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Khomeinis of Iran and the Idea of Philosopher Kings

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Abstract

Plato has often been described as an idealist because his concept of the Ideal State and Utopia can never be achieved. Plato's political program is described as fascist and totalitarian. In fact, he is critiqued as forerunner of fascism (Isaiah Berlin, Karl Popper). This paper will explore the idea of Philosopher Kings and Plato's ideal state and analyze various theories which, according to Plato, constitute the ideal state. This paper seeks to compare, analyze, and find similarities between Plato's Philosopher King and Khomeini's of Iran and the Supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini. This paper will analyze whether present Iran is a characterization of Plato's idea in reality, and if the supreme leader is a refined version or a crude reality in present context. This becomes an even more pertinent issue as Iran is today standing at crossroads of global geopolitics with US and Israel at heads with the country. This paper will look into the foreign policy of the Supreme Leader and compare it with the foreign affairs of the Ideal State ruled by the Philosopher King.

This paper will also analyze the second-best state given by Plato in the *Laws* to get familiar with Iran's political and domestic setup and investigate whether the rule by a single person has created a dictatorship where interests of citizens are sacrificed in the name of greater or bigger good. Research Questions:

1. Is the idea of Philosopher King a sound model of political leadership?
2. Will it lead to the formation of an Ideal State?

Keywords: Khomeinis of Iran, Plato, Philosopher King, Foreign Policy, International Relations

Introduction

The political sphere of Iran takes place in a structural framework that officially and politically combines elements of theocracy¹ and presidential democracy.² The Constitution of Iran was framed in 1989 and amended, which defines the political, economic, and social order of the Islamic Republic of Iran (i.e., IRI), and declares that Shii'a Islam of the Twelver school of thought³ will be, from then, considered as Iran's official religion.

The political structure of the country of Iran consists of the Supreme Leader, the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic is the most powerful and dominant ruler of the country. Iran has a democratically elected president, a Majlis, i.e., the parliament, an Assembly of Experts which elects the Supreme Leader, and local councils. According to the constitution of Iran, all candidates running for this power of Supreme Leader must be examined by the Guardian Council before being elected for it. These representatives are elected from appointed organizations (under the Supreme Leader's control) to "protect the state's Islamic character and have faith in Islam." The Supreme Leader of Iran is the head of state and highest ranked political, economic, social, and religious authority (above the President). The armed forces, judicial system, state television, and other key governmental organizations are under the control of the Supreme Leader. He is elected and overseen by the Assembly of experts. The first Supreme Leader of Iran was Ruhollah Khomeini (11 February 1979 - 3 June 1989).

According to Plato, a philosopher has a rational mind. He has wisdom as his befitting virtue, he has his dominant trait as knowledge, and he only has the *Idea of and for good* and all these qualities make him to be the best ruler of the city-state (as in said at that time). A philosopher, as Plato said, is a "true lover of learning" and therefore would "trace the outline of a constitution" limited by nothing but truth. The ruler would determine laws and justice, motivated by what would be best for the city-state.

Ideology: Iran's Supreme Leader

The first supreme leader of Iran was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. He became Iran's first Supreme Leader immediately after the Iranian Revolution,⁴ and occupied the office from 1979 until his death a decade later. The Supreme Leader, Ali Khomeini, took charge of the office shortly thereafter in 1989. The leader of Iran, Reza Shah (in power from 15 December 1925-16 September 1941), weakened the powers of religious leaders and promoted a more secularized country, whereas Khomeini preached that a state should be ruled by an Islamic jurist. After pressurization from the leader, most powerful religious figures in Iran remained silent and encouraged their followers to follow the same.

¹It refers to a system of government in which priests rule in the name of God or a god.

²A presidential system is a democratic and republican system of government where a head of government leads an executive branch that is separate from the legislative branch. This head of government is in most cases also the head of state, which is called president.

³ The term 'Twelver' is based on the belief that twelve male descendants from the family of Muhammad, starting with Ali ibn Abi-Talib and ending with Muhammad al-Mahdi, are Imams who have religious and political authority.

⁴ Iranian Revolution, also called Islamic Revolution, (also in persian Enqelāb-Eslāmī), popular uprising in Iran in 1978–79 that resulted in the toppling of the monarchy on February 11, 1979, and led to the establishment of an Islamic republic.

The political agenda of Ayatollah Khomeini developed as a doctrine to authorize Islamic laws, with the *faqih* or Muslim jurist being elevated and granted absolute political power. The Islamic jurist would not only interpret the religious codes and conducts, he would be the supreme political leader as well. Khomeini's *Velayat-e-Faqih*⁵ was a reaction to the secularization of the Shahs. Mohamed Reza Shah was obviously bent in curtailing the power of the *ulama* (head member of the religious Muslim groups) as part of his grand strategy to consolidate his power. Khomeini's conception of political leadership evolved, through time, while his concern with the implementation of Islamic laws in all aspects of Iranian life remained constant. He seemed set in his mind that, in the *Velayat-e-Faqih*, the *Faqih* (the Islamic jurist) would never misuse or take advantage of his power, because of his expected dedication and commitment to Islam.

