

Philosophical Theories of Good Governance and Efficiency in Public Administration: a study of the views of selected philosophers in Islamic and western philosophy on freedom, justice, equality, and fairness

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Good governance and efficiency have long been important and central topics in philosophical and political discussions around the world. This study examined philosophical theories related to good and efficient governance, as well as their importance in government structure and performance. Among Western philosophers Plato in his book considers good governance as a government based on justice and the common good, while Aristotle considers it based on good people and citizens. On the other hand, Islamic philosophers such as Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi consider justice to be the basis of government, and Al-Farabi likens good government to the utopian city. This study shows that philosophical concepts in good governance should go beyond abstract theories and be effectively implemented at executive levels. In particular, the emphasis on justice and fairness, freedom and authority, equality and equity in good governance are considered as fundamental pillars in resource management and fair distribution in order to achieve social welfare and democracy. Ultimately, good and efficient governance not only contributes to justice but also to strengthening the relationship between the government and citizens as well as promoting social capabilities to achieve a dynamic and stable government.

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Introduction

In today's world, the components of a successful society are established when there are values, philosophy and desirable government in it. These fundamental factors, which necessitate the acceptance of the principles of values, a deep examination of philosophy and the correct implementation of good governance practices, if properly managed, provide a clear way to progress and social welfare. Without a doubt, these provide a solid foundation for the growth, development and welfare of citizens in a good government. This is due to the fact that values serve as norms for the individuals and society, a guide to their actions and a collective behavioral pattern that determines what they consider important and desirable (Berebon, 2024, 118-119). Nowadays, good and efficient government is referred to as the hope of people to achieve justice, equality, freedom and fairness in different societies.

The issue of good governance and its effectiveness have always occupied the minds of various Western (e.g. Hegel, Plato, Aristotle) and Islamic (e.g. Avicenna, Al-Farabi, and Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi) philosophers, and they have always sought answers to these questions: What is good government? What are the components of a good and effective government? How can justice, freedom and equality be achieved in a society through good government? How should we govern in order to witness a democratic and just society? Plato believes that his ideal and good government should consist of a community rather than a single entity. In this interconnected society, people rely on each other to meet their needs and support each other. This is the same society in which everyone has a specific role (their specific talent that they are inherently skilled in), and they spend their talent on the improvement of the whole society (Brainerd, 2013, 9).

In Plato's political writings, two of his most significant works warrant mention: "The Republic" and "The Laws." The philosopher analyzes rights and the notion of justice in these works. In formulating his theory, Plato initiates by identifying the role of the individual within the state, examining the notion of justice, and conceptualizing an ideal and virtuous state grounded in justice. "The Laws" articulates Plato's contemplation on the objectives, underpinnings of public authority, methods for identifying effective legislation, and the establishment of the rulers' accountability within the state. According to Plato, the fundamental duty of the jurist is to seek goodness intertwined with justice, and the state's policies should focus on enhancing the welfare of both individuals and the broader community (Slusarenc & Pozneacova, 2021, 188).

The concept of efficiency in governments has attracted the attention of numerous researchers, scientists, and philosophers worldwide in the new century, as the structures and institutions of government in a variety of Western, Eastern, and Islamic societies are continuously influenced by rapid social, economic, and political changes. The concepts of efficiency as a management tool can be applied to governance processes within the framework of the good governance approach. This concept has been employed on numerous

occasions in the fields of philosophy, politics, economics, and society. Welfare economics is the term typically used to describe efficiency.

The concept of efficiency as proposed in neoclassical economics emphasizes allocative, productive, structural, and temporal efficiency ([Gunuboh, 2023, 110](#)). Meanwhile, good governance refers to the prevalence of efficiency in government, transparency in political decision-making, the rule of law, and justice. This type of governance is a complex management method through which people express and implement their demands ([Asadbak et al., 2023, 64](#)). In fact, good governance is everyone's dream. Philosophers believe that such a government can contribute to the development of human societies, and this development is manifested in the form of the rule of law, respect for human rights, political stability, and economic progress.

The lack of a strong and healthy national philosophy is the main challenge in realizing good governance. Consequently, it is crucial and imperative to investigate the connection between philosophy and good governance as a potential solution to the growth and prosperity of contemporary societies. Given that philosophy is recognized as the foundation of all legal systems. Systematic and meticulous planning should be employed to develop laws that address the issues that arise from various aspects of human life. In formulating these laws, efforts should be made to establish an appropriate value system based on good governance in society. The value that individuals pursue in how they live in society refers to what they consider as desirable or what they avoid it. Philosophy, as a way of life, helps shape and guides the behavior of individuals towards the realization of the ideals of good government ([Chikelo, 2018, 716-718](#)).

Philosophical views on governance, justice, freedom, and equality in both Western and Islamic traditions encompass a wide range of perspectives. In order to maintain the analytical focus and conceptual coherence of the paper, this study focused primarily on examining the views of two selected philosophers from each Western and Islamic tradition, and in addition, the views of another philosopher are briefly presented to enrich the theoretical framework of the study. These thinkers were selected based on their significant contributions to concepts such as freedom, justice, equality, and fairness in political and governmental structures. The main purpose of this study was not to provide a mere descriptive review, but to extract and compare the theoretical principles of good governance and efficiency in Western and Islamic political philosophy.

1. A Good Government

“Government refers to the set of traditions and institutions through which power and authority are enforced in a society or country. This concept includes the process of electing representatives in a system of government, monitoring their performance, and the succession of governments. It also pertains to the government's capacity to develop and effectively execute appropriate policies and adhere to the institutions that regulate the economic and social interactions between citizens and the government ([Lane, 2015, 14](#)). Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi considers good government to be a government with the

unanimous votes of a community that cooperates and shows respect for each other ([Sedghi Shamir, 2021, 80](#)). In his Opinions of the Virtuous, the second scholar Abu Nasr al-Farabi defined the virtuous government as: "A virtuous government is a government in which the true purpose of the community is to cooperate on matters that lead to the achievement and attainment of human happiness". He emphasizes that the government is virtuous as long as it has a wise ruler, and whenever the condition of wisdom is lost from the ruler, the description of virtue will not apply to this government and it is subject to decline. On the other hand, Plato considers the ultimate goal of the virtuous government to be the achievement of the good idea; He believes that "what a person in the rational world finally realizes after enduring endless suffering is the good idea. This element is the first source and the absolute ruler, and truth and wisdom are both its effects; a society that achieves that idea will be virtuous" ([Firouzjai & Taqizadeh Tabari, 2012, 71-75](#)). He considers politics as a means to achieve relatively good government in conditions where absolute good government is not available. Because in his opinion, "it is undoubtedly impossible to achieve the best absolute government, and therefore the good and wise legislator must recognize not only the same absolute good government but also the relative good government" ([Jovzi & Mollayousefi, 2022, 123-124](#)).

