are not safe, neither are the rivers, creeks, and seas, which have been taken over by armed robbers, kidnappers, pirates, and oil bunkers. Nigerian citizens have become helpless because the government has failed to protect them. In this connection, Ariche et al. maintain that there is a lot of frustration in Nigeria where we have a poor and bad system that can frustrate people (Ariche & Awurumibe, 2018). In terms of hunger, the average Nigerian is unable to afford three meals per day because of unemployment and a hike in the price of stock amidst low quality and quantity. Despite all the food intervention programs by the government, Amalu and Adetu (2018) argue that average Nigerians are yet to feel the positive impact of these programs and food insecurity is still largely widespread. In other words, it is in Nigeria that when there is an increase in price, there is a corresponding decrease in quantity and quality. This is contrary to the common sense economic principle that an increase in price is to maintain quality and quantity. It is in Nigeria that the electricity companies give arbitrary/estimated bills in defiance of the judgment of the court but coerce the citizens to pay not for services rendered but because the electricity cables are in their streets and neighbourhoods, yet switch on generators to print receipts of payment (Kambule & Nwulu, 2021). It is in Nigeria that palliatives to cushion the hardship occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic/lockdown were diverted into private stores/warehouses. In fact, Nigerians have lost trust

and confidence in the government, and this to a great extent explains why some Nigerians still see COVID-19 as a scam (Ariche *et al.*, 2021). It is Nigeria that claims to practice democracy while murdering its citizens who engage in peaceful protests against police brutality and other injustices.

It is Nigeria that exemplifies a country so endowed with natural resources, including crude oil, that the government spends billions of naira to build refineries and import petroleum products for local consumption. Nigeria is a country whose rulers refuse to fund the educational sector's proliferating higher institutions as constituency projects but send their children to well-funded and equipped universities abroad. It was in Nigeria that a python swallowed public funds and disappeared. It is also in Nigeria that monkeys swallowed about seventy million naira and disappeared (Osuala & Nyok, 2018). It is in Nigeria that rodents invaded and swallowed furniture in the office of the President of the Federal Republic. Nigeria is a country that defies positive reforms because such reforms run contrary to the vested interests of a few groups and several people. And there was a country known as Nigeria that experienced a civil war between 1967 and 1970, yet the circumstances that led to the strife are still on a large scale in the twenty-first century (Otiono, 2021).

Nigeria has been described as "fantastically corrupt", "poverty capital of the world", among other derogatory terms, and classified as a "terrorist country" in the past (Adetula & Amupitan, 2018). What is more, Nigerians are seen as people with questionable characteristics in most foreign countries. This may be said to be a reality of the state of nature portrayed by the social contractarian philosophers, which implies for Karl Maier (2002) that "this house has fallen". This situation is a necessary corollary of a dysfunctional system, and a dysfunctional system is a product of leadership failure or lack of it. Ikegbu *et al.*, (2021) maintain that Nigeria, at both military and civilian administration, has not experienced a leadership class at all levels that sees the happiness and health status of its nationals as primary.

In Nigeria, the benchmark educational qualification for one to be elected President, Governor, Chairman, and Legislator is the West African School Certificate or its counter-part, the Senior Secondary School Certificate or its equivalent. Has this level of education properly equipped the person for the responsibilities of the office of President or Governor or Chairman or legislator? Can someone with this level of education comprehend, analyse, and reach decisions on complex issues? Can he/she engage his counterparts on the political world stage where all leaders/presidents/parliamentarians converge? The Nigerian experience is unarguably a problem of deficiency in the quality of her rulers (Achebe, 1984). There are different themes in Plato's ideology of the ideal state, particularly the qualifications of the philosopher rulers with rigorous educational training, which can serve as a lesson for Nigeria to salvage this deficiency.