Khomeini's dream came to reality when popular protests in Iran led to toppling of secular reign of Shah in 1979 which led Khomeini coming into and consolidating the power and establish the Iranian Islamic Republic. What comes as a surprise is that Khomeini, who came to power through anti west revolutionary rhetoric, has a description of the perfect state that is almost identical to Plato's *Republic* (Plato; 380 B.C.).

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, literature has proliferated on the primary leader of the revolutionary movement and Islamic Republic—Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Many scholars who interpret Khomeini's political thought argue that it can best be classified as part of an Islamic mystical-philosophical tradition of political philosophy. Hamid Dabashi, for example, says that Khomeini's political leader was the "philosopher king in the Platonic understanding of the term...Khomeini maintained that people do not know what is good for them" (Dabishi1993). Vanessa Martin says that in Khomeini's thought "ideally it is the philosopher-jurist who understands both the *shari'a* and its hidden meanings and is thus most qualified to rule" (Martin, 1996) and in a different work, she says the '*arif*, the seeker of mystical knowledge of the divine, "is entitled to be *rahbar* [leader] of the community" (Martin , 2000). Similarly, Abbas Amanat says that Khomeini's guardian has a charismatic authority, an authority which has "a mysto-philosophical core colored on the outside by Shi'ite legal trappings."⁶

Khomeini was well-acquainted with and had a deep interest in the Islamic mystical-philosophical tradition of political theory. Scholars of the Islamic mystical-philosophical tradition familiar to Khomeini included Farabi (d. 950), Suhrawardi (d.1191), Avicenna (d. 1037), Ibn Arabi (d. 1240), and Mulla Sadra (d. 1641), who in turn are influenced by Plato (d. 348-347 B.C.). These scholars drew on classical Islamic sources, and often, on the writings of ancient Greek philosophers. Khomeini also recognizes the influence of Plato on these philosophers. Both

⁵ *Velayat-e faqih* is a Shia Islamist system of governance that justifies the rule of the clergy over the state. The concept of *velayat-e faqih* is central to understanding the Iranian political system and Tehran's influence abroad.

⁶ Abbas Amanat. "From *ijtihad* to *wilayat-i faqih*: The Evolving of the Shi'ite Legal Authority to Political Power," *Logos* 2 (2003): 11. Vanessa Martin, both in *Creating an Islamic State* and in "A Comparison between Khumaini's Government of the Jurist and the Commentary on Plato's *Republic* of Ibn Rushd," argues that Khomeini's political leader has the spiritual and intellectual qualities of one who has achieved intimate knowledge of the divine. In the latter work, she says, "to Ibn Rushd and Khomeini, knowledge of both law and philosophy provided a special vision which gave the one who possessed it an outstanding ability to understand the needs of the community as a whole" (Martin, 26). In the former work, Martin states that Khomeini's Islamic Government falls within the Islamic tradition of Platonic utopias, and she says that '*irfan*, or mystic knowledge of the divine, "is important for understanding how Khomeini constructed himself as a leader...and his vision, particularly in terms of authority, of the relationship between the leader and the community" (Martin, 35-36).

Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, he says in his book *The Unveiling of Secrets*,⁷ “proved some of Plato’s theological points,” and Suhrawardi was “on the path of Plato.” They wrote that the perfect man was an individual who had developed an intimate understanding of God or metaphysical truth through intellectual and spiritual development, while Farabi explicitly argued that the perfect man be given political authority.⁸

In Khomeini’s view, the political leader is the jurist—a figure with legal knowledge, and not the knowledge of a saint or philosopher (Mvani 2013), the sort of knowledge held by the philosopher or mystic who appeared in the writings of philosophers such as Farabi, Avicenna, Ibn Arabi, and Mulla Sadra and therefore he calls himself to be the Supreme Leader of Iran.

Influence Of Plato in Today's Contemporary Iran

Political Influence

1970, a group of seminary students published a series of lectures on the theory of Islamic government entitled *Velayat e faqih* or *The Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists* (Utrata,2013). The author of these lectures was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who later established the Islamic Republic of Iran. In *Velayat e faqih*, Khomeini argues while waiting for the return of the Madhi—the 12th successor to the prophet—a religious leader should be appointed caretaker of the state, “like the appointment of a guardian for a minor”(Utrata, 2013). The perfect state, Khomeini preached, should be ruled by an Islamic jurist.” Similar to what Plato claimed while writing in the *Republic* –

"Unless, said I, either philosophers become kings in our states or those whom we now call our kings and rulers take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately, and there is a conjunction of these two things, political power and philosophic intelligence, while the motley horde of the natures who at present pursue either apart from the other are compulsory excluded, there can be no cessation of troubles, dear Glaucon, for our states, nor, I fancy, for the human race either” (473d-e).

