

# Plato's Socio-Political Philosophy: a Veritable Prescription for Achieving the Seven Point Agenda in Nigeria for National Development

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## Abstract

Philosophy, right from its inception in antiquity, has always been a source of ideas, and inspiration for the transformation of society. In attempt to solve societal problems, philosophers ask critical questions and suggest rational answers to them just like some fundamental theories postulated by great thinkers in the past had been usefully applied to solve contemporary problems. The purpose of this exercise is to determine to what extent Plato's socio-political philosophy could serve as a veritable roadmap in resolving Nigeria's critical challenges. The idea that runs through the work is Plato's idea of Justice which is anchored on the principle of division of labour is shown to point the way to the achievement of the 7-point agenda of the present administration. The paper concludes that governance should be an art predicated on exact knowledge of the good and that society is a mutual satisfaction of needs by individuals whose capacities supplement one another. It therefore recommends among others the need for specialized training for leaders to bring about purposeful and reliable leadership that breeds responsible followership.

**Keywords:** Plato, Socio-Political, 7-Point Agenda, National Development.

## Introduction

That we are living in a technology-driven world is not in doubt. That governments everywhere would pay more attention to science and technology is a platitude. That to assume as currently obtained that in a technological world, the humanities can be dispensed with is misleading.

However, our exploration would certainly expose the truism that Nigeria cannot experience meaningful development in the absence of the humanities especially philosophy. That all nations including Nigeria require the discipline called philosophy for genuine national development is incontestable. A quick jump at the definition or description of philosophy is often capable of generating an intense debate and perhaps some sorts of condemnation, disapprobation or vilification from scholars in the field. This kind of attempt noted Akinsanya (2009) has variously led to metaphilosophising (Philosophising around philosophy itself). It becomes thus safer and wise to concede to the advice of Broad (as cited in Oladipo) that: if we want to decide what: philosophy is, one shall naturally begin by considering what kind of activities have been pursued by men whom everyone would regard as great philosophers who engaged in what everyone would regard as their characteristically professional work (Oladipo 2008:1 1).

Accordingly, prudence suggests that we fall back on history to identify what philosophers were pre-occupied with in the past and in the present days. This action is intended to shield us from unnecessary exposure to attacks from various quarters. Succinctly, philosophers have pre-occupied themselves with:

- pursuit of wisdom
- speculations
- critical activities
- prescriptions
- critique of ideologies
- conceptual analysis and
- Investigations of theoretical foundations of other discipline

(Akinsanya 2009:1).

Our concentration in this paper bothers much on the fourth preoccupation - prescription for good life and charting the course for genuine national development. This entails the engagement of the philosopher in inquiry into either the remote problems or more concrete problems of life, directly or indirectly, the fruits of his labour somehow filter back to the society at large. No genuine philosophic sweat is a waste even if the subject matter appears too remote to be real. David Hume in Okolo (1989) has echoed in confidence that "the genius of philosophy, if carefully cultivated by several must gradually diffuse itself throughout the whole society"

The question might be asked, how can philosophy transform society? By the simple logic of the necessary connection that exists between thinking and doing, theory and practice, very few philosophers would deny that philosophy plays practical roles in the transformation of society. This, it does through the development of human persons through moral and intellectual process who in turn can develop the society. Over the decades, philosophers have reflected on national problems, analysed issues and prescribed some contents that can be taught and the best methods of teaching that can bring about a change of attitude and behaviour that will midwife a good society. It is in this connection that we carve a niche for Plato's prescriptions in transforming the Nigerian society through the instrumentality of the 7-point Agenda of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's administration.

### **Plato's Socio-Political Philosophy**

Plato was born into a wealthy aristocratic family in the materialistic society of Athens in Greece in about 427BC. His aristocratic background and orientation marked his antagonism to democracy. A famous disciple of Socrates whose teacher's death in the hands of the Athenian government and the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war (431-404) by Sparta deepened his antidemocratic predilections because of the attendant crisis so generated in the city states.

