NIZAM AL-MULK
AND
ISLAMIC POLITICAL THEORY

EROL SULEYMAN GUNDUZ

I.S.T.A.C.

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With Reference to Machiavelli ; and Normativism and
Pragmatism as Philosophico - Political Notions

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*Submitted to I. S. T. A. C. in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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Abbreviations

ed.   : edited

edt.   : edition

esp. : especially

int.   : international

IC   : Islamic Culture

philos.: philosopy

repr.   : reprinted, reproduction

th.   : thesis

tr.   : translated, translation

tur.   : Turkish

Uni.   : University

unpub.: unpublished

vol.   : volume

yay   : yayınları

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

Nizâm al-Mulk and Machiavelli are two famous names in the
political histories of Islamic Civilization and Western
Civilization, respectively. In a sense their fame counts to
a large extent for the whole past of world political history
too, since only these two religio-social systems contended
for absolute universal dominance, thus making their leaders
universal figures in many fields. This is not to deny the
somewhat universal influences of Buddhism and Hinduism and
other contenders,but surely theirs' were more or less
limited to certain racial,linguistic and cultural zones.

Nizâm al-Mulk lived in the 11th century C.E. His
lifetime, especially his years in office witnessed the
heyday of a strong Muslim dynasty namely the Seljuks as
their sway extended from Central Asia to Syria and the
eastern parts of Asia Minor. They introduced cardinal
political traditions and social patterns to have a lasting
influence in the Islamic world in the centuries to come.

He was the nominated head of the bureaucracy and chief
liaison officer between the palace and the rest, including
the peoples and the local political powers of the countries
that were loyal to the Seljuk throne. Therefore in his
practical politics as well as in his writings perhaps it is
possible to find an undistorted reflection regarding the
actual life and practices of the common folk and also the
palace attendants; the ideological activities,currents and
movements; the prevailing social norms; the political assets

**and values; as well as the scholarly and scientific spirit
of the times which are under scrutiny.**

**Such expectations are valid in the case of Machiavelli
too. He also seems a good reflection point of the 15th and
16th centuries Italian social, political, religious and
intellectual environment. He was a representative of a rival
civilization. This rivalry originally stemming from two
fundamentally opposed faiths, namely Islam and Christianity,
disclosed itself in practical, theoretical and institutional
levels.**

**These two rival systems have many times confronted each
other, and sometimes taken their own route in different
enterprises. For instance while the *sûfî* current established
itself in the Islamic world as a major intellectual school
especially after the 11th century, sometimes fighting its
battles with the philosophers per se, on the other hand
Reformation in the 16th century Europe was finalized in
serious doctrinal and institutional modifications within and
outside the established Church.**

**Nonetheless since both religions were constantly
contending for universal civilizational dominance, the
representatives of these great organizations have always
tried to introduce new intellectual and tactical
interpretations of their respective doctrines to be able to
fully assert the supremacy of their political, intellectual
and cultural orders.**

**The political and other bodies which usually carry out
the implementation of faith, intellectual conviction and
purposes which they often claim as their basis and**

motivating agents, are not as pure as those doctrinal
teachings. This shortcoming is often due to the external
restraints imposed upon them during their operations.

Such an impurity brings an inquiry concerning to what
degree the political, social and intellectual institutions
are obeying the norms and principles that they lay forward
in their drafts.

For a healthy realization of such an inquiry especially
pertaining to the respective periods and personalities of
Nizâm al-Mulk and Machiavelli, I have employed a
philosophical tool, namely Pragmatism.

Though its name was coined only in modern times,
neverthless Pragmatism had implications stretching well back
to the distant past. Starting from mere practicality it
extends to the discussion of ethics, of epistemology, of
social norms and humanitarian values, and the methodology of
philosophy in general.

First I shall discuss here the purpose and general plan
of this thesis in the first part of the First chapter and
then continue elaborating on the terms of Pragmatism and
Normativism in their philosophical context and as related
with theoretical and practical politics. Such an elaboration
seems handy especially from the point of a clear and useful
application of these terms in the analyses of both Nizâm al-
Mulk's and Machiavelli's theoretical approaches and
practical policies.