In the book *The Unveiling of Secrets*, Khomeini still remained concerned with convincing his reader of the harmfulness of Reza Shah’s secular reforms. Through these reforms, the Shah aimed to limit the social and political authority of the clergy and reduce the influence of Islam on society and politics. While some reforms, such as the increase of tariffs on 70 foreign imports in 1927 and the canceling of economic concessions to foreign powers were undoubtedly welcomed by Khomeini, the two men had very different visions of the political end that should be pursued—the one believing that religious belief and institutions were an impediment to, and the other believing they were part and parcel of, good government. After leading a coup in May 1921, with the support of the British, overthrowing the Qajar king Ahmad Shah Qajar, Reza Khan became war minister, and eventually, he accumulated enough political support to be voted shah by

⁷ During the time he was working on *The Unveiling of Secrets*, in May 1944, Khomeini issued his first political proclamation “calling for action to deliver the Muslims of Iran and the entire Islamic world from the tyranny of foreign powers and their domestic accomplices” (Khomeini, *The Unveiling of Secrets*, 380). Still, despite writing *The Unveiling of Secrets* and issuing this political proclamation, Khomeini refrained from regular political involvement until 1962, since such involvement would conflict with the political quietism of the senior members of the religious establishment.

⁸ Philosophy founded in the works of Ibn Arabi, who had a mystical perspective on the individual’s encounter with truth and transformation into the “perfect man.”

parliament in 1925 (Hiro 1935).⁹ His efforts to promote European dress—which included banning the headscarf and requiring men to wear a European hat—were a major affront to many Iranians and resulted in a sit-in at the shrine in Mashhad in 1935. The Shah’s troops responded by firing on the crowd of protesters, and hundreds of people lost their lives or were injured (Arjomand, 1940).¹⁰

Khomeini condemns this tragic event in *The Unveiling of Secrets*. This condemnation can be simply compared with Plato’s idea of Philosopher Kings where he describes a Philosopher King as just, the one who loves his subject and does not support or perpetuate violence. Even in Plato’s idea of Justice, when Thrasymachus stated that might is right, Plato held that what ought to be must not be derived from what is, this is one of the central aspects of the Ideal State imagined by both Ayatollah and Plato.

Many of reforms led by Reza Shah were inspired by those of his contemporary, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the then-president of Turkey; often the Shah would pursue a policy a year or two after Atatürk had implemented a similar one in Turkey (Hiro 1935). In working to diminish the power and prestige of the clergy, centralizing judicial power, creating a uniform, codified law, suppressing religious morality and ritual, and opening access to secular education, Reza Shah aimed to establish a strong, centralized state that would, more than the clergy and more than religion, secure the allegiance and loyalty of citizens. With a few exceptions, clerics did not resist Reza Shah’s program of secularization and centralization, and when there were protests, the Shah responded with great force.

Plato and Khomeini both advocated for a state ruled by philosophers as they believed that humans are inherently materialistic, and appetite and passions govern human rationale. Khomeini, as mentioned above, however, agrees that Islamic thinkers were influenced by Greek philosophers like Plato and Socrates, but at the same time justifies and alters some aspects of Plato’s *Republic* and tries to bring convergence with Islamic traditions to bring a concrete manifestation of the ideology (Utrata 2013). Khomeini was certainly aware of the writing of Plato; this can be inferred from an interview by the Time Magazine in which Khamenei says that he was deeply “fascinated by Aristotle and Plato in his youth, whose *Republic* provided the model for Khomeini’s concept of the Islamic republic” (Utrata, 2013).¹¹ This particular event formed one of the foundational events in the history of Iranian Islamic Republic and Ayatollah Khomeini mentions it in his book *Kashf-al -Asrar* the historical insights of this event on the minds of people of Iran in fact it stirred the emotions of the people and led to unity and wide support for Ayatollah Khomeini.

According to Vanessa Martin, Khomeini’s former students Javad Bahonar and Madhi Ha’iri Yazdi had revealed the influence of Plato on Khomeini’s political thought in an interview with the Time reporter (Martin,1996). Khomeini referenced one of Plato’s books, *Timeaus*, in his book *Kashf al-asrar* also known as *The Unveiling of Secrets*. Although it cannot be certainly commented

⁹ Hiro, *Iran under the Ayatollahs*, 27.