About good government, Aristotle also states: "The politician and legislator of the city are fully engaged in the administration of the city government, and the constitution of the government is a specific way of organizing the citizens of the city government" ([Miller, 1998, 4](#)). According to Aristotle, a good government is a government that serves the political community and protects the lives and property of the people by holding the resources of wealth and power ([Mulaee & Ram, 2025, 356](#)). He also believes that an ideal or good government is a regime in which the good man (one who acts justly) and the good citizen (one who respects the laws) are one and the same ([Giorgini, 2019, 1](#)).

The concept of good governance in Islamic and Western philosophical traditions is fundamentally intertwined with the question of justice, reason, and efficiency. In Western philosophy, Plato considers good governance to be based on reason and logic, the rule of the wise in the utopian city, a society that is virtue-centered and fulfills its duty in every way based on its natural nature.

Aristotle considers good governance to be based on the good man and citizen in a law-based and virtue-centered framework. Hegel considers good governance to be a governance based on rationality in which freedom is realized with just and legal institutions, but in Islamic philosophy, from the perspective of Al-Farabi, a government that is subject to Sharia and reason and the goal of its wise leader or prophet is to achieve felicity is considered a good government. Khwaja Nasir, with a more moral perspective, considers good governance to be based on cooperation and consensus in society. Ultimately, although there are differences in their epistemology and ontology, good governance in both traditions is based on reason, virtue, and rationality.

2. Efficiency

It can be argued that after legitimacy, the most important issue that a political system or government faces is the issue of efficiency; an issue that deals with the way of governing, how to respond to the various needs of society, and its stability and sustainability; and therefore, the political system is obligated to pay special attention to it. Efficiency has its own different definitions among different political and Islamic philosophers, and their understanding of efficiency differs depending on the intellectual foundation they have (Agharkh Mirabadi et al., 2022, 2). An efficient government is a government that provides the basis for the access of individuals to legitimate freedoms, and it is also a government that provides the basis for the realization of justice and equality in society (Jabbarnejad & Panahinasab, 2024, 179).

A government can be considered efficient when it satisfies the elements that are effective in its survival (the people) (Kalantari, 2014, 468). In the political philosophy of Ibn Sina, the efficiency of government in establishing the state is based on the sovereignty of the fair prophetic presidency and measures based on the laws of Sharia and on civil participation, so that on the one hand, it prevents the individuals of the society from the risk of deviation, oppression and injustice by using different mechanisms, and on the other hand, it establishes moderation and balance in the society by using mechanisms that instill justice, and thus, the necessary conditions are provided for the flourishing of the perfect talents of the individuals of the society and achievement of their hopes and dreams (Yousefirad, 2023a, 129).

While in the political philosophy of Khawaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, the efficiency of the government is that civil phenomena, especially individuals, groups and civil guilds, interact with each other in balance. That is, they are in harmony and alignment of interests with each other; because the beginning of their perfection and existential advancement is in avoiding conditions of excess and establishing balance in actions and behaviors (Yousefirad, 2023b, 84). From Farabi's perspective, efficiency in government is considered a necessity for people's socialization and their participation in various political and social issues of society (Pourahmad et al., 2012, 14).

From Aristotle's perspective, when a government recognizes the right of people to participate in holding positions and electing those who hold these positions to ensure the public interests of society, that government is an efficient government (Kholoosi, 2017, 76). Hegel believes that a government is efficient when it can freely bring together different social and political groups in the form of civil society so that they can take steps together with the government to strengthen and develop society (Rahin, 1992, 258).

In the Western tradition, Aristotle sees efficiency in a government that is based on virtue and consistent with the realities and general interests of society. In Hegel's view, efficient government is a means to realize the freedom of civil groups in society. However, in the Islamic tradition, Al-Farabi seeks efficiency in a utopian city where its ruler strives to lead the people to welfare and felicity. Ibn Sina emphasizes efficiency in government through rationality and Sharia. He sees politics as a way to implement moderation and order in

society. In general, Western philosophers emphasize political structure and freedom, while Islamic philosophers emphasize the connection of politics with Sharia, rationality, and spiritual ethics. However, in both philosophies, efficiency in good government is rooted not only in controlling society but also in the purposeful leadership of the people in society.

However, in colloquial language, "efficiency" usually refers to the concept that I can choose an effective and efficient means to achieve my goals instead of an inefficient one. More generally, I can act in an efficient or inefficient way in the way I allocate my limited resources. If we can measure the total utility or well-being of a society, like the principle of utilitarianism, we can say that a society is efficient when it uses effective institutions to achieve the greatest possible well-being in the society (Hardin, 2017, 1). Because ultimately, "if a government cannot provide a minimum level of social welfare for its citizens, it will likely face problems in the long term in establishing political and social authority and legitimacy within the system and society" (Claassen & Magalhães, 2021, 4).

3. Justice and Good Governance

In one of the ancient Greek texts, the question of what constitutes good governance is clarified. This text suggests that the honorable domain of mortal life is the morality of citizenship in a political state. Accordingly, political regimes that are inherently justifiable require a moral-political understanding. The sovereignty is founded on the law of justice to protect the mutual relations of citizens and to form a government based on justice and political order. In fact, the political order that best observes and communicates the rule of justice is good governance, which acts both as a self-limiting measure in a society and as a balancing measure by encouraging civic forces in a proper coordination to form good governance in society (Lambropoulos, 1997, 1).