In chapter II, I have given details regarding the life of
Nizâm al-Mulk. The various stages in his life have been
highlighted in the analysis of his reformative character

during his political career.His major work Siyâsat-nâma has also been dealt with in this chapter. Siyâsat-nâma has been **analyzed from the point of its method of composition,style and the ideas contained.**

In **chapter III, the political thought of** Nizâm al-Mulk **has been elaborated. In this** chapter I have attempted a **comparative analysis between Nizâm al-Mulk's stand and that of Machiavelli at the level of ideas as the latter has been considered a turning point in Western political history and tradition as far as Pragmatist philosophies are concerned.**

In chapter IV, I have discussed Nizâm al-Mulk from another point of view, namely as a scholar who has a political theory in his mind together with the means to practically employ it. Perhaps his profile can be taken as one of the highly successful examples in the history of Islam which showed us the capability of the Muslim scholar in coping with his contemporary environment, producing handy and satisfactory solutions to the challenging problems of the day and therefore proving that the Muslim scholar does not drown in his speculative scruples, on the contrary he leads both his community and humanity at large through many unforeseeable hardships resulting from the weakness in and shortcomings of the interpretations of the faith.

This thesis attempts to show how practical politics is essentially related to a strong background of philosophy that though invisible, actually guides the former.

The philosophy which constitutes the dynamic basis of a

certain polity sometimes claims its origin in a major revelation, and at other times and locations has been framed in the minds of certain major system philosophers.

Whether ultimately based on revelation or a sort of anthropocentric epistemology, or an amalgamation of both, any political organization represents and is in turn represented by a comprehensive world-view. In congruity with that specific world-view the individual members of the political organization and the organization itself develop a self-perception that is unique for themselves.For instance in the modern Malaysian political culture a Malay has a self-perception of sharing well-known Malay customs and traditicns together with the Malay language.Besides he or she is a member of the larger Muslim Community worldwide.

Usually all the members of the society, including their elite totally or partially express themselves in the defined boundaries of that self-perception. For the phenomenon that every political system ultimately expresses itself in the context of a certain world-view and develops its unique self perception that is congruent to that world-view there are various strong causes, such as the feeling of security,the consciousness of self-identity, to distinguish itself from the other and so on.

Like individuals, systems too, feel the need of security and they try to obtain that security on epistemological. cultural, civilizational and as well as tactical grounds.

Therefore when we study a certain period of time or locus, or person, we should try to understand the subject of the study primarily in terms of the epistemologic³¹

civilizational context in which it was or is operating.For instance for a healthy analysis of what is going on today in Eastern Europe we need to refer to the ethnic, religious, and institutional background of the region, for the reality is that their past greatly influences the socio-politic and psycho-politic patterns of behaviour and decision-making processes of the peoples of a certain region.

Such considerations were in place when I started to study Nizâm al-Mulk and his period, too. Nizâm al-Mulk's multi-faceted career displayed many features. He was a statesman,he was a thinker, and he was a practical diplomat. He was neither a king, nor a philosopher per se, yet his profile, it might be argued, recalls the image introduced by Plato's classic philosopher-king model[1]

There are enough reasons to take Nizâm al-Mulk as a representative figure of such a model. In his proposals and advices to the Sultan in the matters of administration, education, foreign policy and in other fields he always followed a prescriptivist line. In his formulations the doctrinal aspect of Islam is often visible, yet in his proposals he does not appear as an absolutist jurist, but he tries to develop new ideas and solutions for the glory of Islam and welfare of the Muslim Ummah.

The ethical norms in general, and the doctrinal values of Islam in particular were among the foremost priorities of Nizâm al-Mulk, thus emerging as a strong supporter of normative politics. His normativism was also reflected in

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[1] Plato. *The Republic, Great Books of the Western World,* ed. in chief: Mortimer J. Adler, vol.6, U.S.A., reprint 1990, Book V (473) p. 369 and Book VII (521) p. 391.

his social and economic measures and proposals.Although it is argued on some grounds by some students of history and politics, such as Lambton[2], that during the historical process Muslim practitioners of politics and the institutions led by them from time to time diverged significantly from Islamic norms, that is not our primary concern here. We rather intend to highlight the mainstream thought and practise in Islamic politics as represented by Nizâm al-Mulk.

A theoretical discussion around the concepts of Pragmatism and Normativism which will constitute the second part of the First chapter, is in place from the point of crystallizing the actual standings of Nizâm al-Mulk and that of Machiavelli who contrasts with the former both in political history, and in the presentation of this thesis.