PLATO'S METAPHYSICS OF THE HUMAN SOUL AND STATE

In order to advance his political ideology, Plato conceived of the state as an extrapolation of his metaphysics of the human soul, which is divided into three components: the rational, spirited, and appetitive. The rational part is capable of producing gold, while the spirited part produces copper or iron, and the appetitive part produces silver, which corresponds to reason, prudence, strength, and emotions, respectively. Thus, justice in the soul is equated with virtue and injustice with vice, and he concludes that:

the justman will not go beyond his like, but only beyond his unlike...the just man resembles the wise and the good whereas the unjust man resembles the bad and the ignorant...but we agreed, you that the character of each of them is identical with the character of those whom he resembles...consequently, we have made the discovery that the just man is wise and good and the unjust man ignorant and bad (Plato, 1991, p. 64).

His argument is that human beings are gifted by nature with potentials which guide their social behaviour. Happiness in the human soul consists in the harmonious functioning of each of these parts: appetitive, spirited and rational. Plato contended that the human soul is composed of three

parts: appetitive, spirited and rational parts, working distinctly but harmoniously for justice in the soul

The Appetitive Part

Plato contends that this is the pleasure-seeking part of the human soul. It manifests in the form of desires for food, drink, sex, and money. According to him, every desire in itself has to do with its natural object in its simple abstract form, but the accessories of the desire determine the quality of the object (Plato, 1991). In other words, the quantity of desires to satisfy an individual's interests determines the quality of the individual's social expressions. Another trait of the appetitive part is that it lacks self-control because the thirsty man has no other wish than to drink, but this is what he desires, and towards it he is impelled (Plato, 1991). It is therefore, through reasoning, that one can be liberated from this prison.

The Spirited Part

This manifests in courage, strength, victory or fearlessness. According to Plato, the spirited part constitutes the third element, which is a natural ally of the rational part, if it is not corrupted by evil training... for even in little children any one may see this, that from their birth they have plenty of spirit, whereas reason is a principle to which most men only attain after many years, and sometimes never (Plato, 1991, p. 139).

The Rational Part

This is the highest and superior part of the human soul. It does the reasoning, comprehension reflection and decision. Plato argues that man would only find pleasure when the rational part rules the soul because those with balanced souls are ruled by reason (Plato, 1991). 'Reason includes not only the ability to understand and to think before we act, the faculty of calculation and foresights, but also the ability to make up one's mind, the faculty of decision' (Plato, 1991).

CLASSIFICATION OF CITIZENS IN THE IDEAL STATE

The correspondence of the above metaphysics in the human soul has in the polis to wit: artisans, auxiliaries and guardians. Plato speaks thus:

Here then, I proceed after a hard struggle, we have, though with difficulty, reached the land and we are well satisfied that there are corresponding divisions, equal in number, in a state and in the soul of every individual...does it not necessarily follow that as and whereby the state was wise, so and thereby the individual is wise? And that as whereby the individual is brave, so and thereby is the state brave, and that everything conducing to virtue which is possessed by the one, finds its counterpart in the other...I imagine Glaucon, that a man is just in the same way in which we found the state to be just (Cahn, 2011, p. 69)

The Artisans

This is the class of the citizens, among whom are craftsmen/women, labourers, drivers, potters, agriculturist. In Plato's words

But we cautioned the shoemaker, you know, against attempting to be an agriculturist or a weaver or a builder besides, with a view to our shoemaking work being well done; and to every other artisan we assigned in like manner one occupation, namely that of which he was naturally fitted and in which if he let other things alone and wrought at it all his time without neglecting his opportunities, he was likely to prove a successful workman (Plato, 1991, p. 56).

One salient point in the above is that each of these artisans should concentrate and specialize on the skill which is gifted by nature because there is none in the world who would make a good draught-

player or dice-player by merely taking up the game at unoccupied moments, instead of concentrating as one's special trait. In other words, mere handling of other instrument will never make such instrument be useful to one who has neither learnt its capabilities nor exercised himself sufficiently in its practical applications (Plato, 1991, p. 57). It is therefore, the responsibility of the guardian to moderate the activities of the artisans in order to bridge the gap between poverty and wealth, among other vices that he is prone to indulging in. In Plato's word to Glaucon;

Do you think a potter after he has grown rich will care to attend to his trade? Certainly not, but he will become more idle and careless than he was before. Then does he not make a worse potter? Then both these conditions, riches and poverty deteriorate the production of the artisan and Artisans themselves. Then apparently we have found some other objects for vigilance of our guardians, who must take every precaution that they may never evade their watch and steal into the city...wealth and poverty, because the former produces luxury and idleness and innovation and the latter meanness and bad workmanship as well as innovation (Plato, 1991, p. 115).

