



Article

Dialectics of Essential Virtues in Plato's Good State: An Analysis

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Abstract

Systematic investigations into the nature of and interface between the human person, the state and questions of relevant virtues and goals thereof; particularly in Western normative political thought, are oftentimes associated with three notable Greek political thinkers: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Of the trio, Plato's treatise provides unique and inter facial profile. Besides the credit for documenting largely the thoughts of Socrates; the corpus of Aristotle's views appears to revolve largely on the body of knowledge canvassed or worked upon by Plato. This paper explores the personae and social context of Plato, his essential virtues and the essence of good state in the cosmology of Plato's political thought. Our findings reveal that despite obvious shortcomings, particularly in his allegorical frames, a handful of the issues harped upon and views canvassed by Plato, over two thousand years ago, are by and large, still relevant in contemporary statecraft.

Keywords

Plato, Virtue, Justice; Knowledge, Ideal State, Statecraft.

Introduction

In today's dominant social order, pursuit of virtues and altruistic ideals in power relations and statecraft appear increasingly sidelined. In most social formations and between social formations, drift towards self-centeredness, rule of the thumb and might is right syndromes, rather than recognition of liberal democracy as the final form of human government as claimed by Fukuyama (1992), have largely become the order of the day. Recent and prevailing situations in Iraq, Libya, Central African Republic, Mali, Israel / Palestine, Syria, Ukraine, etc. are cases in point. Following Giddens's (1994) argument, what all these suggest is that conventional ideologies of both left and right have become increasingly redundant and that what we now have is expansion of social reflexivity (in Heywood, 2007). Largely on account of these, the rubbishing effect on the premises and deductions of Plato's virtues and ideals, now appear increasingly widespread. Is this really the case?

The foregoing notwithstanding, this paper posits that Plato's political ideals still constitute a rich mine of political ideas. In particular, his treatment of virtue as the knowledge of the Good continues to evoke different sentiments among scholars. Taking due cognizance, this paper examines the question of relevant virtues in Platonian political thought. In specific terms, the paper interrogates the concept of virtue in the context of Plato's systematic investigations and understanding of the nature of the human person, state goals vis-a-vis relevant virtues in statecraft. Who is Plato and what is the interface between his background and views? How did Plato conceptualize virtue and its link with his ideal state? How is

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Plato's virtue acquired? How is Plato's ideal state related to collective happiness? What is the value of Plato's political ideas and ideals today?

Given the issues raised in our anchor questions above, this work is divided into six interrelated parts. This introductory part is followed by a discourse of contextual and conceptual issues in the second part. The third is on Plato's personae, his background and the social context of his treatises. The fourth part traces Plato's notion of virtue and as it relates to his ideal state; while the fifth contains details on the acquisition of Platonian virtue and the idea of the Good. While concluding, part six which is the last, underlines the value of Plato's ideas and ideals.

Contextual and Conceptual Issues

Over the years the views canvassed by Plato has attracted profound attention on a wide range of issues. Plato's student and contemporary, Aristotle, for instance, appears to disagree with Plato's classification of the society. Thus, in his prognostic critique of Plato, Aristotle made some classifications of the same sort and therein argued that women, children, barbarians (non-Greeks) or salaried mechanics (manual workers) were not fit to participate in the civic life of a state as citizens. Aristotle acknowledged the existence and significance of virtues at the same posits that virtues such as courage, temperance and the sort were not natural but moral and hence formed by habit. In the process, he identified two forms of virtue: the intellectual virtue which he says is developed by teaching, and moral virtue which is formed by habit, noting in the process that "...none of the moral virtues is implanted in us by nature, for nothing which exists by nature can be changed by habit" (Nichomachean Ethics:1102b19).

