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## Critique of the Philosophic Ideal State: Lessons for Underperforming Leaders

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### Abstract

This study examines the elements of a good and desirable society from the perspectives of Plato, Aristotle and Hobbes. The paper observes that the challenging conditions in which most countries currently find themselves are similar to what obtained during Plato's era. Plato considers the Aristocratic state governed by well-educated individuals as the best form of government. For Aristotle, an institutionally mixed regime is the best form of administration. For Hobbes, a sovereign head with absolute power should administer the state. In the current era generally, and in African states in particular, most governments appear incapable of successfully managing and administering their territories. Therefore, this paper will consider the kinds of political systems that can become models of good governance for socio-politically and economically challenged countries.

**Keywords:** good political society, absolute monarch, philosopher king, mixed regime.

### Introduction

The objectives of this study are to examine the features of the philosophic ideal state as propounded by Plato, Aristotle and Hobbes; the commonalities and divergences in their views regarding the constitutive elements of a good political society; and their applications for improved systems of governance in the contemporary era. Plato considers the foundation of the ideal state as resting on a well-defined division of labour. Aristocracy, for him, is the best and most just form of government for being a state governed by the best individuals. This kind of state can only be realised by powerful men who possess philosophic capacities and capabilities, or who are willing to subject themselves to the acquisition of true philosophic knowledge. True happiness for him, can only be attained by connecting with the world of ideas.

The objectives of the city-state, according to Aristotle, are to promote the good life, just relationships, and equitable distribution of goods and services. For him, an institutionally mixed regime is the best form of government for combining the best elements of the laws that different regimes practice. An example of such polity for Aristotle is the combination of democratic and oligarchic rules. This kind

of regime, among other functions, offers financial assistance to both the rich and the poor to pursue either personal interests or projects and services that benefit the state in general. This practice, for him, will lead to the elimination of discontent, factionalism, disagreements and conflicts that result from claims of injustice as found in unmixed regimes.

The best form of administration, according to Hobbes, resides in the absolute monarch who possesses unrestricted powers. He considers human natural condition as violent, intrinsically aggressive, chaotic, filled with fear, and constantly competing for honour, glory and dignity. The limitation of resources leads to struggle and contestations among the citizens. He asserts that human beings are happy when they are in better social, political and economic conditions than others; and these contestations often lead to envy, hatred and war. He concludes that if human beings continue to live in such state of nature, then all lives would be solitary, nasty, brutish and short. Based on these observations, Hobbes submits that peaceful coexistence among human beings can only be guaranteed when they consent to a social contract in a commonwealth ruled by a sovereign head.

One of the salient features that emanate from this study, which holds far-reaching implications for contemporary systems of governance is the type of leadership that a country has. This largely determines the extent of successes and failures that the state will achieve. While the liberal democratic system seems to be largely preferred and practiced in many parts of the world, this has failed to adequately tackle the challenges that individual states confront. Autocratic regimes on the other hand, also fail to rule with justice and fairness. Most of the problems that many states grapple with can be attributed to the inability of leaders to adequately fulfil their mandates. Most countries in the current era are witnessing incompetent leadership, rampant lawlessness, social, economic and political instability, among other challenges. The extent of lawlessness that obtains in these countries is disconcerting. Many disgruntled individuals and groups engage in violent protests over issues such as racial discrimination, unemployment, poverty, corruption and inadequate provision of basic services. It is imperative that a satisfactory system of governance is conceived and successfully implemented to the satisfaction of all stakeholders.

