Islamic Governance and Democracy
Intersection and Separation

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Abstract

During the Iraq War in 2003, the U.S. administration of George W. Bush advocated "democratization of the Middle East region." Also, with the establishment, in Iran, of the Khatamī administration in 1997, lively discussions began on the relationship between the Islamic governance of Iran and democracy. This essay will first specify a quasi-official view of Islamic governance. It will then show some opinions in Iran concerning the quasi-official view. Finally, this essay will explore what aspects and characteristics of liberal democracy can be observed from the viewpoint of Iranian Islamic governance. What is revealed is an aspect of liberal democracy that seeks to bring order to society while approving of the egotism of human beings. In contrast, Islamic governance views human egotism as what should be corrected.

Keywords: Islam, Iran, liberal democracy, Khomeinī, view of governance

1. Introduction

This essay explores what aspects and characteristics the liberal democratic view of governance assumes when seen from the viewpoint of the Iranian Islamic governance. Towards this end, a quasi-official view of Islamic governance will be specified, and then some opinions in Iran concerning this view will be introduced.

2. Islamic View of Governance

In Iran, there is a five-volume textbook (four volumes plus one supplement for college preparatory courses) for a subject called "Islamic Viewpoint" (*Bīnesh-e Eslāmī*). Partially, these volumes provide a basic explanation of the fundamental articles of faith (*Oṣūl-e Dīn*) of the Twelver Shiism as well as Islamic regulations (*Aḥkām*) and ethics (*Akhlāq*).[1] Islamic governance is concisely described in the first through fourth lessons in the third volume

(*Sāl-e Sevvom-e Dabīrestān*). The general Islamic view of governance, commonly shared among the Iranian people, is presented in the textbook and since all textbooks are published by the Ministry of Education (*Vezārat-e Āmūzesh va Parvaresh*), the textbook view can be regarded as equivalent to the official (though concisely depicted) view of the present Islamic governance of Iran. This quasi-official view is summarized below, if somewhat lengthily.

(1) Divine governance (*Velāyat va Ḥokūmat-e Elāhī*)

Only God has the right to property. God is the unconditional *valī*[2] (supervisor). Governance by those other than God is allowed only when the validity of their governance originates in God.[3]

Therefore, commandments (*ḥokm*) originate only with God. Accepting the commandments of someone other than God means obeying and worshiping someone other than God, which is polytheistic (*sherk*).[4]

This implies that two systems exist: monotheistic (*touḥīd*) and polytheistic (*sherk*). There are also two types of leaders: true leaders and false leaders. People can also be divided into two types according to which system/leader they accept: the followers of Allah who obey the truth, and people who obey unjustified authority (*ṭāghūt*).

Islam is monotheistic and is a religion of obedience to God. Basically, prophets were dispatched to remove polytheism from every corner of human life. Governance by someone other than God is considered polytheistic. This includes *ṭāghūt*-oriented governance, at all legislative (issuance of commandments), administrative (executive) and judicial levels.[5]

Necessity of the establishment of Islamic governance

The Islamic teachings are not confined to personal [God's][6] commandments and religious rituals (*'ebādī*), but include all social, economic and legal requirements. Enforcement of such Islamic commandments, as well as the guarantee of social justice which is a basic objective of Islam, can be achieved only by establishing Islamic governance. Being obliged to enforce Islamic law means the establishment of Islamic governance. Islamic governance is a necessary prerequisite to enforcing Islamic law.

Independence in all aspects of culture, politics, economy and military affairs is one of the most important objectives of Islam. Any transactions or relationships that may lead to Muslims being under the rule of non-Muslims are strictly prohibited.[7]

It is evident from the above that establishment of Islamic governance is, in any era, the first and most fundamental objective of Islam. "Islam without governance" [the separation of government and religion] is propagated by the enemies of Islam to spread their rule over Islamic society by depriving Muslims of their political rights, as well as their right to decide their own destiny. This theory obviously deviates from Islamic teachings, constituting fault.[8]

(2) Muslim rulers

The ruler issues commandments, and people have an obligation to execute his commandments. The ruler has the right of supervision and leadership (*velāyat*) over the people by pressing them to do or not to do something. Any offenders against his commandments are deemed sinners. This right of the ruler is possible only when the ruler himself has the right to governance, or when the ruler is authorized by the possessor of this right.

In Islam, only God has this right; nobody other than God is qualified to have this right. People are under no obligation to obey any unqualified rulers, and disobedience to their orders is not a sin. However, when the rulers are ordained by God or when their governance has been validated in light of Islamic law (*shar‘*), the people must obey. Such rulers are prophets, God-appointed earthly rulers.[9]

In Islam, rulers are representatives of God, and, as such, they must stand firmly on divine commandments and for the sake of social welfare. Muslim rulers are basically characterized as follows:

1. Knowledge: Muslim rulers must be fully knowledgeable in Islam and able to deduce Islamic commandments from the Qur'an and Hadith. They must be Islamic jurists.