Although the sociology of both Platonian and Aristotelian ideas is not within the primary purview of this work, it is necessary to provide necessary windows. The first is to note the character and height of Ethio-Egyptian attainments. Secondly is to underline the Ethio-Egyptian origination and ecology of thought-content of these notable Greek thinkers. As canvassed in Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2011a:31), whereas: . . . the mystery school system of the Ethio-Egyptian epoch centered on the philosopher-priests whose learning emerged and grew autochthonously and matured while attached organically to various temples, political inquiry during the Greek epoch was borrowed, detached and should we say unpopular. It excited a few, such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle who, during their journeys for knowledge benefitted from the Ethio-Egyptian mystery school system, indeed were tutored by the Ethio-Egyptian philosopher priests themselves. . . . armed with these borrowed and strange new ideas, Socrates' student, Plato, stove diligently all his life to generate or bring about the ideal framework for a perfect political order.

Accordingly, we note that in addition to being deductive, Plato's ideas centred essentially on the prescription and generation of the ideal framework for a perfect political order, his good state. He was particularly very adroit in the logic of driving his imaginative and largely abstractive political thoughts through.

The subjection of Ethio-Egyptians to Persian rule and later Greek rule, under Alexander the Great - Aristotle's former student - provided source of immense advantage to Aristotle over his teacher, Plato. Unlike Plato, Aristotle had the rare but ample opportunity to translate first hand and take advantage of the rich knowledge system which the ancient Egyptians had accumulated over two thousand years. As explained in Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2011a:30), this was possible because:

Alexander's ten-year pillage, from 332 BC to 323, during which he looted Egyptian libraries and appropriated their other institutions of learning and culture, gave impetus to, and actually propelled Greek [Aristotle's] ascendancy in what can be termed early deductive period.

In line with the foregoing, it is only logical to properly locate Aristotle's cosmology within the milieu of his more in-depth insight into the attainments of ancient Egyptian thought content. While Plato relied on his memory content for his analysis and propositions, Aristotle enjoyed the ample benefit of first-hand translation, in-depth textual analysis and relevant deductions.

Interestingly, much like Plato. Aristotle also placed great premium on virtues, education and statecraft. Commenting on their relationship and significance, Mukherjee and Ramaswamy (2007:110) clearly observe that:

...trained emotions and impulses, and worked for good as defined by the legislator or the ruler. The task of education was to inculcate moral, social and civic qualities in an individual, develop habits of good citizenship, and in a good polis, good persons. Humans had to be taught to do the right thing. The final aim of education in goodness is to make our immediate judgment as to what is right to coincide with the spirit of wise legislation.

Plato and Aristotle have some common ideas with regard to the kind of education a state should have. First, they agree on the need for a state-controlled system of education as a medium for preparing citizens for civic life. Second, beneficiaries of the system are confined to certain categories of persons. For Aristotle (1979), the state should be more concerned about educating its citizens, by which he meant only mature adult males to the exclusion of women, children, barbarians (non-Greeks) or salaried "mechanics" (manual workers) whom he said lacked the 'deliberative faculty'. Aristotle would later take Plato on with regard to the question of whether an ideal state necessarily translates to a happy state. Aristotle admitted at the opening of his treatise, the *Politics*, that it is indeed true that "...every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think good" (Aristotle, 1979:3). He, however, disagreed with Plato on the point that it is possible to achieve happiness for a state without taking cognizance of the individual happiness of the members of that state. He notes that:

He who would duly inquire about the best form of a state ought first to determine which is the most eligible life; while this remains uncertain the best form of the state must also be uncertain; for, in the natural order of things, those may be expected to lead the best life who are governed in the best manner of which their circumstances admit. We ought therefore to ascertain, first of all, which is the most generally eligible life, and then whether the same life is or is not best for the state and for individuals (Aristotle. 1979:152-153).

After his careful inquiry into what might constitute 'the eligible life' for the individual, Aristotle learned that 'property', which though did not correspond to 'happiness' was essential to man's quest for 'happiness.' He, therefore, condemned Plato's idea of abolishing private ownership of property for the guardian class in favour of a common ownership of property and wives, contending that:

What is common to the greatest number gets the least amount of care. Men pay most attention to what is their own; they care less for what is common; or at any rate, they care for it only to the extent which each is individually concerned (Aristotle, 1979:44).

In all he concluded that the happiness which Plato sought for in his state would not work. This according to Aristotle (1979) is because:

It is impossible for the whole of a state to be happy unless most of its parts, or all, or at any rate some, are happy. The quality of being happy is not of the same order as the quality of being even. The quality of being even may exist in a whole without existing in either of its parts: the quality of being happy cannot.... If the guardians are not happy, what are the other elements of the state which are?

