# Plato Republic and the Contemporary Age

**By**

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**Abstract.**

Plato's republic is a philosophical fact documented by the Greeks. It contains a practical steps that states must follow to attain a democratic perfection of "happiness" in all ramifications. The republic is an imaginary portrait of an ideal society where philosopher-kings could have the qualification and capacity to govern the state. The guardians, he believed had been certified and knowledgeable through intensive training to create a desired happiness that is not gender based, neither wealth nor classes oriented. The focus of this paper is to examine the effectiveness such as the reliability and the application of Plato's Republic with reference to the contemporary local and international governmental structures. The work adopted secondary sources in its methodology which is the use of documented information for collecting data such as text books, journals, newspapers, government bulletins etc. The Republics is one of the most viable information provided mostly for education, politics, literature, rationalism through which decision are made in public sphere. His ultimate questions can be applied in the classroom, government functions, democratic positions, activities and qualification of leaders, mode of training and system of training, justice such as the good man and who to govern the ideal state.

**Key word: Plato, Republic, Contemporary Age, Philosophy, Democracy.**

## Background

Political thought simply means thinking of words associated with ideas in relation to politics, social and activities. These are expressed in oral or writings documented for future reference.

Some of these special areas have been interrogated by political analysts such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, St Augustine and others are forms government, function, authority, structures, activities, organizations, clan, kings, rulers, community, operations of government, nationality, citizen's rights and other sphere of the state.

Again, political thought is an extensive discourse about politics, according to political philosopher's definitions and as such it is not only oral testimonies but writings, treaties, letters, books are devoted for the purpose of politics.

Below are some of the world leading realist and idealist political philosophers who added series of footnotes to philosophy namely Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Karl Marx, Niccolo Machiavelli, John Locke, St Augustine, Thomas Hobbes, Montestquieu and others.

The purpose of this paper is to critiques the reliability, challenges and the aims of Plato's Republic and to ascertain how best its contents are viable to the modern states' politics, education, social-cultural and other human relations in the contemporary age. The contents of the Republic will be broken down and each item will be analyzed with special reference to the contemporary era.

Plato was born in Athens in 427 BC. He belonged to an aristocratic family as his father Ariston was a descendant of an Athenian king.

He died when Plato was a child while his mother Peritione remarried Pyrilampes, an associate of the elite class.

He was Socrates' student though his mentor doesn't document a wring as his philosophical process was on dialectical method which deals with questions and answers.
Plato had political interest and appreciates democratic process and the oligarchy which was dissatisfied by the corrupt political rulers in the City of Athens who unjustly put Socrates to death by given him poison to drink.

Plato left his city of birth unceremoniously for Egypt because of danger as his master was killed by the authority of Athens.

He later returned to Athens in 387 BC and founded a school named Plato Academy which was regarded as the world's first university which was viable till 529 BC but was later closed by Byzantine emperor Justinian 1 because of its pagan teaching he alleged. He began to teach basic philosophical concepts and methods of debate on "Man know thyself".

Also he adopted and accurately followed the footsteps of Socrates' dialectical formula of questions and answers and in the process additional questions arose this made him a rationalist as he carefully sketched and developed the contents of the Republic such as the theory of Justice, Ideal State, theory of education, the hierarchical entry division, the just or good man who will champion the state, theory of the Guardian and others.

A British philosopher, Alfred John Whitehead describes the history of philosophy as a series of "footnotes to Plato".

**The Republic.**

The Republic is often described as the first attempt to inform citizens about political science and its position in a society because it applies a scientific reasoning and enquiry to the study of political ideas and institutions.

Gerasimos (2010), opines that Plato like his contemporaries believes that the right kind of government can be the object of scientific enquiry. In order words, he believes that politics can benefit from science and those political relations and institutions can be mould by scientific analysis.

According to Odhe (2018) This is why 'The Republic has been described as the first attempt at involving the science of politics and indeed the first work or thesis on a systematic political theory.

This is because it began with a comprehensive view of human nature and the belief that by knowing the essential nature of man one can come to a near accurate, if not total picture of the kind of institutions and structures which would be most suitable for its existence.
Subsequently, it began with a step to give the true nature of man and ends with a prescription on the political structure which entails leading to happiness for human existence.