The Auxiliaries

The auxiliaries are those who are gifted by nature to be spirited, courageous and brave. Thus, they are the soldiers and include any one in that category whose duty is to defend the state and preserve its territorial integrity against invaders, foreign and domestic. Plato uses the braveness of a well-bred dog to underscore the qualities required of the auxiliaries thus:

...they ought both of them to be quick to discover an enemy, and swift to overtake him when discovered, and strong also, in case they have to fight when they have come up with him. Certainly, all these qualities are required. Moreover, they must be brave if they are to fight well...Nevertheless, they certainly ought to be gentle to their friends and dangerous only to their enemies, else they will not wait for others to destroy them, but will be the first to do it for themselves (Plato, 1991, p. 57).

The state therefore needs a formidable army to wade off aggressors or respond to attacks of war in order to secure lives and property. In his explanation to Glaucon, Socrates asserts that "at this stage of inquiry, let us avoid asserting either that war does good or that it does harm... 'Once more, my friend, our state must receive accession of the most colossal magnitude, that of a whole army, which must go forth and fight all invaders in defense of its entire property and of the people whom we have just described (Cahn et al., 2021, p. 24).

The Guardians

In correspondence with the classification of the human soul, the rational part manifests in the guardians of the state who are to rule the state. Thus, they are also referred to as "Philosopher Kings or Philosopher Rulers." Plato emphasised the qualities and roles of the guardian because the health, peace, and justice in the state depend on how prudent and effective the guardians are able to co-ordinate the other classes to function harmoniously. While responding to Thrasymachus on the lifestyle of good men, Socrates insists that "they do not consent to hold office for the sake of money nor for the sake of honour, for they neither wish to get the name of hirelings by openly exacting hire for their duties, nor of thieves by using their power to obtain it secretly" (Cahn & Markie, 1998, p. 59). Nor yet will they take office for the sake of honour, for they are not ambitious. The guardians are expected to possess three basic qualities: temperance, courage, and wisdom. Temperance is the ability to control one's appetite for things like eating and drinking. The trait of courage is to overcome fear, danger, and wisdom to handle practical issues towards right judgments.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR THE GUARDIANS IN THE IDEAL STATE

Besides the mandatory preliminary educational training for all young citizens that would highlight their respective natural gifts for classification into the state's structure of artisans, auxiliaries, or guardians, Plato recommends another special and rigorous training for those who would become guardians. The first stage is when they are very young. This focus of the training should be on the development of their minds and moral character through literary education. To achieve this, Socrates said they must be told true stories and fiction, starting with fiction but censoring the ones that misrepresent the gods and heroes (Rochelle, 1996). The second stage is between the ages of eighteen and twenty for physical training and military service. According to him, "if the mind has been adequately trained, we should do well to leave to it the minutiae of physical training: all we need to do, for brevity's sake, is to give a rough outline" (Plato 2007, p. 553). In other words, the guardian needs a synergy of both mental and physical training for balance because excessive athletic training would produce an uncivilized guardian and purely literary training would produce men who are indecently soft. After this stage, there is another educational training between the ages of twenty and thirty for the rulers on mathematical studies, which covers arithmetic, plane geometry, solid geometry, astronomy, and harmonics. This would be followed by studies in dialectic, "the only procedure which proceeds by the destruction of assumptions to the very first principle, so as to give itself a firm base. When the eye of the mind gets really bogged down in a morass of ignorance, dialectic gently pulls it out and leads it up" (Epstein, 1981, p. 339).