Aristotle's (1979) criticism of Plato's idea that the 'Virtue' which the rulers of a state seek should be their only source of happiness, laid the basis for future inquiries into the meaning of 'happiness'; what it means for the individual and the state. We see this in the works of later philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, J.S. Mill, etc, who have all written on the question of individual liberty and the role of the state.

On the logic and essence of the division of the state into three functional groups by Plato, Wolin (1960:33) points to the fact that:

Plato was the first to picture political society as a system of distinctive or differentiated roles...each represented a necessary function: each was defined in terms of its contribution to sustaining the whole society: each bore rights, duties, expectations which provided definite guides and signposts for human behaviour and defined the place of the individual within the system. The harmonization and integration of these roles made apolitical society a functioning interdependent whole. To maintain it required a sharp demarcation among the three classes of the community...no confusion of roles, no blurred identities. From Plato onwards, one of the distinctive marks of political philosophy was its approach to political society as a functioning system.

While some such as Aristotle seemed more concerned about the happiness of the rulers in his critique of Plato, Karl Popper (1945), was more worried about how Plato's political programme applied to the political organization of the modern state. For stratifying society based on naturally occurring virtues and for placing the most important 'virtue' required for statecraft within reach of only a select few. Popper (1945: Vol. 1:87) feared that:

...Plato's political programme far from being morally superior to totalitarianism is fundamentally identical with it. I believe that the objections against this view are based upon an ancient and deep-rooted prejudice in favour of idealizing Plato.

Sinclair (1954:166) toed a similar line in his assessment of Plato. According to him:

Plato's estimate of the human race is at once incredibly low and incredibly high...Between the wisdom of the low and the docility of the rest (sic) the human race has never been so exalted or so abused.

The symbolic implication of the myth of 'metals and of the earth' has also been noted. Shedding light on this, Ndu (1998:27-28) points to the fact:

Iron and bronze are very strong, but they are very plentiful and of less value than Silver or Gold. Silver, stronger than Gold and resilient, is of less value than Gold but of greater value than Iron and Bronze. Gold is the rarest and most valuable. These considerations underscore the importance of the philosophers in the society, for though few in number, yet, they represent the intellectual light of every society.

Arguing largely along the same trajectory, Mukherjee and Ramaswamy (2007:72) observe that:

The myth was necessary to sustain the Ideal State, by convincing every one of their rightful places in society, and the obligations their stations in life entailed. It also suggested that in spite of their differences, all individuals were born of the earth.

In critiquing Plato's allegorical views above, it is important to point out straightaway that our contention here is that the myth remains actually what it is called: a myth, or also in Plato's terms: a noble lie. Although it does help to maintain the unity of the state, it adds nothing of value to support Plato's claims that virtue occurs naturally in individuals or that such naturally occurring virtues can be relied on with absolute certainty in stratifying society. As a matter of fact, "what Plato does not seem to realize, is that the compulsory acceptance of such myths, is incompatible with philosophy, and involves a kind of education which stunts intelligence" (Russell. 19-5:113).

There is no doubt that Plato and the view he canvasses has not only elicited varied comments, but represents a threshold of elaborate political theorizing. Accordingly, we hypothesize that Plato's treatise on the dialectics of essential virtues constitute a robust and deductive inclined frame for the construction of an ideal state. Secondly, Plato's attempt to bring about ideal or good state based largely on the metal images internalized while still a student ancient Egypt.

Thirdly, aspects of the said views are still relevant in the management of today's statecraft.

Plato's Background and Social Context

Born 427 BC, to an aristocratic family in Athens, Plato is easily one of the most influential philosophers of ancient Greek. His earlier intention to enter politics was abandoned following the termination of Athenian democracy and the establishment of a puppet regime of 30 men (Ballantyne, 2008). His meeting with Socrates (469-399 BC) completely altered the course of his life and introduced him to a new world of philosophical thought. Socrates' infamous trial and subsequent execution, for allegedly corrupting the youth of Athens by his teachings, further devastated Plato and hardened his disillusionment with the democratic regime of the time. Consequently, he left Athens.