## Desirable Ends of the Ideal State

The foundation of the state for Plato, lies on a well-defined division of labour [Lull & Mico, 2011:8]. For Aristotle, the state exists for the promotion of just relationships, the good life, and equitable distribution of goods and services [Gordley 2015:201]. Hobbes [1968:186] considers the human natural condition, otherwise known as the state of nature, as innately aggressive, troublesome, chaotic, violent, and filled with fear. He illustrates this belief with the hypothetical image of people's natural condition prior to the advent of a formal state, as one of continuous fear, antagonism, and exposure to misery, aggression and death. He notes that with the limitation of resources, power struggle results when two people want the same thing. Hobbes [Wolfenden 2010:1] submits that the quarrelsome nature of human beings makes it impossible for them to peacefully coexist in the absence of a greater authority. He notes diffidence, competition and glory as the three main causes of quarrels; and he considers the main objectives of human beings to be safety, gain and reputation. For him, happiness resides in their ability to be better off in comparison with others. As a result, he concludes that these contestations among human beings lead to hatred, envy and ultimately war.

Hobbes [Lloyd 2013:4] asserts that because of the conflicting nature of human beings, the natural inclination for self-preservation, happiness and felicity, on the one hand, and the need for interdependence, on the other, it is rational for human beings to seek cooperation with each other. Therefore, Hobbes [1968: 223-224] proposes his Leviathan – the Ideal State, claiming that for human beings to live

in peace and harmony without the need to rely on individual strengths as a means of protection, they must agree to a social contract in a commonwealth ruled by a sovereign head.

The establishment of the *Leviathan* through a covenant, for Hobbes [Wolfenden, 2010:1] is voluntary, necessary and rational, because it is the only means of avoiding the lawlessness that characterises the state of nature, the troublesome characteristics of human nature, the probability of human beings flouting the laws of nature, and to ensure security and peace for everyone. He claims that even an oppressive government is better than living under the threat of war. This study notes that while there may be merit in the claim that an oppressive government may be better than living under the threat of war, an oppressive government can also lead to unrest among the citizens and eventually war, as reflected in the recent destructive developments in various parts of the world. For instance, the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, the former Libyan leader ‘*was characterised by bad governance and corruption... Gaddafi reinforced his authoritarian rule by granting economic privileges..., to various tribes or by threatening punishment*’ [NATO-Harvard Project 2013:12].

In the case of Sudan, its former leader, Omar al-Bشير, while in office pursued a brutal war against South Sudan for over twenty years. During this period, he ordered the ethnic cleansing of non-Arabs in the Darfur region, and he also embezzled about 9 billion US Dollars from his country's resources [CAJ News & Ebrahim 2019:2-3]. He pursued a slanted policy and

projects that favoured the northern part of the country to the detriment and dissatisfaction of the southern region [Tawil 2011:1]. He almost destroyed the diversity of the country through his discriminatory practices, and attempted to impose the hegemony of the minority northern population over the other parts of the country [El Tom 2009:1]. Although the country was divided into two separate entities as a result of the war, this was not sufficient to resolve the conflicts that were prevalent for over 50 years. Instead, the regions continue to be confronted by lawlessness, conflicts and poverty [Verhoeven 2012:1-2]. This study, however, supports the use of force by governments to restore peace and order in cases where peaceful resolution mechanisms fail to avert lawlessness and violence.

Hobbes agrees with those who contend that members of a state are to a greater extent not happy under a powerful sovereign. However, he contends that it is not possible for human beings to be totally happy. He asserts that unhappiness can lead to civil war, while the absence of a powerful sovereign and the pursuit of war exacerbate the level of suffering that accompanies such chaos. He believes that community members will live in consensus once they become part of the commonwealth since the accompanying contract is binding. He considers the rights of the sovereign to be the same irrespective of how he came to power; and his powers can neither be usurped, nor transferred to someone else without his consent. Hobbes posits that the sovereign may neither relinquish his power nor be accused by his subjects of abusing his power. Moreover, his subjects



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cannot reprimand him since he is the judge of doctrines and of what is necessary for peace. According to Hobbes, the sovereign is the ultimate judge and he is above the law; since he acts on behalf of his subjects, his actions are effectively the actions of the members of his state; and he cannot harm his subjects since no one can inflict injury on oneself. He considers the best form of government as residing in the most powerful monarch who possesses unlimited rights, unrestricted powers and indefinite tenure, because human beings are fundamentally flawed and in order to avert the resurgence of the state of nature. He prefers the monarchical form of government to other forms of governance such as aristocracy and democracy, as more superior because it accords the sovereign head maximum power with no constraints. He considers democracies governed by representatives and aristocracies ruled by a part of the population as weaker than a monarchy for their

inability to guarantee a substantial level of peace and security [Wolfenden 2010:1-2].