What is justice? This question has preoccupied the minds of philosophers since ancient times. Various concepts and doctrines have been developed in order to form a correct understanding of justice. In general, the definition of justice in the traditional and modern eras differs from each other. In both periods, the concept of justice is related to the development of a just person. To this end, the concept of justice also paid attention to psychological and metaphysical aspects. The issue of individual justice, which is predicated on good ethics and virtue, was the primary focus in this context. The main idea was that since individuals constitute society, political philosophy should focus on cultivating the best personality traits in individuals. Plato was one of the Greek philosophers who presented this theory.

In his seminal work, "The Republic," he argued that justice is recognized as an individual virtue. In other words, members of a society should fulfill their duties to society based on their existential position in it. Plato focused on answering the question, "What kind of person should I be?" By acknowledging that a just person is one whose desires are governed by reason, Stephen Watt (1997) notes that in his account of the concept of justice, "Plato attempts to lead his audience to understand that a good life in a good society is a particular kind of action: from an action-oriented ethics in which the central question is 'What should

I do?" to an agent-oriented ethics in which the central question is 'What kind of person should I be?' This attempt at a paradigm shift was a reaction to the common assumption among contemporary philosophers such as Plato that justice involves doing things regardless to the moral character of the person doing them" (Edor, 2020, 180).

In Western philosophy, Plato considers justice to be one of the things that, if someone wants to be happy, must be desired both for its own sake and for the effects and results that are obtained from it. Aristotle believes that justice is a middle ground, not in the way that other virtues are middle grounds, but in the sense that justice is right in the true middle ground, which in distributive justice is in geometric proportion and in corrective justice in arithmetic proportion. Therefore, justice means the equality of individuals in society in human rights (Baharnezhad & Shamsoddini Motlagh, 2012, 84-91).

In Islamic philosophy, Ibn Sina gives three definitions of the virtue of justice, one of which is his own definition, and the other two are the same as those of Plato and Aristotle. In the first definition, he describes it as the transcendental state and form of the soul and the subjugation of the bodily powers to the rational soul. This is Ibn Sina's own definition. The second definition is considered to be the Platonic definition of justice, which is a comprehensive virtue of intellectual and moral virtues (i.e., wisdom, chastity, and courage). The last definition of Ibn Sina of the concept of justice is the Aristotelian definition, which is the virtue of the middle ground between oppression and tyranny (Atrak, 2014, 141). In Medina Utah, Al-Farabi believes that justice is not natural, but a rational and humane matter. He considers justice that is used by the strong to be illegitimate and strongly disapproves of the advice that the weak should obey the strong in society and be tolerant and patient. In his view, a good government should establish justice in all classes of society, not a specific class or group in society (Ghasemi et al., 2012, 99-100).

In the view of Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, justice is a way to refine morality and achieve human perfection. With a deep understanding of his time and despair of the development of corruption in the government and people, due to the lack of natural love, he seeks artificial and man-made morality to get closer to Medina Utah. In his view, man is the noblest of creatures and should not be used as a tool in the hands of rulers and treated with injustice (Nancy, 2019, 18). For Plato, justice is the fulfillment of duty in all classes of society. Aristotle considers it as balance in society and distinguishes between distributive and corrective justice. Al-Farabi considers justice to be the basis of utopia and its realization as a rational order in society. Ibn Sina considers justice to be the result of a balance between physical powers and a condition for achieving happiness. In general, justice in the view of Western and Islamic tradition is based on social order and human flourishing, although Islamic philosophy emphasizes more on teleology and rationality.

Justice is usually said to exist when a person receives what he or she deserves, that is, exactly those benefits and burdens that are due to the person's particular characteristics and circumstances. If someone says that a person has done a good, moral, or virtuous act, it does not necessarily mean that person has done a just act, because not all acts are necessarily just.

Tom, for example, did a generous and benevolent act by lending his coat to Mary, who was feeling cold, but it does not mean that his act was just. Similarly, if someone says that a person has done an immoral or wrong act, this does not mean that it is cruel or unjust! Tom may be deliberately rude to those around him and indifferent to the suffering of a poor man who he could easily have helped. However, although in both cases his behavior is immoral, he may at least be able to ease his conscience by justifying that he has not acted unjustly. The point is that justice is only part of morality, not all of it. Justice is therefore a characteristic of a good society. “Societies can be benevolent, efficient, prosperous, good, and just, but it is possible to be just without being specifically benevolent, efficient, prosperous, or good” (Buchanan & Mathieu, 1986, 11).

A theory of justice in the real world should clarify how justice is done. To this end, he insists that we do not need to know what a perfectly just arrangement is, for example, in order to examine and correct injustice. We can still accept that the failure to provide three meals a day to children is an injustice that can and should be remedied. Instead, what matters is how these situations can be made fairer, even if they are far from perfect. A task that transcendental and abstract theories are unable to do, and are not even useful in this regard, because the problem with these theories is that they do not give us the right information about how to compare two situations, nor do they provide a useful framework for how to do justice (Garza-Vázquez, 2021, 444-445). This statement is closely related to the idea of good governance, because good governance focuses on continuously correcting injustices and inequalities in a society, rather than focusing on achieving an ideal and abstract model.

4. Theories of Democracy and Political Participation

After the Renaissance, the 17th and 18th centuries came, in which some Western philosophers presented the concept of the "social contract" (Yahaya, 2020, 48). There is a famous example of the social contract that says that in the state of nature, mothers are the masters of their children. This example explains that “since we all, by our natural necessity, want to obtain those things and desires that are good for us, it is inconceivable that a man or woman, in the role of a parent, should give their life for another, so that he may grow strong and powerful in time, and in the process of gaining power and strength, may in the future make enemies. Therefore, in the state of nature, every woman who bears a child is both a mother and responsible for the care and welfare of her child.” This example indirectly refers to power and guardianship in human societies (Saetra, 2022, 8). This concept can be considered as the most logical theory about the democratic origin of governments and civil governments. According to this view, “democracy” means that the government is just like a social contract in the role of a mother who is responsible for ensuring the security, welfare and upbringing of her child; in this contract, a group of people agree to delegate power to a person or a willower candidate to take care of the public needs based on the consent of the people, because no one can live in isolation and must live in a group among people. This group needs a special personality who can speak on their behalf and take actions in the public interest (Yahaya, 2020, 49).