An 11th century Nizâm al-Mulk, a 15th century Machiavelli, and the philosophical concept Pragmatism , both as a modern coinage and with its historical process, have all been discussed together, since as argued by the Pragmatist philosophers of the 19th and 20th centuries the concept of Pragmatism itself is immanent in the works of past reknowned philosophers including Aristotle.[3] Discussing political thinkers and practitioners according to such a criterion would prove productive and useful.

[2] see: A. K. S. Lambton. *Theory and Practise in Medieval Persian Goverment* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1980), preface.
[3] Especially in the Posterior Analytics, Physics and On the Soul the roots of Aristotelian Empiricism that which contributed to the emergence of the Pragmatic concept can be traced. See: Richard Mc Keon. *Introduction to Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1947).

CHAPTER I

PRAGMATISM AND NORMATIVISM

I.I. Pragmatism:

Pragmatism is a philosophical concept with reflections in the various fields of life and science.

Not as philosophical schools of thought, but perhaps as deeply impenetrated currents and practices in the structures of political organizations and in the persons who were handling them the pragmatic and normative approaches have always been on the scene since the very historical past.

Besides the modern fathers and exponents of Pragmatism as a leading philosophical thought especially in the 19th century, its foundations have been established from Aristotle onward, and still further elaborated by the philosophers of the European middle ages.

In its 19th century form, Pragmatism appeared as a result of a general discontent against the extremism of the Idealist school of thought which was rather a closed system and a little bit too squeamish in its intellectual tastes. Idealism mostly interpreted reality in abstract and fixed

intellectual categories.[4] However the new and significant developments in the natural sciences and logical studies and also a more dynamic social and business environment helped prepare a ground which was seriously critical towards the fixed and often abstract intellectual categories.

Pragmatism as a philosophical notion broadly indicates the workability, usefulness and practicality of ideas, policies, or any kind of suggestions as criteria of their merit, and claims to attention.

Pragmatism emerged more as a method for clarifying concepts than a philosophic doctrine. It stressed the importance of human action and purpose in experience, knowledge, and meaning. Hence, if one can define accurately all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept would imply, one will have therein a complete definition of that concept.

Etymologically the word pragmatism derived from the Greek root "action", or "affair". The words "practise", and "practical" also come from the same root. In Kant's employment of the term, in its German version "pragmatisch" suggests the experimental, empirical, and purposive thought "based on and applying to experience". The Greek historian Polybius, who died in 118 B.C., called his writings "pragmatic". By this he meant that he intended in his writings to be instructive and useful to his readers.

As a further explication of the meanings of "Pragmatism" we can cite Hegel who considered the pragmatic approach in

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[4] H.B. Acton. "Idealism" , *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. in chief: Paul Edwards, vol. 3-4 (U.S.A. : Macmillan , 1972,) , 110-118.

historiography, that is to say the intention to be
instructive and useful in historical writings,as the second
kind of reflective history.

In the philosophy of education, the notion and
understanding that emerge from the application of concepts
to directly experienced subject matters has been called
"pragmatic".[5]

In the general theory of language , i.e. semiotics, that
part that studies the relation of the user to the words or
other signs that he uses is called pragmatics and this part
is distinct from syntax and semantics.

There were two major , and several other minor influences
on the early formation of Pragmatism: One was the tradition
of British Empiricism; and the other one came from the
Continent proper and especially from modern German
philosophy. The representatives of the former influence,
such as John Stuart Mill, Alexander Bain, and John Venn had
emphasized the role of experience in the genesis of
knowledge. They analysed belief as being intimately tied in
with action, and indeed as definable in terms of one's
disposition and motive to act.[6]

Essentially, Pragmatism was diametrically opposed to
Idealism,yet the 18th century Irish bishop-cum-philosopher
George Berkeley, who defended Empirical Idealism, was
considered later by the modern father of Pragmatism Peirce
as the introducer of Pragmatism. Berkeley held that all
reality reduces itself to human thought but that the

[5] H.S.T. "Pragmatism" . *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol.25, 645.
[6] Ibid., 646-7.

existence of human mind argues the existence of a universal mind , a God. Neverthless the alleged link between the human mind and that of the universal one has never been established satisfactorily neither by Berkeley himself, nor any other philosopher of the experimentalist school after him. In the theory of knowledge as presented by Berkeley, knowledge has a practical and inferential nature, and sensations are taken as signs of future experience, in other words they predict future experience.[7]