It a rational use of inductive and deductive reasoning in which the logical outcome is applicable to political institutions in the modern age.

For example, in the contemporary political system in Nigeria, the elite/kings are the key decision makers in the helms of affairs.

The upper class as contained in Plato's hierarchical entering divisions are practiced in most countries, if not in the whole world.

Today, the contents of the Republic is viable in academics institutions between student-teacher relations in the classroom situations which define Plato ultimate's questioning method.

Furthermore, the Republic started with an in-depth analysis of the concept of justice because of his belief that justice is the foundation of human society.
Thus it describes justice as given to every man according to his measure which is expected in an ideal society.

**Plato's Hierarchical Entry Division.**
Plato gave a logical break down on social strata for the attainment of his ideal state which include

1. The Guardian:- The Philosopher-king who must be trained and educated to have qualification to govern the ideal states.
2. The Military:- Soldiers such as the security agencies to protect the states against external and internal aggressors.
3. The Commoners:- The peasant, tailor, famers, petty trader etc.

Stating that each group must function properly according to their level and not to meddle into each other's affairs.

**Plato Academy.**
Plato founded his own school in 387 BC, the Academy in Athens.
This university was for higher studies with instruction in the Sciences, Mathematics and Philosophy. The academy attracted students far more than nine (9) centuries and he was known as the father of western University. Plato continued to teach and served as President of the Academy until his death in 347.
He laid educational foundation which is applicable in the contemporary age.
Plato proposes his theory that the ideal state or polis can only be achieved through a balance of ideas.
Political justice can only be present when people serve their functions properly as determined by their tripartite souls.

**Plato's Theory of Justice**
Plato began the main body of his political thought with an examination of the word "justice". Justice in Greek usage meant the standard and rule of action or behaviour for a man living in a community.

According to Foster (1971:38) states that Plato's policy of justice is a part of human virtue. Human virtue according to him is divided into four (4) main constituent elements: the virtues of

1. Wisdom
2. Courage,
3. Temperance
4. Justice

Whoever has any one of the above is to that extent a good man and whoever has all of them is a wholly a very good man.
Plato analyzes and states firmly that justice for any one means specialization that is, the will to concentrate in one's own sphere of duty.
That is specializations, professionalism, talents, skills, and so on.
According to Lear and Gabriel (2016), justice for Plato is for both the part of human virtue as well as the bond which joins men together in society.
In other words, there must be synergies working together between the state and citizens to build communication skills that will hold all helms of affairs for effective society.

Plato said that quality and personality bring men into good social interactions and follow the rule of law that enables them to enter into social relations and form a just political society void of bias or sentiments.
Furthermore, a good society will necessarily be an ideal society if the men are good and not pursue needs at the detriment of others.
This is applicable in the contemporary age whereby each professional is logically separated in our politics, education and other institutions of government such as the judiciary, executives and legislatives where decisions are made according to the measure of every man.

As Plato argued that the good man must be a good citizen, a good man could hardly exist in a good state and it would be irrelevant to discuss what was good for the man without considering also what was good for the state.

The state is in fact a moral entity in the sense that it has responsibility for the total being of its citizens.
It is expected to oversee not only the citizens, social, political, economic relations but also their moral behaviour.
But where and how to find the just man (good) as describes by Plato to achieve his ideal state remained unanswered.

In the contemporary system most humans involved in politics are greedy with their selfish interest interesting at the risk of other person's pain.
Hobbism state of nature (social contract theory) states that humans are hostile, greedy and void of beauty, arts and love.
That is the reason Niccolo Marchiavelli also recommended absolutism to restrain man's action by urging leaders to enthrone power above all.
On the other hands, the idealist sees humans as good in nature and capable to be trusted and co-habiting, hence, politics is defined as a struggle for consensus.

**Plato's Ideal State**

The totality and the content in the Republic is the imagination and establishment of the Ideal State where justice superseded and reigns above all.
The ideal state according to Plato, simply means a society built on fairness, justice, equity, wisdom, courage and discipline which is the virtue and most fundamental elements of society.

The contemporary international and local structure especially the judiciary, the system of justice, equity and fairness which is the virtue of life according to Plato, has been neglected and built by injustice.

