# Problematization of political ontology in Islamic political thought in Iran: Horizontal or Vertical

**Mohammad Bahrampour:** PhD. Student of Political Thought, Faculty of Political Science, Tehran University, Tehran, Iran.

bahrampour.m@ut.ac.ir

## Introduction

Any political thought, to be valid, should be based on the three foundations of ontology, epistemology and methodology. Emphasizing the importance of ontology, David Marsh writes: " they [Ontological dimensions] are like a skin not a shell ; they cannot be put on and taken off whenever the researcher sees fit. In our view, all students of political science should recognize their own ontological and epistemological positions and be able to defend them(Marsh & Stoker, 2018, p.177).

In general, ontology means the theory of existence, and when the analysis of existence enters the field of politics, it deals with concepts such as the Self, society and the mutual influence of these two.

In a division and in order to identify ontology from political ontology, we can refer to two of Heideggerian concepts: ontic and ontological. In examining existence, Heidegger uses two words, ontic and ontological, and their equivalents, respectively, Existential and Existential. Existential refers to social existence, and Existential refers to the possibilities available to Dasein to become a particular Existential. (Inwood, 1999, p.62).

In General, a Being surrounded by society can be called a Subject. Although the Subject and subjectivity in many texts are mixed with human objection to transcendental or metaphysical authority, but the Subject, is made by it`s connection with the outside world. Even a

Subject relying on pure human experience and wisdom, like Hay Ibn Yaqzan, to be aware of his identity and duties, has to be in a group of people. He was not able to understand his intuitions until Absal came to his island, and **after** Absal explained to him the verdicts of the Sharia, Hay Ibn Yaqzan accepted them, and he considered himself to fulfill his duties in accordance with what he believed to be true. (Ibn Tufail, 1334H,p.146).

We can identify four attitudes towards the Subject. David Howarth calls these four basic approaches: simple structuralism (e.g., Althusserian Marxism), simple voluntarism (e.g., Popper), dialectical structuralism (e.g., Bhaskar's critical realism), and dialectical voluntarism (e.g., Giddens's structuration theory)(Howarth, 2013,p.119).

In these four attitudes, the relationship between the Subject and his world is considered. To what extent this Subject has the ability to influence the world, it shows differences between these aspects of political ontology. In recent attitudes in Western political thought, contingent ontology and constant change have been accepted. It is in such a world that the Subject does not find a final verdict on his questions and must solve his problems by sharing his thoughts with other Subjects.

On the other hand, in Islamic political thought, the issue of ontology and the issue of the Subject and its world is clear and obvious. From the beginning, an ontology based on the existence of a resourceful God with the attribute of breeding is drawn. This breeder Lord, guides the creatures who need to receive guidance in order to reach their perfection. Further the merciful God`s guidance; the prophets who bring the divine message to order people and their world have also important role in this ontology.

In this space, the first name that comes to mind in the field of coherent political philosophy is Al-Farabi. According to Al-Farabi's cosmology, humans live in a hierarchical world and in order to

organize their societies, they need to communicate with upper world. A communication that only certain people can do. In this way, the Subject needs a world in which he can perfect himself, and he achieves this perfection when he is obedient to the orders of the person who is in contact with the upper world. In this way, Al-Farabi's political ontology is clear: the subject needs wise guidance in a world full of imperfections(Al-Farabi, 1379H).

Such an attitude is repeated in Mulla Sadra`s. According to his point of view, there is a hierarchy between the mass of people, scholars of the Ummah, guardians and Imams, prophets, angels and God, from the lowest level of existence to the highest level. In such a hierarchy, a person who needs happiness and law, in order to obtain it, needs to communicate with his higher hierarchy, that is, revelation. In this view, in order to reach the human perfection, people with more prominent human characters are responsible for guiding the human society. In general, the headship and governance of human societies and the implementation of Sharia laws are the responsibility of the prophet as the divine caliph in the world and then his successors, that is, Imams, scholars and mujtahids. And these superior people are the ones who can bring the laws governing world from the upper world to the lower world and put other people on the path of growth and excellence. (Miandhi and Sharifi, 1397H,pp.162-163).

Islamic political thought in Iran, influenced by philosophical changes in the West in recent years, has also been forced to change its attitudes. Turning towards democratization and trying to create a convergence between democracy and Islam, is one of the results of philosophical changes in the Western world, which has also affected the Orient. But these efforts, rather than focusing on ontology, have been based on methods of integration between Islam and new ways of governance. The use of concepts such as council, allegiance and representation are among the methods that have been adopted to

create closeness between Islamic political thought and new political currents in the West.

If we look for the major political ideas presented in the Islamic discourse in recent centuries, we come across titles such as constitutional government, Islamic Republic, or religious democracy. Naini, in his book Tanbih Al-Ummah and Tanzih Al-Melleh, justifies the presence of people in politics based on the Shura (council) principle. According to Naini, mistakes are allowed in the majority vote and this permission is based on the life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (PBUH). Therefore, in Naini's political ontology, people are allowed to change their world. But it also points out that the Shura (council) must be within religious boundaries and not in the principle of Islamic rules (Feirahi, 1394H).