This study agrees with Hobbes that democracies do not guarantee maximum peace, order and cooperation from the population. Many citizens tend to abuse the rights and privileges that democratic regulations provide, since the consequences of engaging in illegalities are not tough enough to serve as a deterrent. However, this study disagrees with the idea of according the sovereign head unlimited powers because that would be excessive. Rather, it is suggested that a competent sovereign head who rules his state with justice and fairness, and who successfully provides for the needs of all members of the state should be allowed to continue administering the state until he is no longer able to perform his duties satisfactorily. This suggestion is made on the basis that there is no point in replacing a good leader when he is still effectively dischar-

ging his duties. Furthermore, it is recommended that leaders vacate their office between the age of 65 and 68 years; the leaders must put proper succession plans in place to ensure that worthy successors are prepared to take over the reins of power when the incumbents vacate their positions.

This study considers the level of faith that Hobbes places on the sovereign head as excessive and capable of causing more harm than good for the state. His consideration of the sovereign as a perfect leader who is not capable of doing wrong, runs contrary to what obtains in reality, because there is no leader who has ruled his state to the ultimate satisfaction of his subjects. It is further noted that the conferment of excessive power on one ruler without the oversight of constituted authorities can lead to dangerous developments if the ruler is unethical. Although this study agrees with Hobbes that that no normal human being would

consciously inflict harm upon himself, this does not mean that he is not capable of inflicting harm on others for selfish reasons.

The best form of rule for Aristotle is an institutionally mixed regime which tends to be more stable than unmixed regime where claims about injustice result in conflicts, factionalism and revolutions. The polity, for him, can be a combination of individual laws that democracies and oligarchies typically practice. For instance, while democracies tend to make financial assistance available to poor citizens to take part in political life, oligarchies on the other hand tend to do the same for richer citizens [Nitsch 2009:12, 18].

This study recommends that countries experiencing rampant lawlessness and instability, such as South Africa, Nigeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Libya should opt for the Aristotelian form of rule which adopts aspects of the monarchical system, if the sovereign heads were just, fair and possessed sufficient wisdom. It is noted that the extent of lawlessness which obtains in these democracies is disconcerting. In the case of South Africa, many disgruntled individuals and groups, according to Nembambula [2015:47] engage in violent protests over issues such as corruption and inadequate provision of basic services. In the process they often engage in the destruction of public goods, property and private businesses. It is observed in the Nigerian case that

there are groups such as the violent Boko Haram which attempt to islamise a section of the northern region [Arendas 2016:40]. This study notes that democratic principles often fail to firmly quash civil agitations that could otherwise be expressed through peaceful means. These are cases where the monarch could employ drastic measures, including the use of force to quell such dissents and to serve as a deterrent.

Wolfenden [2010:1-2] considers Hobbes' arguments to be mostly valid, though consisting of a number of deficiencies. He finds Hobbes' theoretical explanation for the formation of government not feasible. For instance, while Hobbes posits that all governments be formed on the basis of covenants, Wolfenden contends that there are a number of cases where governments are imposed on unwilling population. Hobbes defends his position, claiming that all people acting rationally would prefer to associate with the commonwealth since the alternative in the form of a state of nature is not appealing. Wolfenden disagrees with Hobbes for placing excessive levels of faith in his absolute and benevolent sovereign; for making a number of implausible assumptions, including that the sovereign is prepared to work solely in the interests of his subjects without allowing his personal interest to cloud his judgements. He considers this tendency unlikely because most rulers do not always prioritise the interests of the people in their actions and

decisions. Wolfenden notes a contradiction in Hobbes' claim that although the sovereign may be selfish, he is at the same time able to take into consideration the interests of his subjects because, according to Wolfenden, history reveals that,