He used the simile of the cave to advance this view. Plato has Socrates asking Glaucon to imagine a group of people trapped in a cave, and they are continually facing a wall that reflects the images and objects of things that they have become accustomed to. And suppose that one of them now escapes and is able to see the actual images and objects that were reflected on the wall while in the cave. It is now his duty to return to the cave to enlighten the other prisoners (Reeve, 2012). The final phase of the educational programme would be for fifteen years of practical experience in subordinate offices so that those who survive would qualify as philosopher-rulers and divide their time between pure philosophy and ruling. The philosopher-rulers who are armed with the idea of the good are the best to rule and administer justice. They would have good character, calm dispositions, sound minds and also possess sterling qualities like truthfulness, high-mindedness, discipleship and courage. They would be honest, forthright, not petty or mean, public-spirited and wise. Thus, Socrates concludes that,

The society we have described above can never grow into a reality or see the light of day, and there will be no end to the troubles of states, or indeed, my dear Glaucon, of humanity itself; till philosophers become Kings in this world, or till those we now call Kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into same hands, while the many natures now content to follow either to the exclusion of the other are forcibly debarred from doing so. This is what I have hesitated to say so long, knowing what a paradox it would sound; for it is not easy to see that there is no other road to real happiness either for society or the individual (Smith, 2005, p. 57).

QUALIFICATIONS FOR RULERS IN NIGERIA

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) 1999 (as amended) prescribes that a person shall be qualified for the office of President of the Federation, Governor of a state, or if he has been educated up to at least the School Certificate level or its equivalent (Koni, 2021). This is replicated for legislators and chairmen/chairpersons of local governments. The law is silent on the minimum number of credits that must be earned. Thus, it has come to mean that evidence of having attempted the School Certificate Examination is sufficient. Furthermore, even if the provisions specified the number of credits/passes to be earned, this level of education does not provide the person with the intellectual acumen to comprehend, analyze, and make decisions on complex issues. Also, such a person would develop a personality complex to lead others of high intellectual acumen.

Although the rulers are not expected to work alone but to form a team, sometimes of experts, the final decision and responsibility are attached where the bug stops. According to Machiavelli, “a prince who is not himself wise cannot be well advised” (Quaglioni, 2014, p. 104).

MATRIXES OF NIGERIA’S DEFICIENCY OF RULERS

We can attribute Nigeria’s leadership deficit to a number of mutual factors, which include but are not limited to: the antics of the colonists, the cult of the mediocre, and the political aloofness of educated Nigerians.

Antics of the Colonists

It is common knowledge that Nigeria was colonized by Britain until 1960. At independence, the colonists preferably handed over to those whose intellectual acumen at the time would necessitate dependence on them for ideas on how to govern. Thus, many Nigerian leaders often seek foreign ideas on even the most common things that would improve the welfare of Nigerians, whereas some of these ideas are meant to under develop Nigeria. This disposition has been entrenched in our psyche so that incumbents manipulate the system to install a successor not on the criterion of competence but to protect the interests of the former occupant, who now wields the influence of a “political godfather” and directs the conduct of the incumbent and diverts state resources to further enrich himself as a colonist while the public interest or welfare of the citizens suffers.

The Cult of the Uneducated Nigerians

The cult of the uneducated is an alignment of the uneducated to protect their interests and wade off educated Nigerians into the political sphere. The majority of those who took over from the colonists were not educated, and having occupied the space, they saw the entrance of educated citizens and experts as a threat to their political dominance. This is achieved by ensuring that only people of their educational category enter into the political circle so that they can dominate the sphere and make decisions that protect their interests. It is their dominance that resulted in such legislation like the requirement of a senior school certificate as a benchmark to occupy the offices of President, Governor, Chairman, and Legislator. Another strategy is to destroy the educational sector so as to frustrate the illumination of Nigerians in order to consign them to the cave of illusions of the essence of government and the irreducible minimum standards of a civilized society and to produce those who would be uneducated though educated. While executing the above templates, their children are sent to schools abroad or private schools in Nigeria so that if any educated person is to be admitted into the circle, then it should be their children who would only protect and further their parents’ or allies’ interests and not the common good of the citizens or state. These have permeated the Nigerian political system to such a height that when a few educated people enter into the political space, their mentalities are either warped or they are sidelined in the scheme of things or intimidated or blackmailed to think and act like the majority (or at the extreme, one is killed) and, as a consequence, they have no positive impacts on governance and the state.

