



# Swaying between governmentalization and privatization

## National Desk

The latest session of the "Organ of Wisdom" critical dialogue series on human sciences took place both in-person and virtually at the Abu Nasr Mohammad Farabi Hall of the Ministry of Science's Institute of Cultural and Social Studies. Mostafa Zali, assistant professor of philosophy at Tehran University, and Hossein Houshmand, researcher of political philosophy, were in attendance for the 20th meeting, discussing a range of important topics, including social justice. At the beginning of the session, Zali pointed out that increasing inequality and theoretical debates have helped heat up the issue of social justice. He noted that in the recently translated book 'A Short History of Distributive Justice', the author posits that social justice means the state is tasked with providing everyone with the basics of a social existence. As a philosophical and political concept, social justice emphasizes the fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within a society. Just as well, it seeks to address and rectify systemic inequalities and injustices in a society. As an advocate of a just society, social justice insists that all individuals have equal access to basic rights, opportunities, and resources, and policies and institutions be designed to promote fairness and reduce disparities. "The author's strange claim is that this concept was first raised



Mostafa Zali, assistant professor of philosophy at Tehran University  
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by Adam Smith, and that he defended the minimum provision for all by the government," the professor of philosophy noted, and countered by saying, "Adam Smith actually advocates that the market rewards those with merit and this for him has a theological basis." Adam Smith, the Scottish economist and philosopher, is widely regarded as the father of modern economics. He laid the foundation for the study of economics and the concept of the free market in his seminal work 'The Wealth of Nations'. Smith proposed that the "invisible hand" of the market would in effect lead to the efficient allocation of resources and the overall improvement of society. Although the ideas of the Enlightenment philosopher are often associated with laissez-faire capitalism, he also recognized the importance of the state in

providing public goods and addressing market failures. Therefore, in this sense, Smith's work can be seen as having a nuanced relationship with social justice, acknowledging both the potential benefits of markets and the need for state intervention to ensure a just society. Zali went on to say that "Hegel and Marx themselves analyzed problem of inequality and the market," and posited that the market, contrary to what they thought, excludes certain societal classes. Marx further contends that these excluded classes, specifically the proletariat, serve as the impetus for societal progress. He further proposed that throughout the 20th century, a notable trend has been the waning of political philosophy, which has been attributed to the rise of positivism and its rejection of values. "However, this decline was challenged in 1970 with the publication of John Rawls' seminal work, 'A Theory of Justice'." Zali pointed out that Rawls redefined the social contract, offering a framework for defending certain values within society, most notably social justice. This work represented a significant contribution to the field of political philosophy, providing a renewed impetus for the exploration of ethical and normative considerations in political discourse. Zali highlighted a significant challenge in the realm of justice theory, noting that the practical application of these theories in

real-world policymaking remains unclear. He questioned, "The theories of justice are based on ideal models, but how should we transition from an unfavorable situation to an ideal one?" Discussing the lack of implementation of Rawls' theory of justice globally, Zali shared an anecdote: "One of Rawls' students told me that we've had only one brilliant point in recent decades, and that is Rawls. His theory of justice is applicable. For instance, Robert Nozick proposes a theory about justice, but it lacks the capacity for operationalization." Tehran University professor emphasized that the study of justice reached a pinnacle with Rawls. John Rawls was an influential American philosopher who focused on the concept of justice in his work, 'A Theory of Justice'. Rawls posited that a just society is one that maximizes the well-being of its least advantaged members. He argued that social and economic inequalities are only justifiable if they benefit the least advantaged members of society. Rawls' ideas have had a significant impact on contemporary political and economic discourse, particularly in discussions of distributive justice. Lamenting the lack of serious academic efforts in justice studies and the general disregard for political philosophy in Iran, Zali stated, "We are at a standstill in justice studies, with no teaching or research. Even the number of theses on this topic is limited to

a handful. Compare this to the extensive literature on Kant and Heidegger." Zali also pointed out that, in terms of social justice, Iran is caught between two opposing currents: excessive governmentalization and excessive liberalization. He elaborated, "In the 1980s, even a matchbox required a coupon, while the 1990s saw a surge in liberalization and privatization. We comically sway between the two. Sometimes, a single government implements both approaches in its policies. Consequently, these contradictions remain unresolved in Iran." In another part of the session, Hossein Houshmand delved into the historical development of the concept of social justice. He remarked, "In the 1970s, discussions surrounding social justice encompassed economic justice. However, in the following decade, the debate shifted to whether justice is derived from society's common values or from liberal values." Houshmand further observed that the 1990s saw the emergence of minority rights and citizenship issues. He explained that immigration to Western societies presented a challenge, leading to the realization that an integrated liberal society no longer existed. Expounding on the views of philosopher John Rawls, Houshmand said, "Rawls believed that social justice could only be established in Western democratic societies. However, some of his

