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MAKALE

Different Conceptions of Governance in Kutadgu Bilig and Republic: The Case, Line, and Sun Similes

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ÖZET

Bu makale, Yusuf Has Hacib'in Kutadgu Bilig ile Platon'un Devlet adlı eserleri arasındaki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları incelemektedir. Özellikle, Kutadgu Bilig'in Devlet'teki Mağara, Bölünmüş Çizgi ve Güneş benzetmelerine benzer bir felsefî ve teorik tartışma sunup sunmadığını ve eğer sunuyorsa, bu benzetmelerin hangi yönlerden örtüştüğünü ve hangi açılardan farklılaştığını ele almaktadır. Bu analizden sonra makale ikinci bir soruya odaklanmaktadır: Elde edilen bulgular, her iki eserin siyasal öğretileri hakkında bizi nasıl bir sonuca götürmektedir? Bu nedenle makalede eğitim, devlet-toplum ilişkileri ve hükümdarın nitelikleri gibi temalar da ele alınmaktadır.

Makale, Kutadgu Bilig'in Devlet'teki Mağara, Bölünmüş Çizgi ve Güneş benzetmelerine benzer bir felsefi ve teorik tartışma içerdiğini öne sürmektedir. Ancak iki eser arasında hükümdarın rolü, bireyin Güneş'i algılama yolu ve yönetenler-yönetilenler arasındaki ilişki konularında önemli farklılıklar bulunduğunu savunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, Kutadgu Bilig ile Devlet farklı siyasal yönetim modellerini benimsemektedir. Devlet eseri otoriter bir yönetim biçimi öngörürken, Kutadgu Bilig görece katılımcı (ortak akla ve istişareye dayalı) ve teokratik olmayan bir yönetim modelini teşvik etmektedir.

ANAHTAR SÖZCÜKLER

Kutadgu Bilig, Devlet, Yusuf Has Hacib, Platon, Mağara-Bölünmüş Çizgi-Güneş Benzetmeleri, Adalet, Yönetim Modelleri, Otorite.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the similarities and differences between Yusuf Has Hacib's Kutadgu Bilig and Plato's Republic. It specifically investigates whether Kutadgu Bilig presents arguments comparable to the Cave, Line, and Sun similes in the Republic, and, if so, how these analogies resemble or diverge from one another. Building on this comparison, the paper then addresses a broader question: what these findings reveal about the political teachings of the two works. To that end, it also considers key themes such as education, state-society relations, and the moral and political characteristics expected of the ruler.

The paper argues that Kutadgu Bilig contains a philosophical framework structurally parallel to Plato's similes. However, the two texts differ markedly in their prescriptions concerning the ruler's role, the path to perceiving the Sun (or truth), and the relationship between ruler and ruled. While Plato's Republic envisions an authoritarian form of governance, Kutadgu Bilig promotes a relatively participatory (consultative and based on shared wisdom) and non-theocratic model of rule. This divergence highlights fundamentally different visions of justice and political order.

For all these reasons, Kutadgu Bilig stands as a foundational yet underexplored work of political thought that remains deeply relevant today. Its emphasis on ethical governance, justice, and the integration of moral philosophy with political responsibility offers a compelling alternative to authoritarian paradigms. The text invites renewed scholarly engagement as a source of comparative political insight and provides a valuable framework for reimagining statecraft in societies seeking to align traditional values with modern political principles.

KEYWORDS: Kutadgu Bilig, Yusuf Has Hacib, Republic, Plato, Cave-Line-Sun Similes, Justice, Governance Models, Authority.

1. Introduction:The Philosophical Context and Storyline of Kutadgu Bilig

Yusuf Has Hacib, in Kutadgu Bilig[1], proposed a model of governance that remains unfulfilled even in contemporary times. As indicated by the title of his work, Yusuf sought to provide guidance on achieving happiness in both this world and the hereafter. He outlined the characteristics of an ideal state and offered profound insights into the social and political organization of Turkic-Islamic societies. The ideas he formulated in 1069/1070 anticipate themes later developed in the Western "mirror for princes" tradition and in the political thought of figures such as Machiavelli and Hobbes.

[1] For the sake of brevity, the title Kutadgu Bilig will be abbreviated as KB in citations and direct references throughout the article.