2. Justice: Muslim rulers (*valī-ye amr*) must guarantee the lives and property of the people and are enforcers of Islamic law. Rulers must establish Islamic justice in society. To this end, they must be free and normal human beings who are immune from sinful impurity and injustice.[10]

In other words, Muslim rulers must be exemplary models in practicing Islam, able to carry out *Dawah* (calling to Islam) and to enforce Islamic commandments.

3. Ability to manage society: The enemies of Islam are always watching for an opportunity to defeat it. Arrogant people in the world are attempting to plunder weaker peoples' property and to subjugate them. Exploiting every possible means, they seek to get rid of other peoples in order to become master of the world. These blasphemous, polytheistic leaders try to spread their rule by asserting their influence through many channels (such as politics, culture, the economy, and the military). In the last two centuries, in particular, they have first used cultural channels to propagate their philosophy, intending to foster committed supporters and thereby deal a blow to Islamic society.[11]

Therefore, Muslim leaders responsible for Islamic governance must be extensively discerning against any such plans and conspiracies, and able to identify any deviations from what Islam should be, so as to lead the Muslim community (*ommat*) along the right path.

4. Bravery: Islamic society is always facing domestic and foreign enemies, who intentionally create problems for the purpose of bringing Muslims to their knees. Therefore, Muslim leaders must courageously confront enemies. They must not be afraid of anyone in enforcing Islamic commandments, and must be capable of withstanding threats from enemies.

Supervision (*velāyat*) by a Muslim ruler

Islamic governance is based on divine commandments, and the ruler is therefore obliged to enforce the divine commandments. How, then, are the divine commandments established and enforced? What are the duties of the ruler who supervises and is responsible for the governing institutions?

a) Regulations and commandments in Islamic society

The most important and basic requirement of society is regulations. Islam has two types of regulations: primary and secondary commandments.

Primary commandments (*Aḥkām-e Avvalīe*): Most Islamic regulations are contained in the Qur'an and Sunnah (*Sonnat*), in which the legislator (God: *share'*) states those regulations in whole or in part. The duty of Islamic jurists, who are Muslim rulers, is to deduce, from the sources of Islamic law, divine commandments so as to specify new obligations and detailed *ḥokm* (commandments). Such divine commandments are called primary commandments.

Secondary commandments (*Aḥkām-e S̱ānavīe*): In the case where a Muslim ruler cannot overcome a problem in managing Islamic society by taking action in accordance only with the primary commandments, and/or where the foundation of Islamic governance is likely to face a crisis, the ruler is allowed to resolve such a problem by issuing a secondary commandment in consideration of the welfare of Islamic society and various other conditions. Such secondary commandments issued by Muslim rulers are called "the government commandments" (*Aḥkām-e Ḥokūmatī*).[12]

Another power of the ruler is to issue commandments concerning taxes and restrictions. Examples include the Prophet, who issued a commandment concerning water use in the city of Madinah, and Emām (Imam) 'Ali, who imposed a tax on horses. Thus, the Muslim ruler can decide commodity prices and restrict trade based on his authority and duty.

Secondary commandments are issued as needed, and such need should be recognized by either an Islamic jurist himself or an individual or group authorized by an Islamic jurist. Furthermore, a secondary commandment remains valid as long as there is a need for it— for example, to avoid turmoil, corruption, or other predicament of the Islamic system. The commandment automatically becomes invalid when there is no need for it.

b) Responsibility of the administrative body

Administrative and judicial bodies should be subject to authorization, supervision and guidance by the Muslim ruler. Therefore, the administrative body (president), after being elected by the people, is granted authority for governance by approval of the ruler (leader). Other officials in charge are authorized by the leader as well.

c) Judicial body

The head of the judicial body is also appointed directly by the leader.[13]

(3) People under Islamic governance

Islamic governance, which should be established under the supervision (*velāyat*) of God, rests on the shoulders of the people who believe in God. This is governance by Allah over the people. The people must accept governance by God and submit themselves to God.

Objective of the prophets' vocation

All holy leaders and prophets have made great efforts to awaken the people, to let them know their holy duties, make them understand how they rely on the great power of God and what great missions and roles rest on their shoulders.[14]

The Qur'an says that the aim of the prophets is to establish justice, which can be made to happen not by unknowable power but by the power of the people. Under the guidance of the prophets, the people are awakened by the power given by their God to come to know their duties, and then rise to establish justice.

When the "friends of God" (*ouliā*) succeed in making the people accept their preaching, and their words are not blocked by any tyrant or *ṭāghūt* from reaching oppressed people, the prophets are able to advance to the next step and establish the governance of justice.