Plato's most popular work on education is the Republic. Others include the Laws and Crito. He attached so much importance to education arguing that the best of men can ever have is education. In the Crito, he postulated that no man should bring children into the world who is unwilling to preserve to the end in their nurture and education (Rusk 1976 cited in Shaaba 2003:51).

In his Republic, Plato relates peace to the original inclinations and desires of human beings (state of nature) to address the social context of peace. He discusses justice as the most fundamental basis of peaceful social existence. Nisbet (1983) records that Plato argues that every society requires three functions to achieve harmony namely production, security and political rule. These necessitates three aptitude in the populace — appetite, courage and knowledge and three roles — workers, soldiers and rulers. Justice therefore entails that society systematically determines the endowment of each member and ensures that they are placed in each of the three functions according to their endowments. People of appetite work and produce society's means of material existence, those with courage defend the territorial integrity of the society while the knowledgeable provide political leadership. This according to Nisbet (1983) is outward justice. Inward justice on the other hand obtains in a situation where a man does not allow the several elements within him to interfere with one another or allow any of them to do the work of the other. Justice to Plato therefore is anchored on inward and outward division of labour, a perfect state of harmony (peace).

Plato recommends a form of communism for leaders. They are to live together and would not own any private property beyond what is absolutely necessary. He endorses gender egalitarianism; women belong to the ruling class and they are equal. He thinks that the possession of private property and nuclear families among the guardian class is bad because the purpose of the city is the good of the whole not the happiness of one class. Both wealth and property are harmful and in Plato's ideal state, neither will exist (Anele 2010).

The three classes in the ideal republic are by no means castes, for membership in them is not hereditary. Ideally, every child is to be given the highest training that their natural capacities permit and every individual is promoted to the highest position in the state that his capacities together with his education and achievements allow him to fill adequately.

Education, in Plato's political theory plays a prominent role. This must be expected, given that Plato accepted wholly his teacher's (Socrates) doctrine, that knowledge is virtue. His unhappy experience concerning Athenian democracy reinforced in him the need to found an institution of higher learning to inculcate the spirit of true knowledge as the foundation for a philosophic statecraft (Anele 2010).

In Plato's recommendations, gravitas, decorum and courage are the major qualities to be cultivated through education. To realize his ideal for the topmost positions in the guardian class, Plato crafted a professionalized education and recommends for its course content the only scientific subjects known to him — mathematics, astronomy and logic in his school, the Academy which has no precedent in Greek education. The soldiers or people with the most courage, loyalty and spirit would be trained in the army as warriors to protect the state. The emphasis would be on character and body development. The majority of the people would be trained to do the physical work of the state. The emphasis on education would be on physical and manual training to produce workers. In all, Plato recommends that every individual in the society must be educated to the level that his

aptitudes can carry so that the ills of ignorance and illiteracy would have no place in the scheme of things. The 7 - - Point Agenda of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua As the driving force of his administration's policies and programme, the 7 - - point agenda constitutes the most important framework for policy implementation the success of which will ultimately be judged by governments achievements in these seven key areas as press released by the presidency.

- Power and energy
- Food security
- Wealth creation
- Transport sector
- Land reforms
- Security
- Education

The above seven key areas, as laudable as they are can be reduced to four major points. Power and energy and transport sector could be regarded as the infrastructural challenges. These comprise electricity, transportation. Telecommunication, water ways and national gas grid distribution which are of priority importance as a consequence of their cross-cutting significance to the Nigerian economy. Primarily agrarian based are land reforms, food security and wealth creation points that aim to diversify production especially in the agricultural and solid mineral sector and targeted at ensuring improvements to boost the production and wealth creation initiatives. Thirdly, security constitutes the foundation on which success of all initiatives of government in ensuring good governance is anchored. The authority of government over the people can be legitimized and sustained only to the extent that it guarantees the security of their lives and properties. The educational profile of a people has a lot to do with the quality of their lives. The utilitarian value of education is therefore not lost on responsible government everywhere. This explains why as far as education is concerned, government financing is indeed a matter of enlightened self-interest. Hence it cannot be controverted that ignorance constitutes a veritable component of the human misery index and any country that wishes to navigate out of underdevelopment would have to take education of its citizenry seriously. The 7 Point Agenda should be applauded for the message they convey lifting the country from her underdevelopment status to an industrialized nation that can attract international respect if the enabling environment for judicious implementation is provided.