¹⁰ According to Arjomand, after 1930, Reza Shah became “increasingly dictatorial,” and his choosing of representatives resulted in the creation of a “rubber stamp” parliament (Arjomand, *Turban for the Crown*, 64).

¹¹ A Greek and a Persian: Plato’s Influence on Ayatollah Khomeini, Alina Petra Utrata, 2013, *Avicenna: The Stanford Journal on Muslim Affairs*.

on how Khomeini saw the nature or how he was influenced by Plato, it is clear that he had read the Greek philosopher in some depth and made analysis and interpreted in the Iranian Ideal State.

The republics as described by both Khomeini and Plato are somewhat based on similar assumptions about human nature and the role of the state and idea of Justice and shared resources within the *quam* or community. Plato and Khomeini both held that without the guidance of a proper government, people may become corrupt. Plato dedicated an entire part in the *Republic* to bemoaning society without adequate government, calling it an awful state where the “tyrannical man . . . becomes drunken, lustful, passionate.” (Plato, the *Republic*). Similarly, Khomeini argued that without the proper authority “everybody would engage in oppressing and harming others for the sake of his own pleasures and interests” (Utrata,2013).

Educational Reforms and Influence

Educational Reforms Crucial to the creation of a modern state and undermining the influence of the religious classes was the revamping of Iran’s educational system. Reza Shah’s reformation was directed at undermining the seminaries and even American missionary schools in Iran; in 1928, the Ministry of Education began regulating these missionary schools, which resulted in financially well-off Iranians instead sending their students abroad for their education (Avery,1965).¹² On the whole, between 1921 and the Second World War, there was an expansion of educational institutions, including primary and secondary schools (Avery, 1965), and the University of Tehran was established in 1935. Significantly, the University of Tehran included a “Faculty of Theology”—an opportunity for religious learning outside of the traditional seminary (Hiro). Beyond the University of Tehran, Reza Shah established numerous universities that offered a secular education in competition with the Islamic seminaries, previously the predominant and most easily accessible educational institution in Iranian society (S. Bakhshah, 1985). He reduced the presence of clerics in government by recruiting top state bureaucrats not from the seminaries, but from graduates of secular 71 universities or universities abroad (Tabari, 1983).¹³ Reza Shah sought not only to enhance the secular education of Iranians but also worked to gain control over the seminary’s educational curriculum. In 1928, the government established a law for state examination of religious students and licensing of religious teachers, and in 1931 it established a curriculum for all seminaries (Algar, 1981).¹⁴ In the decade following the passage of these laws, the number and size of religious seminaries would decrease (Hiro).

Plato too gave a very elaborate system of Education and also included the stages and processes of filtration at each stage to identify capability and establish an Ideal and just state. Plato had observed the system of education found in Athens and also observed the system of education found in Sparta and he combined the two systems of education to bring out good features and establish it in Athens. He wanted a holistic system of education through which a Philosopher King/Queen can be selected and included women in the education setup. He

¹² Peter Avery, *Modern Iran* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1965), 277.

¹³ A. Tabari, “The Role of the Clergy in Modern Iranian Politics,” in *Religion and Politics in Iran*, edited by Nikki R. Keddie (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 47–72.

¹⁴ Hamid Algar, “Religious Forces in Twentieth Century Iran,” *The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 7*, edited by Peter Avery, Gavin R.G Hambly, and Charles Melville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 741.

emphasized military training, mathematics, and reasoning and development of a logical mindset along with literature, although he had asked the state to put up restrictions on the kind of stories, music, and arts children are exposed to during this process as it can adversely affect their minds. Khomeini on the other hand revamped the entire education setup and made it much more radicalized. Rather than focusing on modernization of education, he made the education system regressive which lacked equal participation from women. The education system was more or less centralized around Khomeini's ideology and the Iranian revolution. Textbooks were printed which praised Khomeini; one such line from an unknown textbook can be quoted to cite this "Khomeini, Khomeini, you are light from God," and "This American shah should be executed."

Similarly, history textbooks were rewritten to emphasize Islam and the revolution that overthrew the rule of the shah 17 months ago. Hardly any mention was made of the ancient kings of Persia and eighth grade students in one school students were warned against reading pages of an old textbook that referred to the glories of the Pahlavi rule, which ended when the shah fled Iran Jan. 16, 1979.

Iran's new revolutionary authorities engaged in a massive upheaval of the country's educational system from the primary grades through the universities. The universities were closed for an indefinite period until they can be made more Islamic and purged of Western influence. To accomplish this, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran's religious and political leader even appointed a seven-man committee to cleanse the country's educational system of the "imperialist influences" left by the old government.