To contextualize Kutadgu Bilig, it is essential to examine its narrative structure, the central characters, and their symbolic representations. The text is framed as a dialogue between four principal figures, each embodying a specific social role and representing a distinct value. Küntoğdı is the ruler, symbolizing law; Aytoldı serves as a vizier, representing fortune; Öğdülmiş, also a vizier, embodies wisdom; and Odgurmış, an ascetic, signifies the ultimate fate (Dankoff 1983: 3).

The story can be summarized as follows. Aytoldı, eager to enter state service, is introduced to the chief chamberlain through an acquaintance, who then presents him to the ruler. Impressed by Aytoldı, the ruler appoints him vizier. After some time, Aytoldı passes away, leaving behind his only son, Öğdülmiş. Although Öğdülmiş occasionally refers to Odgurmış as "brother," the text makes it clear that Aytoldı's only son is Öğdülmiş. His use of the term "brother" reflects his deep affection for Odgurmış and his recognition of him as a spiritual companion.

The ruler assumes responsibility for the upbringing and education of Öğdülmiş. Intelligent and knowledgeable, Öğdülmiş soon gains the ruler's trust and is eventually appointed vizier. Deeply attached to Öğdülmiş and fearful of losing him, the ruler seeks another wise individual who could assist him and, if necessary, take his place. At Öğdülmiş's recommendation, the ruler considers bringing Odgurmış into his service. However, despite the ruler's efforts, Odgurmış refuses, preferring instead to continue his life of seclusion and devotion away from society.

Later, Öğdülmiş also contemplates withdrawing from state service to dedicate himself entirely to worship. Odgurmış, however, opposes this decision, arguing that individuals should remain in their respective roles, as this is the best way to serve society. In time, Odgurmış passes away, leaving behind only his disciple, Kumaru. Guided by the counsel of his viziers and Odgurmış's wisdom, the ruler establishes just laws, restores order in the state, and leads the country toward prosperity, enabling the people to live in happiness and stability.

Despite its rich narrative and profound political philosophy, much of what should be said about Kutadgu Bilig remains unarticulated, while much of the existing discussion is incomplete or inaccurate. Research on Kutadgu Bilig has largely been confined to specific topics. Scholars have primarily focused on identifying possible influences on Yusuf Has Hacib, examining the impact of Chinese, Indian, and Persian cultures on the text, and tracing elements of religions such as Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Zoroastrianism (Doğan 2016: 117). However, rather than serving as contextual footnotes, these discussions have often taken center stage in scholarly debates.

The fundamental flaw of this approach lies in its neglect of Kutadgu Bilig's

forward-looking perspective. The work's significance for the future has been largely overlooked, with greater emphasis placed on examining the influence of earlier philosophical traditions and cultures. Yet what is truly important is how Kutadgu Bilig can be interpreted in relation to contemporary and future contexts. Yusuf himself underscores this purpose when he states that Kutadgu Bilig "will be a true guide, that [the reader] may grasp both the worlds and be blessed with Fortune" (KB, 350).

Many studies on Kutadgu Bilig also contain a methodological flaw. They tend to focus on the past, comparing Yusuf's ideas with specific philosophies and cultures, without examining Kutadgu Bilig's original political philosophy or evaluating its teachings in the context of the present (Doğan, 2016: 118–119). For instance, Halil İnalcık examines Kutadgu Bilig in relation to themes found in Indian and Persian works of political advice (nasihatname and siyasatname), concluding: "Ultimately, there is no doubt that the understanding of the state and the principles of politics and ethics in Kutadgu Bilig are largely based on Indian-Persian sources" (1966: 267). Building upon this perspective, Fuad Köprülü argues that the literary form of the work was influenced by Persian culture, suggesting, "in terms of meter and poetic form, we are dealing with an imitation of the Persian Shahnameh" (1981: 170).

Therefore, this article seeks to uncover the original message of Kutadgu Bilig by comparing it with one of the foundational works of Western philosophy, Plato's Republic. This comparison highlights both the core themes of the text and its distinctive features. This study also contributes to the field of comparative political theory, which seeks to place non-Western classics into dialogue with canonical Western texts in order to expand and diversify our understanding of political thought.

With this framework in place, we now turn to the comparison between Kutadgu Bilig and the Republic, focusing specifically on the Cave, Sun, and Line similes.

