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PLATO'S CONCEPT OF PHILOSOPHER KING: IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
Political leadership is an important tool for the promotion of national development and should not be left in the hands of ignorant, uneducated or semi-educated fellows. The paper examined the concept of "Philosopher King" as perceived by Plato and its implications for Nigeria's political leadership and national development. The concepts of philosopher king, political leadership and national development were examined. The paper drew the conclusion that Plato's idea of philosopher king has implications for Nigeria's political leadership and national development and can be used to address the leadership and developmental challenges in Nigeria. The paper also concluded that there will be no national development if leadership is not placed in the hands of highly educated and knowledgeable Nigerians who can make sound and rational decisions for nation building. Based on this, the paper recommended the amendment of the constitution of Nigeria to give room for highly educated and knowledgeable Nigerians to oversee the affairs of the Nigerian State.

Keywords: Philosopher, Philosopher King, Leadership, Political Leadership, Development, National Development.

Introduction

Leadership is a potent tool for the development and transformation of every nation. The quality of leadership determines the quality of life in a nation. Agbor (2012) asserts that the success or failure of any society depends largely on the manner and nature of its leadership. Chemers (2002) views leadership as a process of social influence by which a personinfluences others to accomplish an objective and directs the

organization in a manner that makes it more cohesive and coherent. The famous Greek philosopher, Plato recognizes the importance and role of leadership in the affairs of a society when he made a case for philosopher kings (leaders with high level of intellect) to govern the state. Plato argues that decision making in political leadership requires judgement and skills and should be left for experts who have knowledge (philosopher kings) (Wolff, 2006).

The position of Plato is different from what is obtainable in Nigeria. Leadership in Nigeria has become an all-comers affair. People occupy leadership positions even when they lack the basic knowledge and requirements for the office. In Nigeria, knowledge of one's intellect is not considered in the choice of political leadership. The people do not consider the intellectual ability of the would-be leaders and this is the major cause of leadership failure and underdevelopment in Nigeria. A leader who cannot reason critically cannot make administrative decisions capable of bringing about national development. Critical thinking and high intellectual reasoning come as one acquires high level of education. Education develops the mental aspect of man and a man whose mind is not developed cannot lead effectively. The situation in Nigeria where everybody occupies leadership positions without placing knowledge and intellect as criteria, is to say the least, supported by the 1999 constitution of Nigeria (as amended) which stipulates that the academic qualification for political leadership in Nigeria shall be the possession of school certificate or its equivalence. The implication of this is that anybody who has attended the first level of education (primary education) in Nigeria and has been awarded the certificate can govern the Nigeria state even though he lacks higher level of education.

Plato's Life and Philosophy

Plato was born in Athens in 428 BC. He was a student of Socrates and was the son of Ariston and his mother was Perictione. Plato was born into an Aristocratic family. Plato as a young man was a member of the circle of Philosophers and scholars raised by Socrates. Since Socrates did not

document his teachings, most of his teachings were documented and popularized by Plato (Okoh, 2003). It is on this note that most of Plato's teachings are commonly referred to as Socratic. After Socrates was tried and executed on charges of impiety and corrupting the youth in 399 BC, Plato was greatly influenced by both the life and death of Socrates. The activities of Socrates provided the starting point of Plato's philosophy. Amaele (2017) observes that Plato's Philosophy was influenced by Socrates, Pythagoras, Heraclitus and the Athenian society. Socrates' interactions with Plato on moral qualities and attributes, such as courage and justice among others raised sustained arguments between them and this sharpened Plato's interests in the Universal theory of ideas (idealism). Another influence of Plato's philosophy according to Amaele (2017) is Heraclitus. Heraclitus argues that nothing is permanent in the Cosmos (word). Everything in the Cosmos changes and such changes are governed by laws. Plato accepted Heraclitus' philosophy of constant state of flux but argued that knowledge could be attainable in the universal (the world of reality) where things, including knowledge are permanent, stable and real. Plato was also influenced by Pythagoras who was the inventor of the popular geometrical theorem known as the "Pythagoras Theory". Plato's interest in mathematical universals emanated from Pythagorean philosophy. The last influence on Plato's philosophy was the Athenian society. There was total collapse of morality in Athens and the city lost her traditional values and conduct. As a moral Philosopher, Plato began to research for ethical universals such as goodness and justice, to see how he could restore moral sanity and stability to the Athenian ethical system (Amaele, 2017).