**“absolute power corrupts absolutely, that when leaders are allowed to act however they wish they more often than not take what they want at the expense of the state and their citizens. Hobbes reliance on a monarch who would somehow be able to ignore his personal desires for the good of the country makes his political regime seem much less practical.”**  
[Wolfenden 2010:2]

This study submits that there is no single system of governance that can guarantee a well ordered society in which the needs and aspirations of all the members are fulfilled. It is observed that while the monarchical form of governance may be preferable for applying tough measures on those who flout the rules and values of society, it is better to subscribe to a system of rule that holds the absolute monarch accountable if he fails to be ethical, just and fair in administering the state. This would include elements of a mixed regime as Aristotle suggests. However, this study submits that the mixed regime must have the monarchical system as one part of it.

## Features of a Good Political Society

A number of theorists, such as Allen, recognise Plato as the world's first systematic political philosopher. He considers Plato the West's first critical activist who wrote, among other things, to effect change in societies that were in ethical, social, economic and political turmoil [Allen 2010:4]. In the *Republic*, Plato (Lull & Mico 2011:9) considers the Aristocratic state to be the best and the most just type of government. He terms the other forms of government, such as oligarchy, democracy, timocracy and tyranny a degeneration of Aristocracy. He posits that rebellion is the only measure that can lead to the disintegration of a state, and therefore, can never be justified. He describes the characteristics of these forms of governments as follows:



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**“Aristocracy is a state governed by the best. Timocracy is the government of the ambitious who believe themselves to be superior because they are good huntsmen, sportsmen, or soldiers and who are, in the end, men of action, who own properties and get rich in secret. Oligarchy represents the government of a small group of wealthy citizens who hold power. In democracy there are neither criteria, nor ideals of law and order, as truth itself is not believed in, only subjective personal appetites, depending on who governs the city. It is only the ideal form of government in appearance, where no one is in command, with no coercion, where equality is shared out equally. Tyranny is the degeneration of democracy and arises when freedom concludes in licentiousness and the people need a leader to settle internal conflicts produced by private desires and selfishness ”**  
[Lull & Mico 2011:9]

Plato [Bruchmüller 2011:46] considers the realisation of the best state as depending on the possibility of finding powerful men who are able to acquire philosophic knowledge and ability, or who are prepared to be educated in true philosophy. He asserts that the only means to attain happiness on earth is by connecting with the realm of ideas with commitment.

Plato's social order (*Republic*) is structured around a meticulously planned division of labour, in which a person is given a social responsibility on the basis of his combined qualities of maturity and good education that links up with elements such as virtue and temperance. He structures the po-

pulation into three parts with clearly differentiated intellectual and social objectives, namely: the magistrates, rulers and philosophers; the guardians; and the workers [Lull & Mico 2011:5-8]. He posits that the guardians will protect the city from lawlessness, internal and external aggression; and the workers who are the lowest class, such as farmers and artisans will provide the basic needs of society [Wright 2016:11-12]. The layer from which leaders of the state will be chosen consists of magistrates, who are both rulers and philosopher kings. He posits that the only solution to the problems of any state and the human race is that its rulers must be the best. In other words, they should be philosophers devoted to the contemplation of knowledge and the search for goodness. He believes that the idea of the Good is something that only philosophers are familiar with [Lull & Mico 2011:5]. Plato recommends that the ruling class receive the kind of education that enables them to govern impartially and with disinterest. While he concedes that education alone may not be a sufficient means of producing the required kind of rulers, he adds that rulers must pursue the kind of lifestyle that enables them to always consider the interests of their citizens. He made this provision as a result of what obtained in his era, where the oligarchs disbursed favours and political powers to wealthy individuals [Beever 2013:41].