People's responsibility

The Islamic Revolution of Iran exemplified the truth of the role of the people in a system of governance by God. This truth is that if the people are awakened and also act under the direction of a holy leader, they win. As long as both occur, no machination can disturb the governance achieved by the rising up of awakened people and the holy leader.

Positioned at the top of the hierarchy of Islamic society, the ruler/leader has the greatest responsibility; the lower one's level in the hierarchy, the less the responsibility. However, even common people at the lowest level of the hierarchy bear responsibility. Every person bears holy responsibilities.

Under Islamic governance all people are equal under the commandments of God.[15] Administrators of society are not privileged at all.

Mutual rights of the ruler and the people

In Islamic society, the ruler and the people mutually assume obligations. Emām 'Ali said to the people:

> O' people, I have a right over you and you have a right over me. As for your right over me, that is to counsel you, to pay you your dues fully, to teach you that you may not remain ignorant, and to instruct you in behavior that you may act upon. As for my right over you, it is fulfilment of (the obligation of) allegiance, well-wishing in presence or in absence, response when I call you and obedience when I order you.[16]

People must give advice and opinions to the ruler, and the ruler must discuss them with the people. To make this possible, Muslim ruler and people must not be distant from each other; the ruler must stay close enough to the people so that they can feel free to talk to him.

The Muslim ruler also must restrict himself to the lowest living standard in society. Thereby, he shares suffering with the people and gives joy and hope to the people; it is his duty to live such a life.[17]

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The above-stated quasi-official view of Islamic governance emphasizes the importance of the ruler's duty to listen to the opinions of the people and to be well-informed about, give consideration to the difficulties people are facing,[18] and the importance of the people's participation in establishing and maintaining governance. However, this view also regards the ruler and the people as being in contraposition to each other, by drawing a sharp distinction between the position of ruler as "giver of orders" and that of people as "obeyers." Behind this distinction is the Iranian view of the ruler, which consists of two parts: he should make the people obey the commandments of God, and he should give consideration to the welfare of the people. The Iranian textbooks states that in Islam, rulers are representatives of God. As such, they must stand firmly on divine commandments for the sake of social welfare.

However, this view is not very convincing to us, the Japanese people, based on ideas that have been advocated and generally accepted in Japan. For example, the Japanese accept the democratic principles that political policy is determined by the freely expressed will of the people for the sake of the people, that such policy is carried out by representatives elected freely by the people,[19] and that political power is created by participation of the people.[20]

The Iranian textbook states that the Qur'an says that the aim of the prophets is to establish justice, as mentioned earlier. There is also a passage in another textbook that says the aims of the prophets are, first, to lead the people in the direction of God, and, second, to establish social justice.[21] Regarding the establishment of social justice, it explains as follows:

> Since humans are social beings, a human's effort to seek God is impossible without well-balanced social order.... Therefore, the prophets raised a cry for social emancipation by means of jihad and fighting.... It is not that society will be automatically created when morality is established.... The prophets lived lives battling against social imbalance.... The Qur'an calls on the people for social battle to acquire various rights for themselves and others.[22]

It argues that the aims of the prophets are not only the calling to spirituality and morality in the inner domain, or the private domain, but also the establishment of social justice in the outer, or public domain. This "social justice" can be defined from the above explanation as "well-balanced social order" and "restoration of various suppressed rights."

Regarding the meaning of justice as defined by Khomeinī, Dr. M. H. Jamshīdī states in his book *Naẓarīe-ye ʿAdalat, Az Dīdegāh-e Fārābī, Emām Khomeinī, Shahīd Ṣadr* (The Theory of Justice in the Viewpoint of Farabi, Imam Khomeinī, and Sadr) that what holds an important place in Khomeinī's view of justice is his consideration of the theory of justice rooted in Aristotle's concept as a mean equilibrium. Dr. M. H. Jamshīdī also writes:[23]

> Justice is an attribute of God. Therefore, the cosmos created by God with plans and purposes is a manifestation of the justice of God. God's justice represents balance and equality between the constituents of the whole, with the placement of each constituent in the right place. Possessing part of the reason of God, human beings should understand justice with their reason so as to serve the purposes intended by God, and to follow the course of justice according to their own free will. Furthermore, they must achieve not only personal justice, but also social justice by establishing governance. If everyone is equal before the law and there is no discrimination, any people at any levels of the hierarchy can acquire their rights. Such is the society of justice. In accordance with this view, Khomeinī placed great emphasis, throughout his life, on fighting against oppression, tyranny, and the trampling of people's rights.