Although some authorities, such as Sabine and Thorson (1973) chose to say Plato busied himself with travels on leaving Athens, increasing evidence point to the fact that, it was much more than mere travels. In search of safety and knowledge, Plato first took refuge with Euclid the geometrician in Megara from where he journeyed to ancient Egypt, otherwise called Ethio-Egypt, where he studied "mathematics and the historical traditions of the priests" (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007:51). As further argued in Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2011 a, 2011b), the truth is that for four years within the period, Plato was a student at the Ethio-Egyptian mystery school system.

At this point, it is equally noteworthy to reiterate, albeit in passing, that ancient Egypt was an important centre of learning and innovations in diverse fields of the arts, sciences, religion and philosophy, from which the entire Greek epoch and eminent personalities, including Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; actually benefitted significantly. It is thus not difficult to glean that while in ancient Egypt, Plato was schooled by the philosopher-priests of the Mystery School system. In the process, he learned and benefitted from the centuries of ancient Egyptian advancements, attainments and civilization (Biereenu-Xnabugwu, 201 la).

Upon his return in 385 BC, Plato founded a school in Athens, the Academy, which became a very influential centre of learning in the city-state, and from which one of the brightest philosophical minds of all times, Aristotle, emerged. Reflecting on the founding of Plato's Academy, Taylor (1926:5) says that: The founding of the Academy is a turning point in Plato's life and in some ways the most memorable event in the history of European science. It was the culmination of his efforts. It was a permanent institution for the pursuit of science by original research.

Plato gave the bulk of his time and energies to organising and managing the school, during which he churned out numerous philosophical works such as the Apology of Socrates, the Republic, the Statesman and the Laws. The last three are among his most famous works. He spent the last years of his life teaching and instructing philosophy, and died in his sleep in 347 BC.

The life of Plato and his political thought is devoted essentially to the understanding of the nature and concerns of the concept of virtue. As attested to by Sabine and Thorson (1973:49):

The outstanding fact of Plato's intellectual development was his association as a young man with Socrates, and from Socrates he derived what was always the controlling thought of his political philosophy -the idea that virtue is knowledge. Otherwise stated, this meant the belief that there is objectively a good life, both for individuals and for states, which may be made the object of study, which may be defined by methodical intellectual processes, and which may therefore be intelligently pursued.

The foregoing underlines the fact that in Plato's cosmology, virtue and state are central themes. Accordingly, there is need to understanding and appreciate the place and specificities of the two concepts in the political thought of Plato.

Virtues and Ideal State in Plato's Thought

In understanding the concept of virtue in the political thought of Plato, we must make reference to one of his seminal works on statecraft, the Republic. It is in this work that Plato puts forward his idea of what a perfect state is, what kind of men should rule it, and what role the citizens of such a state should perform. It is also in this work that we get to see what Plato refers to as virtue and why he sees the concept that way.

Concept of justice is central to Plato's notion of good and ideal state. In contemplating the meaning of virtue, Plato begins with his criticism of the Athenian democracy of his time in the Republic. Using Socrates as a narrator to convey his own thoughts and philosophy, we see Plato's dissatisfaction with the concept of 'justice' as proffered by Thrasymachus, a sophist and teacher of rhetoric. Accordingly, for Thrasymachus (in Plato, n.d.: 216):

...the different forms of government make laws democratical, aristocratical, tyrannical, with a view to their several interests; and these laws, which are made by them for their own interests, are the justice which they deliver to their subjects, and him who transgresses them they punish as a breaker of the law, and unjust. And that is what I mean when I say that in all States there is the same principle of justice, which is the interest of the government: and as the government must be supposed to have power, the only reasonable conclusion is that everywhere there is one principle of justice, which is the interest of the stronger.