This change is quite in contrast and Plato's Philosopher King would have never subscribed to such changes. Although Plato wanted the Philosopher to control certain aspects of the education and censorship on books, which is quite prevalent in Iran, he focused on holistic development rather than a fixated one as we saw in Iran during Ayatollah. This faltered the entire generation and left them untouched with the scientific development. Plato said that state does not come from oak or wood it resides in the people who live in it, but in Iran it was complete contrast as to what Supreme Leader thought of changing the minds and hearts of the youngsters and saving them from western catastrophe. In this case the Philosopher King would have incorporated good aspects of both the systems rather than alienating young minds from the world and its affairs, the education system under Khomeini's can be called as a sham which did not let Iranians get out of silos, it was also infringement of liberty as people were not allowed to decide they were just given orders from the top.

Economic Influence

Plato traced origin of the state to economic considerations. Plato said, "a state arises out of the needs of mankind" (Rekhi 2013). No one is self-sufficient. All of us have many wants." The partners and helpers of this gathering is called the state. In Plato's ideal state there were two classes, the rulers and the ruled. The rulers were the king and warriors and the ruled were artisans and unskilled workers.

The members of the ruling class must be set apart from early childhood and they should be educated in philosophy and the arts of war because they will have to protect the state against foreign attack. At the age of thirty they will have to pass an examination. This examination selects the future philosopher king and those who cannot pass are concerned with general

administrative duties (G.Walendowski, 2011). Plato's contribution to economic thought has been primarily in two areas: the division of labor, and intrinsic and extrinsic incentives.

Plato links the creation of a State as the result of a division of labor. The division of labor here means that every person in a state is assigned work or tasks, and these works and tasks are different and divided upon the various capabilities of an individual and his own instinct. Plato expanded his idea of Division of labor by involving a cyclic chain of demand and supply therefore focusing and emphasizing on the need of regular supply of labor. This can be seen through one of the mentions in his writings:

"And they exchange with one another, and one gives, and another receives, under the idea that the exchange will be for their good...[with] the true creator[being] necessity... Now the first and greatest of necessities is food, which is the condition of life and existence... The second is a dwelling, and the third clothing and the like... And now let us see how our city will be able to supply this great demand" (Plato, *Republic*).

Plato also introduces the concepts of productivity and efficiency where the supply will meet the demand. Here again, Plato uses his division of labor to support this statement given below:

"And will you have a work better done when the workman has many occupations, or when he has only one? When he has only one... we must infer that all things are produced more plentifully and easily and of a better quality when one man does one thing which is natural to him, and does it at the right time, and leaves other things... Then more than our citizens will be required; for the husbandman will not make his own plough or mattock, or other implements of agriculture, if they are to be good for anything. Neither will the builder make his tool — and he too needs many; and in like manner the weaver and shoemaker... Then carpenters, and smiths, and many other artisans, will be sharers in our little State, which is already beginning to grow" (Plato, *Republic*)?

In other words, even though the division of labor provides the benefits of efficiency and productivity, nevertheless, greed (the accumulation of wealth) can lead to undesirable consequences. It is interesting to note that in this particular discourse Plato writes about money as a medium of exchange. This is to say that money is responsible for the accumulation of wealth and greed.

Plato writes that eventually a city will need to import goods which will be provided by merchants (exporters and importers). As a result, a marketplace will come in place where goods can be exchanged for money. This will create a luxury state where people will aspire and demand goods beyond the necessities of life. Consequently, the city will expand due to this demand for accumulating unlimited wealth and will lead to stark contrast between two sets of people one rich and other poor. Plato then writes that because of this war will be the result:

"Parents and tutors are always telling their sons and their wards that they are to be just; but why? Not for the sake of justice, but for the sake of character and reputation; in the hope of obtaining for him who is reputed just some of those offices, marriages, and the like which Glaucon has enumerated among the advantages accruing to the unjust from the reputation of justice" (Plato, *Republic*).

Though it may not be easy to infer right now the consistency between Plato on economy and the role of Philosopher King in maintaining a just economic system, except the theory of interdependency amongst the three classes. This cannot be seen in context of direct influence

on Iranian Economy; today we live in different time and space, and it will be extremely vague if any country applies Plato's economic theory verbatim, but it will be a gross mistake to reject the relevance of theory all together as we can see Plato talks about diverse components of economy which is still relevant today in current era of globalization.

The Iranian economy suffered all through the decades as the leaders shared great aversion for the western countries and wanted to stay away from Bretton Wood Institutions. The Iranian economy can be called an oil economy as it is the one and only resource which the country exchanges in global trade. Its enmity within the region with Iraq, UAE, Israel, and outside the region with USA led to imposition of trade sanctions by USA, which has severe effects on the economy and resulted in huge trade imbalance (trade deficit). Iran also faced issues with UAE on forums like OIC¹⁵ and OPEC. Washington introduced few more steps against Iranian currency trade, especially in metals and automobile sectors in July-August after its withdrawal from the 2015 deal that lifted sanctions in return for limits on Iran's nuclear program (Hafezi, 2018). Combined with rising inflation and growing unemployment, a slump in the rial and state corruption caused Iran's economy to deteriorate. The International Monetary Fund predicted that it will shrink to 1.5 percent this year and to 3.6 percent in 2019, before recovering slowly at current inversion rates.