2. The Cave Simile

In Plato's Republic,[2] the prisoners, chained in place, watch shadows cast on the cave wall by objects carried in front of a fire behind them. Unaware of both the objects and the world beyond the cave, they accept these shadows as their only reality. As Plato explains, "what people in this situation would take for truth would be nothing

[2] For conciseness, Plato's Republic will be abbreviated as "Rep" in citations and direct references throughout the article.

more than the shadows of the manufactured objects" (Rep, 515c).[3]

According to Yusuf Has Hacib, this world itself is the cave, and most people are its prisoners. They are enslaved by fortune, yet fortune should not be trusted because of its inconstant nature. It comes and goes, making it illusory, much like a shadow. The fleeting quality of worldly things is vividly illustrated by Full Moon, who personifies fortune in Kutadgu Bilig. In explaining the meaning of his name, he states:

With this name, a sage has likened my character to the moon, which is small when it first rises… But when it reaches its zenith of perfection, it begins to wane and to lose its beauty. Its light diminishes, then disappears (KB, 730).[4]

For Yusuf Has Hacib, nothing in this world is real or everlasting. Everyone who is born, whether a prince or a slave, must eventually die, just as whatever rises must inevitably fall. Therefore, rulers should not place their trust in fortune, as it is fleeting and unreliable. This perspective is reflected in the very structure of Kutadgu Bilig, where Full Moon, the embodiment of fortune, dies at the very beginning of the book.

Another similarity between the Republic and Kutadgu Bilig in relation to the Cave simile is the idea that escaping the cave is difficult and painful. Plato argues that for someone who has spent an entire lifetime in the cave, watching only shadows on the wall, even turning toward the fire, let alone looking at objects under sunlight or at the sun itself, would be a painful experience. Similarly, Yusuf Has Hacib suggests that people are inherently greedy and struggle to abandon their pursuit of fortune once they have acquired it. According to Yusuf, the ruler should therefore be generous toward his people, recognizing their attachment to material wealth.

A comparable understanding of human nature appears in the Republic, where Plato asserts that a truly good ruler must not desire power but should prefer to engage in other pursuits. This notion aligns with Plato's broader concern about the negative impact of human desires and appetites on the welfare of the city.

3. The Line Simile

According to the orthodox interpretation, Plato's Line simile contains two critical

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[3] References to Republic in this article are based on T. Griffith's English translation, The Republic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). The numbers following Rep citations refer to the standard Stephanus pagination used in Plato studies.

[4] References to Kutadgu Bilig (KB) in this article are based on Robert Dankoff's English translation, *The Wisdom of Royal Glory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983). The numbers following KB citations refer to the paragraph numbers as given in Dankoff's translation.

aspects (Cross and Woozley 1966: 208):

a) The Line represents four mental states arranged in an ascending scale of clarity, corresponding to four classes of objects arranged in an ascending scale of truth or reality.

b) The Cave simile must be applied to the Line simile, as a parallel relationship exists between them.

Following this framework, the ABCDE Line can be understood as follows (see Figure 1):

- AB represents images, such as shadows and reflections;
- BC corresponds to sensible (physical) objects;
- CD signifies forms not yet perceived in connection with the Form of the Good;
- DE represents the Form of the Good itself and other forms perceived in connection with it.

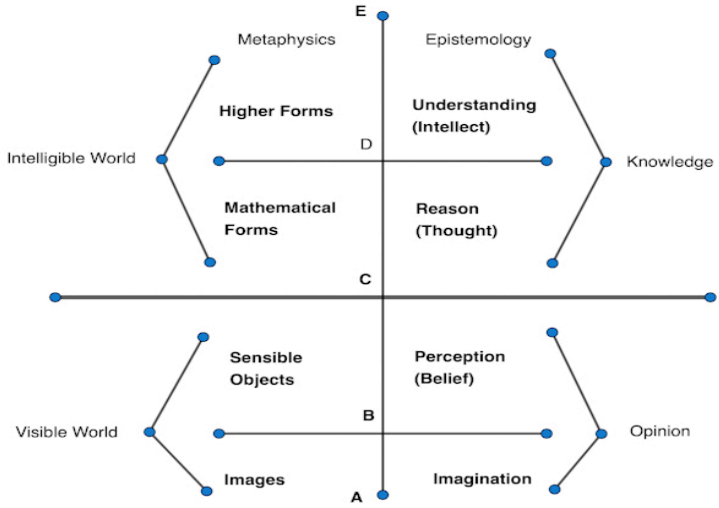


Figure 1. The Divided Line of Plato

Source: Adapted from McAleer (2020: 199) and Rescher (2010: 141).

