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Elaboration and Critique of Principals of Platonic Republic and Governance in Contemporary Iran and the United States: Iran a Philosophical Samsara

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Abstract

This article examines the principles of Platonic governance as articulated in *The Republic* (or *Politeia*), specifically the notion of the philosopher-king, and juxtaposes these ideals with the contemporary political systems of Iran and the United States. While the Islamic Jurisprudence conveys the principal message of transcendental guidance by the messenger of God, American focus on the authenticity of the two party governance necessitates a thorough investigation regarding the authenticity of both systems to find common grounds, weakness and strength. Plato's framework emphasizes governance by philosopher-leaders committed to justice and truth, supported by a class-stratified society. While inspiring, these ideals also invite criticism, particularly when compared to modern democracies. The article evaluates the philosophical and practical implications of Platonic ideals, considering their resonance and divergence in theocratic

and democratic contexts. While this article without any doubt remain open for revisions, the precedence in election of Donald Trump and his legal backgrounds as well as electoral engineering by monetary prizes to provoke voters remains a center of debate about the authenticity of the U.S presidential election in 2024

Keywords: Governance, Election, Plato

Introduction

Plato's philosophy of governance, as elaborated in *The Republic*, envisions an ideal state led by philosopher-kings—individuals deeply trained in philosophy, morality, and knowledge. These leaders are tasked with prioritizing the public good over personal gain, ensuring justice and harmony in society. The framework is fundamentally meritocratic and hierarchical, dividing society into three classes: rulers, auxiliaries (guardians), and producers.

This paper applies Platonic principles to critique governance structures in two contemporary states—Iran, a theocratic-republican hybrid, and the United States, a constitutional democracy. These systems illustrate distinct challenges when philosophical or ideological principles intersect with governance.

Although the mention of constitutional democracy provokes certain questions regarding the expectation from an authentic democracy in the case of i.e. freedom of speech, justice and fair elections which has been separately infringed in the course of Israel act of genocide and crime against humanity which is pending before the ICJ (International Court of Justice) and the matter of electoral engineering (Davoudpour, A.R., 2024a,b) in 2024 by voters million dollar jackpots, this comparison humbly highlights the shortcomings of both systems while suggesting that a theocratic government remains less criminal in the foreign policy making.

Platonic Governance: Key Features

Philosopher-Kings and Leadership

Plato argued that only philosophers, equipped with love for wisdom and access to true knowledge, could lead justly. Philosophers transcend material desires, focusing solely on the collective good.

In practice, philosopher-kings are expected to remain incorruptible due to their intellectual commitment to truth.

Education and Selection of Leaders

Plato emphasized rigorous, lifelong education for potential rulers. This curriculum included mathematics, dialectics, natural sciences, and moral philosophy, culminating in understanding the Form of the Good. Only candidates who pass through this process of intellectual refinement are deemed worthy of governance.

Class Stratification

Plato's society relies on specialization and division of labor. Individuals are assigned roles—rulers, guardians, or producers—based on their abilities and predispositions. Justice is achieved when everyone fulfills their designated function without interference.

Challenges and Critiques

Despite its appeal, Platonic governance faces criticism for its potential to foster authoritarianism. The notion that philosopher-kings possess access to absolute truth risks concentrating power and marginalizing dissent. Furthermore, the rigid class stratification limits individual freedom, opposing democratic ideals.

Governance in Iran: A Platonic Perspective

Iran's political system, characterized by its fusion of Islamic theocracy and republicanism, reflects elements of Platonic governance. The Supreme Leader, an authority combining political and religious leadership, parallels the philosopher-king in certain respects. The leader is expected to possess profound moral and intellectual qualities, guiding the nation in accordance with divine principles. Transcendental knowledge acquired by divine authority (Davoudpour, A.R., 2024c) is a central focal point in the Islamic Republic governance, marking it non-questionable by inferior classes.

Merits and Challenges

- **Merits:** Iran's emphasis on moral leadership echoes Plato's stress on the ruler's ethical commitment. The clergy's rigorous theological training resembles Plato's vision of specialized education for rulers.

- **Challenges:** Concentration of power in the Supreme Leader risks authoritarianism. Moreover, the exclusion of diverse perspectives undercuts justice as envisioned by Plato. The stratification between clerical elites and the general populace mirrors Plato's rigid class system, raising concerns about equality and representation.

Governance in the United States: A Platonic Critique

The United States' constitutional democracy starkly contrasts with Platonic ideals. Leadership is determined through elections rather than meritocratic selection, reflecting a kind of pluralism or better called dualism rather than philosopher-rule. However, parallels exist, such as the role of intellectual elites in policymaking and judicial review by the Supreme Court.

Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Strengths:** Democratic processes ensure broader participation, safeguarding against tyranny. The separation of powers prevents the concentration of authority, aligning with the Platonic goal of minimizing corruption.
- **Weaknesses:** Plato would critique the susceptibility of democratic systems to populism and self-interest. For example, former U.S. President Donald Trump's controversial tenure and subsequent legal challenges exemplify the risks of unqualified leaders ascending to power. These challenges resonate with Plato's concern about governance driven by ignorance or personal gain.

Comparative Insights and Philosophical Implications

Paradoxes in Platonic and Modern Governance

Both Iran and the United States demonstrate the complexities of aligning governance with higher philosophical ideals. Iran's theocratic system illustrates the tension between moral absolutism and pragmatic governance. Conversely, the United States grapples with balancing democratic freedom and the need for qualified leadership.

Education and Governance

Plato's emphasis on education finds partial resonance in both systems. In Iran, theological education dominates leadership selection, while in the United States, higher education often serves as a proxy for intellectual competence. However, neither system achieves Plato's vision of a comprehensive, philosophy-driven curriculum for rulers. While in Islamic Republic of Iran most authorities are educated systematically in government incubators including Imam Sadiq University (Hashemi, 2021) and religious centers i.e. in Qom to align with government theocratic nature which resembles Platonic definition of centered education for philosophers and government leaders, in United States the education aligns more with democratic values and not necessary Platonic definition of the philosophers education.

The Role of Justice and Public Good

Plato's vision of justice as societal harmony remains relevant. In Iran, justice is often framed within theocratic principles, while in the United States, it reflects constitutional and legalistic ideals. Both systems face challenges in ensuring equitable governance amidst competing interests and ideologies.

In the context of theocratic governance, the concept of the *public good* is often intertwined with religious principles and the moral objectives set by the ruling clergy or religious authority. Unlike secular states, where the public good may be defined in terms of collective material welfare and individual rights, in a theocracy, the public good is typically seen as the promotion of religious values, spiritual well-being, and adherence to divine laws as interpreted by religious leaders (Moussavi, 2019). The state is expected to align its policies with religious teachings, and decisions are made to ensure that society functions in a way that reflects the moral and ethical standards prescribed by the faith (Keddie, 2003). In this system, the notion of public welfare is often secondary to religious duties, and the ultimate goal of governance is to create a society that adheres to the will of God as understood by the ruling religious authorities (Nasr, 2009). As a result, the public good in a theocratic state may emphasize communal harmony, spiritual salvation, and the preservation of religious order, sometimes at the cost of individual freedoms or secular considerations (Esposito, 2011).

In the context of U.S. governance, the concept of the *public good* is traditionally framed around the idea of promoting collective

welfare, individual rights, and social justice within a democratic framework, although as explained earlier the term of democracy itself in reference to the US has to be seriously criticized (Davoudpour, A.R., 2024d). In United States, the public good is often understood as the well-being of the own population, which is achieved through a combination of economic prosperity, the protection of civil liberties, aggressive means, and the provision of public services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure (Rawls, 1971). The U.S. Constitution envisions a government that is “of the people, by the people, for the people,” underscoring the importance of democratic participation and the protection of individual rights as key components of the public good (Jefferson, 1776). Furthermore, public policy decisions are typically guided by the principle of *utilitarianism*, aiming to maximize the greatest good for the greatest number, although the application of this principle often leads to debates about the balance between individual freedoms and collective responsibilities (Mill, 1863). As a result, the definition of the public good in U.S. governance is dynamic and multifaceted, often influenced by political ideologies, public opinion, and shifting societal values (Dahl, 1989).

Conclusion

While Platonic governance remains a theoretical ideal, its application in contemporary contexts such as Iran and the United States reveals both its strengths and limitations. The vision of philosopher-kings inspires ethical leadership and prioritization of the public good but risks authoritarianism when divorced from democratic accountability. Conversely, democratic systems, while inclusive, often face challenges related to populism and governance by unqualified leaders. In our perspective, Islamic Republic of Iran is adhered more to the concept of Platonic Republic than the United States but the outcome of such philosophical and theocratic governance is not necessarily a Platonic state or Utopia (Davoudpour, A.R., 2024e). Could it mean that philosophers quest for a Utopia or so called paradise was met with a Samsara or illusion? We have not the capacity to question the outcome but as we see, German Philosophy of Nazism, Zionism or Marxism has been forced to catastrophic states in a shorter period of time (Davoudpour, A.R., 2024g,f).

In addressing these dilemmas, both Iran and the United States can benefit from integrating aspects of Platonic philosophy—particularly in education and ethical governance—while upholding democratic values and ensuring accountability. This synthesis might pave the way for more harmonious and just societies.

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