How to structure the ideal state had been the most challenging aspect of politics and social system today where there would be peace and harmony between the different classes of people if the philosopher kings, military and the commoner according to Plato hierarchy maintain the boundary as recommended and not to interfere in each other affairs.

Subsequently, the Republic aims at the highest educational system, whereby his projections in academics was to produce enlightened individuals who will be trained in a refined environment for the purpose of good leadership qualities according to their natural calling to ensure happiness.

Today, it's unarguable that millions of universities had been structured around the world, attracting various personalities as it was in ancient Greece in Plato's Academy training citizens for different specializations.

The System had exposed students of the same background of educational learning to a desirable extent to make a progressive stance for those who possess natural capabilities to move to a higher level possible for higher academics orientations.

Plato is described as the father of western University because of his interest in the state and the academic skills to develop the good man toward achieving a good society unlike some modern defenders of totalitarianism who do not believe that the state has interest which are greater than those of individual.

In the contemporary era, totalitarians believe that where the interest of the individual clashes with those of the state, the interest of the individual should prevail.
This is unacceptable in a republic where it is stated that the general interest must supersede.

In an Ideal State, argued Plato, there can be no difference between the interest of the state and those of its citizens.
The attainment of the ideal state becomes the main challenge and the most difficult question to answer in the contemporary world.

Against the above background, Plato develops the first comprehensive political philosophy.
According to Michelle (2011), Plato began to search for the ideal state by painting a picture of human nature.
Stating that human beings are governed by three elements which he refers to as element of the soul.
1. The first he calls the appetitive or nutritive and this resides below the diaphragm.
2. The second one is that which is executive, "spirited" or emotional which resides in the chest'
3. While the third is rational soul that is situated in the head for thinking purposes.
Although all human beings possess these elements in Plato's logic they however do so in different dimensions and beautifications;
1. Individuals have an abundance of the appetitive or nutritive elements.
2. Others have spiritual or emotional elements
3. While some also have abundance of the rational.

Logically, Plato ideal state portrays a structure of a society in which everyone is given the highest training that his nature powers permit him to profit.
This means that every individual can advance to the highest position in the state and achieve his capacity in educational experience to enable him to fit adequately into the state. (Sabine, 1962).

However it is from this pseudo – scientific characterization of man Plato makes profound inferences for the ordering of political relations.

The first step in this inference begins with the suggestion that a state is functional entity which comes into being because no human being is self-sufficient. Human beings require the company and competence of others in order to live a good life.
The State, therefore, is often a complete functions resting on shoulders of the reliability of trained individuals.

An efficient society will be one which is based on functional specialization for man and the society to live better working at one talent.
It is, therefore, important to identify innate differences in individuals which fit them for different occupations.
It is only by fitting into occupation for which they are best suited that society can be magnificently organized.

To fit people into a particular occupation, it is imperative that the three elements of the soul be taken into account respectively.
First, the philosopher-king who had the full knowledge of leadership most be taken in to rule the society.

Those with an abundance of the appetitive or nutritive element would be properly placed to take care of the basic needs of the society such as agricultural productivity and practical skills for the satisfaction of people in the state.
He recommends a legal composition of the army to protect lives and property both internal and external.

These groups, he refers to as the "Guardians" which are viable in the contemporary national and international politics as various structures had been laid by the government to promote the functionality of the military in all counties around the world.

**Plato's Theory OF Education**
According to Plato, knowledge is the basic need for the attainment of the ideal state in a society hence; the introduction of academics to train individuals for efficiency, responsiveness and accountability.

A blind prisoner, as he said, may not be able to withstand the bright light of the sun outside the cave, which is the reason he advanced the system of education in the State with the following objectives.

1. To prepare man for the proper acquisition of the true knowledge;
2. To provide ground strategy for citizens for possible steps for creating job opportunities so as to determine that which they are naturally inclined.
3. The educational structure is also basic to the existence of the ideal state and the just man as well as described by Plato.
4. To engage individuals toward building the 'right attitude of mind that would not be occupied by negative thoughts among the philosopher - kings.
5. Plato's justice and his ideal state can only be achieved through a systematic educational background for well-meaning society because the system will eliminate ignorance among the citizens and enlighten their mind to perform to the good will of the system.
6. His educational system helped to eliminate privatization which was formally dominated in the Athenian system of learning education to correct the imbalance in Athenian system of education until the Spartan system was adopted.

