

Crisis of Leadership in Nigeria Democracy: Is Plato's Philosopher-King an Option?

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Abstract

This work looks at the concept of Philosopher-King and its adequacy as a solution option for the continued crisis of leadership within the Nigerian polity. Using the method of hermeneutics, it examines the history of leadership failure in Nigeria as well as Plato's concept of Philosopher-King within the context of the Republic and which he considers a *sinequanon* for the emergence of a just society. While the present work acknowledges that the concerns of Plato remain valid today, namely, the need for creation of a just state in a country bedeviled by unjust structures and subjugation; the need for the application of principle of functional specialization in a polity where interest, ethnic and religious considerations have eclipsed meritocracy and capacity in the name of quota system; it however, finds very disturbing the evident institutionalization of personality contained in the concept and which would ultimately degenerate into oligarchic autocracy as the philosopher steps into the murky waters of politics. In failing to take care of the question of building a formidable political institution that acts as checks and balances to the Plato's strong person of the intellect; and in relegating the masses whose opinions do not account at all, this write-up considers Plato's conceptualization of the Philosopher-King as it is, as inadequate for the Nigerian democracy, without prejudice to the subsisting question of the real possibility of actualizing such a system.

Introduction

Chinua Achebe's undying line in his *The Trouble with Nigeria* to the effect that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" has become a catchphrase for many a discourse that focus on the why of the woes of the Nigerian nation. For the author of *Blackman's Dilemma*, leadership problem is the black man's greatest problem. Leadership crisis remains the explanatory fulcrum of a rather rich nation lurked in overlapping political, social and economic woes. It needs be mentioned, however, that the complacency and docility of the *demos* of the Nigerian democracy is also a key factor in the current travails of a nation, a situation made even worse, given the prevalence of ethnic chauvinism and religious jingoism that tenure discourse on many national issues of great importance. This reference to the masses is made in order to place the Nigeria's problem in its causative-permissive perspectives, all of which have congregated to make the yesteryears going backwards seem as the golden age of the nation's development with the present day left in hubris of the dark ages as national discourses pride themselves with the so called great potentialities that never succeeded in becoming actualities. For instance, per capita income, infrastructural development, education system, health system, rate of employment today compared to 1960s shows a country on reverse gear. The allusion to the masses notwithstanding, the leadership is the pivotal explanation of the dwarf that the giant of Africa has become. After all, it is most often the political elites who would always stir the murky and hyper-delicate waters of ethnicity and religion in order to get away with their incompetence and rascality. It is these same leaders who pay lip service to education of the masses, a situation that is worse in the Northern part, in what has been described as weaponization of ignorance which is ultimately a

weaponization of poverty, all for the continued monopoly of the political and economic spaces by the political elites.

There is no gainsaying that the Nigerian situation is deplorable and in a state of near hopelessness occasioned by the type of leadership we have had over the years. This unwholesome state of affairs has for long entrenched in our political space crisis of legitimacy and trust deficit with regard to our political leadership vis-à-vis the common man. Long history of this deficit has opened up need and quest for an alternative leadership. This has led to lots of literature on leadership in Nigeria with different sorts of solution proffered. One of these is the beckoning of the emergence of Plato's Philosopher-King which is the major subject matter of the present work.

A Sully History of Leadership Failure

The truth is that an organization, an institution, a nation is as good as its leadership who shapes and molds the society according to its conceived forms. Thus, the fate of a nation simply hangs upon the leadership:... the height attained by a nation is determined by its leaders. Similarly, the depth to which a country sinks is a function of its leadership. The success recorded by any society or country is dependent on the kind of leadership it has as the point in time (Olanrewaju, 2021).