Meanwhile, Alasdair MacIntyre pointed out in his book *After Virtue* that there is a crucial conflict in terms of morality between the Aristotelian tradition and liberal individualism,[24] arguing that the concept of justice established by Aristotle has lost, in the modern age, the teleological view of the world lying behind it, and that therefore, under liberal individualism, there is no rational way to resolve the rivalry between various concepts of justice.

Michael J. Sandel states in his book *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, that "…[liberal] society [of today], being composed of a plurality of persons, each with his own aims, interests, and conceptions of the good, is best arranged when it is governed by principles that do not themselves presuppose any particular conception of the good."[25]

These arguments clearly point to the conflict between today's liberal society of the modern West and the Iranian perspective on social justice based on a teleological worldview.

3. Various Viewpoints Regarding Islamic Governance

Moḥsen Kadīvar says that, in Iran, there are three different theories about the previously-discussed view of Islamic governance. Each of the three positions outlined below nearly represents one of the three theories pointed out by Kadīvar. (These three theories will be described later.) Here it is considered that the perspective of Moḥammad Javād Nourūzī, described first below, supports and supplements the above-stated quasi-official view.

(1) Nourūzī's view

Created by God, human beings are uniform in that they are all the slaves of God, and none of them is privileged. How, then, can such a human being secure the right to govern others? Governance is what deprives human beings of freedom and rights; it constitutes a sin, allows arbitrary (*taṣarrof*) ownership of human beings, and thus can only be undertaken by those authorized by God.[26]

The Shī'ah and the Sunni share the thought that the Prophet Muḥammad was appointed by God as ruler. However, while the Sunni claims that nobody has been chosen by God as ruler after the Prophet Muḥammad, the Shī'ah believes that Imams have also been elected by God after the Prophet. In today's era of the Occultation of the Imam, Islamic jurists have the right to governance. The validity of governance originates in God; the consent of the people is requisite to the creation of governance but insufficient for its validation. Furthermore, there exists an interpretation that the people are allowed to select a specific individual from among the Islamic jurists as their ruler, but this idea is false; the validity must originate in God, not in the people.[27]

Islam states a general framework of governance, which is permanent but flexible in accordance with changes in the times.[28] It is the duty of the ruler (*Valī-ye Amr*) to demonstrate this form of governance by issuing secondary commandments flexibly in response to particular space and time conditions, and the people are obliged to obey such commandments.[29] The perfect ideal of governance is said to be accomplished when the Imam becomes a leader, and until then, the next best ideal must be sought.[30]

The existing Islamic system of Iran adopts the system of separation of powers of administration, legislation, and judicature introduced from the modern West. However, the assembly (legislative body) should be intended to be an advisory body from which the ruler (*Valī-ye Amr*), who has the power of decision, seeks expert advice. Therefore, an assembly should be formed for each specialized field (for example, an assembly consisting of medical doctors).[31]

Whether or not Islam accepts democracy as a means of governance, Islam does not accept democracy in legislation.[32] The prerogative of legislation belongs to God. Human beings can legislate only when God has not enacted a law regarding the matter in question and has permitted them to do so.[33]

As for democracy in executive (administrative) practice, there is room for consideration. In fact, since the Iranian revolution, Iranian presidents have been chosen in elections. However, after being elected by vote, the president must be appointed by the ruler. Voting by the people is considered a suggestion to the ruler, and represents the contract between the ruler and the people that stipulates that if the ruler appoints the elected person to be president, the people obey the president.[34]

There are at least the following three possible forms of religious governance:
a) Governance under which every important matter is founded on religion.

b) Governance under which religious decrees are complied with.

c) Governance by Muslim believers.

Under a), law is based on religious decrees, and not only that, but the enforcer of law is appointed by God or authorized by the Imams; this is the ideal form of governance. Governance by Islamic jurists falls under this type.

Under b), the ruler does not have to be appointed by God. This form of governance is considered religious only because all laws are based on Islamic law; not everything has to be based on Islamic law. This is the second best governance system after a).

Under c), there is no requirement to comply with Islamic regulations. It is assumed that because the citizens are Muslim believers, governance by such citizens is automatically religious. This is absolutely unacceptable to the Shī'ah in the light of their principles of belief.

Governance of the type a) is true religious governance. If it cannot be brought about, b) is acceptable as a makeshift alternative, but only when realized by issuing secondary commandments; this is not to say that it is always acceptable under any conditions.[35]

(2) Kadīvar's view

The following is the view of M. Kadīvar, who, although an Islamic jurist, criticizes the present religious regime in Iran from the standpoint of democracy. He says that in Iran, there are three different theories about Islamic governance.