This study notes that the manner in which political offices and privileges were disbursed in Plato's era is similar to what obtains currently in many parts of the world, including Africa, where powers and favours are distributed through favouritism

and nepotism. Plato's era witnessed immense anarchy, violence, instability, internal and external negative influences, which led to the loss of the state's social, ethical and cultural values [Wright 2016:11]. The solution that Plato advances in regards to moral laxities and inadequate governance systems is to

**“regulate the lifestyle of the rulers so that such conflicts of interest cannot arise. It is as radical as we might now expect. He stipulates that the guardians are to hold no private property and are to have no families...; the rule is not that guardians are prohibited from procreating. It is that they are not entitled to have spouses or to act as parents. Instead, they are to copulate during state-run mating festivals and their children are to be raised by a state-run organisation in ignorance of their biological parents. Moreover, as Plato holds that physical and moral traits are hereditary, he maintains that the state must adopt a programme of eugenics.”**

[Beever 2013:41-42]

This study contends that Plato must have thought that eugenics would enable society to produce well-ordered human beings by ensuring that people with undesirable traits are not allowed to have children since they might produce like-minded children who would constitute hindrances to the process of realising a well ordered and ethical society. It is possible that eugenics might be a good way of improving society. However, this study argues that it could also become a means of brainwashing people from childhood to act and behave in a certain manner. It is noted here

that a society that sincerely aims at becoming ethical and just may use such a process to its advantage, by teaching and directing people from infancy to knowledge of the good life, to how to live a life that secures happiness, love, respect, peace and tolerance for everyone. A society, on the other hand, whose main objective is to cause chaos and illegalities can use such a programme to create a more unstable world.

For Plato, leaders must possess the character of Philosopher Kings. He does not mean that philosophers must be given political power. Neither does he mean that political power should be given to a select group of people such as the Aristocracy, nor that power should be given to selfish people whose main goal is the acquisition of pleasure and wealth. Rather, he means that political power should be given to those whose main focus in life is the discovery of truth because disinterested rulers are more likely to be incorruptible. He believes that philosophers who are more concerned with contemplating the world, who do not really seek political power, but who are prepared to actively participate in political affairs and governance out of a sense of duty, are more likely to rule disinterestedly. While he posits that the state must be governed on the basis of justice, he considers philosophers to be the only people who are able to discover what justice entails since their focus lies on the form of the good [Beever 2013:41-43]. The potential to realise the ideal state for Plato and Socrates [Bruchmüller 2011:54], depends on the ability of philosophers to rule the state. In this regard, they outline the characteristics of the true philosopher as one who ought

to love all wisdom, who loves to learn and pursue all parts of knowledge whole heartedly. The realm of truth or wisdom, according to Plato and Socrates,

**“is a structured whole with a considerable number of different parts, each of which the lover of wisdom has to investigate. Therefore, he needs intellectual capacity..., which is indispensable for philosophy must be directed toward the right things within the ontological structured whole...; it is pointless to know everything if one is unable to perceive how everything hangs together and incapable of organising the manifold objects of knowledge on a higher ontological order.”**

[Bruchmüller 2011:54]

The contemplative ideal for Plato, is the kind of life that is mostly associated with the natural character of the philosopher; this is the kind of life that brings the greatest happiness to the philosopher. He asserts that the happiness, or the dominant factor in the happiness of the philosopher is philosophical contemplation. His contemplative ideal relates to those who possess philosophical character, who possess good memories, who are critical thinkers, broadminded, naturally curious, persistent, and tend to engage in abstract thinking. Accordingly, he expects the philosopher to organise his life in a manner that prioritises philosophical contemplation. In order to attain such a philosophical ideal, he expects the philosopher to devote marginal time to non-intellectual and bodily matters. Socrates agrees with Plato's characterisation of the philosopher as he posits in the *Phaedo*, that philosophers must

seek wisdom above other things; and wisdom will be derived from philosophical contemplation. The philosopher who seeks the contemplative ideal, according to Plato [McKeen 2010:198], should engage only in partial community and political activities, especially in communities that he is very familiar with. Rather, he should prefer a state (Polis) or community in which he can have unlimited space to engage in philosophical contemplation to the highest level permissible by nature. The individuals who possess natural philosophic characteristics in the ideal state, according to Plato, ‘will be identified, nurtured, and groomed through a long programme of education and training. At the end of this long road, these developed philosophers will serve in key roles governing the state.’ [McKeen, 2010: 198]