Singapore is five years younger than Nigeria in terms of attainment of nationhood and at its inception, only few gave it much chance of survival. In fact Malaysia in extruding Singapore, was sure of the birthing of a nation doomed to be a failed state. This sully narrative was never to be actualized, for, "Rising from a legacy of divisive colonialism," Henry Kissinger (Yew, 2011) writes, "the devastation of the Second World War, and general poverty and disorder following the

withdrawal of foreign forces, Singapore now is hailed as a city of the future.” Today Singapore “is thriving metropolis with not only the world’s number one airline, best airport, and busiest port of trade, but also the world’s fourth-highest per capita real income. Thanks to the Singapore’s charismatic and controversial founding president, Lee Kuan Yew that set the stage for the transformation of Singapore “from Third world to First,” the smallest state in the Southeast Asia that had been destined by naysayers to be a client state in Southeast Asia of more powerful neighbours, did not only survive but prevailed by excelling becoming the high-tech leader of South East Asia, the commercial entrepot, the scientific centre, the second financial centre in Asia, playing a major role in the politics and economics of Southeast Asia and beyond. This, for Kissinger (Yew, 2011) rests “the ancient argument whether circumstance or personality shapes events is settled in favour of the latter.” It is not circumstance nor bounty of natural resources but the intelligence, discipline and ingenuity of leadership within the ambience of patriotism that determine the state of a nation’s development.

Rwanda’s story is for the moment, Africa’s most inspiring success story made possible by committed leadership since the 1994 genocide against Tutsi by Hutu. Inheriting a country decimated by the genocide, fuelled by ethnic primordial sentiments, Paul Kagame, through a committed leadership first deepened the after-war realization that “for a nation to grow, the tribe must die,” (Ogundele, 2022) And ever since led the nation to the path of recovery and restoration exceeding all expectation and aspiring to middle income country status by 2035 and high-income country status by 2050. (World Bank: Rwanda Overview)

Nigeria is in the unfortunate state it finds herself due to her crop of leaders. Like Achebe correctly diagnosed, “There is

nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or anything else.” According to him, “The Nigeria problem is the unwillingness, or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmark of true leadership... .” Nothing explains the degeneracy of Nigerian state like the leadership failure over time otherwise, how else could one explain the paradox of a nation richly endowed with natural resources and yet being almost the global headquarters of poverty? According to the latest development update by the World Bank, Nigeria has 18.5 million of her children out of school, making Nigeria the country with the highest number of out of school children in the world. Nigeria National Educational Survey conducted by the National Population Commission showed that 18 percent of Nigerian girls aged 6 to 16 was out of school.

Yet, this is a country that has had to enjoy oil booms at different points in their history: In the 1960s with the discovery of oil and oil boom of 1973-74 and 1979; again 1980-82 which saw the transfer of humongous wealth to Nigeria to the extent that Gowon, the then president of Nigeria had to state that the problem of Nigeria was not money but how to spend the money. The Gulf war of 1990 was yet another occasion. Again, in 2011-2014 the price of oil per barrel rose to over 100 dollars per barrel. Unfortunately there is no proportionate structure and dividend in the light of the series of these windfalls. The proceeds were in the main squandered and embezzled. The Gulf War windfall “famously vanished.” There was a distortion of the economy by neglecting productive sectors like agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and SMEs such that “From self-sufficiency, the country transited to import dependency for food and eventually practically everything else” (Punch Editorial, 2022). Today Nigeria finds herself in a dire economic

quagmire; thanks to inefficient management by a less purposeful and self-serving managers. The Economist (September, 2022) reports that given the opportunity of surge in oil prices, Saudi Arabia plans a futuristic city in the desert replete with an artificial moon made of drones. Angola's currency which had been wobbling became one of the strongest performers against dollar. Middle East and Asia oil exporters look forward to pocketing \$320bn more oil revenue by the end of the year more than was forecast. In all these, the giant of Africa, Africa's most populous nation and the much touted former Africa's biggest oil producer is conspicuously absent and records negative in terms of the net effect of the high oil price (Addeh et al., 2022). One wonders how such colossal theft is even possible without collusion, a ship getting into the national waters where naval officers are stationed and yet they are not seen. One wonders why the record of the actual number of barrel that leave the shores of the country has become a mirage in a high tech age, but for lack of political will which of course presupposes deep level of collusion. Today, Nigeria gets nothing from the soaring oil prices when its counter parts are raking in dollars in excess gain (Blurb Team, 2022). Just as many oil producing countries are cashing out big in a windfall due to Ukraine-Russian war, Nigeria has nothing to show for this economic windfall. This is in addition to humongous amount on fuel subsidies which is shrouded in secrecy yet quoted as exceeding the total expenditure by all the states of the federation in 2021, which amounts to \$9.8billion (Addeh et al., 2022).