#### **Achieving the 7—Point Agenda via Plato's Prescription**

It is true that Nigeria's profile in the comity of nations is to say the least unenviable. As a nation, it has continued to move around in circles. That the country is blessed is not in doubt. That the level of national sub-optimisation is astounding is also a stark reality. But even truer is the fact that the country has been thoroughly degraded and abused over the years by successive government and the urgency of critical repairs has never been more imperative. This period should challenge all hands to be on deck.

Meanwhile, events have proved over time that our leaders have ignored the basic notion that the human being should at all times be at the centre of government programme. Every government programme, policy or project will fall short of the anticipated outcomes if it seeks to downplay this vital imperative.

No nation can ever look good if the facts keep saying that its infant and maternal mortality rate is one of the highest in the world, ranks very low in the U.N.D.P. Human Development Index, sits atop corrupt nations list, spreads wild polio virus around the world, has the lowest water coverage for its citizens, cannot contain religious and ethnic strifes while its citizens get hounded and jailed worldwide for fraud and related, activities, transportation is fraught with high incident of death and molestation, cannot possibly meet any of the millennium development goals within the stipulated timelines, harbours large army of rural and urban poor with a high rate of illiteracy.

Also poignant is a leadership that talks as if all is well when what we have to show for it as a nation is an economy perpetually in reverse gear-25% of budget performance in 2008 (Famakinwa in Guardian 2009:79) and a worse performance in 2009, a social system that leaves everyone stranded. On top of this glooming scenario are a stagnant executive, a thoroughly unresponsive and unfeeling national assembly, a predatory political class, parasitic elite, weak national institutions, rent seeking private sector and a cynical citizenry. Nigerians have become a people on their own where no claims responsibilities for flops and failures. Achievement of the 7-point agenda under the present scenario will amount to an impregnable falsehood.

It is in the light of the foregoing that the recently launched rebranding exercise being championed by then minister of information and communication Prof. Dora Akunyili should be assessed. Specifically, the underlying

assumption should be that at the end, it is for the benefit of the people, that the people have a role to play and finally that our charity must start from the homestead, it must not be an initiative in showmanship.

Corroborating the rebranding message, Plato's prescription first and foremost directs attention to a deliberate agenda of national renewal that every one is committed to—a renewal that involves a complete re-working of the Nigeria project. Nigeria must be made to work to achieve the laudable vision of the 7 — Point Agenda anchored on Plato's prescription. This is the job of everyone. Leadership needs to take the lead and point the way to a genuine national renewal by leading from the front, becoming accountable to a new vision that the people can easily be rallied around. Nigerians need to see why they should genuinely love the country and be ready to make appropriate sacrifice for it.

Consequently, a new sense of national ownership must emerge where leaders on account of their specialist training no longer pander only to the greed and lust for power and can honestly be trusted with our common heritage. Only then can we realistically expect everyone to see the country before self and promote programmes that seek the common good. When Arowolo (in the Punch newspaper of March 22 2010 p96) declares that:

*The truth is that we are a nation whose rampant criminality and ethno-religious uncertainties have constantly eroded the prospects for peace and rapid economic progress,*

He would be alluding to the fact that our nation can guarantee neither domestic nor international security of life and properties. The upsurge in criminality evidenced by the almost daily reports of armed robbery, kidnapping and gruesome assassination of notable Nigerians across the country is enough to trigger off alarm bells that the country is descending into anarchy and mob rule. As Max has admonished "every morbid society inevitably gives birth to its grave diggers". No genuine policy however good it is will succeed in attaining its target in the absence of peace and tranquility. This is where the security arm of Plato's prescription cannot be underestimated especially in the achievement of the 7 - point agenda. No amount of investment in resources in building the socio-economic status of the nation will yield the needed result in the midst of dreaded fraternities and sororities. The listing of the country by the United States of America as a sanctuary of terrorists and damned brutes in human clothing following new evidence as epitomized in Jos massacre, Boko Haram, Niger Delta militants and other senseless acts can only be reversed by a specialized security outfit of integrity and highest sense of mission as proposed by Plato. This will create the enabling environment for the achievement of the 7 point agenda.