This study finds it questionable that Plato expects natural philosophers to abstain from political activities, while he expects those in the city who have inherent philosophical potentials to participate in state affairs once they have been sufficiently trained. One wonders what use it is for the natural philosophers to only engage in philosophical contemplation when they could use their good knowledge to improve the conditions in their countries. This study recommends that natural philosophers be actively engaged in the administration of the state, so that their knowledge can be fully utilised for the development of their society.

## Critique of Emerging Issues

Popper [Wright 2016:10] contends that Plato's ideal state is extreme, petty, immoral, the kind of life that obtains in a totalitarian regime, and a crass promotion of a Spartan-like regimentation of social life. He condemns Plato's ideal state for lacking diversity; for limiting freedom of expression; for encouraging repression; for proposing that members of the state should only engage in the occupation for which they are best suited; for making no distinction between what is public and private; and for permitting neither poverty nor wealth because he considers both as leading to vice. His views on women and children are considered by the average liberal to be alarming, for arguing through Socrates that

**“the traditional form of the family should be done away with. Men should have women and children in common, such that no man knows who his children are or has excessive love for one woman in particular. Even mothers are not allowed to know who their children are. Their children are taken from them at birth, and they are given other children to suckle as long as they have milk. Plato's breeding principles sound ominously like the Nazi idea, and Spartan practice, of killing weak and deformed infants.”** [Wright 2016:12]

Popper criticises Plato's *Republic* as responsible for many of the totalitarian movements that caused upheavals in the world. He termed the *Republic* disastrous, for projecting the idea that a political society whose justice hinges on the virtues of its leaders can be developed. He insists that such claim fails

to recognise what is obvious to contemporary humans that power corrupts. Therefore, he concludes that it is misleading to have excessive faith that powerful individuals will be virtuous [Beever 2013:39].

There are other theorists however, according to Wright (2016:10), who note elements of democracy in Plato's proposals, such as in the egalitarianism that surrounds some aspects of his programme of education. Although Beever [2013:43] admits that Plato was wrong about many claims, he considers him neither wrong nor naïve about the corruptive nature of power, because this motivated his contributions to his system of politics. While Beever concedes from the foregoing that Popper's criticism of the *Republic* is questionable since Plato was aware of the corruptive nature of power, he contends that Plato's responses to many issues are difficult to accept and unacceptably authoritarian in contemporary terms. Beever criticises Plato, claiming that his ideas on

**“Censorship, the abolition (for the guardians) of private property, of the family, eugenics, and the (admittedly purportedly meritocratic) authoritarian rule of the Philosopher Kings is too much for even the most utopian modern thinker to stomach [...]. In fact, not only is Plato's position authoritarian, it is recognisably totalitarian, as Popper sensed (though not for his reasons). This is because running through the whole of the *Republic* is the idea that the individual is merely a means to the community's ends.”** [Beever 2013:43]

Many scholars assume different positions on Plato's comments on gender equality. For instance, while Rickman refers to Plato's proposals for equal opportunities and education as emancipation, Annas does not consider Plato to be the first feminist. Rather, he finds his arguments unacceptable to a feminist, and his proposals on gender and communal ownership irrelevant to contemporary debate. For Caccia, Plato's proposals appear dogmatic, while he fails to explicate the potential implications of his communal proposals. However, he notes that it was Plato's realisation that he was not able to clarify the consequences of communal ownership that led him to conclude that his rule was sufficient rather than great [Caccia 2012:19-20].