Thrasymachus' conception of justice was not really a product of abstract reasoning as in the case of Plato, but "... a description of Athenian politics during Plato's life time" (Ndu, 1998:17). By this definition of justice, Thrasymachus meant "...that those who rule... frame the laws, which determine what is just, to their own advantage." (AGPR, n.d:3). Therefore, justice meant not deviating from the provisions of those laws. However, Socrates, whom Plato retains as the chief discussant in the Republic, rejected this idea of justice because of its inherent inconsistencies. He argued that since rulers could make mistakes by making laws that were not in their interests, it would be difficult to speak of justice in the sense that Thrasymachus saw it, because then, it was no longer to the advantage of the stronger or those who rule, but to their own detriment. Through a series of comparisons, Socrates provided that this view of justice was wrong. He observed that governance and statecraft, was some form of a craft or skill as medicine, horsemanship, sailing, etc., and in any of those cases it was the proper thing for the craft or skill to be employed in the interests of their objects and not the other way round. In other words, just as the craft of medicine is to make a sick body well; the craft of horsemanship is to take care of horses; and the craft of sailing, to ensure the safety of sailors; it was a ruler's duty to serve the interests of the people (Plato, n.d.).

This exposition on the meaning of 'justice' in leadership is significant to our understanding of Plato's concept of virtue because in subsequent dialogues in the Republic, we see what virtue means, as Plato tries to consider the meaning of 'justice' within the broader context of a state or society.

In trying to locate the place of justice' in society, Plato identifies three basic functions of a state as "ruling, defence and production." and classified these functions among three categories of individuals, each category performing the function in which it is best-suited to perform (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007:69). The function of ruling is assigned to a group of philosopher rulers who together with the soldiers, or Auxiliaries in charge of defence, make up the Guardian class. Production is left to the money-making class which is comprised of individuals who exhibit a natural fondness for material things. They are to furnish the state with the sustenance it requires.

It is at this point in his dialogues that Plato introduces his concept of virtue. He first explains his arguments for classifying society into different and strict functional groups by drawing an analogy between the state and the human person, indicating that since the state is made up of human beings and is in fact a product of human growth and expansion, it follows then that what is just for the human being, must certainly be just for the state. Following this logic, Plato identifies three parts of the human soul which he says corresponds to the classes in the state as follows: the rational which embodies wisdom and therefore should rule other parts; the spirit which has the virtue of courage and therefore acts a check on human excesses as long as it partakes of the rationality of the former; and the appetitive which has the

virtue of temperance, but one which it shares with other parts. This latter part of the soul is responsible for our nourishment and sustenance.

One major virtue which Plato mentions is 'justice' in the individual which he describes as the harmony that results in each part of the soul doing that which it is meant to do. An individual who is termed as 'just' must, therefore, be one who "... is really at peace with him- or herself. A person with these virtues is unlikely to do the sorts of things normally considered unjust - stealing, betraying friends, neglecting friends or parents" (AGPR, n.d: 10). Plato's idea of virtue in the individual is, therefore, conceived out of the need to achieve some kind of mental and emotional balance and harmony. Reflecting on the foregoing Klosko (1986:69) avers that:

Thus, Plato's conception of virtue centres on psychological harmony. In the just soul each element stays in its own place and performs the task to which it is naturally suited. The result is a condition analogous to the health of the body. The chief benefit of justice is that it allows this condition of psychological harmony to come into existence and to be maintained in his soul.

In representing this idea within the context of the state which is "assumed to be merely the individual writ large," (Sabine and Thorson, 1973:62), Plato argues that the philosopher rulers in the guardian class correspond to the rational element of the soul. They have the virtue of wisdom and, therefore, are best-suited to rule since the dominant part of their souls is of the rational; the Auxiliaries or soldiers correspond to the spirit element of the soul and are at best warriors because they are dominated by an impetuosity that would rather make them better soldiers than rulers. The virtue of this class is, therefore, courage. Finally, the producers or artisans in the money-making class correspond to the appetitive part of the soul because the dominant part of their souls is of the appetitive, which is responsible for their natural inclination for material things. They control production and are the only class who could appropriate property and also raise a family. They possess the virtue of temperance which they share in common with other classes because Plato imagines that "temperance will then be the agreement of all parts that rationality should rule," and, as we earlier observed in the case of an individual who is 'just.' "Justice comes to pass" in the state when all three parts or classes fulfil their proper role (AGPR, n.d: 10).