Against the above structure of education by Plato, he went further to recommend a scheme of learning for each units containing all items needed to groom the guardians for physical training.

The Guardians he said must be trained continually to be fit in various relevance spaces so that they can respond accurately to internal and external attack.
The interest of the state should be the only direction of reasoning of the guardians. They should be thought through propaganda to think toward the state well-being.

**Challenges of Plato Republic**

One of the biggest challenges of the Republic is "when, where and how to find the just or the good man in the society" remains the most unanswered questions.
The theory of state is invalid and unstable without the good man who Plato describes as one with political sagacity and uprightness to champion the ideal society.
The flexibility and unstable nature of man make the selection of the philosopher-king and their training becomes problematic and also the complexity and the strict rules involved in choosing the governing scheme.

On the other hand, succession to rulership was not hereditary, as Plato recommends a system of communal education in which all children born in a society are given the

opportunity of the same level of training because he sees the Spartan system of education and the military structure as a model that is worth emulating. The selection is strictly an educational process which will, in fact, provide the criteria for every one into the different classes of training identified by the end of the process.

But the necessary tools, sometimes, to achieve the above work is neither accessible nor available, making the selection process inadequate because it demands a high level of wisdom and educational sensitivities to arrive at a desired point of selection of the rulers and only those who are the most well-informed qualify to rule.

Formally, education was privately oriented and for commercial purposes in Athens, but Plato argued that the state must itself provide the needed means to educational system which was a big challenge between Plato and the then rulers until it was adopted.

To actualize his ideal state, education must leave the hands of private persons to the general public to liberate the educational scheme that will enable accurate selection of individual persons into different groups.
Furthermore, his logical documentation of the three elements of the soul is the first step in Plato's ideas of his ideal state.

The basis for functional and role differentiation in society rests on these three (3) elements of the soul, without it, there cannot be justice and order.

Finally, Plato does not encourage poetry for him its leads to uncontrollable emotions that can make a man unjust in a society.

Today, most of our structure lacks accountability as Plato said when a society is found in certain pleasure that structure can collapse rather than having accordance with the basic attributes of its members.

In other words, a well-structureds society is bound to be cohesive, peaceful and just. Because each class of the society is at liberty to do what it is best capable to do to promote the well-being of the state.

**Critique of Plato Republic**

Several criticisms have been documented from various scholars both international and local regarding the weaknesses in Plato's formulations.

Wayper (1971) states that, Plato's formulation of happiness is understandable given how the ancient Greeks stressed the importance of the polis which is one of the reason for ceaseless rational ideas for the attainment of the ideal state.

Consequently, the perspective of the Republic in general is what Plato defines as "happiness" which is more like contentment of needs which is known to be insatiable by economists no matter the amount of provisions made available by the state.

Aristotle being Plato student is one of his earliest critics; Aristotle visualized the drawback of his mentor's concept of happiness and rebranded the whole idea and introduced empiricism to Plato's philosophical documentations.

Aristotle was critical in questioning Plato's reliance on intuitive reasoning which he describes as rigid and lacked flexibility for a state to rely on when selecting leaders to rule the political and social system in general.

Aristotle believes that knowledge should be built on practical experiences that can be perceived by the senses through rigorous process such as hypothesis testing; sample, sampling. Experimental and analysis to arrive at verify conclusion that is beyond mere visualization of concept that deals with inductions and deduction.

According to him, happiness as an abstract is the living a virtuous life and promoting well-structured social benefits if each items is being verify.

The emphasis on contrast tripartite soul by Plato, Aristotle argued and split human soul into two (2) elements the rational and the irrational.

According to him, individuals are rational and they are sometimes irrational elements as political animals they also possess faculties that are definitely humans. For example, humans have the capability to regulate their feeling or desires through reasoning.

That is, some humans are unreasonable while some are reasonable and intellectually oriented which he describes as intellectual advantages of human being if they are reasonable which highlights the relevance of reasoning but Plato abandoned other important aspects of human nature: emotions, depression, anger, bitterness, love and desires for sex.

