

Pathologies afflicting Islamic philosophical tradition in eyes of martyred Leader

Restoration of philosophy to fabric of politics, society



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OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

For the elucidation of the views of the martyred Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei concerning Islamic political philosophy, one must first succinctly explain his intellectual station within the context of the Islamic political philosophical tradition.

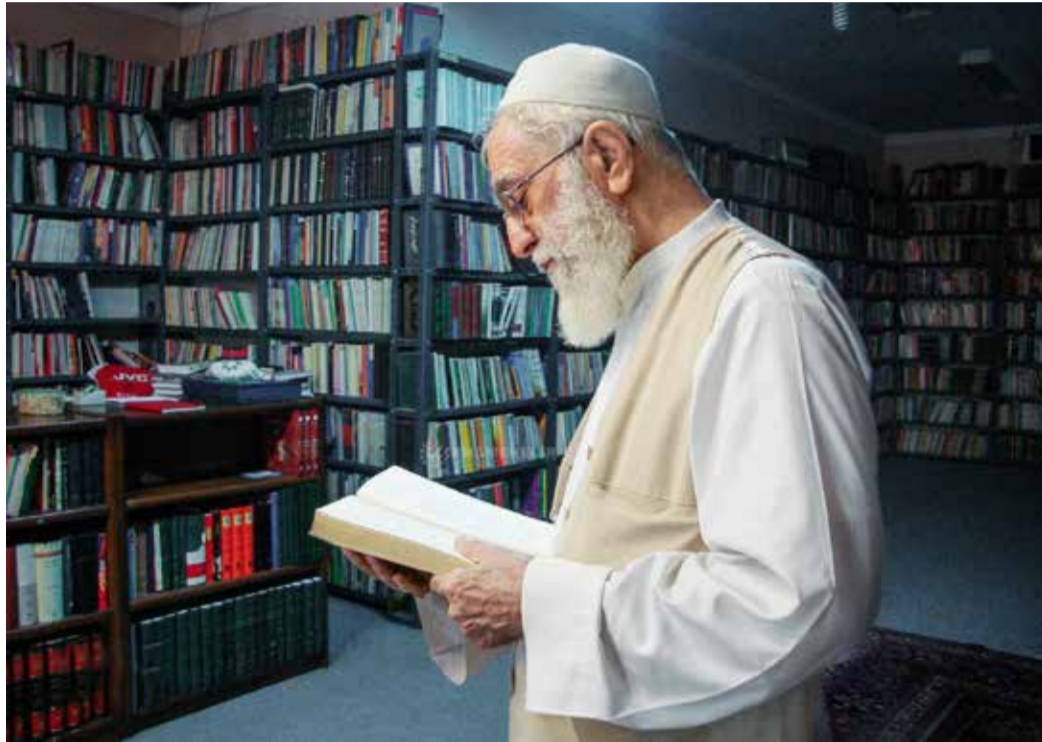
By "Islamic political philosophy," I intend that historical tradition of philosophical thought within the Islamic world, a tradition commencing with al-Farabi, perpetuating and fortifying itself throughout history via Peripatetic wisdom, and culminating ultimately in the philosophy of the Islamic Revolution. Within this tradition's continuum and extension reside the "Two Imams of the Revolution," namely Ayatollah Khomeini and the martyred Ayatollah Khamenei. In this discourse, I shall address certain axial themes susceptible to pathologico-examining scrutiny from the perspective of the martyred Leader within Islamic political philosophy.

Extension of philosophy into politics, society

Among the most consequential critiques advanced by the martyred Leader against Islamic philosophy is its incapacity to generate a "social and political extension". He maintained that, notwithstanding the ideational richness and the presence of illustrious philosophers and sages within this tradition, Islamic philosophy has failed to acquire its befitting station in social existence and the lifeworld of the faithful, remaining predominantly at the level of subjectivism and generalities. In other words, Muslim philosophers have seldom arisen in the political field to champion "social and political religion". This deficiency, however, has been substantially ameliorated by the Islamic Revolution. Consequently, one may regard the "philosophy of the Islamic Revolution" as an autonomous school alongside other philosophical schools — a school wherein the role of Ayatollah Khamenei is conspicuous and within whose framework this historical shortcoming has been to a considerable degree redressed, with the social and political extension of philosophy attaining objective realization.