The same collusion is evident in the spate of insecurity that have ravaged the length and breadth of the nation: Fulani bandit gang, Bokoharam and Islamic State in West Africa, smoldering ethnic tension, separatist groups, 'unknown gunmen' ravaging the South East etc. Most of these are

simply on a free-rein mode, a situation that has precipitated the phenomenon of internally displaced person and has continued its rise. Numerous soldiers have been killed; army barracks attacked without any traces of the on slaughters; correctional facilities are attacked without genuine resistance; village wipeouts, mass pillaging by swat of attackers moving in droves; yet nothing like reprisals from the security forces nor are they apprehended, such that one cannot but conclude the reality of government collusion.

These and many more have led to the characterization of Nigeria as arguably a failed state. Robert Rotberg and John Campbell in their analysis in an essay for Foreign Policy in May, 2021 furnish a very bleak narrative of the state of the country: "Nigeria has long teetered on the precipice of failure. Unable to keep its citizens safe and secure, Nigeria has become a fully failed state of critical geopolitical concern. Its failure matters because the peace and prosperity of Africa and preventing the spread of disorder and militancy around the globe depend on a stronger Nigeria" (Beaumont, 2021). The finality in the tone of these lines may be unwelcomed in many quarters. Patrick Stewart in his "Weak states and Global Threats: Facts or Fiction?" highlights the relativity of state strength and state failure. While there may still be a glimmer of hope, one cannot fail to point out that Nigeria has failed to supply the provisions by which good/strong states are known: "... physical security, incorruptible political institutions, a strong economy, and social welfare." Falola (2021) notes that once any state falters in three out of these four essential goods, it suffices to say that it is a failure. Little wonder that Nigeria is rated among the weak state occupying the 16th position in the fragile state scale, with the first on the scale being the most fragile state out of 149 countries of the world.

All these are indicative of a leadership that is not adequately motivated by the cause for the common good and so has not

been able to translate power into nation building and public wealth. Rather, power serves the purpose of self-interest and aggrandizement signaling the dearth of patriotism among leaders characterized by primordial arrogance, a gross lack of vision, unfettered greed, disdain for the rule of law, power intoxicated and lack of broadmindedness for the best hands. This unfortunate state of affairs explains the desperation in the following lines: "Nigeria is certainly in desperate need of good leadership," according to Wambutda (2011),

... the constant change in the leadership in our history clearly testifies that we are a people groping in the dark, searching and yearning for a more reliable form of government which is fair, just, and caring enough to evoke spontaneous patriotism from the citizenry.

Plato's Philosopher-King: Context and Concept

Plato's idea of Philosopher King is a key concept in his theory of Ideal State. The Philosopher-King is for Plato, a *sinequanon* for the emergence of the *kallipolis*, which is in reality a just society. In his *Republic* 437 CD, Plato was unequivocal in his assertion that "Until philosophers are kings, or kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and philosophic wisdom meet in one..., cities will never have rest from their evils, nor will the whole of mankind." In fact for Plato "... there is one form of goodness"- that is the just rule of the Philosopher-Kings but "an infinite variety of wickedness," which represent the degeneration of his hypothetical perfect state, the first iteration being timarchy, then oligarchy, democracy and tyranny (§§445c, p.155).