Plato contributed to all branches of knowledge. He is the father of idealism. He contributed immensely to the field of education and philosophy in general. Plato's metaphysics conceives that the soul has pre-existed in the world of forms prior to its existence in this physical world of human experience. Plato in Okoh (2003) describes a being as an entity having three parts:

Reason, Spirit and Appetite. Every individual possesses one of these parts at different levels.

Plato developed a theory of forms. His theory of forms asserts that the physical world is not really the real world instead ultimate realities exist beyond our physical world. There are two realms: the physical realm and spiritual realm. The physical realm is the material things we see, touch and interact with on daily basis. The Physical realm is a changing and imperfect world.

The Spiritual realm however exists beyond the physical realm. Plato calls the Spiritual realm the 'Realm of Forms'. The spiritual realm is also known as the realm of ideas or realm of ideals. Plato quoted in Osaat (2002) asserts that the physical realm is only a reflection of the realm of forms' true existence. The realms of forms are abstract, flawless and immutable conceptions or ideals that transcend time and space (Okoh, 2003).On Epistemology, Plato maintains that the world of senses is unreliable and full of contradictions and so man cannot gain true knowledge by relying on them. According to Omoregbe (1991), Plato's theory of knowledge depicts that knowledge is virtue. In this sense, to know good is to do good, ignorance is the source of evil. The forms according to Plato provide absolute standards against which values of morality can be judged. Human actions and values are imperfect and unstable. To Plato, virtue is the most important thing in life. There is nothing as important and worthwhile as virtue.

Plato's Social Stratification

Okoh (2003:92) Posits that Plato's utopian state was divided into three categories of people:

1. **The Masses (workers):** This class of people was dominated by their appetite (desire for food, profit, luxury and wealth). Their major responsibility was the production of food. They were the largest group in Plato's utopian state. The masses according to Plato should be given basic education.

ii. **The Guardians (auxiliaries):** This group was dominated by the spirit (part of the soul). It consisted of mostly the military and civil servants. They were the executors of the decisions of the ruling class. The group was characterized by a small measure of rational thinking, courage, patriotism and ambition.

iii. **The ruling class or philosopher Kings:** This group was dominated by their rational thinking, high level of intellectual abstraction and intelligence. Their function was the governance of the state.

Justice

The idea of justice is based on the fundamental equality of all men. Men should be treated equally because they are fundamentally the same. St. Thomas Aquinas in Omoregbe (1993) views justice as the firm and constant will to give to each one his due. To treat men unequally is injustice. Wuraola (2018) views justice as the fairness, equality, equity, rightness, virtue or the equal distribution of resources. Justice is the practice of recognising fundamental rights of all men and treating them fairly and equally. Justice can also be viewed as the will to treat all humans equally and render to them what is due to them. Justice is fundamental in any society. A good society is one structured according to the principles of justice.

Omoregbe (1993:113) reports that the scholastics classified justice into four kinds, namely, commutative justice, legal justice, distributive justice and vindictive justice. Commutative justice is the justice which demands that the rights of others should be respected. Legal justice is that aspect of justice which demands the observance of all laws aimed at the common good. Distributive justice is the aspect of justice which demands the fair or equitable distribution of the goods, privileges, work and obligations of a society to all the members of the society. Vindictive justice demands appropriate punishment for an offence, not out of the spirit of vengeance but in the interest of the community or for the correction of the offender and should not be more than is deserved by the offence.

Plato on Justice

Justice is central in the philosophical writings of Plato. He was concerned with building a social order where justice would reign supreme. Plato's classification of society into the masses (workers), the guardians (auxiliaries) and rulers (philosopher kings) was done in a bid to promote justice in society. Plato regards justice as the true principle of social life and his famous work Republic as a discussion on justice (Hamedi, 2014). Plato's justice does not state a conception of right but of duties. It refers to the whole duty of man. In his city state of Athens, Plato saw the division of cities such that their citizens stood against one another. Thinking mainly of the Athenian democracy in which he lived and at the hands of which Socrates had been killed, he found the politics of his day dominated by two things. One was political selfishness and the other was ignorance. Plato found in justice the remedy for curing these evils (Hamedi, 2014).