Disused state of philosophy

Another pathology, partially derivative from that same absence of philosophy's social and political extension, is the "disused state of philosophy" within the Islamic tradition. Naturally, when philosophy proves incapable of exerting effective presence in the societal and political sphere, it becomes marginalized and distances itself from the substantive intellectual life of the community.



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei is seen reading a book in his library in this newly released image.
● IRNA

Marginalization of philosophers

In consequence of philosophy's disused state, philosophers, too, have been pushed to marginality. From the martyred Leader's perspective, this marginalization has occasioned Muslim philosophers' diminished participation in the theater of political praxis and in the strengthening of philosophical approaches within social existence.

Obscurity of philosophy, philosophers

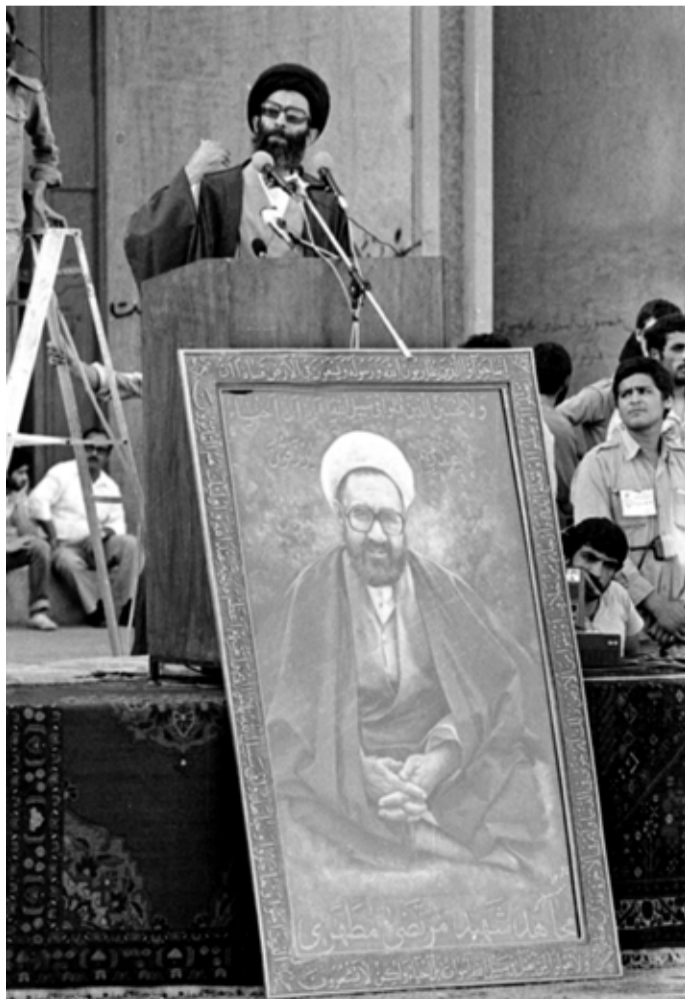
Another outcome of philosophy's disuse and philosophers' marginalization is their historical obscurity. When philosophers remain removed from the arena of power, active intellectual engagement, and political practice, they gradually fade

from historical memory as well. Despite the multiplicity of philosophers and the richness of philosophical texts in the Islamic world, many of them remain unknown today; this circumstance, in the martyred Leader's view, constitutes a grave pathology in the history of Islamic political philosophy.