students disagreed, arguing that global justice could be achieved irrespective of a society's cultural background." Houshmand then highlighted Rawls' theory of universal justice, noting its limitations in comparison to the theory of liberal justice. He explained that Rawls believed his theory could only be implemented in societies where a hierarchical structure is justified and a specific model of government is established. Addressing the question of why Rawls' theory has not been implemented globally, Houshmand cited Robert Nozick's perspective: "Nozick argued that when discussing justice, one must first determine whether they adhere to Rawlsian principles or not." He further explained that Rawls acknowledged the difficulty in understanding a philosopher's views compared to critiquing them. Consequently, Rawls established a paradigm that other philosophers, such as Nozick and Cohen, engage with, but they cannot deny its framework. Lastly, the political philosophy researcher mentioned that Rawls identified five economic and social theories in his work. Rawls argued that unbridled capitalism was incompatible with his theory, adding, "Rawls also claimed that state socialism and the welfare state were not in harmony with his theory, as they violated basic freedoms and concentrated wealth among a select few, causing basic freedoms to lose their true value."

## Iran-Afghanistan water dispute has far-reaching consequences

The Hirmand River, also known as Helmand, originates in Afghanistan's Helmand province and feeds into the Hamun Lake. The Hirmand River functions as a natural system that originates from one place and overflows to another, like a wetland, and does not recognize borders. It stands as the dividing river between Iran and Afghanistan. Afghanistan's noncompliance with the allocation of water rights for Hirmand has created troubles in this region, particularly for the Iranian southeast-

ern province of Sistan and Baluchestan, which is dependent on the Hamun Wetland. Over the years, negotiations between Iran and Afghanistan have been conducted to secure Iran's water rights, with recent months witnessing intensified efforts by the current Iranian government. Registered under UNESCO's global network of biosphere reserves in 2016, the Hamun Lake stands as the world's seventh-largest international wetland and the twelfth-largest biosphere reserve in Iran. The key component of this reserve is the Hamun Wildlife Sanc-

tuary, which encompasses vital wetlands. The reserve covers a total area of nearly one million hectares and serves as part of the Hirmand transboundary basin, with only 17% situated within Iran's borders. The Hamun Wetland has significant ecological significance and is the only habitat source for migratory birds in the eastern part of Iran. Yet, the Afghan government continues with its upstream water control measures with greater intensity. This prevented water from the Hirmand Basin from entering the Hamun Wetland last year.

Almost 98% of the Hamun Wetland's water levels are dependent on Afghanistan's water resources. Afghanistan's diversion of the Hirmand River ignores international biological considerations, international regulations, and the principles of good neighborly relations between the two nations. This has resulted in Iran's inability to receive water from the basin and difficulties in providing drinking water to its population. Despite Afghanistan's promise to stop the diversion of water from the Kamal Khan Dam, satellite

imagery shows that the diversion has continued for the second year. This disregard for good neighborliness could further complicate the provision of water to the Hamun Wetland and harm the people of Afghanistan through the fine dust generated by the wetland. In June 2022, Ali Salajeheh, the head of the Iranian Department of Environment, commented on the latest developments regarding the release of the water rights of Hirmand. "The Ministry of Energy had a meeting with their Afghan counterparts. However, these meetings

did not result in any conclusive outcomes due to the Afghan side's rejection of our facts and figures," Salajeheh said. Despite this, the Iranian government has continued its efforts to secure water for Hamun. Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian also emphasized the importance of resolving the water rights issue in a peaceful and diplomatic manner. The issue of water rights for the Hirmand River has been a topic of concern among experts and authorities for many years. Without such rights, the river could dry up, lead-

ing to the desiccation of the Hamun Wetland. This would result in irreversible damage to the livelihoods of the local population and could turn the wetland into a source of dust. It is essential for both Iran and Afghanistan to engage in constructive negotiations to find a mutually acceptable solution to this issue and prevent further damage to the region's ecosystem and biodiversity. The international community can play a vital role in facilitating such negotiations and supporting the preservation of this unique natural resource.