1) The first is a theory that is regarded as the official view of the present regime. It rests on the theory of "absolute governance by [God-appointed] Islamic jurists" (*Valāyat-e Faqīh*). This is the only form of Islamic government allowed in the era of the Occultation of the Imam, and it is a religious duty for the people to be bound by the government. The government of this type can be considered a people-led system in that it is given the consent of the people. However, this theory argues that in the public domain, every decision and action is validated only by the supreme Islamic jurist as the ruler (*Valī-ye Amr*). According to this interpretation, "governance by Islamic jurists" (*Valāyat-e Faqīh*) is incompatible with democracy. While a limited form of voting by the people is allowed in case of extreme necessity [*ẓarūrat*], this theory still holds that democracy is neither desirable nor beneficial.

2) The second theory discussed by Kadīvar is a conventional one, advocated by the reformist party in Iran. This theory does not completely accept either absolute governance by God-appointed Islamic jurists or democracy. Instead, linking the two together, it argues for Islamic democracy, that is, conditional governance by Islamic jurists elected by the people (not by God). According to this theory, representatives of the people elect an Islamic jurist as ruler (*Valī-ye Amr*) to administer society for a certain period of time based on laws approved by both Islamic jurists and the people. It also holds that the chosen jurist is responsible to the people.

3) The third theory is supported by Kadīvar himself, and is regarded by him as the view of Muslim intellectuals in Iran. This theory argues that "governance by Islamic jurists" in the realm of politics is not supported by religious doctrine, regardless of whether such jurists are appointed by God or elected by the people and whether such governance is absolute or conditional. Basically, Islam does not offer any specific form of political governance of society. The theory also claims that "governance by Islamic jurists"—amounting to autocratic governance by God based on the holy rights of Islamic jurists—is incompatible with democracy, since democracy is based on the principles of "popular sovereignty and participation" and "the rule of law and human rights." These democratic principles are obviously in conflict with "governance by Islamic jurists" which constitutes governance by religious leaders, or religious absolutism.

According to this theory, the illusion that governance by Islamic jurists and democracy do not contradict each other results from ignorance of the definitions of Islamic law, as well as about the theory of democracy. However, this fundamental incompatibility between democracy and governance by Islamic jurists does not prevent the democratic administration of society. It is possible for the Muslim populace to have a democratic government by, for example, creating an Islamic civil society, while maintaining the Islamic faith and moral values. This means that Islam, as a religion, can be combined with democracy, a method of modern politics.[36]

(3) The View of Aḥmad Vāʿezī

While Kadīvar declares that the illusion that governance by Islamic jurists and democracy do not contradict each other results from being uninformed about the definitions of Islamic law, as well as about the theory of democracy, Vāʿezī, who is an Islamic jurist well-versed in modern Western political thought, refutes this argument that Islamic democracy is impossible. Vāʿezī argues for religious democracy, stating that many opponents of religious democracy fail to distinguish between democracy as a means of collective decision-making and liberal democracy provided with an ideological framework of principles and values.[37]

Vāʿezī first poses the question of what democracy is. He then concludes, after considering various viewpoints (including that of Robert Alan Dahl), that democracy is a political system which acknowledges the right of the people to participate in political decisions so as to distribute and regulate political power under the rule of a majority. The prerequisites needed to ensure the soundness of this process include free, fair and frequent elections, freedom of expression, and inclusive citizenship.[38] He also discusses the relationship between democracy and liberalism, in the following terms.

Democracy and liberalism are in a kind of tense relationship. Democracy is merely one method for overcoming difficulties in decision making in society, and does not, by itself, provides us with substantial values such as way of life, morality and philosophy. Pure

democracy, or unlimited democracy, is a system in which all political questions are settled by the majority vote of citizens. Under unlimited democracy, the tyranny of the majority, of the masses, can trample minority rights. In liberal democracy, however, even if a policy that has a potential to trample on the fundamental rights and liberties of the minority is formulated under the tyranny of the majority by means of the democratic process, the fundamental rights and liberties of individuals are constitutionally guaranteed. In short, a liberal democracy is a limited democracy.[39)] Such protection from possible democratic harms is not restricted to fundamental rights; it also covers moral and religious values.

In Islam, Islamic rules and values have precedence over any others, and therefore, the people have no power to legislate or make judgments that contradict Islam by majority rule. Religious democracy (Islamic democracy) can therefore be established by replacing liberal values with Islamic values. In the same manner, liberal democracy takes the form of limited democracy so as to protect the fundamental rights and liberties of individuals from the possible harm of unlimited democracy.[40)]

Various important Islamic teachings, including *shourā* (shūrā: a system of mandatory consultation), *bei'at* (pledge of allegiance) and *Amr be Ma'rūf va Nahy az Monker* (enjoying good and forbidding evil), can also serve as an approach to an Islamic democratic state.[41)]

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It seems that Vā'ezī regards this form of democracy within religious democracy as a means of embodying the idea of "mutual rights of the ruler and the people," namely, a mutual relationship between the ruler and the ruled in Islam, which is discussed in the Iranian textbook *Bīnesh-e Eslāmī* (Islamic Viewpoint) described earlier in this essay.