The crisis of infrastructure has heightened the cost of doing business, triggering a collapse of the nation's real sector. A shrinking economy has compounded the lingering crisis of unemployment and poverty. As expected. Nigeria remains backward in human development indices with over 70% living below the poverty line while access to education, health and water remains abysmally low. A report by the World Economic Forum (Punch Editorial Oct. 27 2009 p14) describes the nation's health and education infrastructure as one of the worst in the world. If the maxim "a hungry man is an angry man" is true, what peace will there be in a country that continues to harbour a large army of rural poor and urban disinherited? Poverty and ignorance constitute indisputable breeding ground for all manner of anti-social behaviours. With a conscientious labouring class that produces food in abundance for the whole country as recommended by Plato, people will live happily and obey every law and policy that could lift them to the next level like the 7 — point agenda.

The fact must be recognized that we need as much manpower to generate the electricity we all crave for, provide security, stimulate agriculture, create wealth, provide jobs, propel land reform, calm strained nerves in Niger Delta and other 20 visions postulated for a better Nigeria in 2020. Nevertheless the 7 - point agenda minus education equals zero. Even if a miracle provides first rate infrastructure for the country, will the lip commitment to quality education which keeps university students at home at regular intervals and children in lower public schools to the streets enable the country to build a global-standard economy? Education remains the bedrock on which the achievement of the 7-point agenda is built. Plato has provided us the answer in his prescription for a state-financed education.

## **Conclusion**

It is self-evident that nations and peoples are not equally endowed. It is this disparity that gives rise to concepts such as international division of labour and comparative advantage. Thus in furtherance of their national interest, nations always strive to maximize their advantages vis-a-vis other members of the international community. This is in synergy with what Plato recommends for individuals in a society in a bid to achieve a perfect state.

Plato, we have shown believes that governance should be an art predicated on exact knowledge of the good and that society is a mutual satisfaction of needs by individuals whose capacities supplement one another. Even though we may quarrel with Plato's idea of the good as vague, his overriding concern for proper maintenance of

a harmonious state where the different classes perform their duties without interference on each other should overcome the vagueness.

Despite the somewhat extremism associated with his doctrine and advocacy of enlightened despotism, his recommendation that societies are better entrusted in the hands of enlightened knowledgeable individuals not because they are infallible but because they are less likely to lead the society into perdition through selfishness and greed cannot be controverted.

The call here is not living in denial while washing or sweeping issue under the carpet. It is about positive behaviour and then telling a story round them. It is about national icons championing national issues. It is about the aggregate behaviour, action and performance of a people who have collectively agreed on strong governance parameters and are therefore organized and mobilized around certain inviolable core values. When this has happened, a new brand Nigeria appropriately tagged Good people, Great Nation will naturally emerge and anyone among the comity of nations that ignores us will either be envious or mischievous or both because we have acted well our part and earned the honour there from.

### **Recommendations**

1. There is the need to build strong and veritable institutions in order to ensure good governance and equality before the law.
2. To bolster our unity\* as a plural society, public institutions must become neutral to religion and ethnicity upholding the principles of justice and fairness to all regardless of tribes and culture. It is this kind of fairness and institutional neutrality that has put a Blackman in the white house.
3. We must immediately begin to rebuild our federalism which was destroyed by the military so that every ethnic nationality will have enough space to evolve according to its own culture and value system.
4. There is the need for specialized training for leaders as obtained in China. Once leadership is purposeful and reliable, followership is bound to be responsible.

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