Political Aloofness of Educated Nigerians

The silence and inertia of most of the educated Nigerian citizens and experts in the respective fields of human endeavours contribute to exacerbating the deficiency in the rule of Nigeria. Most educated and enlightened Nigerians are aloof from the political affairs of their country yet expect positive changes. This is partly due to a wrong notion that political participation is contestation for public offices. It is not limited to contesting for political offices but includes the publication of papers or memoranda (like this one), commentaries on government policies, testing the validity of legislation and policies in court, peaceful protest against policies, and voting, among others. Where the educated, enlightened, or experts remain aloof, then those who are available would fill the vacant positions, and that accounts for one reason why square pegs are in round holes. If it involves voting,

then the uneducated who are in the majority would elect a member of their circle and even make laws and regulations to protect and defend their interests. If it is an appointive position, then those who are involved would be given priority and most likely be appointed over those who are aloof. Another consequence of the aloofness is that it is difficult to effect positive reforms from outside rather than from within.

LESSONS FROM PLATO'S PHILOSOPHER KING FOR NIGERIA

Plato has clearly shown that there are three classes of citizens based on their natural gifts: artisans, auxiliaries, and guardians. This is discernible through educational training. Whereas it appears that he paid more attention to the guardian class than the artisan and auxiliary classes, it is because the guardians presided over the other classes for justice to prevail in the state. Consequently, a very special educational program was designed for them to undergo, and only those who succeed are fit to rule. The first and elementary stage of education that lasts till the age of fifteen is what is equivalent to the school certificate in Nigeria. The dialectical final stages would be equivalent to university education in Nigeria. Ariche, in agreement with Plato, maintains that only philosophers have the power of dialectical reasoning (Raven, 1965). What this means for Nigeria is that the country's rulers could be either potential artisans, auxiliaries, or unintentional guardians because senior school education had yet to categorize the people. Thus, Nigerian presidents and governors, from independence in 1960 to then (and indeed to date), with this qualification, have suffered a leadership deficit in comparison with those that have earned higher qualifications like Bachelor's or doctorate degrees (Ariche, 2015). The worst has been the current experience, in which low levels of education have been so apparent in interviews, engagement in international arenas, poor handling of domestic affairs, and obstinate deliberate breaches of the CFRN 1999, among others. And that is why Nigeria is either unable to transit from the state of nature or relapses into the state of nature

CONCLUSION

Plato has shown that the state is a macrocosm of the metaphysics of the human soul and that justice, peace, and order in the human soul are the harmonious functioning of the component parts of the soul when the rational part is playing its role of superintendence effectively. In the same vein, if the human soul is sick, it would mean that the rational part has neglected, refused, or abdicated from its pivotal duty. Plato's philosophy may seem abstract and inapplicable in modern societies, but some parts of it may be abstracted and modified as a guide to resolve current realities. Thus, by extrapolation, Plato's views on training to qualify the Guardians would serve as a guide to salvage Nigeria from this leadership deficit because the art of leadership is too complex for a school certificate holder to comprehend, analyse, and handle. As a result, it is the opinion of this work that sections 131(d) and 177(c) of the CFRN 1999 (as amended) be amended to review the level of education to a first degree (Bachelor's degree) for persons who would hold the offices of President, Governor, Chairman, or legislator in Nigeria. As contended above, a university education equates with the special training which Plato recommends for those who would qualify as philosopher rulers. It also recommends that the standard of education should be improved to be capable of producing philosopher rulers and that the educated, enlightened, or experts in different fields should be involved in the political affairs of Nigeria in order to fill the gap in the quality of rulers. These are the first and fundamental steps to salvaging Nigeria from the deficiency in the quality of her rulers that has or is wrecking the ship of the state. Plato concluded thus: "When the supreme power in man coincides with the greatest wisdom and temperance, then the best constitution comes into being; but in no other way..." It's either that or nothing.

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