4. Intersection and Separation of Values

Khomeinī says in his *Velāyat-e Faqīh* (Government of Islamic Jurists):

> It will always happen that men overstep the limits laid down by Islam and transgress against the rights of others for the sake of their personal pleasure and benefit…. It cannot be asserted that men became angels. The wisdom of the Creator has decreed that men should live in accordance with justice and act within the limits set by divine law. This wisdom is eternal and immutable, and constitutes one of the norms of God Almighty. Today and always, therefore, the existence of a holder of authority, a ruler who acts as trustee and maintains the institutions and laws of Islam, is a necessity—a ruler who prevents cruelty, oppression, and violation of the rights of others; who is a trustworthy and vigilant guardian of God's creatures.[42)]

In other words, he argues that since men are not angels, they need a ruler who guides them to the path of God.

Nourūzī too says, "Considering that men are not angels, and that it is believed that even after the appearance of the Hidden Imam there will appear those who fight against the Hidden Imam, it is unrealistic idealism to rely merely on moral principles,"[43] and therefore argues for the necessity of governance.

Both Khomeinī and Nourūzī consider that human beings are selfish, while according to Shī'ah doctrine it is humans' inherent nature (*feṭrat*) to seek God. For example, in the first volume of the textbook *Bīnesh-e Eslāmī* (Islamic Viewpoint), one reads that:

> Human beings have, in their nature, not only a knowledge of God, but also a natural ability to be attracted to God. In other words, humans have an internal desire to worship God, prostrate themselves before and obey God. This natural desire and tendency is called "natural God-orientedness" (*khodā gerā-ye feṭrī*). Natural God-orientedess also implies natural recognition of God, because a man can never be oriented to something/someone unless he does not get to know that something/someone.[44]

Man is comprised of two aspects; the material aspect that makes him selfish and recede from God, and the spiritual aspect which is represented by the human nature (*feṭrat*) to try to come closer to God. Humans must therefore strive to come closer to God by, under divine guidance, casting off material desires and enhancing spirituality. This is accomplished by being guided by prophets dispatched by God or rulers as representatives of the prophets, along the path of Islamic law laid down by God.[45]

The textbook *Bīnesh-e Eslāmī*, based on the ideas outlined above, states the following about rulers who guide human beings as representatives of God: "Not everybody can assume the position of ruler." It also makes reference to modern Western society, saying: "In many other societies today, one can assume the presidency or premiership irrespective of the conditions regarding justice, piousness and spirituality, while these (conditions regarding justice, piousness and spirituality) are extremely important for Islamic rulers, who are in charge of people's property and destinies."[46]

Meanwhile, N. Machiavelli, who stood at the turning point from medieval to modern Western political thought, pointed out that until his time, people had questioned how they should live and ignored how they were living. He then argued that human beings were selfish, their ambition and greed never sated, while politics consisted of measures designed to bring a specific order to such human beings rather than to make them virtuous.[47] This view of governance virtually gives approval to the egotism, insatiable ambition and greed of human beings under the system of governance.

Thomas Hobbes argued that the world was created by God, who is the "first cause" that gave the universe the first push to get started, and maintained that nature moves according to its own law of causality. According to Hobbes, human beings can be seen as a phenomenon of such nature. The core motive of human desires is the self-preservation of life. Approving of such desires, Hobbes presented a view of governance in the form of a state constructed by a contract between people as a means of securing self-preservation in a better and more rational manner.[48] The perspective of Machiavelli and Hobbes that human beings are selfish by nature served later as the starting point for modern Western political thought—liberal thought in particular.

Shī'ah Muslims and Khomeinī share with Machiavelli and Hobbes the viewpoint that humans are selfish beings. The difference between them has to do with the kind of governance system and notion of values that should be established on the basis of such a view of human nature.

The modern Western view of governance has developed safeguard concepts and systems to protect against possible harm based on the idea that humans are selfish beings. Fundamental human rights, constituting a core conception of liberalism, have their roots in a security concept for safeguarding life, freedom of religion, and property against the tyranny of government and ruler. Comprising the basis for modern politics, the system of separating the administrative, legislative, and judicial powers also serves as a system of security to prevent the tyranny of government or ruler by distributing their powers. That is to say, these are security systems established on the premise that the ruler can be a bad, selfish person with strong material desires, just as the textbook "*Bīnesh-e Eslāmī*" points out, saying, "In many other societies today [namely, societies modeled on modern Western society], one can assume the presidency or premiership irrespective of the conditions regarding justice, piousness and spirituality."