Plato became committed to thinking through the formation of the ideal state that is overseen by the Philosopher-King. He was very critical of democracy and dictatorship of the tyranny which were in fierce confrontation with each other in his

time. Plato's young age was beset with socio-political and economic crises that eventually led to his despise of democracy and indeed every form of existing state. The Peloponnesian war which ended in 404BC was a disaster for the democratic Athens. The same democracy illegally tried the generals who had failed to rescue the survivors of the naval battle of Arginusa *en masse* and *in absentia*. (Apology 32b) Besides, the thirty man commission that was set up to draft a new constitution for Athens as well as to govern it pending the completion of the assignment unfortunately degenerated into what has become popularly known in history as "Thirty Tyrants," who were known for their highhandedness and who, overthrowing democracy, acted in flagrant disregard of the law in order to commandeer citizens' property (Apology 32c-d; Seventh Letter 324b-25a) These were later killed by the *demos*, the masses. Plato describes the whole situation as the discrepancy of interests between two poles, namely, the aristocrats (the oligarchs) and the democrats.

Plato's society according to Avoseh was basically beset with "... the three fundamental political evils of party-selfishness, incompetence and factionalism," all of which contributed gravely to the instability and disorganization of the Athenian government and society. This is coupled with deterioration of law with "... large scale distrust, betrayal, mal-administration, disregard for essential traditional values and general moral degeneracy." Given this, Plato became disenchanted with the existing states and with this, the thought about an ideal state began to take shape in him.

One can draw a parallel between socio-political context of Plato and that of Nigeria: the clash of interests, distrust, betrayals, crisis of values, mal-administration, bitter party politics, military intervention likened to the Thirty tyrant have

been the bane of Nigerian polity right from the first republic. Though, it must however be pointed out that for Plato, the context led to his scorn of democracy among other forms of government. Of course, the climax in his disaffection for democracy was the tragic end of Socrates in a democracy, an unfortunate incident that solidified Plato's stance against populism and democratic government. For Nigeria, the focus is on leadership within democratic set up for it seems democracy is generally accepted among the populace not minding that it has not yielded the desired dividend which is for all, the problem of leadership.

Plato's formulation of the Ideal state overseen by the philosopher-king is at the centre of his longest work, the Republic. Thus, the context of the Republic whose task is the constitution of a just society is the context for the appreciation of Plato's concept of the Philosopher-King. He was concerned with the constitution of a just society which for him is the actualization of the ideal state. For him, this state must possess the four cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, discipline and justice. Plato at the beginning of the dialogue was bothered about determining the nature of justice, which is complex and ambiguous as shown in the dialectic progression of the discourse by the personel of the dialogues of the Republic, yet one of the most fundamental ethical and political concepts. When the path was consistently beclouded, Socrates saw in the society a binocular for an enlargement of the concept of justice for a better visualization and clarity of understanding.

Holding a psychological view of the society, and armed by the principle of functional specialization, Plato classified the just society into three. Plato had the doctrine of tripartite nature of the soul, a doctrine presumably borrowed from the Pythagoreans and recurs in his *Timaeus* according to which

the soul consists of the rational, wise part; the spirited, courageous part and the appetitive part that must be tempered. Conceiving the society as man writ large, he had also tripartite classification within the society, namely, the (inferior) artisans, the auxiliaries and the guardians. While the guardian embodies the rationality of the society, the auxiliaries embody the courage of the state and are charged with the protection of the state. The appetitive part is more given to artisans. They are the class of producers or money making class and temperance of the state consists in the due subordination of these to the higher. There are thus according to him three kinds of men: "...those who are fitted by nature to work but not to rule, those who are, fit to rule but only under the control and direction of others, and finally those who are fit for the highest duties of statesmanship such as the final choice of means and ends."