As earlier noted, Plato's conception of virtue in the individual as in the state is meant to achieve some kind of harmony or systemic balance in the operation of the different parts and classes in the individual and the state respectively. The presence or possession of virtue or the virtues, as it were, within the state is meant to foster perfect co-operation and harmony for the social benefit of all. In doing this Plato visualizes society as:

a system of services in which each member both gives and receives. . What the state takes cognizance of is this mutual exchange and what it tries to arrange is the most adequate satisfaction of needs and the most harmonious interchange of services. Men figure in such a system the performers of a needed task and their social importance depends upon the value of the work they do. What the individual possesses, therefore, is first and foremost a status in which he is privileged to act and the freedom which the state secures him is not so much for the exercise of his free will as for the practice of his calling (Sabine and Thorson. 1973:60).

From the foregoing assertion, it can be seen that the challenge that confronts Plato come from assuming that his 'just' state translates to a happy one. For while it is true that people would be happy doing things for which they are best-suited, we also recognize the fact that much happiness lies in the exercise of free will (people being able to make their own choices and decide their own fate), which Plato's state does not guarantee.

Plato seems to appreciate the foregoing fact through the objection raised by one of his characters in the Republic, Adeimantus, who noted, with regard to the ideal state, that "rulers, deprived of private property, will not be happy" (AGPR, n.d:8). But Plato appears even ready to give up this notion of happiness for individuals in the interest of the collective happiness of the state. His stance on this issue and on several others would later become a source of controversy for subsequent philosophers beginning with his most illustrious student, Aristotle.

This obsession with perfection within the state also drives Plato to vest the reins of leadership in the class of the philosopher rulers because they, as Plato argues, are the only category of individuals who by reflection can attain what he describes as 'the Good.' The Good has been defined as "...what truly is..." (AGPR, n.d: 12), as differentiated from other visible things around us assumed to be good.

Before now, in the course of this paper, we are led to believe that 'justice' which results from the harmony of other virtues namely: wisdom or reason, courage and temperance, is superior to other virtues because it appears to be the essence of the state. However, Plato's introduction of the idea of the Good in Book Five of the Republic which suggests otherwise. It harps on an objective reality beyond our physical senses, or as Xdu (1998: 21) puts it, "...the highest point on the scale of reality..." from which every other thing seen as good proceeds, places this Good above every other thing. Even the virtues themselves become subordinated to the Good because they derive their existence from it. The knowledge of this Good, for Plato, is thus the highest form of virtue that must be attained only by those who are properly equipped to do so, which in this case are the philosopher rulers.

Acquisition of Virtues and the Idea of the Good

Plato identified four forms of virtues which every just' state must possess in order to be deemed good. He identified the virtues as Wisdom which will be possessed by the rulers. Courage by the soldier auxiliaries, Temperance which is seen in the agreement shown by all three classes (rulers, auxiliaries, and producers) about who is to rule and finally, Justice which is more or less the harmony or balance achieved in the state as a result of the different classes minding their different classes minding their different areas of specialization but in a mutual way that benefits them all (AGPR, n.d:8). He also introduced his idea of the Good as the fifth and highest form of virtue.

In line with the foregoing, for Plato, the highest form of virtue is easily his idea of "the Good". Our interest at this stage is primarily on how this highest form of virtue, is acquired. Before this, however, there is need to dwell on the acquisition of the other four essential Platonian virtues. In Plato's cosmology, the four forms of virtue occur naturally in individuals as a result of the dominant component of their souls. Those who are ruled by reason or the rational part of their souls are wise; those who are ruled by the spirit element of their souls are courageous, while those who are ruled by the appetitive element of their souls are materialistic. Therefore, it is possible to classify people as wise, courageous or materialistic by observing their actions.

Furthermore, to uphold the argument that individuals differ in their capacities and nature. Plato employed the myth of 'metals and of the earth'. According to this myth, while it is true that all men in the state share a common origin from the earth, nature has mixed their souls with different metals. This explains why some are meant to be rulers with their souls mixed with gold; some soldiers with souls mixed silver; and finally, others producers or artisans with souls mixed with bronze (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007).