The second major influence on the early formation of Pragmatism came from German philosophy and especially that of Kant. Kant distinguished the "practical" relating to the will and action, from "pragmatic" relating to the consequences. His influence especially was through his analysis of the purposive character of belief and of the roles of will and desire in forming belief and his doctrine of "regulative ideas" such as God or the Soul, which guide the understanding in achieving systematic completeness and unity of knowledge.[8] Another instrument for Continental influence was Romantic Idealists for whom all reason was "practical" in expanding and enriching human experience. Hegel was also influential with his historical and social conception of changing and developing subject matters.[9]

Other than the British and Continental influences on the formation of Pragmatism, we must consider the American social experience in the 19th century, too. The rapid

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[7] H.B. Acton. "Berkeley , George". *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol.1-2, 295-303.

[8] Lewis White Beck. " German Philosophy" , *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3-4, 291-309.

[9] Ibid., 303-304.

expansion of trade and industry and together with this a popular optimism with a Puritanical root, which holds that hard work and virtue are bound to be rewarded, were among the major elements of the American social experience. Both the uncertainities of fast changing life conditions, and rapidly expanding economy weakened the prevailing Calvinistic belief in a predestined future and encouraged the rise of an highly innovative mood. This new sense dominated the discussions of the "Metaphysical Club" in the 1870's in Cambridge or Massachusetts. Pragmatism first received its philosophical expression in the discussions of this club.[10]

Pragmatism, with its British and German background emerged as American philosophy in the 20th century. It exerted a strong impact on various and diverse fields such as social and political theory, education, law, religion and art.[11] A thorough analysis of this philosophical current reveals that various aspects of it have been developed by various philosophers and with varying degrees of emphasis. Hence, some of the essential features of Pragmatism are:

A. Usually philosophers defined truth in terms of a belief's "coherence" within a pattern of other beliefs, or as the "correspondence" between a proposition and an actual state of affairs whereas Pragmatism generally held that truth, like meaning, is to be found in the process of verification. Peirce worded this formula as the "limit towards which endless investigation would tend to bring

[10] Cornel West. *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (G. B. , Macmillan, 1989). 42.
[11] see: H.S. Thayer. " Pragmatism" , *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* vol. 5, 430-31.

scientific belief". This formula may amount to saying that truth is the verification of a proposition, or the successful working of an idea which later received much criticism from opponents, the most important of whom was Russell. Another exponent of Pragmatism, John **Dewey,** declared truth as belief warranted by inquiry.

B. Stemming from their theory of truth Pragmatists have interpreted ideas as instruments and plans of action. Pragmatist theory emphasized the functional character of ideas, in contrast to the conception of ideas as images and copies of impressions, or of external objects. Ideas might be compared to tools in the sense that whether they are efficient, useful, and valuable or not. Efficiency is measured by the significance of the role that they play in contributing to the successful direction of behaviour.

C. In a sense Pragmatism is a continuation of critical Empiricism. Pragmatism too, insisted on emphasizing the priority of actual experience over fixed principles and a priori reasoning in critical investigation. According to one of the most dramatic exponents of Pragmatism, William James, Pragmatism is "turning away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. On the other hand it is a way of turning towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action... .It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against ... dogma, artificiality, and the pretence of finality in truth ".[12]

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[12] see: W. James. Pragmatism, The Great Books of the Western World. vol. 55. 1-84.

D. **Pragmatism judges any idea, belief, or proposition by its sensible objects, i.e. from the results of the use, application, or entertainment of a particular notion. If a proposition leads to no definite theoretical or practical consequences it is said to be pragmatically meaningless. Therefore there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practise. Man's interpretations of reality too, are motivated and justified by considerations of efficacy and utility in serving his interests and needs. The molding of language and theorizing are also subject to the critical objective of maximum usefulness according to man's various aims.**

E. Pragmatism did not bother much with deeper analysis of the nature of reality, instead it emphasized the practical function of knowledge as an instrument for adapting to reality and controlling it. For Pragmatists existence is fundamentally concerned with action, thus making change an imminent feature of life. Only in action, alongside a spate of confrontations and subsequent choices man's being realized and discovered. Pragmatism has called attention to the ways in which change can be directed for individual and social benefit. Consequently the moral and metaphysical doctrines which relegate change and action to the lowest level in the hierarchy of values were sharply criticized.