In his social classification, Plato identifies three classes of people with distinct roles and functions. The first was the labour class or workers. They had the function of producing goods and services in the state and they were dominated by their appetite. The second class was the guardians (auxiliaries) who were dominated by the spirit and had the function of implementing the decision of the ruling class and also protecting the city. The last class according to Plato was the philosopher kings (rulers). They possess high level of intellectual abstraction and knowledge. Their duty was the governance of the state. Plato's conception of justice is that each class should perform its role efficiently and effectively and should not interfere in the roles of other classes. In this way there will be justice in the state, for justice will then be the harmony resulting from each class fulfilling its functions properly without interfering in the function of others (Omoregbe, 1993). In other words, when the different classes are performing their respective roles without meddling in the functions of each other, there will be justice. Plato's idea of justice is that individuals should undertake only those tasks in which they have comparative advantage. For instance, the philosopher king

should play only the function of governing the state. When this happens, there will be justice in society.

Justice is a principle of non-interference which keeps the various classes of society and individuals within proper bounds. Every member of the state must be assigned to the class for which he proves himself best fitted. It is a principle of functional specialization which involves everyone to make a specialized contribution to society. Specialization according to Plato leads to efficiency. Plato understood injustice to mean interference and meddlesomeness. Any interference in jobs among the three classes would bring harm to the state and was the worst evil (Omoregbe, 1991).

Plato's Concept of Philosopher King

In Plato's philosophy, a philosopher King is one who has received the highest level of education. He is dominated by rational thinking, high level of intellectual abstraction and intelligence (Okoh, 2003). In his stratification of society, Plato classified the philosopher kings as those who are highly knowledgeable and grounded in the field of philosophy. They are logical, objective and rational. Plato's conception of philosopher king was influenced by the death of his master, Socrates, who died in the hands of ignorant men overseeing the affairs of the Athenian state. To Plato, leadership is an essential task that requires knowledge and as such, should not be left in the hands of ignorant men. According to Plato in Wolff (2006), democracy is the rule by the demos, where "demos" can be understood as "the people" and as the "mob"–unfit.

Plato in Wolff (2006) argues that making political decisions requires judgement and skills and should be left for experts who have the knowledge.

According to Plato, a Philosopher king should be the one to rule the city state because of his possession of the knowledge of Philosophy. In his Republic, Plato argues that kings should become philosophers and philosophers should become kings as they possess special level of knowledge which is required to govern the Republic effectively (Matassa,

2013). Plato argues that there will be no end to the troubles of state until philosophers become kings and kings become philosophers (Plato in Matassa, 2013). Plato did not believe in democracy. He views democracy as an irrational government. In the views of Plato, the state is like a ship. It is not everybody that qualifies to be the captain of a ship. It is only those who have been properly trained in navigation can be captains of a ship. The idea of democracy to Plato is similar to everyone directing a ship. Democracy according to Plato is the rule by the mob which he describes as the "worst of all lawful governments, and the best of all lawless ones. Plato therefore argues that only those who have undergone special training and education (in philosophy) can rule a state and these he calls the philosopher kings (Hamedi, 2014).

Political Leadership

Leadership according to Nwanegbo (2009) is the art of motivating people or group of people to act towards achieving a common goal. Ogbeidi (2013) defines leadership as a body of people who lead and direct the activities of a group towards achieving a common goal. Leadership is the coordination and utilization of the resources of a group to achieve the objective of the group.

Aleyomi & Bakar (2018) views leadership as the power or ability to organize, direct and lead a group of people towards a shared or desired goal. The power of leading can be exercised in a positive way for public good, generally seen as good leadership or negatively which can be generally seen as bad leadership

Political leadership therefore is the coordination and utilization of public resources to improve the well- being of the people. It is the making and enforcement of decisions to achieve public good and interests. Political leaders make laws and policies for the well-being of the citizens and development of the state. Examples of political leaders are president, state governors, ministers, commissioners, state and federal lawmakers, etc, who are charged with the responsibility of making laws, policies and

creating programmes for the welfare of the people and development of the state. The essence of political leadership is to bring about national development. The level of development in a country is largely determined by the quality of political leadership.