Democracy is also considered as an important principle that is implemented by citizens in social life. Political philosophers from Plato to Hegel have emphasized the role of the citizen as a builder of democracy and the consent of the governed people (Kiess, 2021, 76). A participatory understanding of democracy places direct citizen involvement at the center of democratic theory and suggests that democratic systems structured along these lines can lead to more legitimate and effective governance. Contrary to the dominant view of participation in democracy, and particularly in Western liberal democracy, which largely follows the charter of electoral politics, a wide range of different forms of participatory democracy, such as; formal or consultative participation, committee hearings, and participatory budgeting sessions, as well as "political" actions such as spontaneous protests, volunteering, or participation at the local and national decision-making levels, have been proposed that are effective in expanding democracy in contemporary societies (Dacombe & Parvin, 2021, 146).

Another type of democracy can be considered representative democracy, which is a form of government in which the people exercise their right to make political decisions through their elected representatives. In this way, the people elect their representatives in representative bodies. The essence of representative democracy lies in the fact that the will of the people is realized through representative institutions that are directly elected by the citizens themselves. The representative democracy focused mainly on how to ensure efficient government and respect for individual rights and freedoms, The essence of representative democracy lies in the realization of the will of the majority of citizens, through representative institutions that are directly elected by the people. Representative democracy has become essential for good governance, so that citizens make decisions more easily (Sadik Haxhiu & Alidemaj, 2021, 77).

Humans are created to participate in the world (Marshall, 2021, 39). Valuing the participation of children, adolescents, men, women, and the elderly in today's society based on who they are now gives us a more realistic understanding of "political participation" (Brisos Matos and Vieira, 2023, 5). Political participation can serve as "an essential tool for the individual to discover their true needs through intervention as a social being" (Ujomu & Olatunji, 2014, 121). Political participation is crucial in countries based on the collective will because it allows people to hold their elected representatives accountable and have a say in how their society is run (Alodat et al., 2023, 1).

From a philosophical perspective, political participation has formed an intellectual structure of a quadrilateral and organic unity that has equality as its premise, freedom as its limit, democracy as its principle, harmony as its goal, and its ultimate goal as the foundation of political civilization (Na, 2012, 1). In the Western tradition, Plato believes that democracy establishes equality among equals and unequals equally. Aristotle, with a more analytical approach, considers democracy to be the fruit of man, who is a political being and has a significant share in advisory positions and political activities. In his opinion, democracy belongs to a good and virtuous life of man (Fathi, 2009, 10; Mulgan, 1990, 195). While in

the Islamic tradition, Al-Farabi considers participation as a kind of unlimited freedom in which people are free to do whatever they want, and even people with various and incompatible desires, from noble to vile, gather in the utopian Medina to ensure their own good and well-being, Ibn Sina, emphasizing active reason and the hierarchical order of the universe and nature, focuses on the leader's competence in presiding over Medina and the moral education and training of citizens, not just on public participation in society (Jahaninasab et al., 2021, 117; Mahmoudi, 2000, 129).

As a result, although the term democracy is not used in the Islamic tradition, ideas such as public participation and justice in the ruling system are observed in the works of Islamic philosophers. In both Islamic and Western philosophy, the ideal form of good government requires justice, rationality, and social and political order, with the difference that in Western philosophy, more emphasis is placed on active political participation in an institutionalized form, and in Islamic philosophy, more emphasis is placed on the moral competences of the ruler, goodness, and justice.

According to political philosophers, the right to political participation is necessary for the political legitimacy of governments not only at the national level but also at the global level (Peter, 2017, 1). Political participation in democratic life is a positive thing and that inclusive participation in this area helps to strengthen democracy (Parvin & Saunders, 2018, 4).

The importance of paying attention to political participation in governments can be found in the famous story of the grasshopper and the ant. The ant worked hard all day in the summer and collected food for the winter season, while the grasshopper mocked the ant and told him to come and enjoy the sunshine and spend the summer singing and dancing with me, but the ant did not pay attention to his words and continued working until winter arrived, while the ant had stored food for the winter. The hungry grasshopper asks the ant for food, but the ant only tells him to spend the winter like summer by dancing and singing, I have no food for you. Without making any moral judgments about either, we can see that during the summer the grasshopper is more concerned about its immediate environment, while the ant is more concerned about the future.

From this story, we can infer that this contradiction between the grasshopper's immediate pleasure and the ant's concern for the future is similar to the challenge that many governments face in giving importance to political participation. Some governments, like the grasshopper, turn to issues related to political participation when urgent issues arise, such as elections and political crises. But governments that are more like the ant strive more for the future of political participation to create stability and sustainability in society, even if it does not bring immediate results (Knudsen & Christensen, 2021, 1-2).

However, a good government must be built on democracy and transparent and trustworthy political participation because participation in society is vital and is considered the foundation of basic human rights in societies, and a government that emphasizes the full participation of citizens in society can be a good government.

5. Challenges of good governance and efficiency in practice

5-1. Justice and fairness

There are some evidence and documentation that suggests it is necessary to differentiate between the terms justice and fairness. Justice means the adherence of an individual or individuals in society to rules and regulations, while "fairness" refers to the way an individual responds to the understanding and obeying of these rules and regulations in human society (Goldman & Cropanzano, 2014, 313).

Endless debates about justice and fairness indicate their long-standing value. However, the question is: 'Is justice synonymous with fairness, rights, entitlements, and or virtues? Can we consider all of them to be fair and just people and establish a justice-based system by citing human corruption or honor? Or does justice consist of putting each agent in his/her position and granting good or granting rights to those who deserve it? How can we really practice justice and fairness and commit the least amount of wrong and injustice? It seems that some philosophical perspectives in different traditions have provided a novel answer to this long-standing question. They consider justice to be the result of fairness in their view, justice means eliminating unfair privileges and creating a fundamental balance between the conflicting desires of humans within the framework of an institution and society.