During a high-level meeting with the Islamic Republic's political elite, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reiterated familiar calls for a "resistance economy," but also placed new emphasis on the "business environment and increasing the ease of doing business." The Iranian Economy is neither productive nor efficient or diversified and also suffers from wide economic disparities which is certainly inconsistent with Plato's Idea, and so we cannot call it the ideal economy under the Philosopher King. There are wide gaps between incomes of the people, government spending and welfare schemes did not lead to bridging the gaps. Plato stated that reason for deterioration of Athens was that it consisted of two cities one for its rich and other for its poor. Iran is currently going through the same problem; if not reconciled this may lead to another civilian revolution.

In the mid-2000s, some movement towards greater equality can be identified in the data set provided by the Central Bank of Iran (Illustration 1). This data set uses a Gini coefficient based on urban household expenditure as measurement of inequality which can theoretically take values between 0 (total equality) and 1 (one person responsible for all spending). For reference, the latest World Bank Gini for the UK from 2014 is 34.1 (Schwarz, 2018).

¹⁵ The OIC's mission statement bills it as "the collective voice of the Muslim world" that works to "protect the interests of the Muslim world". It was established by 24 member states in 1969. Today, with 57 member states from four continents, the OIC is the second-largest intergovernmental organization in the world after the United Nations, with a collective population reaching over 1.8 billion. While the 22 members of the Arab League are also part of the OIC, the organization has several significant non-Arab member states, including Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan. It also has five observer members, including Russia and Thailand. The organization has permanent delegations to the UN and the European Union, and its official languages are Arabic, English and French.

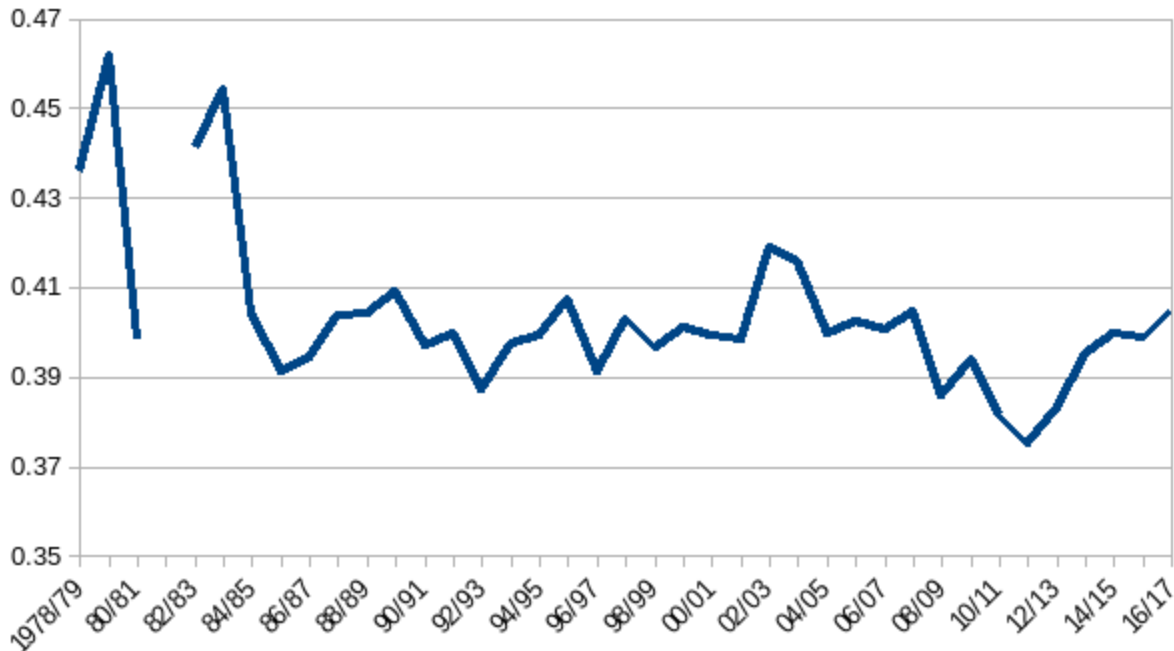


Illustration 1: Household expenditure Gini in urban areas; Source: Central Bank of Iran (2017)

Foreign Policy of Iran

After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran, under the sole leadership of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, reversed its pro-American foreign policy of the last Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (Maloney 2019). The foreign policy was based on the strategy of eliminating Western and non-Muslim influences while promoting the Islamic revolution in and out of the country, make it pan Islamic, and use pragmatism to create worldwide Islamic connection, which would advance and improve economic development and normalization of relations.