Lull and Mico consider the manner in which Plato allocates duties and responsibilities in his *Republic* to be most appropriate and fair, since everyone is allocated a function based on individual abilities, strengths and weaknesses. They are further supported with relevant training. However, these theorists note a contradiction between Plato's respect for ideas that are pronounced in a caste system, namely, that all children should acquire knowledge from the earliest possible age, and his idea of justice that partly implies that everyone should do what their nature allows them to do best. This implies the potential in everyone to seek any position in the community. Plato clarifies his position, claiming that indeed everyone is free to seek any position, not on the basis of caste endogamy or hereditary wealth, but on the basis of their skills, innate aptitudes and good qualities [Lull & Mico 2011:8-10].

Wright considers Plato's worldviews irreconcilable with what obtains in contemporary liberal democratic societies where human beings are not ranked on the basis of their value to society or their intrinsic value; where rigid hierarchical structures or ideas that promote a caste system are deemphasised; while instead, dynamism, freedom and chaos are often the case. Wright contends that modern society neither considers the world a harmony nor really cares about analogies between society and nature. He claims that although order is preferred, it is not seen as a core value; driven and ambitious people are admired much more than those who do things in moderation or who seek internal peace. Moreover, contemporary cultures do not promote good values on a large scale. Rather, they appear in general, to censure the kinds of behaviours that impede the pursuit of happiness by others. Plato would have considered such contemporary systems anarchical, decadent and unjust [Wright 2016:10-11].

Plato's treatise in the *Republic* is largely rejected by modern political philosophers for its regulatory structure of individuals in the state. However, it is the basis of modern political philosophy, in view of the consensus between Plato and modern political philosophers that the concern of justice relates to the relationship between all members of society. This reflects in Plato's claim that each person counts equally, and that justice relates to taking into consideration the interests of all citizens. Beever considers Plato's assertion contradictory for on the one hand, accepting slavery, while on the other hand, he rejects slaves as citizens of a city

state. The implication here for Beever, is that this equality does not apply to slaves; Plato does not consider all humans as equals in the modern sense going by his consideration of Philosopher Kings as better suited to rule. Nonetheless, justice for Plato, is distributive because it takes into account the interests of the entire community and by extension of those he considers as persons [Beever 2013:45].

It has been noted in this study that various philosophers, such as Popper and Wright find Plato's ideal state unrealistic. However, a number of theorists, such as Lull and Mico find elements of good democratic practice in Plato's treatise. While most of Plato's proposals are difficult to attain, this study concedes that the contemporary era needs such a radical reform if it is serious about curtailing the excessive unethical conduct and bad governance that pervades African societies in particular, and the world at large. These include, ineffective and unethical leadership [Ogbogbo 2011:1]; erosion of values, cultures and traditions; and poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and drug abuse [The Saylor Foundation 2012:1-2].

Plato makes a far-reaching proposal that children be disengaged from their parents and brought up by philosopher kings. This study believes that this would be a good way of indoctrinating children in the right way if it were feasible. If children are inculcated with strong moral foundations at a young age, the tendency is for them to grow up knowing what is right and what is wrong, and doing the right thing most of the time, if not always. It is argued here that it will be easier to

realise the ideal state if contemporary societies can be restructured into small manageable societies, because it will make it easier for politicians and bureaucrats to pay detailed attention to their subjects and make more progress.

Plato realised that some of his more radical proposals may not be favourably considered. However, he would have appreciated their institutionalisation in order to curtail the decadent conditions prevalent in many societies [Wright 2016:11-12]. Given this realisation, the question that this study poses is how can Plato's ideal state become functional in the current world order? This study submits that the best the philosopher king can do in the contemporary era is to choose workable aspects of Plato's theory. While there are divergencies in the views of Plato, Aristotle and Hobbes concerning the features of a good society, they all agree on the need for the state

to maintain peace, order, happiness and justice. Most contemporary systems of governance seem incapable of implementing policies and processes that guarantee happiness and satisfaction for the citizens. For instance, '*post-independence leadership styles in Africa have hitherto remained... incompetent in both public and private organisations*' [Kuada 2010:15].