Justice is the fourth virtue and Justice lies in everyone going about this task without interference with anyone else's and that means when the lower and inferior part is subordinated to the higher. It is the equity or fairness that grants each social group its due and ensures that each does one's own work" (Bolarfinwa, 2009). While the economic structure is maintained by the artisans or merchant class, security needs are provided by the military class while the political leadership is provided by the guardians. By way of analogy, the just person is the one in whom the rational element, supported by the will which itself is guided and the appetites are controlled. It is so with the just society where in the enlightened supported by the soldiers govern the rest of the society. The achievement of the justice in a state would depend, according to Plato, on whether the philosophic element is in control. He says as much when he avers that "I was forced to say in praise of the correct philosophy that it affords a vantage-point from which we can discern in all

cases what is just for communities and for individuals...” (Stumpf, 1994). Thus, the ruler that brings about the just society is the philosopher who is a king or the king who is a philosopher, the Philosopher-King.

The philosopher, for Plato, is one who could understand the difference between the visible world and the intelligible world, the realm of opinion and the realm of knowledge; one who in ascending the divided line has come to the knowledge of the world of Forms where the Good is apprehended for what it is and uses this as a model for the actualization of the ideal State. Of course the Philosopher-King comes to this point “through many stages of education ...fifteen years would be spent gathering practical experience through public service.

Finally, at age fifty, the ablest men would reach the highest level of knowledge, the vision of the Good, and would then be ready for the task of governing the state.” Part of the practical studies would be gymnastics and music. With the attainment of knowledge of the Forms, the interest of the Philosopher-King coincides with the interest of the State, the common good, regard for equilibrium and social harmony. Elsewhere, one finds conflict of interests and factionalism of different sorts which, for Plato, is the greatest enemy of the city. By virtue of specialization and expertise which is the operational principle in the society and basis of all social interchange, the Philosopher King exercises supreme authority in the state and having risen to the pure region of the world of forms, are no longer interested in ordinary matters of this world and so, are free from lust and greed that engender abuse of power and tyranny. Advocating for the communism of spouses and property, Plato believes that this ensures that the Philosopher-King does not become self-serving, imperious and dictatorial and this ultimately,

promotes the happiness of the entire community and by happiness, is meant harmony, efficiency and moral goodness. This is in addition to censorship of art and literature.

How the membership into different classes are determined is shown to be through engagement with state education, with each child valued by his merit and right by what has been termed noble lie. Book 3 of the Republic describes the education for the production of the fine young citizens suited to be Guardians of Plato's Ideal state and this Socratic dialogue was wrapped up with Socrates' famous proposal that all the citizens be taught a myth, a story. The noble lie comes into two parts, the first being about autochthony which claims that "people are gestated under the earth, and that the earth is their mother;" while the second is the Myth of the Metals which claims that "god infuses a metal deposit into each soul during the gestation under the earth, different metals for different people" (Rowett, 2016). These metals, gold for the guardian, silver for the auxiliaries and wood for the artisans, are definitive of their future career and place in society.

The gestation period as Rowett (2016) rightly interpreted is not the biological gestation but gestation into adulthood, citizen birth, midwived through education. This is based on the textual reading that the word used is *ekgonos* which according to Rowett (2016) does not mean a child but means a son or daughter and there is no textual evidence that what is meant is birth of infants or that the requirements for assessing the progeny by their metals involves judging children's abilities in infancy or childhood. Such assessment is left until the manifestation of capabilities during a period of universal comprehensive education as Socrates explains

I'll try first to convince the rulers themselves and the military, and then the rest of the community, that all the nurture and education that we gave them seem

like dreams...that they experienced, or happened round them, when in truth at that time they were being molded and nurtured deep under the ground, both themselves and their amour and the rest of their manufactured equipment, and then when they were fully formed, the earth, who was their mother, brought them forth, so now... (See Stumpf, 1994)