Iran's foreign policy talks have been sometimes confusing and contradictory. Iran has often tried to take advantage of its relationship with India too and has on several occasions tried to strike balance as equals. Indian Iranian relations have always been mutual, friendly, and both have suited and served each other's purpose on International Platforms. Iran became important for India due India's oil demand, both the countries are part of NAM, and several bilateral agreements have been signed by both the countries. In spite of such historical relations of cooperation, Iran back in 2010 criticized India's policy on Kashmir and urged Muslims to unite for a common cause. This was criticized by the Indian MEA but the strings of cooperation and communication certainly got disturbed if not spoilt. This shows a lack of pragmatism in foreign policy. It is often said you cannot forget one old friend for two new ones. This move was certainly to suit political agendas in the domestic sphere but did not go well in the wrong run. If India and Iran still maintained a good relationship, maybe other countries like USA, which has severed its diplomatic ties with the country, would have not accepted intervention in domestic affairs.

Plato too suggests pragmatism in foreign relations. According to Plato, no country can live in isolation. So, while conducting relations with other countries, it should be ensured that both the countries are on the same page and discussions are more important than wars. The

Philosopher King is one who can serve his states interest while not compromising on the sovereignty of the country.

Iran currently maintains relations with 97 countries across the globe. According to a study published by the Reputation Institute Iran is considered as world's second most hated country, ahead of Iraq, and has held that position for the three consecutive years. Islamism and nuclear growth are recurring issues with Iran's foreign relations. In a series of international polls given by Pew Research in 2012, only one country, i.e., Pakistan had its majority of the population in support of Iran's right to acquire nuclear arms; and all other population polled overwhelmingly rejected a nuclear-armed Iran (90-95% opposed in the polled European, North American, and South American countries), and majorities in most of them were in favor of military action to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran from materializing.

Under Khomeini Iran's foreign policy emphasized on the elimination of foreign influence and spread of Islamic revolution over other countries. In Khomeini's own words,

We shall export our revolution to the whole world. Until the cry "There is no God but Allah" resounds over the whole world, there will be struggle" (Khomeini , 1982).

This kind of attitude is not only dangerous for the country but also for all of humankind. We can see the xenophobic sentiments which even Plato had, but in today's world where society stands united and immigration and tourism is prevalent, Iran is definitely staking a lot; the economic opportunity cost outweigh the benefits.

Iran has also tried to influence people (Muslims) across the world through its two pronged strategy - armed struggle against what were perceived as Western imperialism and its agents; and a purifying process to free the Muslim minds and brethren of non-Islamic cultural, intellectual and spiritual influences, by providing justice, services, resources to the mustazafin (weak) masses of the Muslim world (Iran A "Spy" Guide Volume 1 Strategic Information and Developments, 157). This again was seen as a dangerous idea and led to many diplomatic and non-diplomatic differences. Even Plato states that contact between states creates friction and conflict because of diversities and differences that may cause wars when states interact. The sure shot solution then is a minimizing its foreign affairs, if not a regression to a golden age of the past when states lived in good ignorance of each other. But agreeing with Herodotus (The Histories, volume I, chapter 32) that no land is an island, even Plato admitted the need for some foreign relations (Plato's *Republic* book 2, section 370e-371a). Since one cannot escape from his place and time, the rational and smart thing to do is to make the best of one's location and situation.

The Islamic Republic of Iran accords priority to its relations with the Islamic world. This includes a strong fidelity to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Non-Aligned Movement. Relations of Iran with the states of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), especially with Saudi Arabia, are characterized by rivalry and hostility. Although Plato recognized foreign relations as less evil and saw some desirability in ecopolitics and accepted that seclusion of states will be rather uncivilized and a childish move, but he also believed in regulated foreign policy where interest of the state does not get adversely influenced by external players. Plato stated that states can attach to intergovernmental organizations until they effect the country's independence and sovereignty. According to Plato any foreign relation must not affect domestic laws and customs which can destroy solidarity of the community. According to Plato nothing should create confusion in the society, which is somewhat accepted by all the countries. They consider sovereignty as supreme virtue of the state and is given primary importance but at the

same time we can see supra national institutions like EU,¹⁶ ASEAN,¹⁷ and UN¹⁸ where countries come at a common forum for discussion and improve bilateral understandings.