This study finds it inconceivable and ironic that despite the magnitude of talents and intellectuals that abound in many African states, who are versed in ethics and good governance, most African states continue to be governed by unethical, greedy and incompetent individuals who are not fit for purpose. Furthermore, the idea of democracy as the rule of the majority is problematic as it contributes largely to the election of wrong individuals to positions of authority. In this instance, the majority tends to be biased towards the election of

mediocres whom they can identify with, while they view the educated individuals with disdain and inferiority complex. The irony in this scenario is that while many African intellectuals and qualified candidates are abhorred in Africa, the West, in particular, North America consistently attracts the best brains from Africa for their developmental agenda. The sorry state of African politics and governance will remain the norm until Africans at large begin to change their negative mindsets towards the educated and qualified candidates. It is imperative that a satisfactory system of governance is conceived and successfully implemented to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. This demands that the right kind of leaders in terms of education, experience and moral disposition are appointed. The onus lies on such leaders to be cognisant of their values, capacities and capabilities; and values must be institutionalised in all structures of society.



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## Conclusion

This study set out to examine elements of the philosophic ideal state from the perspectives of Plato, Aristotle and Hobbes; and the lessons that current societies can learn with the view to improving their systems of governance for the benefit of the citizens. They all believe in the central role that the state plays or should play in bringing about stability, peace and development. However, they do not agree on a common means of realising that. Hobbes considers the best form of government as that ruled by a sovereign monarch with unlimited powers. He contends that the troublesome pattern of human existence makes it impossible for people to live together in harmony. He, therefore, concludes that if human beings do not refrain from living in this state of nature by submitting to an absolute authority through a social contract, all lives would be nasty, brutish and short. Hobbes is criticised for placing unlimited powers in one ruler. The excessive level of faith and trust that he places in the sovereign head has the potential to create discontent and chaos in the state. This study notes that it is risky to confer so much power on one individual without the control of oversight bodies in case the leader becomes unethical or despotic. In contrast to Hobbes, Aristotle submits that a mixed regime is the best form of government for being more stable, unlike unmixed regimes where factionalism, conflicts and revolution often result from claims of injustice.

Plato believes that the best state is one, which is governed by wise leaders. He subscribes to a radical reform by philosophers of everything that goes wrong in the state, including the people and their characters in order to create a constitutional and ethical state. A number of modern theorists such as Popper criticise Plato's conception of the just state as petty, immoral and totalitarian for encouraging repression and suppressing freedom of *expression*; for not promoting diversity; for not making a distinction between public and private property; and for not promoting either wealth or poverty since he considered both of them as resulting in vice. Plato's ideal state is further considered unrealistic as his reform process consists of complicated programmes that are not achievable. Plato is cognisant of the challenges inherent in his proposals. However, he would have preferred their implementation in order to minimise the extent of unethical conduct in society.

This study submits that although the proposals of the philosophers examined in this study may be complicated and unrealistic in a number of cases, a radical overhaul of the system of governance in the world in general, and in Africa in particular, is imperative. The magnitude of immorality in the world is overwhelming. This projects a bleak future and requires the intervention of renewed ethical consciousness in order to avert future

negative complications. The study recognises that it is difficult to find a single system of governance that guarantees a well ordered society, in which all the citizens are accorded the justice and fairness they deserve. However, the desirable society must be one that adopts the good and applicable elements of Plato's, Aristotle's and Hobbes' ideal state. This inclusive approach to good governance will be suitable for countries that are prone to racism, lawlessness, conflicts, intermittent strikes and civil disobedience or unrest.

In that regard, this study proposes a kind of state governed by the most qualified and ethical individuals, who are critical thinkers, visionaries and lovers of knowledge. The leaders must give priority attention to the provision of basic services for all the citizens, to just and equitable distribution of public goods by ensuring that the less privileged members of society are provided with social benefits, while the rich and powerful are given a conducive climate to contribute the development of the country. The leaders must be given the authority, subject to regulatory oversight, to exercise unrestricted powers where necessary in order to provide peace and stability.

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