Why the Philosopher-King would engage in such kind of lie beats imagination but it seems that the noble lie is designed to ensure that all members of the society is on the same page with regard to the principle of functional specialization which for Plato, is key for the constitution of a just society. Speaking in terms of birth that seems to conceal the natural equality of the people, one could read ignominy from it. This fades when one recalls that Plato's concern was the actualization of a just state and it is not averse to class mobility. Thus the rule is laid that with regard to children of gold parentage that "If a child of their own is born with an alloy of iron or brass, they must, without the smallest pity, assign him the station proper to his nature and thrust him out among the farmers and craftsmen." Similarly, if a child with gold or silver is born to craftsmen, "they will promote him according to his value..." (Stumpf, 1994). Accordingly, Rowett (2016) argues that the noble lie is meant to ensure that "... the city and its citizens are lucidly aware of something that is important and true, and that it is designed to deliver greater fairness and equality of opportunity, to prevent prejudice or privilege arising from noble birth or wealth or any other unfair advantages, and to facilitate social mobility."

Plato's Philosopher-King: Is this the option for Nigerian Polity?

The Platonic proposal of Philosopher-King as the *conditio sine qua non* for the emergence of the ideal state which brings

to an end all evils is as audacious in its presentation as it is finalistic in its tone, creating a certain challenge as would any proposition couched in such conclusivity. Little wonder Plato himself did not waste any time in admitting that such a call would meet with great difficulty. However, with great display of optimism, he underlines that “all great efforts are attended with risks. Everything excellent is difficult,” a line which would again be repeated by Spinoza in his Ethics but not with any reference to Plato’s Philosopher King: “everything excellent is both difficult and rare.”

For many, the Platonic attempt at marriage between philosophy and politics in the Philosopher-King is simply reprehensible and these have in various ways called it into question. It is fraught with many theoretical and operational difficulties. Michael Ernest Sweet (2016) in “Plato’s Philosopher King: A Potent Object of Hope,” while keeping focus on his conviction, does not fail to point out the difficulty especially in factoring the possibility of conceptualization and operationalization of Plato’s concept of Philosopher-King within Plato’s system itself. Sweet argues that the construct Philosopher-King constitutes a paradoxical roadblock to the acceptance of the idea itself. According to him “...how can one man do two jobs?” This is premised on the fact that Plato’s concern from the beginning was the building of a just society, which is fundamentally a city of experts at work in their respective domain, in the light of the principle of functional specialization. Sweet’s observation would be valid if it could be argued that philosophy instead of being a field of study just like music, gymnastics which are requisite study for the philosopher-king, is a career of its own. Rachana Kamtekar doubts the philosophy-politics combination on different grounds. According to him, the allurements and charms of power unchecked when it meets philosopher as he enters into a marital bedchambers with

politics appears to be a paradigmatic case of *liason dangereuse* as both party ends up damaging the love affair. The philosopher, living in his ideal world of ideas and the good as he steps into the murky waters of politics, becomes perverted in the face of all sorts of entanglements and clashes of interests while the politician/king if he succeeds to venture into the world of Forms becomes immobilized and impotent that he does nothing.

Aristotle is even the first to call the shot and does not see any possibility of the actualization of Plato's ideal state and his conceptualization of philosopher-king. Chroust (1968) provides the outline of this criticism. *On Kingship* is commonly regarded as a fragment of Aristotle's lost work and there in, Aristotle as related by Themistius upbraids Plato. This is in spite of coming to the famed plain of Cecropia and his setting an altar of sacred friendship for the man Plato: "Plato, even if in all other respects he was divine and deserving our unlimited admiration, was utterly reckless when he made the statement that evils would never cease for men until either philosophers became kings, or kings became philosophers." In this, Themistius relates that for Aristotle, it was unnecessary for a king to be a philosopher but also a distinct disadvantage, he rather maintains that the king should seek the counsel of true philosophers if the monarch actually wants to "enrich his reign with good deeds and not merely with fine words." Aristotle is of the view that politics require more realistic approach in contradistinction to Plato's which he sees as purely theoretic view of politics. In *Politics* (1277 a 16ff) Aristotle holds that "... the good ruler must be a wise (practical) man." In 1287b 26ff he maintains that the ruler avails himself of the advice of other people.