However, we cannot deny Plato's idea of protectionism which is somewhat mercantile protectionism rather than the idea of closed economy which cannot help in sustenance of a country in long run especially in the present era where world is moving towards the formation of global village. Also, this theory cannot be used to justify the use and perpetuation of violence against other states and communities. Hatred for any community or country cannot be used to serve xenophobic agendas. Even Plato does not believe in violence and calls it unjust, although medicines given by Plato to treat this problem are somewhat idealistic especially when we look at current international scenario but countries at the same time should not forget that there is more cooperation than competition, more convergence than divergence amongst the nations which must be used as instrument for peaceful coexistence and mutual assistance.

Relevance of Plato's Philosopher King

According to Plato there should be no limitation on the power of the Philosopher King because he has ultimate knowledge. Plato states that it is foolish if we limit the expert practitioner of medicine with the book of medicines. His own student, Aristotle, has criticized him, saying "law is a reason without passion." Aristotle has justified the rule of law over the rule of persons.

Also, in the above examples we can see it is almost impossible to find the perfect Philosopher King and create The Ideal State as mentioned by Plato. Philosopher rule remains a utopia. In reality it will become tyrannical for one person to rule and is one of the foremost reasons for a Failed State. Not only it is impossible to realize and identify who can be a Philosopher King but it is also said that ones who do not wish to rule cannot be made to rule, which completely nullifies Plato's idea "those states are best governed where rulers are reluctant to rule." Humanity by nature is power seeking and it will be contradictory to expect a person to not have the urge to rule and govern.

In his book *Laws*¹⁹, Plato accepts that second best state is one based on Rule of Law. The wisdom of many is preferable over the wisdom of one. Laws represent collective wisdom of ages; it is true that Rule of Law has certain limitations but in the long run we can see the fruits and wisdom of our forefathers in establishing a state based on Rule of Law. We should recognize and acknowledge the wisdom of the makers of Indian Constitution who did not approve Rule of a

¹⁶ The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 28 member states that are located primarily in Europe. The EU has developed an internal single market through a standardized system of laws that apply in all member states in those matters, and only those matters, where members have agreed to act as one.

¹⁷ The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a regional intergovernmental organization comprising ten countries in Southeast Asia, which promotes intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, security, military, educational, and sociocultural integration among its members and other countries in Asia.

¹⁸The United Nations (UN) is an intergovernmental organization responsible for maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations, achieving international cooperation, and being a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations. It is the largest, most familiar, most internationally represented and most powerful intergovernmental organization in the world. The UN is headquartered on international territory in New York City; other main offices are in Geneva, Nairobi, Vienna and The Hague.

¹⁹ *Laws*, by Plato, translated by Benjamin Jowett.

person which could have been an easy path to pursue during turbulent times. Rule of a person in Iran has resulted into dictatorship where people are not given their basic fundamental rights.

We can see historical references like Adolf Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy, Pol Pot the Cambodian premier, R. Khomeini of Iran where Plato's Philosopher King is used for expressing the "tyrant with an ideological agenda." Could it transpire in a modern contemporary form? There is no specific answer to this, but it certainly leans towards "no." As countries are progressing, people to people connections are increasing too. Citizens see their social, economic, and political rights through a global lens, they demand democracy and consider themselves as equal partners in the development of a country. One recent manifestation is The Hong Kong protests against the Chinese government.

Conclusion

According to Raphael Henrich B. Vicente,²⁰ the Philosopher King can never be a reality due to three reasons –

1. It is too idealistic
2. It would likely lead to tyranny or dictatorship
3. It promotes social discrimination

Although the idea of a Philosopher King may become more acceptable after certain positive alterations, we cannot deny the importance of Plato in the history of political philosophy. It is said one can either be platonic or anti platonic, but can't one be non-platonic? Plato was the first thinker to conceive of the idea of an ideal state. He wanted to bring about positive changes in governance; the very reason he wanted to establish an ideal state is because he considered the ultimate aim of human life to be attaining happiness (eudaimonia),²¹ which can be achieved only in a just state ruled by Philosopher King. Plato's *Republic* is not only a masterpiece in political philosophy, but it is recognized as one of the best books written in the field of education.

Plato's greatness is acknowledged not only by his supporters but also by his critics. Karl Popper, who has openly criticized Plato, also recognizes his importance in the history of political philosophy when he says that the influence of Plato's ideas is such that we can either like him or dislike him, but we cannot ignore him.

²⁰ The Impossibility of Plato's Philosopher King, Raphael Henrich B. Vicente.

²¹ In its simplest (translated) form, eudaimonia is often taken to mean happiness (Deci & Ryan, 2006; Huta & Waterman, 2014; Heintzelman, 2018). Sometimes it is translated from the original ancient Greek as welfare, sometimes flourishing, and sometimes as well-being (Kraut, 2018). The concept of Eudaimonia comes from Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, his philosophical work on the 'science of happiness' (Irwin, 2012).

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