In their theory, they paint a picture of a situation in which power and wealth are fairly and equitably distributed among the members of society. In such a society, each member should benefit fairly from the fruits of production, unless this fair benefit means deviating from the basic principle of justice. Initially, this should be possible for all individuals and then be in line with ensuring and increasing future productivity. Therefore, fair action is seen as a strategy to achieve the ultimate goal, which is justice (Nasri, 2003, 2).

What does the definition of justice ultimately entail? It can be argued that the definition of justice should be the result of reflections on the concept in order to serve as a starting point for discussion. In the case of concepts such as freedom, democracy and justice, the distinction between defining and defending them is extremely difficult and complex. Although these concepts have definitions that include assumptions of their own values, there is a need to defend these values in order to accept them as naturally and intentionally included in the definitions. However, this argument may affect the distinction between a concept, an image and an idea of justice. The concept of justice merely tells us what justice is about. And this can limit the scope of the discussion about justice (Sadurski, 1985, 9).

In pre-modern theories, the Sophists, as an anti-philosophical school of thought, expressed their central view of justice as follows: what is commonly considered just or unjust does not represent an objective, external truth or a natural reality, but is merely the result and reflection of social conventions and rituals. From the Sophists' perspective, nothing is absolutely and permanently true, and no principle or rule has absolute validity. Therefore, no particular lifestyle can be permanently and everywhere just and right, and there is no just principle that is absolutely and permanently valid. Some radical Sophists believe that the concept of justice only means following the laws existing in society. Since

these laws are established everywhere by and for the benefit of the system of domination, justice is in fact nothing more than protecting the interests of the powerful. In response to these views, ancient Greek philosophers developed theories about just and right action that laid the foundation for the philosophy of ethics, politics, and law.

The main discussion about the concept of justice began with Plato. His main goal was to clarify the shortcomings of the common understanding of justice. For example, against the definition of justice as adherence to moral obligations and the fulfillment of religion, he gives the example of someone who borrowed a weapon from a friend and that friend then stepped into the valley of madness; in this case, the conventional definition of justice will not be helpful. Plato's main issue in discussing justice as a fundamental virtue was that, contrary to the idea of the relativistic sophists, it is possible to recognize the absolute value of virtue and justice and that a just and virtuous person is someone who recognizes virtue and justice. Plato, like his teacher, accepts the objectivity and universality of the standard of justice and virtue. In his treatise "Republic", he begins the concept of justice with the question: "If someone were to obtain a famous mythical ring that makes a person invisible, would such a person still act justly?". Because the Sophists, as Plato's rivals, believed that the only reason for doing a just act is its inevitable consequences. In his argument, Plato considers the knowledge of the pattern of justice as a necessary condition for just action and believes that all partial just actions must be related to a common general pattern. Therefore, it is essential to know this pattern of justice ([Bashiriyyeh, 2003, 17-18](#)).

In contrast to the extreme ideas of the Sophists, Greek philosophers considered justice in governments to be a kind of social and internal order in the structure of society that is based on rationality and logic. This understanding of the fundamental concept of justice was later reflected in Western and Islamic philosophies. In his treatise "The Republic", Plato considers justice in government as a kind of internal and moral order that results from the harmony of the three faculties of reason, anger, and lust of man, which is equivalent to the harmony and establishment of balance between the three classes of society (rulers, guards, craftsmen). In Plato's view, justice is the harmony and balance of the elements alongside each other. In fact, it is justice that causes unity, friendship, balance, and harmony between the elements of society and the individual. Therefore, justice is a virtue that builds society and the individual. Al-Farabi, focusing on the utopia of Medina, in social relations, it is justice that leads society towards happiness. In the eyes of both philosophers, justice in government requires wise leadership (prophet or philosopher) that is linked to virtue ([Hajizadeh & Kalbasi Ashtari, 2014, 126-138](#)).

In Hegel's view, justice is a historical process that is realized by the state. In his view, justice is achieved by realizing the individual's freedom of choice and individual choices in society. Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, who was influenced by the Aristotelian tradition of ethics, believes that justice is that everyone should be in their own place and not exceed it in order to observe fairness. Unlike Hegel, who sees justice in the political structure of the state, Khwaja Nasir sees the root of justice in ethics ([Abbasi & Kheyri, 2022, 118-119; Akbari, 2018, 168-169](#)).

5-2. Freedom and Authority

Attacks on the power of authorities are usually made in the name of freedom or libertarianism. In these discussions, the concept of freedom is often vaguely or incorrectly defined. Also, authority is sometimes confused with power and is associated with physical force rather than with the ability to reason. To clarify the relationship between freedom and authority, we need to formulate the question of freedom more precisely in the light of our theory of authority. But before doing so, and as an introduction to the philosophical analysis, we may consider a key piece on freedom that is often cited in connection with our problem.

The struggle between freedom and authority is the most striking feature of those parts of history with which we are familiar, especially in ancient Greece, Rome, and England. However, in ancient times, it was a contest between subjects and the government. Rulers were usually conceived in a hostile position towards the people. Their power was seen as necessary and at the same time very dangerous. Therefore, the existential purpose of patriots was to establish limits to the power that the ruler must bear in order to exercise it over society. And those limits were the very meaning of freedom (Friedrich, 1972, 79).

Man can be "good and bad" in his actions, rational and irrational - this cannot be taken to mean that man is crazy: it is related to his freedom. Therefore, man's responsibility is born of this very concept of freedom, and there is no freedom without responsibility. The question is that: "Does man act rationally in his actions?". This question cannot be answered with a simple "yes": that some of his actions are rational is proven by the fact of our existence; our present situation proves that not all actions performed by man are rational. On the other hand, if man does not perish, there is no proof of man's rationality. Even the evolution of all creation, which undoubtedly moves from a stage of ease to a stage of suffering and hardship, cannot prove this rationality. However, it is not difficult to imagine that the human being is the only one capable of rational action among all living beings. Where human reason does not reach it, the law of choice prevails. The law of choice prevails wherever man acts irrationally. The human being, due to an "unreasonable desire for existence," is a being who enjoys a kind of superiority. He exhibits himself in every field, whether through strength, speed, protective coloration, or any other ways, except in the case of certain individuals (Drzymalla, 1954, 86).