On the other hand, the breakdown of social engagement between the social classes counter to many feelings that are major fundamental parts of human nature.

While Plato is one of the few thinkers who believe that women can be ruled by intuitive reasoning as he stipulates that good female parents must nurture their own families which is applicable to some extent in the modern days where by some well to do women have nannies who take care of their kids.

Sexual appetites, Plato describes as illicit but fails to deferential whether sex should be for married couples or unmarried as he generalized the concept.

His stance was that if humans do not impose boundaries on their tastes or desires, it will lead them to become victims of disorder and unfocused which he argued that greed and social vices comes from unrestrained human appetites.
Today, it is unarguable that humans are victims of uncontrolled element of appetites that had led majority to engage in corrupt practices in public places losing their good nature.

Plato sees the good person as ruled by reason whereas most moral codes see good people as ruled "by a passion that of love".

The analogical documentation of the cave underlines Plato's weight on the relevance of the inspected life and self-values.
Individuals who see only manipulated shades fail to see the larger picture outside and can thus never be fit to make concrete knowledgeable decisions.
False morals and principles will linger on and resist efforts made on their behalf to improve their lives.

Plato while visualizing the ideal state, is criticized for its strict hierarchical orders; he laid a significant contribution to political knowledge by upholding that the public must encourage the wellbeing of her citizens.

Plato laid too much emphasis on a good political leader which he said must be educated while he rightly criticized some for ignoring other human needs when he abolishes family ties for the ruling class.

The most viable content of his Republic is the astonishing idea of equality among the sexes as he believed that competent females can become associates of the guardian level as well as men.

The weaknesses in Plato's Republic arises from a flawed and unbending categorization of human beings such that neglected human emotions, flexibility and needs as he compelled individuals to handover their own personal needs to the public before one can properly fit in the guardian.

**Purposes of the Republic**

Plato rationalized and outlined what he acknowledges to be a viable structure of government and a proper rule of law.

In a society, he carefully sketched the mode of leadership position, governing style and property ownership which make up the contents of his Republic.

His main reason was to pass information directed to the doctrinaires (Sophists), whom he criticized on two (2) fundamental bases.

1. He ruled out their code of self-gratification, class of arrogance and self-independence such as individualism championed by the sophists.
2. The doctrinaire's orientations was not accepted by Plato, on the ground that their teachings corrupted the mind of the youth thereby making them to be self-centered.

He argued further, that before, the sophists caused more social damage in the City of Athens and posited that the Sophist teaching must be restrained.

One of the most challenging teaching of the Sophists recognized by Plato was their rapid spread of ideas that government policies and programmes are media for some individuals in a society to enrich themselves at the detriment of others. In other words, the Sophist claimed and projects that youths in Athens should not engage in political process that had no collective benefit.

Plato found the above assertion of the Sophist offensive and condemned their teaching which he fought rationally to be corrected by formulating the "Republic" and making it known to the youth that politics is game of all citizens in a state.

But on the contrary, the modern political structure in various states and their functions, using Nigeria as a case study, can one boldly say that Sophist are wrong where most Countries of the world practice individualism and cut off collectivism?

Republic simply means restructuring the general system, which Plato's objectives of formulating the Republic was to remould the system and contribute to the existing status quo.

As well as rebranding the general political setting of the Greek City States that were suffering from inadequacies such as defects

1. Inexperience and unawareness (ignorance) was projecting itself in the space of knowledge.
2. Plato was not satisfied with the presence of laypersons in politics championing governmental decision.

According to George and Thomas (1933), the Republic is the most relevant work in philosophical knowledge and political approaches.

Plato fundamentally orchestrated the foundations for true democratic governance by specifying that leaders must function in the interest of the general will of the people aimed at recognizing the position of education in the life of the guardians by ensuring the best training and qualifications above all.

In other words, Plato actions simply mean that a person with ignorance or illiteracy cannot in any way govern the citizens in the Ideal State using Nigeria as a case study whereby those who have no qualifications feel they are qualified to rule Nigeria in diaspora. The same applies to some other African countries.

Subsequently, he formalizes an ideal society by given no room to one person to repeatedly have the advantages over all by wealth, birth, gender or rule continually.