Unfortunately, this course of action is anathema in the Platonic system. Platonic Philosopher King is attributed

almost with omniscient capacity and advice from other people is considered heretical, not in the least with the artisan. The Platonic Philosopher-King is as such super valued for the simple reason that he perceives the good. The present writer thinks this is one of the problems with architectonic system. Plato has been consistent with his intellectualism. His ethics is built on the assumption that if one knows the truth he cannot but act in that regard. And he goes to uphold the view of ignorance or forgetfulness as being the cause of evil. For him, one's moral development parallels one's intellectual ascent as one's growing knowledge intensifies one's love for Truth, Beauty and Goodness. Plato's political system of ideal state and Philosopher King is consistent with such view. The problem with such position is its interpolation of knowing and willing which are treated purely and simply as if the knowing man is always a willing man or as if he is not an emotional and instinctual being who could be swayed on either side of the aisles and as if one cannot know the truth and still as a result of other considerations and interests act otherwise. This is what makes the operationalization of Plato's Philosopher-King apprehensible.

Plato's conceptualization presumes the infallibility of the wisdom of the so-called Philosopher-King as well as his having to act in the light of this. No wonder the power of the Plato's philosopher king is essentially unchecked and this could be a disaster for the polity, more so when this is within the context of a conscious disdain for democracy and its *demos*, in this case, the artisans who contribute nothing to the government of the polity but should literally submit themselves to the so-called expertise of the Philosopher-King.

Little wonder that Karl Popper (1943) labels Plato an enemy of open society and reads his view as being contributory factor to the history of totalitarianism in the world politics.

Popper observes that Plato in giving solution to the crisis of governance erroneously, focuses on the question of who should rule, what he refers to as the theory of sovereignty and misses the even more pragmatic political question of “How can we organize political institution so that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?” Popper argues that the danger of the neglect of this question in Plato’s system exposes Plato’s just state to the dictatorship of the philosopher-king as the political power unchecked meets the philosopher who though may be contemplating the good is still a human with needs and interests. Perhaps Plato would argue that this is the reason he insists on communism of wives, children etc. This though, well intentioned, appears to be anti-human and human-ness at some point would show itself for what it is. This unchecked power of the Philosopher-King is even more disturbing when the system makes room for moral exceptionalism which is explained shortly.

One may think that Plato’s Philosopher King would always and absolutely act in the light of the ascent to the Good. Unfortunately, it is not the case. We had referenced the noble lie above which the Philosopher-King must hold unto for the maintenance of the just state. Even more, the same system encourages acting based on the principle of expediency that it grants as one of the royal privileges of the sovereign the discretion to make full use of lies and deceit: “it is the business of the rulers of the city, if it is anybody’s, to tell lies, deceiving both its enemies and its own citizens for the benefits of the city; and no one else must touch this privilege.” One does not go far to observe the danger in this privilege that must never be questioned! This is simply making the principle of collective utility as the ultimate ethical consideration and one need not think too deep to realize that this is typical of totalitarian morality which

“overrules everything, even the very definition, the idea of the philosopher.”

Besides, one wonders even why the Philosopher-King is inoculated from the input of the masses. This may be because of the picture Plato paints of the philosopher as the possessor of wisdom instead of a lover of wisdom in continuous search for it. While the latter is certainly exposed to the dynamics of certitude and ignorance, the former is all-time certain and wise. One wonders where to find such a figure any area of life, not to mention fields as vast as leadership and as unpredictable as politicking that involves a web of many realms that are in themselves complex and intricate. That it has taken two millennia since Plato's launch of the idea on Philosopher-King as the harbinger, foundation and preservation of the *kallipolis* without success at actualization, shows that the concept and its application faces a grave and formidable roadblock. This leaves Plato's ideal state which is so artistically and meticulously weaved together as merely object of Platonic desire whose actualization appears to be too far in sight. In fact, I consider it an absolute impossibility. Perhaps the disastrous experience of effort at converting Dionysius II, tyrant of Sicily to philosopher as recounted in the seventh letter may have warned Plato that his proposition is foredoomed to failure. This unwholesome experience shows the unrealistic optimism that Plato's ideal state, watched over by Philosopher-King is.