Freedom is one of the main values in political philosophy. Freedom also figures strongly in normative discussions in ethics, politics, and law (Schmidt, 2022, 1). Human freedom is a central theme of modern political philosophy, and Hegel offers perhaps the most profound and systematic modern attempt to understand the state as the realization of human freedom (Franco, 2008, 1). The concept of freedom is a concept that Hegel considers to be of great importance. Indeed, he believes that it was the central concept in the history of humanity. He wrote: "The mind is free, and to actualize it, its essence is to achieve this superiority,

namely freedom – the mental effort of the world in the history of the world” ([Parkinson, 1972, 174](#)).

In the Introduction to the “Philosophy of Right (PR)”, Hegel claims that the will is a complex interaction between the finite and the infinite. “Infinite” means that every free being wants to show that he/she is not subject to nature or other objective conditions. Hegel uses “infinite” because from this perspective, being free means going beyond all limitations and conditions. Freedom, therefore, is the absolute possibility of abstraction, to be free from any determination in which we find ourselves or have placed it in our being; to escape from any content as a limitation. We are free because we can always be other than this and our conditions (social role, body, profession, etc.) are to some extent conditional ([Ayala, 2023, 624](#)). From Hegel’s perspective, the relationship between the individual and the government is characterized by freedom. He believes that it is in this state that freedom is first realized ([Osigwe, 2008, 1](#)).

For Hegel, the order of authority is the essence and condition for the realization of mental freedom. The end of law is not to abolish or restrict, but to preserve and expand freedom: for in all states of beings they are created to be capable of accepting laws, where there is no law, there is no freedom ([Cristi, 2005, 55](#)).

Freedom is one of the main issues of political philosophy in both Islamic and Western traditions, which has a special place, although Western and Islamic traditions have explained it within the framework of their own values. In the Islamic tradition, Ibn Sina considers freedom to be in the continuation of human life and survival. In his opinion, man is fundamentally civil by nature and needs freedom to meet his needs for life and survival. Al-Farabi, in Medina Utopia, explains freedom as follows: people are free and free in the government and do whatever they want, and there is no domination or obligation in it, and only that government is valuable that helps to increase their freedom and liberty. On the other hand, in the Western tradition, Plato emphasized that a free person is someone who, while being a citizen, abides by the law, meaning that a wise man is the source of lawmaking, and Aristotle considered man a free being, but he believed that extreme freedom is contrary to reason. He considered freedom as the source of human agency ([Sharifani, 2019, 65-72](#); [Hedayat Afza & Forouzian, 2020, 247](#)).

Al-Farabi sees people's freedom in collective justice and the utopia. Ibn Sina considers freedom in society to be a kind of natural nature that must be led through rationality. In the Western tradition, Plato considers freedom in society to be one of the capabilities of being a citizen, and Aristotle considers freedom to be the source of human agency. Therefore, both Islamic and Western philosophies believe that freedom in government will find meaning within the framework of social order and justice.

From a philosophical perspective, freedom of thought and speech is considered as a fundamental human right that has both an individual and a social dimension. This freedom is considered as “a necessary condition for the full development of the individual”, “a fundamental building block of every free and democratic society” and “necessary for every society” ([Howie, 2018, 12-13](#)). However, one of the basic human needs emphasized in

philosophy is freedom, which plays a fundamental role in the human social process. Human development means the expansion of human choices, which conveys the same concept of freedom. The development of human society is the most important factor in improving well-being, and freedom is considered an essential means to achieve it (Jafarzadeh & Beheshti, 2012, 323).

On the other hand, authority plays an important role in preserving the individuals' freedom. One of the common questions among philosophers on authority is: "How can authority be considered legitimate, while individual and group freedoms are not threatened by it?". Joseph Raz's normative theory of authority is the most influential narrative in current political and legal philosophy (Venezia, 2013, 1). This theory proposes two types of authority, one is theoretical authority and the other is practical authority. Theoretical authority is the competence of experts and those with more knowledge to state what is or is not in it, while practical authority is the discretion to guide the behavior of others. This authority can only be legitimate when it helps the individual to better achieve the right balance of individual freedom and is at the service of the individual. He considers this type of authority as the theory of the service of authority (Ehrenberg, 2011, 1-3).

5-3. Accountability and Responsibility

The concepts of "accountability" and "responsibility" are often confused with each other, and many dictionaries define one based on the other. These two concepts not only affect the functioning of governments, but also play an important role in public management and the application of governance models (McGrath & Whitty, 2018, 687). In recent decades, especially in tense government politics, the word "accountability" has become one of the main keywords for politicians. Without referring to a specific person, politicians on the left frequently state that "there is a need for accountability" for the actions of politicians on the right, and vice versa. However, they usually make a similar point, such as "this politician should be punished for failing in his duty." For this reason, the negative connotations of the word have become clearly visible. Today, accountability is seen more than ever as a threat to individuals who fail in their roles – "If you fail, then you will be held accountable!". So how can accountability be viewed in a more positive light? This perspective emphasizes the principle that accountability relationships can help individuals grow and develop, rather than threaten to harm them (Torrance, 2021, 1).

In philosophy, responsibility is expressed as: We are responsible for what we could or could not prevent, and this is part of our duty to the world: not only to the society to which we belong, but to all of humanity. Basically, no government wants to accept the responsibilities, but wants to run away from them. The arguments used to justify moral evasion of responsibility are many. We have people who, because of their inability to resist any kind of financial temptation, whether bribes or special privileges, are ready to ignore their moral responsibility towards society. In fact, governments must be held accountable for their responsibilities. The indifference of governments to their responsibilities is an unforgivable injustice in human history (Sánchez Muñoz, 2009, 1-6). The concept of "self"

responsibility means the accountability of an individual or group for actions that have been taken in the past or are to be taken in the future (Maier, 2018, 27). In responsibility, “our sense of responsibility towards ourselves and others must be considered as a moral responsibility, because this feeling is an inseparable part of human sociality” (Maciej Juzaszek, 2021, 18).