The Line simile also depicts the human journey from the Cave to the light, or the

Sun. In other words, it illustrates the stages of intellectual development necessary to attain perfect knowledge of the world. At the same time, it represents the successive ways in which reality appears to the human mind as it advances in understanding (Nettleship, 1937: 239).

When applied to the Cave simile, the segments of the Line correspond to different stages of enlightenment:

- AB represents chained prisoners, who perceive only shadows.
- BC corresponds to released prisoners viewing objects within the cave.
- CD signifies released prisoners observing shadows and reflections in the upper world.
- DE represents released prisoners fully perceiving the Sun itself, attaining the highest level of knowledge.

Yusuf Has Hacib also envisions a "Line" along which humanity must ascend to reach the Sun. As noted earlier, Full Moon represents the prisoner sitting before the fire, watching shadows, thereby embodying the lowest segment of the Line, namely images (AB). However, unlike those who remain entirely captive to illusion, Full Moon at least makes an effort to turn back, look at the fire, and recognize the objects within the cave. Shortly before his death, he counsels his son, Highly Praised, warning him about the deceptive nature of worldly wealth:

Do not throw yourself into the Fire for the sake of this world. I knew how to garner wealth but was unable to eat the fruit thereof, and now that my day is passed there is no profit in my repentance (KB, 1283).

Similarly, in a letter to the King, Full Moon offers the following counsel: "Do not sacrifice your own soul for others' sake... The world's princes before you left the world… Death awaits you as well, O resplendent sun: he is only biding his time" (KB, 1401).

From these reflections, one may argue that Full Moon has ascended to the next segment of the Line, BC, which represents physical (sensible) objects. Yet, despite this progress, he remains within the visible world and has not yet perceived the higher forms of reality.

In Kutadgu Bilig, Highly Praised embodies wisdom, which, as he explains, is acquired through learning: "The more a man learns, the greater he grows in wisdom" (KB, 1822). Educated first by his father, Full Moon, and later by the King following his father's death, Highly Praised serves as an alter ego to the King. His role is to remind the ruler of the transient nature of the world and the existence of a higher realm.

Despite his wisdom, Highly Praised himself remains within the Cave and does not attempt to see the light. Why does he not seek enlightenment? This question will be addressed later in the discussion of the relationship between the King and Wide Awake. For now, it is sufficient to note that Highly Praised, like his father, remains in the Cave to manage state affairs, as this is ultimately beneficial for the city. Thus, Highly Praised represents the BC segment of the Line and, like Full Moon, remains within the visible world rather than ascending toward higher forms of knowledge.

However, the position of King Rising Sun along the Line is open to debate. He could be placed in either the BC or CD segment, or perhaps straddle both the intelligible and visible worlds. Yet it seems more appropriate to situate him within the *intelligible world* for two key reasons. First, wisdom must precede justice, implying that he has attained some level of intellectual enlightenment. Second, he shares certain characteristics with the image of the Form of the Good. Rising Sun explains the significance of his name as follows:

The sun never wanes; it is always full, its brightness constant and excellent. Second, when the sun rises, it sheds its light on all creation without being in any way diminished thereby. Third, when the sun rises and warms the earth, myriad flowers bloom. Finally, the sun's abode is stable, its foundation firm (KB, 823).

Likewise, the King embodies unwavering justice, treating all people with equality, and his nature remains constant, never transforming into anything other than light. While he governs the city, he is not a prisoner in the Cave. He is aware of the upper world and perceives its images and shadows, yet he does not ascend to Plato's Sun, nor is he the Sun itself. Instead, the King serves as a source of illumination within the Cave, guiding its prisoners and ensuring stability. However, unlike Plato's philosopher-king, he does not bear the mission of leading others to enlightenment, nor does he impose his perception of reality upon them.

On the other hand, the ascetic Wide Awake, who represents the ultimate goal of human existence, corresponds to the DE segment of Plato's Line, the Form of the Good. Highly Praised introduces Wide Awake to the King as follows:

He has turned his face from this world and has withdrawn to a mountain in order to straighten his heart… He is a hundred times more virtuous than myself, an outstanding person, the choicest of mankind (KB, 3145).

Unlike others, Wide Awake does not dwell within the city or Plato's Cave. Instead, he has withdrawn to the heights, far from his kinsmen, where he gazes directly at the very Sun. His relationship with the King and his perspective on returning to the city are essential for understanding Yusuf's political theory.