Curiously, Plato goes on to use this 'Noble Lie' to support his claims when he proffers that the males and females of the Guardian class are to be on the lookout for that propitious time when mating between them will most likely result to an offspring of the Golden element. The success of this scheme requires that the state will outlaw indiscriminate marriage or mating between the groups.

Nevertheless, Plato's allegorical stratification of society allows for some form of mobility in the sense that a child who is born to the money-making class but happens by chance to be of the Golden element can change his status. Women are also placed in the same status as men as what matters is the dominant virtue inherent in one a notion Aristotle was never going to tolerate.

On the question of how the virtue of the knowledge of the Good is acquired; it important to point out that Plato believes that there is an objective reality beyond the practical senses. This lies in the realm of pure thought and can only be attained through perfect reflection. This realm is so important to Plato because right there is situated the essence of all things which we believe to be good, wonderful or just in our physical world. He refers to this essence as 'the Good' and makes the pursuit and acquisition of the knowledge of this Good a top priority, and as such the highest form of virtue.

However, realizing that merely possessing a soul dominated by the rational element does not bring one any inch closer to grasping the essence of the Good - even though it means that one has the ability to undertake such a philosophical mission to the realm of pure thought he identifies what one call 'a gap deficiency'.

By nature, would-be philosopher rulers are the only ones who can truly undertake the reflective mission to discover the Good. To make up for the identified 'gap deficiency' and ensure that the latent abilities of would-be philosopher rulers in the guardian class are properly harnessed - for the good of the community - Plato proposes a very robust and intensive system of education; under the control of the state, and run from childhood to adulthood.

Driving his commitment to his recommendation. Plato (1955:190-191) further posits that:

The one sufficient thing is the guardians' education: if they are well educated, they will see to everything. Education was more important than community of wives and property because it tries to cure the ills at the source while communism tries to prevent distractions that may corrupt the soul.

Plato is more concerned about the education of the would-be philosopher rulers and soldiers of the guardian class to the exclusion of the artisans or producers, though he includes women and children in his own scheme. With regard to the children, education should begin at the elementary level, and confined to only those in the guardian class till they attain the age of 18. The content of education at this level is diversified to include both theoretical and practical experiences. The essence is to train both the human

mind and the physical body to be able to make moral and aesthetic judgments, and to be athletic and healthy respectively. To this end, children, both boys and girls, are taught the art of music, poetry, literature, gymnastics, etc (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007).

Being cautious about the kind of education children receive, Plato recommends strict censorship of learning resources from literature to music in order to ensure that the guardian class gets only the learning suited to the virtues they manifest. Therefore, stories or poetry which expresses sorrow, lethargy, fear of death, lusts or weaknesses of the gods are to be concealed from the children. Rather, they are to learn about tales of bravery and courage, the greatness of the gods and legends of great men of history, etc. in order to ensure the right moral development. Plato's idea to "...shut off ail vice and ugliness from the life of the young person." ensures that:

...all the works of art they see and hear influence them for good, like the breezes from some healthy country, insensibly leading them from earliest childhood into close sympathy and conformity with beauty and reason (Plato, 1955:162-163).

Higher education commences at 20 years of age and those who do not make it to this stage form the "...second tier of the ruling elite" the soldiers or auxiliaries, while the best ones move on to advanced courses in mathematics, geometry, astronomy and harmonics. While elementary education looks to sound moral development, higher education is to "cultivate the spirit of free intellectual inquiry" (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007:77). The next thirty years in the life of the learners is crucial within this period, if they continued to scale through various selection points, they are exposed to the "study of the Idea of the Good and the first principles of Being" and are apprenticed to "junior positions in the military and political life" till they turn 50, when the philosopher ruler finally emerges.

Concluding Analysis

This concluding analysis further reflects on the Platonian virtue and the idea of good of the state. As pointed out earlier, the virtues which Plato speaks of, both the naturally occurring ones and the ones which are developed by a rather rigorous system of education are all geared towards the good of the state. Plato reveals this at some point in the Republic - when Socrates, in response to the question by Adeimantus, on whether rulers would be happy without private property - made it clear, that:

...he is looking not to the happiness of any individuals in the city, but to the happiness of the city as a whole. Just so a beautiful statue is beautiful as a whole rather than in its parts, some of which, like the pupils of the eyes, may be painted a dull black rather than a lovely purple (AGPR, n.d: p.8).