According to the concept of responsibility, individuals should be held accountable for the impacts they have on others. Also, to create effective accountability relationships, it is essential to have clear roles and a shared understanding of expectations; that is, to whom each person is accountable, for what responsibility, and for what purpose or benefit (Witvliet et al., 2022, 661). In the Islamic tradition, Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, in his work on Nasirian ethics, does not consider the political responsibility of rulers to be separate from ethics. He believes that the ruler must have inherent justice and moral virtue in taking responsibility (Abtahi, 2019, 150–157). In the views of the people of Medina, al-Farabi considers the head of Medina and the ruler to be someone who has complete reason, the quality of persuasion, and the quality of imagination so that the ruler is accountable to reason and the law in the event of people's deviation from the right. (Modarresi, 2012, 78).

In the Western tradition, Plato, in his work on the Republic, emphasizes that in the ruling class, regardless of courage, they must use political wisdom to serve others and not for personal gain. In his works, he considers the philosopher king as synonymous with moral responsibility and accountability, and in his ideal city, he considers responsibility as an inherent duty for rulers. (Ahmadvand & Bordbar, 2016, 19; Maleki & Mostafavi, 2015, 159) In both Western and Islamic traditions, responsibility and accountability are not necessarily an institutional or political mechanism, but rather a moral principle. In the Western tradition, collective virtue and social accountability are emphasized. In Islamic philosophy, responsibility and accountability of governance originate from reason, ethics, and Sharia. Therefore, in the view of both Western and Islamic traditions, good governance without accepting responsibility and accountability will lack legitimacy. Finally, the moral goal of responsibility is “to live well with others in just and accountable institutions” (Tholen, 2018, 27).

5-4. Equality and Equity

The terms “equality” and “equity” are widely confused. Despite phonetic similarities and linguistic associations, the two concepts are quite different. Equality refers to the distribution of income or wealth, which is essentially a matter of fact and objective fact, while equity refers to an equal distribution, which is more concerned with moral and subjective judgments. This discussion is intended to avoid additional issues such as the moral superiority of the poor over the rich or the effect of unfair economic distribution on economic stagnation (Bronfenbrenner, 1973, 9). So what is the difference between equality and equity? Equity refers to a measurement of quantity—such as the same amount of two different things. In other words, as the dictionary puts it, it is a comparison between two things that are exactly the same: of equal importance, deserving of equal treatment (Keilman, 2024, 1).

The law of nature dictates that every human being should treat others equally in the distribution of rights (Corbin, 2022, 523). “Equality” can be understood as providing fair and equal treatment to all individuals (Thomson & Goberman-Hill, 2024, 4). In the Western tradition, Plato was the first to speak of equality. In his treatise “The Republic”, he considered men and women equal and emphasized the proportionality of each individual's natural position in the social structure of society. In Plato's view, among the aristocracy or the wise, men and women enjoy equal rights and conditions. He believed that equality and internal social order are achieved when each individual has a duty commensurate with his or her capabilities.

Although Aristotle accepted the differences in human societies, he saw equality in distributive justice in such a way that opportunities, responsibilities, and rewards are proportionate and not equal (Sanei, 2003, 2-11). On the other hand, the Islamic philosopher Al-Farabi, with the views of the utopia's people, although he presents a hierarchical social structure led by the first head, a prophet or a sage, considers its goal to be the collective achievement of equality in true happiness by humans in which humans are superior to other beings in reason, dignity, and wisdom (Mosavi & Akhavan, 2022, 238-239). In his Nasirian Ethics, Khawaja Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, discussed the balance between justice and fairness and believes that the difference between subjects and the powerful should not prevent the observance of equality and justice in responsibilities because it is necessary to observe this requirement in order to maintain the consistency and cohesion of society (Razawī, 2011, 108).

Although in Western traditions, equality means a fair distribution of resources and responsibilities, in Islamic tradition, equality is inherent in human nature and its ultimate goal is happiness and felicity. These two traditions complement each other in the discussion of equality in good governance. On the other hand, in equality, Western philosophers define equality as “every individual who is considered morally worthy should have his interests considered equally.” He states that there are generally two options for assessing the interests of the parties that should be considered equally: one is equal treatment (for example, in the allocation of resources or taxation) and the other is equality in society (for example, when individuals interact with each other or with society as a whole). However, apart from this formal attention to equality, the material aspect of having equal opportunities to realize these claims is also important. In conditions of extreme poverty, for example, a child's ownership of a bicycle can be a determining factor in their education, as having a bicycle ensures that the child can get to school, even if the school is far away (Buchholtz et al., 2020, 16). However, a good government is one in which the ruler is able to apply equality and equity equally to all social rich and poor classes of the society.

6. Global and Transnational Challenges of Good Governance

A significant difficulty confronting governments, particularly in the realm of effective governance in the 21st century, is climate change, including global warming and its resultant environmental changes. These changes, which have become more intense in countries

around the world over the past 65 years, are considered as a complex intergovernmental issue at the international level, the effects of which on various ecological, environmental, socio-political and socio-economic components of human societies are undeniable (Abbass et al., 2022, 42540).

In the context of the challenge of climate change, profit-oriented theorists of recent centuries emphasized the importance of individual rights and justice within a utilitarian framework by proposing utilitarianism. They believed that utilitarianism is the principle of utility that maximizes human happiness and minimizes their suffering. They were of the opinion that governments should judge the repercussions of their actions on climate change, as utilitarianism offers a moral justification for such actions, with the objective of preventing widespread damage and promoting social welfare. Utilitarianism supports policies and practices that aim to promote the collective benefits, making it a powerful tool for guiding climate change policies and ethical decision-making in this area. On the other hand, western theorists propose intergenerational justice in climate change, which focuses on the moral obligations of current generations to future generations. They believe that climate change actions by governments should not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs. They believe that intergenerational justice advocates for sustainable practices and policies that ensure the long-term health and sustainability of the planet, emphasizing the rights and needs of future generations (Ike, 2024, 32).