Plato's ideal model had obviously reckoned in normative conceptualization of ideal social norms, role of individuals, moral standard, patterns and style of leadership, structure of government and so on. The influence and the impact of the model among states over the centuries cannot be over emphasized.

Thomas More incorporated Plato's earlier negation of private property and the necessity for educated and qualified rulers which was largely applied in modern states.

Also the French Philosopher; Emile Durkheim (2001) wrote on the function of state organism which he required a segment of Plato's work to make up the Division of Labour in society.

Furthermore, Santas presents the Republic as a discourse among different accounts of justice describing how Thrasymachus used rational knowledge to argue that justice should be the attention of the leaders in all proceeding.

The operations of Athena's democracy was condemned by Plato that the governing process should contain the historical items.

But most countries around the world lack the historical contents and liberal manner of dissemination of the dividends of democracy and this is at the back ground of unjust attitudes.

Nigeria for instance claims to be democratic but does not practice true representative government to allow freedom of expression and civil opinions to prevail.
Foster (1971) states that those undermining the limitations in the Republic principles it continue to hold relevant position in politics and social affairs in the contemporary age.

**Findings**

The impact of Plato's Republic in politics, education, justice, states, classes to the modern state structures cannot be over ruled;

1. Leaders must be qualified through educational training before venturing into leadership position.
2. The just man (good) is the right person to occupy a position of general interest of a state.
3. Leaders must deliver according to the will of the people not other way round.
4. Voters should be equipped to make viable decisions.
5. The criteria to rule should not be measured by wealth, gender, power or any forms of advantage.
6. Most importantly, debates and dialogue in public places should be adheld to always have majority opinion.
7. Plato has carefully sketched the image of two States where he expects man's purity manifestation above all.

8. Plato is a great philosopher whose principle of the Republic (ideal state) is viable to all modern structures such as politics and general norms that must be practically followed during decision making process to attain perfections.

**Conclusion**

Plato Republic reveals the practical process on how a society can be well structured and governed through a logical placement of individual role in a society (Plato hierarchy of entry division).

A ruler, according to him, can only be a ruler if properly trained based on state interest and propaganda must be used to enlighten them to always think at the direction of the state interest only especially the military.

The training must include physical strength and mental cognitive development of the guardians to be able to measure if he or she had the intelligence and capacity to deliver objectively concerning the development of the highest interest of the state.

According to Sachs and David (1963), the activities in the state are voluminous and require skillful and talented guardians to execute them without biased mind or any form of weaknesses.

That means the state can only be viable and attain perfection when philosopher became king or vice versa.

It's unimaginable that most leaders in the contemporary age are not viable in terms of leadership skills because they are not properly trained or groomed to execute the skills of leadership in today's world.

This had affected the modern system in most countries because of irrational decisions made by these people who were installed through god-fatherism or political means. Hence, lack the skills for leadership because they don't have proper training.

The emergence of the good man to eliminate injustice in the ideal state, "Philosophe-king, Plato says must be the first attention of a society that those who by virtue of their large endowment of the rational element can take advantage of all the relevant training to attain power and political knowledge.

Plato was discouraged with the Athenians' corrupt practices of democracy and oligarchy and as such the ruling class did not take care of the needs of her citizens.

Those who dared to question their authority like Socrates were executed followed by many others.

Plato's formulation of the tripartite soul and based on this principle the ideal society of guardians and auxiliaries had also been critique by rulers. His courage and level of reasoning against the existing status quo and other essential aspects of human natural emotions and passions had been one of the main challenges to the government.

However, Plato's republic is a strong foundation that portrays the appropriations showing that the Republic has much to provide the political and democratic frame-work in the contemporary age. It is legitimate for government to act in their citizens' interest which seems one of the most standing legacies of Plato's documentations in the contemporary society.

Furthermore, the placement mechanism for an educational system that allows people to progress based on their own capacity rather than on privileges of wealth or status remains a viable modern classification.

On the other hand, Plato's most viable input was to think of an ideal state that addressed the prevailing inadequacy of political structure and social injustices such as inequalities existing among states of affairs.

Societies in the contemporary national and international system continue to search for the good and just man to attain the ideal nature of affairs.

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