Furthermore, the popular election system and secret ballot system of democracy were discussed by Jeremy Bentham, a utilitarian thinker who sees humans as beings motivated by self-interest, which is defined as pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. He argued for the construction of a governance system in which the ruler can maintain the position of power only by paying continued attention to people's demands, and in which the benefits shared by all members of the community can only be promoted through voting by individual members.[49]

British political scientist Jack Lively believes that one of the ends of democracy is to ensure that governments pursue policies in the general interest or for the common good, on the premise that human beings (both politicians and voters) act selfishly.[50] Of course he makes reference to some other arguments regarding the aims of democracy that disagree with his view. These include J.S. Mill's idea that participation in politics makes people improve, and Jean Jacques Rousseau's argument that democracy is not for egoistic benefit but for the benefit of the whole community.[51]

However, Yasunobu Fujiwara states that the utilitarianism of Bentham best represents the values of liberalism, arguing that most of today's social sciences ground their values in utilitarianism which, in addition, serves as common principles of behavior for many people and as a criterion for judgment in political society.[52] J. Lively admits this indirectly, saying, "(... many modern theorists suppose) a mechanism for systematically representing them [individual or sectional wants]."[53]

In other words, modern Western political thought (and the mainstream of liberalism, in particular) takes the view that humans are selfish by nature and, with this view as a premise, seeks to establish a governance system. On the other hand, though also maintaining that humans are selfish entities, Shī'ah Muslims and Khomeinī aim to construct a governance system to discipline and improve selfish human beings. The fundamental difference between these two viewpoints is seen in how human egotism is treated: in the one case, approved of and accepted, in the other, corrected and improved. Khomeinī states:

> The worst of all mistakes is to have a selfish mind. As long as human beings have a selfish mind then war, degradation, corruption, oppression, and tyranny will continue. Creation of a single just governance system in this world is the purpose of the prophets, because the governance of justice is governance with a holy motive, also equipped with moral and spiritual values. Therefore, if one such governance system is built, it will control and dramatically improve society.[54]

In March 2003, the Bush administration in the USA commenced military action in Iraq, advocating "democratization of the Middle East region." If the type of democracy advocated by the Bush Administration is one that goes beyond the framework of religious democracy (Islamic democracy) advocated by Vā'ezī, it means that what will be maintained and protected under limited democracy is not Islamic values, but liberal values. This in itself would mean that Iranian society be reorganized into a society that gives approval to human egotism. But this, from the Iranian point of view, is a path to degradation, corruption, and falling away from God, completely undermining Khomeinī's view.

5. Conclusion

As was mentioned at the beginning, this essay is intended to explore what aspects and characteristics of liberal democracy can be observed from the viewpoint of the Iranian Islamic governance. One aspect found when seen in connection with morality is that there is no official agreement regarding the substantial content of the concept of justice. Another aspect, found in connection with democracy, is that liberal democracy is a political-social mechanism that approvals of and accepts human selfishness for what it is. Although there are,

of course, some positive findings, our renewed attention should be given to these somewhat negative, fundamental facets of liberal democracy. In a Japanese textbook for social studies titled "Democracy," which was published by the then Ministry of Education of Japan and used from 1948 through 1953—the period immediately after World War II during which Japan was under American occupation—the values of liberal democracy are discussed with a fresh perspective. However, one reads there the following passage:

> Even if people think of nothing but their own interest, politics by the people is supposed to promote the welfare of each and every individual in the country....[55]

NOTES

1) The explanation on the fundamental articles of faith includes the oneness of God [*touḥīd*], prophethood [*nobovvat*], life after death [*ma'ād*], the Imam [*Emāmat*], excluding God's divine justice [*'adl*].

2) The meanings of *valī* include "supervisor," "primary possessor," "friend," and "companion." It is used here to mean "supervisor" or "primary possessor."

3) Vezārat-e Āmūzesh va Parvaresh, *Bīnesh-e Eslāmī, Sāl-e Sevvom-e Dabīrestān*, Tehran, 1376 (1997), p. 4.

4) *ibid.* P. 5.

5) *ibid.* P. 6.

6) Words in brackets [...] are my notes. The same applies hereinafter.

7) Prohibition of any transactions or relationships that may lead to Muslims being under the rule of non-Muslims is called a general rule of "closing of measures" (nafī-ye sabīl) in Islamic law.

8) *ibid.* p. 9.

9) *ibid.* pp. 10-11.

10) *ibid.* p. 13.

11) *ibid.* p. 14.

12) *ibid.* p. 16.

13) *ibid.* p. 18.

14) *ibid.* p. 19.

15) *ibid.* p. 21.

16) http://www.al-islam.org/nahj/, Sermon 34. Feb. 2, 2007.

17) *ibid.* p. 23.

18) *ibid.* p. 22.