The second national and transnational challenge raised in good governance is refugee migration. Regarding refugee migration, we can point to an ideal and non-ideal world. Philosophers believe that good governments can idealize the poorest societies in the world by paying money to poor governments and prevent the forced migration of people from those societies, while we have bad and corrupt governments in the world whose goal is to impoverish global societies and shape them into non-ideal worlds that will cause migration of people from those societies. Therefore, addressing the issue of refugee migration is one of the moral duties of governments. Also, we are morally obligated to help not only the current victims of poverty but also refugees and migrants from different societies. On the other hand, the philosophy offers a convincing example regarding refugees: If I pass by a shallow pond and see a migrant child drowning in it, I should go into the water and pull the child out. This may get my clothes dirty, but it is nothing compared to the death of a child, because the death of a child is painful and very bad. With this example, it can be said that governments that they must assume their moral duty towards refugees because it is a human and humanitarian duty (Cunliffe, 2017, 28-33).

Therefore, the views reinforce the notion that the world has entered a new era of refugee migration due to the actions of governments, characterized by an intensification of the movement of the poor and refugees as a result of war, oppression and injustice, climate change and various forms of environmental degradation. Refugee migration as a result of “government injustice” has been described as “one of the greatest humanitarian challenges of the 21st century” in good governance (Fransen & Haas, 2021, 101). The third national and supranational challenge to good governance is economic and social inequality. When

we ask about fairness and justice or economic and social inequalities, we should first turn to political philosophers rather than economists for answers! Because, economists believe that we need to be aware of any economic determinism in relation to inequality in wealth and income. The history of the distribution of wealth and income has been deeply political. From the philosophers' perspective, there are different types of inequalities among humans. A large and related division is between natural or inherent inequalities in intelligence, health and strength, beauty, and in abilities and talents in general. And social inequalities in political power, rights and privileges, economic inequality in income and wealth, in the cultural level of the family, the income class of society and access to education ([Santas, 2018, 3-5](#)).

Meanwhile, Hegel believes that governments should not use the natural and inherent inequalities of humans as a basis for creating injustice in the social and economic equality of society. Because in Hegel's view, the development of natural and inherent skills depends on the socio-economic status of the family: "A poor man cannot teach his children any skills or knowledge," while "a rich man can teach his children skills and knowledge." He adds that inequality in individual abilities and inherited assets will fuel socio-economic inequality in society. Hegel emphasizes that natural and inherent inequalities in families are not a problem in terms of justice. Because, the skills and abilities of individuals are considered as important personal characteristics, and the policies of a government are unable to eliminate these differences in the inherent ability of families in implementing social and economic equality in society. If a government favors the natural abilities of a rich family over a poor family, which creates social and economic inequality, that government has in fact significantly violated civil rights, which is unacceptable within the framework of modern constitutional law ([Folkerts, 2025, 5-7](#)).

Conclusion

In this study, we first addressed the basic concepts of good governance and efficiency from a philosophical perspective, and then analyzed the challenges of good governance in practice and its national and transnational challenges. In light of the current challenges and issues that human societies are encountering, it is possible for politicians and government officials to continuously enhance and reform injustice in government processes by comprehending the philosophical framework of the concepts of good governance and efficiency. This can be achieved by using the ethical and legal principles of Western philosophers such as Hegel, Plato, and Aristotle, as well as Islamic philosophers such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Khawaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, in order to establish a good and efficient government. In the meantime, the importance of freedom, fairness, justice, equality, and accountability in good government cannot be ignored. And these principles need to be meaningfully, purposefully, and effectively included in government policies and decisions so that we can witness the implementation of civil rights, social and economic equality, and ultimately democracy in that government.

A review of the various theories of Western political philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato shows that a good government does not only mean efficiency and optimal use of resources, but also a government based on justice and fairness in the entire society. Plato considers a good government to be a government of more than one person who helps each other in achieving goals and needs, and Aristotle considers a good government to be a government in which a good person and a good citizen are one.

While Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi, and Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi consider a good government to be based on justice and fairness so that the government prevents injustice, oppression, and inequality in society. These words are still considered a model for good and efficient government in contemporary societies today, but in practice, many challenges such as fairness, freedom and authority, equality and equity, and ultimately responsibility prevent the realization of these important goals. Because a good government must be the basis for the realization of freedom, as the German philosopher Hegel says: the relationship between the individual and the government is determined by freedom. Also, a good government must implement fairness and justice, as Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi says, good governance is a government in which power and wealth are distributed appropriately among the members of society. On the other hand, an ideal and good government must be accountable for its actions in all areas of its society, because a just and good ruler, even if he fails in his policies, must be accountable in order to gain the trust of the people and their participation in the form of democracy.

However, beyond the challenges we have mentioned, there are also challenges at the national and transnational levels in good governance that must be addressed in practice. The first challenge is climate change, which governments should be morally judged for the actions they take in this regard, because the government should not take actions that jeopardize intergenerational justice in the present and future generations, because climate change actions can threaten future generations in achieving their goals and desires. The second challenge is refugee migration. A good government should help poor communities in the form of funds so that those communities can take on an ideal form in the world and be saved from poverty and displacement, and this is one of the human and humanitarian duties of governments towards immigrants. The last challenge is social and economic inequality in governments.

As Hegel says, in a good government, the natural and inherent inequalities of human societies should not be used as a basis for creating injustice in social and economic equality in society because no person, poor or rich, is superior to each other and both have equal and fair rights, and this is very beautiful if a government implements it. Ultimately, the realization of all these goals requires accountability and responsibility in government structures, strengthening democratic popular institutions, and granting freedom to citizens to actively participate in political and social issues. Given the various challenges on the path to good government, including fairness and justice, freedom and authority, responsibility and accountability, and ultimately social and economic inequality, it is essential and important for governments to seek to create and devise solutions to address these challenges.

Because, it is only under such circumstances that good and efficient governance is truly realized and the public and collective interest is provided in the best possible way.

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