Now I shall give the cardinal views of some of the leading Pragmatists briefly:

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914): Peirce criticized Cartesian epistemology which represented knowledge as an

edifice built on a foundation of indubitable beliefs. Instead he proposed the instrument of fallibilism in which inquiry begins with the beliefs of common sense, submits them to critical scrutiny, and concludes with hypotheses that claim no more than provisional acceptance. Pioneering modern logical studies Peirce argued that only the scientific method can satisfy the aim of inquiry, namely the establishment of a stable belief or settled habit of action.Consequently the truth is that opinion on which the users of the scientific method would eventually agree. Peirce also suggested that one's concept of self is not intuitive, as Descartes had argued, but is developed through one's experience of error.[13]

William James (1842-1910): He defined truth as the satisfactory, verifiable, useful, or expedient belief. The truth of a belief is marked by its consistency with new experience, and it is its continued verification that makes it satisfactory. He also secured a place for the religious belief in his grand scheme on the condition that that belief provides comfort to the believer.[14]

John Dewey (1859-1952): Dewey stressed the social character of knowledge. He was against authoritarian methods in education, arguing for learning through experience and necessity rather than by rote. In matters other than education he developed themes which were formerly initiated by Peirce and James. Dewey described experience as the result of interaction between the organism and its

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[13] Murray G. Murphey. "Peirce, Charles Sanders" . *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol 5-6, 70-78.

[14] see: James, W. *Pragmatism, The Great Books of the Western World*, op. cit., ibid.

environment; experiment as deliberate change in the
environment; and finally truth as warranted assertability.[15]

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[15] Richard J. Bernstein. " Dewey, John" , *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 1-2, 380-385.

I.II. Normativism :

Normativism here in the thesis is positioned **opposite**
Pragmatism for the sake of comparison and a **better**
clarificaton of the nature and content of the latter.**The**
main criterion determining the opposed grounds in such a
comparison is the role played by **"values"** in both **Pragmatist**
and Normativist approach.

We are not yet familiar with Normativism as a distinct
current of thought or school of philosophy in the related
literature. Neverthless it is related to such concepts as
"ethics", "justice", "virtue" and so on, all of which had a
considerable weight in classical philosophy be it Islamic,
Western, or other.

A norm as a concept is either related to Normative theory
and asserts a judgement, like "thieving is a blameworthy
activity"; or states a fact only, like "Animals have a
capacity for reproduction" which does not assert a
judgement.

The norm as playing the dominant role in Normative theory
is a prescribed guide for human conduct, and in actual fact
many times amounts to a rule. A norm which maintains a
relation with Normative theory is a pattern of normatively
governed behaviour, instantiated in a group through
conformity, which is prescribed by at least some members and
usualy enforced through sanctions. As far as its content is
concerned a norm is either expressed through speech and
writing,or entertained internally.

"Practises" should not be confused with norms, since the former are regularities of behaviour that lack normative content,and also vary across societies. Practises can exist over short periods of time, like the participants of a month-long seafaring may develop certain patterns of common behaviour during their company. On the contrary, norms require more time to take shape. Norms and practises which stretch over a long time period are called customs or traditions, hence customs and traditions may or may not maintain a stable relation with Normative Theory.

As for the origin of norms they might be prescribed in accordance with Revelation; through consensus; or by one person only.As for the shape and content of the norms they exist in various shape and contents in a family; a tribe; among the members of a Community based on a certain Revelation such as Islam, Buddhism or Christianity; or in any anonymous group such as lorry drivers. Norms arise by decree or spontaneously. In the case of their origination by decree,often through ethical doctrines, they may transmute over time into patterns of prescribed behaviour with only a slight resemblance to their forebears.For instance, if only respect for Jesus was pescribed in the Bible,worshipping him is a transmutation of the decreed norm.

Especially after David Hume (1711-1776), the study of norms have been emphasized in conjunction with social theory.[16] However our main concern here is their relation to the theory of morality and its reflection on the practical

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[16]Steven Hetcher. "Norms in Social Theory" . *Encyclopedia of Ethics* . vol. II, 910 ; see also: Eugene Rotwein. " David Hume" . *Int. Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 5, 546- 550.