The audacity of his claim that evil will never cease until the philosopher becomes king, simply shows a flight to the ideal as if the real life is not always a scenario of evil and good in opposition. And this remains the case even in the journey towards the emergence of the Philosopher-King and his continued leadership whenever it happens. The real challenge of the existing system is not dealt with for it is not the case

that those who benefit from the existing system would allow the emergence of Plato's system. This is for the fear of what Joseph Schumpeter has termed fear of creative destructive. Such transformative change as purportedly claimed by Plato's ideal state would create losers and winners and so, there is always a strong opposition from the powerful who benefit from the extant system. Unfortunately, Plato's system does not deal with this burgeoning reality. This is one of the reasons that his system has been dubbed too idealistic than realistic.

The fundamental question which this piece is meant to address is whether Plato's Philosopher king is actually good for the Nigerian polity. Given what has been pointed out, Nigeria does not need pure and simple Plato's Philosopher-King. There is no gainsaying that the concerns of Plato remain valid today: the need for creation of a just state in a country bedeviled by unjust structures and subjugation; the need for the application of principle of functional specialization in a polity where interest, ethnic and religious consideration have eclipsed meritocracy and capacity in the name of quota system. It is also good that one who knows or rather those who know how to govern should rule but there is definitely something disturbing about Plato's Philosopher-King, particularly in its unfortunate institutionalization of personality. It is about the intellectually 'strong' man, an omniscient personality who functions without any check and balance. We may be lucky to have a benevolent leader but not all the time and given the dialectics between power and philosophy, the Philosopher-King who is as clay-footed as all humans can be vulnerable to negative consequences of ambivalence of human interest. Perhaps this obvious danger may be one of the reasons that Plato in his *the Law* gives supremacy to the rule of law instead of the Philosopher-King and proposes a mixed constitution with extensive checks and

balances. Building of strong institution is pivotal for the rebirth of Nigeria, not institutionalization of strong personality even if in the guise of intellectualism. We may not forget in a hurry what the military era of strong man of might did to Nigeria. There is only but thin line between Plato's Philosopher-King and dictatorship of tyranny or oligarchy and without any social and legal pressure, a slip into the latter is bound to happen.

Besides, the conceptualization is premised on a gross disdain for democracy as it considers the demos to be untutored without any contribution to governance. Justice is such that they should be governed by the expert, the Philosopher-King. The masses are thus excluded and this has a terrible consequence as the Plato's excellent Philosopher-King given his humanity and reality of ambivalence of interest slides to oligarchy and the power being unchecked makes for the iron law of oligarchy. The present writer has always read politics in terms of Karl Marx history of struggle which is basically a struggle between inclusivity and exclusivity of the masses. While the iron law of oligarchy is a reality, it is for the people to struggle to thin down the circle of power of the oligarchy or at least, to increase their own sphere of influence.

In failing to take care of the question of building a formidable political institution that acts as check and balance and in relegating the masses whose opinions do not account at all, this write-up considers Plato's conceptualization of the Philosopher-King as it is, as inadequate for the Nigerian polity. We do not need king, we need leaders who are philosophical among other things in their dealings, philosophical in the sense of those who are lovers of wisdom rather than absolute possessors of wisdom, who instead of being windowless monads continue to search for this wisdom wherever, guided by patriotism and love for the common good which is prioritized above personal interests and all

forms of parochialism that have mortgaged the development of the giant of Africa. In all, the masses must have their voice in governance and claim Lockean ownership of the republic and sovereignty.

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