19) Principles of democracy were described in a Japanese textbook for social studies, published by the then Ministry of Education of Japan and used from 1948 through 1953, the period after World War II during which Japan was under American occupation.
Minshu-shugi: *monbushou chosaku kyokasho* (Democracy: Textbook written by the Ministry of Education) (Komichi-Shobo Publishers, 2004), p. 75.

20) Kawahara, Akira, *Shiminshakai-ron-no Shintenkai—Minshu-shugi-no Saiteigi-no Tameni* (New Development of the Idea of Civil Society—for Redefinition of Democracy), Michitoshi

Takabatake, ed. *Gendai Shiminseiji-ron* (Essays on Civil Politics) (Seori-shobo, 2003), p. 260

21) *Bīnesh-e Eslāmī* (*Sāl-e Dovvom-e Dabīrestān*), p. 20.

22) *ibid*. p. 22.

23) Jamshīdī Moḥammad Ḥoseīn, *Naẓarīe-ye ʿAdālat, Az Dīdegāh-e Fārābī, Emām Khomeīnī, Shahīd Ṣadr*, Pezhūheshkade-ye Emām Khomeīnī va Enqelāb-e Eslāmī, 1380 (2001), p. 389, p. 453, p. 469, pp. 470-471, p. 496.

24) MacIntyre, A., *After Virtue*, Fourth Edn., translated by Sakae Shinozaki (Misuzu Shobo, 1999), p. 315.

25) Sandel, Michael, J., *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Second Edn. Cambridge Univ. 1998, p. 1.

26) Nourūzī, Moḥammad, Javād, *Nezām-e Syāsī-ye Eslām*, Moʾassese-ye Āmūzeshī va pezhūheshī-ye Emām Khomeīnī, 2002, Qom (Iran), p. 146.

27) *ibid*. p. 151.

28) *ibid*. pp. 113-115.

29) *ibid*. pp. 117-118.

30) *ibid*. pp. 113-115.

31) *ibid*. pp. 133-134.

32) *ibid*. p. 158.

33) *ibid*. p. 167.

34) *ibid*. p. 159.

35) *ibid*. pp. 170-171.

36) Kadīvar, Moḥsen, *Velayat-e Faqih and Democracy*, http://www.kadivar.com/Htm/English/Papers/Velayat-e%20Faghih.htm (Jun. 28, 2006)

37) Vaezi, Ahmad, *Shia Political Thought*, Published by Islamic Center of England, 2004, p. 151, http://www.al-islam.org/shiapoliticalthought/ShiaPoliticalThought

38) *ibid*. p. 151.

39) *ibid*. p. 152, pp. 169-170.

40) *ibid*. pp. 171-173.

41) *ibid*. pp. 174-183.

42) Emām Khomeīnī, *Velāyat-e Faqīh* (*Ḥokūmat-e Eslāmī*) The Ninth Edn., Moʾassese-ye Tanẓīm va Nashr-e Aṣār-e Emām Khominī, 1999, p. 31.

43) Nourūzī, Moḥammad Javād, *op. cit.,* pp. 97-101.

44) *Bīnesh-e Eslāmī (Sāl-e Avval)*, p. 31.

45) *ibid.* (*Sāl-e Dovvom-e Dabīrestān*), p. 25.

46) *ibid. (Sāl-e Sevvom-e Dabīrestān)*, p. 14.

47) Fujiwara,Y., *Jiyushugi-no Saikento* (Reconsidering Liberalism) (Iwanami Shoten Publishers, 1999), p. 58.

48) *ibid*. p. 59.

49) Lively, Jack, *Democracy,* Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1975, pp. 95-96.

50) Lively, J., *Democracy*, translated to Japanese by Yoji Sakurai and Tsutomu Tonoike (Ashi-Shobo, 1998), p. 180, (Eng. p. 112).

51) *ibid.* p. 134 (Japanese tr. p. 214).

52) Fujiwara, Y., *op. cit.*, pp. 157-158.

53) Lively, Jack, *op. cit.,* p. 120 (Eng.).

A. MacIntyre also says, "Law is a method used in politics to coordinate the views of various political factions and to keep social peace. Law specifies the range and extent to which conflict should be restrained." MacIntyre, A., *op. cit.*, p. 309.

54) Khomeinī's speech delivered at Ḥoseinī-ye Jamārān in Tehran on the 14th of Farvardīn in the Iranian year of 1361 (Apr. 3, 1982).

Mo'assese-ye Tanẓīm va Nashr-e Āṣār-e Emām Khomeinī, *Ṣaḥīfe-ye Emām*, vol. 16, p. 162.

55) *Minshu-shugi*: *monbushou chosaku kyokasho* (Democracy: Textbook written by the Ministry of Education) (Komichi-Shobo Publishers, 2004), p. 363.