Mahdi Bazargan, as a main figure in the current of Liberal political Islam, has also used the metaphor of the Shura (council) to refer to the right of the people to determine their own destiny (Hosseini zadeh. 1385H,pp. 203-205). On the other hand, in Ali Shariati's point of view, the leadership of the nation is the responsibility of someone who is a superior. He neither needs people's approval nor is he answerable to them. But in this system, there is a need for the existence of a Shura (council) that can provide its popularity (Hosseini zadeh. 1385H, p.217). In the Velayat Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist) theory, to which the Islamic Republic and Religious Democracy are dependent, attention has been paid to democratic methods in governance. Imam Khomeini was able to promote the presence of political Islam in society and the role of people in Islamic politics by presenting the theory of Velayat Faqih.

In his analysis of Imam Khomeini's thought, Davood Feirahi refers to Imam Khomeini's style of governance to the metaphor of judgment and says, "The first assumption in the government based on the metaphor of judgment is to rely on a free, wise and faithful man" (Feirahi, 1394H, p. 497). He continues, "The second analytical element

in the government based on the metaphor of judgment is the society of the wise [a society comprised of wise people]" (Feirahi, 1394H, p. 498). And finally, he says, "It seems that Imam Khomeini's conception of society is based on a different understanding [from the point of view of the lack of perfection in society and the need for guardianship] ... which we mentioned as the society of the wise" (Feirahi, 1394H, p. 500). In describing the society of the wise, Feirahi says, "The society of the wise is not a limited and incomplete; rather, due to its maturity, wisdom and freedom, it not only enjoys many rights and powers, but also manages these rights directly or indirectly by representation" (Feirahi, 1394H, p. 502).

Despite paying attention to the political ontology in Imam Khomeini's thought, Feirahi considers the main problem of not referring to the principles of democracy in Islamic political thought in Iran to be the type of authoritarian government (Feirahi, 1394H, p. 508). A concept that focuses more on the mechanism of exercising power and does not reveal the ontological foundations as well.

Instead of being the strength of Islamic political thoughts in Iran in recent centuries, paying attention to governance is their weakness. Ali Ashraf Nazari in his book "The Ontological and Identity of Political Science in Iran" writes: [Political science in Iran] has a formal view of the ontology and it cannot reach an ontological awareness to itself and others. (Nazari. 1402H,p. 24). this can mean the failure of political thought from the perspective of ontology. 15 years before Nazari, Ahmad Vaezi tried to introduce Mulla Sadra's philosophy as a solution to answering ontological questions in an article titled "Sublime Wisdom and Compilation of Political Philosophy". In this article, he tried to prepare for formulating an Islamic political philosophy by presenting various questions about man in society. But the judgment of Ali Ashraf Nazari shows that this task has not been completed yet.

The predominance of the effort to gain power in Islamic political thought and the creation of Islamic governance institutions has led to the production of political thoughts about the form of governance. New questions before Islamic political thought in Iran are around questions such as how democratic is it? How important is public opinion? Is it populist or liberal? Is the separation of powers respected or not?

Attempts to answer these questions include the importance of dealing with the metaphors of the Shura, allegiance, judgment, representation, or common ownership, and basically overemphasis on the democratization of Islamic political thought. The concentration on the metaphor of Shura as a form of governance (Mir Ahmadi, 2014), is a sign of paying attention to the results instead of dealing with the foundations.

In the current Islamic political thought, the conflict is over the form of government and the degree of legitimacy of different parts of the government in gaining power, and it seems that no one wants to tell the true story, that is, the political ontology. Perhaps the issue of liberation from tyranny and colonialism is a reason for neglecting political ontology.

Afterall, for example and if a comparison is to be made between Islamic and modern political ontology, the best criterion is the criterion that Lawrence Friedman presented in his book entitled "Horizontal Society"(Friedman, 2008)

He distinguishes between two types of societies: vertical society and horizontal society. According to his opinion, vertical society is a society in which people have upstream dependencies in expressing their identity and define themselves within their framework, which are beyond individual identity. In the horizontal society, which are common in modern societies, these elements of identity have reached their lowest level, and because of this, the possibility of creating global societies has emerged. In this type of

society, human equality and freedom are more important than any kind of hierarchical authority.

Now **the main question** for Islamic political thought in Iran should be based on political ontology. Instead of addressing the type and method of government and the degree of councillorship or Allegiance of the government, the main questions should be focused on the Islamic Main Sources' point of view to Human and its world. If this happens, the following theories will be considered acceptable.

The main question should be based on the issue of what are the opinions of the Islamic Main Sources regarding the vertical and horizontal society? Like Al-Farabi and Mulla Sadra and those who believe that the society is incomplete and in need of guardianship, do they approve the vertical society, or do they recognize the equality of human beings based on concepts such as human dignity or human caliphate and accept its consequences?

Is there a need to make Islamic societies horizontal? Should the Islamic political thought go towards the horizontalization of the concepts of the society or is the vertical description of the society enough to answer the questions about the way of governance in the new world? Basically, what is the view of Islamic political ontology towards the Subject and its world?

In this article, an attempt was made to emphasize the importance of political ontology. Also, a place of dispute was suggested to deal with these issues. In the following writings, we will try to provide answers to the questions that were presented as a place of conflict in Islamic political ontology.

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