However, this topic will be explored later. For now, I turn to the final simile in the Republic: the Sun.

4. The Sun Simile

Plato distinguishes between things that are good and the Good itself, as well as between things that are beautiful and the Beautiful itself. While good and beautiful things are objects of perception, the Good and the Beautiful belong to the realm of thought. According to Plato, light is essential for perceiving good and beautiful things, and this light is provided by the Sun, which is the offspring of the Form of the Good (White, 1979: 178). Plato elaborates on this concept in the Republic:

If there is sight in the eyes, and its possessor is trying to make use of it, you surely realize that even in the presence of color sight will see nothing, and the colors will remain unseen, unless one further thing joins them, a third sort of thing which exists for precisely this purpose. [This thing is] light (Rep, 507d/e).

Just as light is necessary for perceiving good and beautiful things, the Form of the Good is essential for comprehending the nature of goodness itself. Plato develops this idea in the Republic:

It turns out to be the cause of all that is right and good for everything. In the realm of sight it gives birth to light and light's sovereign, the sun, while in the realm of thought it is itself sovereign, producing truth and reason unassisted (Rep, 517c).

Although the Form of the Good, or its offspring, the Sun, is the source of all existence, it is itself not subject to generation; it transcends the realm of being (Rep, 509b). Just as the Sun is visible, the Good is knowable only through dialectic. Plato asserts that the ruler, through dialectical reasoning, can come to know the Form of the Good (Rep, 534b–d). Moreover, only those who have attained an understanding of the Form of the Good and have seen the Sun have reached the highest point on the Line, fully inhabiting the intelligible realm.

The concept of the Form of the Good is also present in Kutadgu Bilig, where it is identified as God. God is the ultimate cause, the source of all living and non-living beings, yet He Himself transcends existence. This idea is expressed in Kutadgu Bilig:

He created brown earth and blue sky, sun and moon, darkness and light, rich and poor. He brought into being living creatures without number... His unity has no admixture of number. Without doubt, He, the One, exists without how and wherefore (KB, 3713).

In Kutadgu Bilig, a parallelism exists between the Sun simile and the Line, much

like in the Republic. As argued above, King Rising Sun can be seen as an *image* of the Form of the Good. Though he has been released from the Cave, he still looks at the shadows and reflections in the upper world rather than fully perceiving the truth. In contrast, Wide Awake represents the *Form* of the Good itself, having left the city to seek and devote his life to the Light.

Yusuf's hierarchical gradation of characters is evident throughout the text. This distinction is further reinforced by the names he assigns them. Wide Awake has awakened to true consciousness, and his Turkish name, Odgurmış, carries an even deeper meaning: it not only signifies "awakened" but also "he who has awakened others." As such, Wide Awake possesses greater wisdom than others and is uniquely capable of advising the King and his vizier, Highly Praised, guiding them toward awareness of the upper world.

In conclusion, Plato's Cave, Line, and Sun similes are also present in Kutadgu Bilig. However, the nuances within these similes and their implications lead to fundamentally different political theories in the Republic and Kutadgu Bilig, a subject to which we now turn.

5. Kutadgu Bilig and Republic

The main differences in the political teachings of the two books crystallize around three issues central to political philosophy: the role of the awakened individual, the status of the ruler, and the place of education in sustaining just governance.

5.1. The Role of the Awakened

A fundamental difference between the Republic and Kutadgu Bilig lies in the role of the awakened individual. In the Republic, the one who has seen the Sun must return to the Cave to lead the prisoners toward enlightenment. In contrast, in Kutadgu Bilig, the awakened person is not required to do so. Although he may offer guidance and advice, drawing attention to the upper world and helping others adjust their behavior accordingly, he is not obligated to intervene.

According to Plato, an individual who has attained knowledge of the Form of the Good must descend back into the Cave to elevate others into the intelligible world (Shorey 1965: 187). However, this process involves a degree of coercion. First, the state compels the enlightened philosopher to become a ruler or to return to the Cave, a duty that Glaucon, Socrates's principal interlocutor in the Republic, interprets as forcing the philosopher to live an inferior life (Rep, 519d). Second, the philosopher-

king imposes his understanding upon those still living in the Cave. Plato justifies this authoritarian aspect of governance by appealing to the greater good of the city. Responding to Glaucon's concerns, he argues that the law seeks to foster collective happiness, ensuring harmony among citizens through both persuasion and compulsion:

The law does not exist for the exclusive benefit of one class in the city. Its aim is to engineer the benefit of the city as a whole, using persuasion and compulsion to bring the citizens into harmony, and making each class share with the other classes the contribution it is able to bring to the community (Rep, 519e).