In Plato's cosmology, an ideal state translates to a happy one since it is 'unjust' for anyone to jeopardize the collective happiness of all in pursuit of their own happiness. The import of this is that, to be fair to Plato and his political ideals, it is important to reflect, recap and understand what he actually set out to do.

Plato sought to locate the place of justice in a state: what it might be called; how it is attained; and who might be responsible for it. It is also the same objective that has driven philosophers hundreds of years later to launch similar investigations. Aristotle, whom we can regard as a contemporary of Plato did not disagree with the latter on that fundamental point. Even though he did not entertain Plato's theory of the

Forms and the Good, he surely believed that a life of contemplation, a notion which Plato first espoused in his Idea of the Good and for which he must take the credit, was the best kind of life and therefore guaranteed the greatest happiness. The good that lies in this kind of virtue, therefore, is that apart from being complete in itself, it is the source of other ideas that can guarantee good governance and shape the real world.

Furthermore, a lesson that can be drawn from Plato's conception of virtue is that it abhors the rule-of-thumb approach to politics associated with modern-day system of political succession in which anything goes in the name of politics. For Plato, politics is much more than the grand political campaigns, manifestoes and elections as was the case in his own time and as obtained today. It is much more than the fiery speeches given at political rallies and the surging crowds milling around politicians whose true intentions, or knowledge about the political and the ends of leadership are not readily ascertainable. Politics instead should be seen as a sacred duty and the preserve of those who have the aptitude and have been properly trained to fulfill its exalted ends for the common good.

Although one may not all agree with Plato's views as to how society and leadership should be organised, we can still appreciate his call for the recognition of the role of virtue in politics. This is one thing we can get out of his political ideals instead of discarding them as impracticable or anti-democratic. Accordingly, we recommend follows:

1. Professionalization of political practice

There is need, to make political practice a profession, with very strict codes of ethics. In this regard, the idea of an institute for political practice a ruling class-wide self-regulating mechanism akin or comparable to professional bodies such as ICAN, MBA, NIM and APCON should be given serious considerations. The institute should be able to punish those who breach ethics of political practice. The implication is that political practice should no longer be an all-comer's affair.

2. Leadership imbued with relevant knowledge

As argued by Plato, a rigorous system of education geared towards the good of the state is a sine qua non for leaders. To qualify to hold political office, such a person must among others, attain a reasonable knowledge level in political practice. To achieve this, he or she must successfully undergo series and coordinated stages of compulsory and relevant training.

3. Enhancement of productive base

Experience has shown that contemporary democracy in polities and social formations with robust productive base. This also implies that those charged with various responsibilities must live up to expectations. For polities, such as Nigeria to blossom all hands must be on the accentuation of genuine in driven production capacity.

4. Due process approach

At the international stage, justice and right must be seen and applied to all peoples and social formations on the same terms. Might is right must be abhorred. Ideas and ideals which respect and affirm fairness and due process and rights of groups and social formations must be upheld at all times and in all

situations. Had this approach been adopted, the situation we have in Israel / Palestine, Iraq, Libya and Syria may probably not have occurred, or if at all, would have been better managed.

As has been seen, this paper set out to look at Plato's conception of virtue and its influences and relevance in statecraft. In conclusion, it makes to state that:

- Pluto's political thought and ideals are still a rich mine of political ideas.
- His treatment of virtue as the knowledge of the Good continues to evoke different sentiments among scholars of political thought. His insistence, however, that this knowledge is attainable continues to prick our collective conscience, especially, when we reflect on the turmoil and uncertainty which have engulfed leadership contestations in many pans of the modern world.
- If the world can still learn a thing or two from Plato, it is obviously because his ideals, were in the words of Nettleship (in Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007:49) conceived “...in the spirit of a man no: merely reflecting on human life but intensely anxious to reform and revolutionize it”.

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