



The Politics of Friendship in the Political Thought of Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article	Civil friendship among human beings is a noble virtue, a prerequisite for human flourishing, and a defining characteristic present since the dawn of history. As Carl Schmitt asserts, the essence of politics lies in the friend-enemy distinction, inherently inciting conflict. In recent centuries, discourses of hostility have expanded within the Islamic world, with movements such as Wahhabism and jihadist-takfiri factions exemplifying this tendency. Given that conflict appears foundational and that one of the main responsibilities of politics is conflict resolution through friendship, this study aims to conceptualize and advance the idea of a "politics of friendship" in Iran and across Muslim societies. To this end, the thought of Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi—an influential thinker from the Islamic Golden Age—is revisited. Tusi emphasized love in political thought, considering it superior to justice, and offering great potential for grounding a politics of friendship. The findings suggest that Tusi's political philosophy can be adapted to contemporary contexts through a theoretical model of political and civil friendship. This model incorporates insights from Western thinkers such as Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida, as well as elements from the thought of Imam Khomeini.
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1. Introduction

1-1. Statement of the Problem

Today, many societies are engulfed in violence, war, and terror, and atrocities such as genocide continue to unfold. The persistence of conflict in the Islamic world—exacerbated by takfiri groups operating on the basis of enmity—underscores the need for politics to resolve such tensions. A forgotten dimension of political practice is friendship, a concept that remains largely absent from scientific and academic discourse. Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi was an ethical thinker and politically astute philosopher who recognized his responsibilities in a time of widespread conflict and moral decay. By entering the Ilkhanid political system, he assumed leadership over the scientific and cultural domains. Under his influence, the Mongols transitioned from destroyers to patrons of Islamic science and culture. After the fall of Baghdad, Tusi leveraged Mongol authority to empower Shi'a Islam, revitalizing religious endowments and promoting the status of Shi'a scholars. Consequently, the 6th and 7th centuries AH became a golden era in Islamic intellectual history. Tusi also emerged as a prominent commentator on Greek philosophy and a leading statesman of his time (Tabatabaei, 2021: 300).

1-2. Research Question

How does the politics of friendship emerge within the intellectual framework of Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi?

1-3. Hypothesis

The hypothesis posits that the components of political friendship in Tusi's thought include public happiness, power, equality, acceptance of difference and the other, responsible friendship, and love—all of which form the foundation for a politics of friendship.

1-4. Purpose of the Study

This research aims to re-examine and contemporize Tusi's theories, tapping into their potential to shape a modern politics of friendship that can inform policymaking in both the Islamic world and the global arena.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach consistent with the interpretive paradigm. It seeks to uncover meaning through a dialogical engagement between researcher and text (Iman, 2017: 150–154). Qualitative inquiry here is methodologically plural, employing a mix of techniques, notably the "interrogation of the text" approach innovated by Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr (Manouchehri, 2015: 161–163).

3. Literature Review

Several recent studies have addressed themes related to friendship in Islamic philosophy. Hamleh Dari and Fazeli (2023) explored the causes and objects of friendship in the views of Ghazzali and Tusi. Abolhasani Niaraki (2022) examined the evolution of the concept of love in the works of Farabi and Tusi. Her earlier work (2021) analyzed the role of love and friendship in civic ethics through Tusi's lens. Kashani et al. (2020) explored the voluntariness of love in early human experience. Zaghari et al. (2020) compared political ethics in the views of Tusi and Nizam al-Mulk. Yousefi Rad (2022) systematized Tusi's political thought in his monograph, while Noorian (2015) conducted a comparative study of Tusi and Nizam al-Mulk's statecraft. Bayat Sarmadi (2022) examined love and friendship in the thought of Ibn Miskawayh and Tusi. Although the centrality of friendship in Tusi's work is acknowledged, no comprehensive study has yet explored his concept of a "politics of friendship." This research addresses that gap by:

1. Constructing a theoretical framework that blends classical Islamic and contemporary Western views on friendship (e.g., Derrida, Arendt).
2. Utilizing qualitative content analysis and a directed interpretive strategy.
3. Systematizing and localizing Tusi's thought for present-day political application.

4. Findings

Tusi's political philosophy embraces religious and ethnic plurality. For example, he accepted Sunni functionaries and showed regard for Arabs in Iraq. His vision of an ideal society is one built upon love and mutual care. Altruism, as he describes it, stems from virtuous self-love—not narcissism—and extends outward to form genuine friendships. Tusi believed that love and friendship are key to social cohesion, preventing societal fragmentation. Maintaining solidarity, however, requires acceptance of religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences. In his view, true power arises from cooperation, and the politics of friendship is a natural outcome of human sociability.

Love, for Tusi, is more foundational than justice in sustaining society. When love and friendship prevail, the need for distributive justice may diminish. His concept of equality is tied to justice and equitable access to public goods, aligning with the principles of the politics of friendship. He also emphasized responsibility within civil relationships—ruler to subjects, teacher to student, citizen to citizen. This responsible friendship forms the ethical backbone of his vision for political society. Ultimately, love represents the highest political unity, one that links affection, honesty, and even divine union. Tusi advocates for overcoming selfish tendencies through the prioritization of others—an act that enables the emergence of a politics grounded in friendship.

5. Conclusion

A thorough analysis of Tusi's texts reveals that all dimensions of the politics of friendship can be drawn from his thought. By adapting his ideas through a contemporary theoretical framework, this research lays the groundwork for friendship-based policymaking within the Islamic Republic and the broader Muslim world. Tusi's philosophy presents a path toward mitigating violence, terrorism, and radicalism through a political ethic centered on love, compassion, and unity—offering a more humane and peaceful image of Islam to the world.

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