National Development

National development according to Emeh & Ogaboh (2010) is the total transformation of society, making humanity the focus of the development drive and seeking to develop man's potentials. Egwu quoted in Adeyera 2011:108) views national development as the establishment of a viable and buoyant national economy, the establishment of a just and egalitarian society, the enthronement of equality and social justice and the building of a unified and integrated society where the different ethnics, religious and geopolitical identities develop a collective sense of imagination that they are one. Lawal & Oluwatoyin (2017) Posit that National development is the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. National development is the aggregate of all other forms of development such as political, economic and social development. National development involves social security and welfare, wealth creation, and infrastructural development. It is the creation of programmes, policies and activities that seek to improve the economic well-being and quality of life of the citizens.

The people are the recipients and beneficiaries of national development. Every agenda or effort for development must target and aim to develop and improve the living conditions of the people. The pointers or indicators that a country or nation is achieving national development are food security, qualitative education, gainful employment, good health care system, social justice, affordable housing, infrastructural development, equality of opportunities and many others.

According to Seers quoted in Wilson (2022), there are three questions to ask about a country's development. The questions are: what has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to poverty? What

has been happening to inequality? According to Seers, if the rate of unemployment, poverty and inequality is high, then development has not taken place. But if the three indicators of unemployment, poverty and inequality are very low, it means that development is or has taken place. A country is said to have developed if poverty, unemployment and inequality have been reduced to the barest minimum (Seers quoted in Wilson, 2022). National development is all about bringing about social change that allows people to achieve their human potentials.

Implications of Plato's Concept of Philosopher King on Nigeria's Political Leadership and National Development

Plato's idea of philosopher king has implications for political leadership and national development in Nigeria. Those who preside over the affairs of the Nigerian state should be men and women of high intellect and mental abstraction. Political leadership in Nigeria should be undertaken by those who are knowledgeable and highly educated. Political leadership should not be in the hands of mediocres as is commonly obtained in Nigeria. A leader must be a man of intellect and knowledge, a rational and critical thinker, a man who can make good and sound judgements. Political leadership is a serious business that requires constant decision making. The decision made by political leaders can make or mark the development of the state. A philosopher king (a political leader with knowledge and high level of intellect) will make good decisions that can bring or engender national development and move the state forward. A leader who is not educated and knowledgeable will not be rational in decision making. Since he is not rational, his actions and decisions can spell doom and chaos for the country.

Plato's idea of philosopher king also has implications for national development in Nigeria. Men and women of knowledge, wisdom and high intellectual and mental abstraction (philosopher kings) who occupy leadership positions are well–equipped to make sound and rational decisions and will be able to deploy their knowledge and high intellect to effectively manage the resources of the state to bring about national

development. A country achieves national development when the leaders are endowed with knowledge, wisdom, critical and rational thinking acquired through years of education and training. A leader who is not knowledgeable and well educated cannot have the mental capacity to develop the country whose affairs he is presiding. Plato argued that there will be no end to the troubles of states if philosophers do not become kings and if kings do not become philosophers (Plato in matassa, 2013). The implication of the above statement by Plato to national development is that there will be no end to the troubles of Nigeria if those who manage the affairs of Nigeria are not highly educated and knowledgeable. It means that unemployment, inequality, poverty, hunger and other myriads of problems confronting Nigeria will not end. When the affairs of the Nigerian state are in the hands of ignorant, unwise and uneducated leaders, they cannot make wise decisions to reduce poverty, achieve or provide gainful employment for the citizens, secure food, reduce child and maternal mortality, combat diseases, reduce hunger, provide quality education for the citizens and provide basic infrastructure in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Plato's concept of philosopher king has influence and implications for political leadership and national development in Nigeria. It can be used to solve or resolve the leadership challenges of countries, especially developing countries like Nigeria who place leadership positions in the hands of mediocres and ignorant men who do not have the mental ability to coordinate and manage state resources for genuine national development. Leadership is an art of making series of decisions. Except one is a philosopher king (a man of knowledge and high intellect) he cannot make good decisions that can engender national development and transformation.

Recommendations

The paper made the following recommendations:

1. The present constitution of Nigeria should be amended to allow only those with high level of education to govern the Nigerian state;
2. Those with low level of education should be discouraged through legislation from governing the Nigerian state;
3. Government should priotize the teaching of philosophy at every level of education in Nigeria. This will foster the habit of critical thinking among Nigerians;
4. The school curriculum should be organized in such a way that it will prepare the learners for future leadership roles.

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