Interaction with contemporary intellectual currents

Another point upon which the martyred Leader insists is that

✓ Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei delivers a speech at the University of Tehran, Iran, during a commemoration ceremony for the martyrdom of Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, a prominent Muslim philosopher.
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religious culture and thought have, throughout history, succeeded in appropriating, purifying, and reproducing external concepts and elements within an indigenous framework. Nevertheless, this process has not been realized in a worthy manner within the philosophical domain, and Islamic philosophy has failed to engage actively with the literature and intellectual currents contemporaneous with itself and to reproduce concepts in its own philosophical language and framework. This deficiency, of course, has been substantially remedied during the Islamic Revolution, such that one may speak of a certain "philosophical renaissance".

Opaque complexity of Islamic philosophy's language

A significant pathology of Islamic political philosophy is the opaque complexity of Islamic philosophy's language. According to the martyred Leader, the language of philosophical texts is such that comprehension thereof is not easily accessible to the generality of thinkers. This linguistic complexity has converted Islamic philosophy into an esoteric discipline appealing to a select few and has precluded its transformation into a public knowledge possessing social extension — a knowledge capable of theorization and effective intervention in contemporary existence. In contradistinction, in the Western world, numerous philosophical theoreticians, particularly in the domains of politics and society, have succeeded in communicating with society through a more intelligible idiom.

Absence of equilibrium within Muslim epistemic apparatus

The absence of equilibrium within the Muslim epistemic apparatus constituted another pathology that persistently occupied his attention. This signifies that, throughout history, certain epistemic domains have been fortified while others have been marginalized. For example, a doctrine denominated "the sufficiency of jurisprudence" has emerged, whereby jurisprudence has become progressively preeminent, whereas "speculative theology" has been sidelined and, consequently, philosophy has likewise been weakened and largely reduced to the rational foundations of jurisprudence. In his estimation, this disequilibrium has inflicted a serious detriment upon the body of Islamic political philosophy.

Effective confrontation with hegemony of Western political philosophy

Another pathology pertains to the contemporary period and

the ascendancy of Western political philosophical discourse. Over approximately the past century, the incursion of Western ideas, conjoined with Islamic philosophy's antecedent disuse and the marginalization of Muslim philosophers, has imposed supplementary duress upon Islamic political philosophy.

Under these conditions, numerous philosophers, for the defense of their intellectual identity, were compelled to confront and acquaint themselves with these emergent currents. This confrontation, however, was sometimes conducted without planning and systematization and happened in a certain "incoherent mixture". Moreover, this process, in certain instances, also culminated in a species of intellectual surrender, which itself constitutes an additional pathology for the Islamic philosophical tradition.

Eudaimonistic contemplation; principle of Islamic political philosophy

Another pathology that attracted the martyred Leader's attention is the weakening of idealism and value-orientation in Islamic philosophy. In the Islamic philosophical tradition, the ultimate end of thought has been the attainment of "happiness," "the good," and "human perfection". In the contemporary period, however, under the influence of certain Western philosophical currents, this "perfectionism" and "eudaimonistic contemplation" have been to some degree enfeebled.

Even in the endeavor to resuscitate philosophy's social extension, there exists the peril that this resuscitation might occur within a framework discordant with authentic religious values. Nevertheless, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, with an optimistic perspective, emphatically maintains that the philosophy of the Islamic Revolution, relying upon its own religious foundations and values, can acquire an autonomous and distinguished station vis-à-vis Western political philosophy.

Revivification of Islamic political philosophy

Another pathology that the martyred Leader discerns in Islamic political philosophy is a certain internal despair and pessimism concerning the possibility of revivifying Islamic political philosophy. In his conviction, throughout history and even in the present era, there persists a viewpoint that deems Islamic philosophy incapable of responding to the problems of the contemporary political lifeworld and maintains that, relying upon schools such as Illuminism, Peripateticism, and Transcendent Theosophy, one cannot administer contemporary society. He levies a serious critique against this disheartened attitude and considers it one of the significant pathologies for Islamic political philosophy. In opposition, he emphasized that Islamic philosophy, particularly Islamic political philosophy, possesses extraordinary capacities, foundations, and values and can assume a productive role in confronting contemporary issues.

The article first appeared in the Persian-language newspaper Iran.