In Kutadgu Bilig, by contrast, an individual who has seen the Sun is not required to return to the Cave or take part in governing the city. In fact, Yusuf appears to suggest the opposite: that the awakened person should refrain from political involvement. This idea is exemplified in the relationship between the King (Rising Sun) and the ascetic (Wide Awake). Although the King summons Wide Awake twice, the ascetic refuses to return to the city or serve as an advisor. It is only after the third summons that Wide Awake agrees to visit the city, and even then, solely for the purpose of seeing the King once and offering counsel. After fulfilling this duty, he withdraws once again to the mountains, where he ultimately dies alone, leaving behind only his disciple, Kumaru.

Wide Awake's philosophical stance is clearly articulated through his interactions with the King. Upon the King's first summons, Wide Awake responds to Highly Praised, who has been sent to bring him back, with the following words: "I have come here to flee the world; how then can I go back? I have devoted myself to the service of God; would it be proper then to serve a man?" (KB, 3692). In addition, Wide Awake entrusts Highly Praised with a letter addressed to the King, further clarifying his stance: "What would I gain by going to your gate [court] and spending my life in your service? Both of us are the servants of God, and in this station, we are of equal rank. It is unfitting for one servant to serve another" (KB, 3742).

In his second summons, the King writes a letter to Wide Awake, making an argument that closely parallels Plato's justification for the philosopher's return to the Cave:

I summon you here, O ascetic, for the sake of [your kinsmen]. Come and benefit them, make yourself useful to men, for a useless man is a corpse among the living. The real man is not one who desires his own welfare but one who seeks the welfare of the community (KB, 3928).

However, Wide Awake's response contrasts sharply with Plato's vision: "Let the

King leave me to God" (KB, 4865). After being rejected twice, the King ultimately abandons his efforts to bring Wide Awake back to the city. Reflecting on the situation, he acknowledges the ascetic's wisdom and the futility of his summons in a conversation with Highly Praised. Despite his previous failures, the King still wishes to meet Wide Awake and seek his counsel on good governance. This time, he requests only a single visit. Unlike before, Wide Awake agrees, explaining his change of heart to Highly Praised: "If I refused to go before, it was because [the King] was seeking his own advantage from me. Now that he has renounced that purpose...I will go" (KB, 4990).

Upon meeting the King, Wide Awake reassures him: "I came to you willingly, O King, so it was no trouble" (KB, 5040). After offering his counsel, he departs once more, returning to the place where he truly belongs.

Sometime after Wide Awake's visit to the court, Highly Praised begins to regret his past life and contemplates resigning from the King's service to devote himself entirely to God. However, Wide Awake advises him otherwise, emphasizing the importance of fulfilling one's role: "Today, it is better for you to remain there, just as it is better for me to remain here" (KB, 5723).

Through these dialogues, Yusuf Has Hacib underscores the value of individual choice, the respect it warrants, and the distinction between worldly and divine affairs. Wide Awake chooses to live outside the city and refuses to return; this is a decision that the King ultimately respects. Second, both the King and Wide Awake act of their own volition, without coercion. Third, while the general welfare of the community remains important, individual well-being is not necessarily sacrificed for the collective. Finally, religion is neither subordinated to the King nor exploited as a tool by the state.

Taken together, these elements suggest that Yusuf envisions a model of governance in *Kutadgu Bilig t*hat is both participatory and non-theocratic. The concept of participatory does not refer to "electoral democracy" in the modern sense, but to a consultative order in which the ruler governs in dialogue with wise counselors and respects the moral agency of his subjects. Similarly, the concept of non-theocratic signifies that political authority is not subordinated to clerical power but operates within its own temporal sphere.

5.2. The Status of the Ruler

In the Republic, the only person capable of ruling is the philosopher-king, who alone possesses the wisdom necessary to govern. In contrast, in Kutadgu Bilig, the

King is depicted as a first among equals (*primus inter pares*), holding qualified powers and responsibilities rather than an absolute, superior status. Unlike Plato, Yusuf Has Hacib does not argue that the ruler must be a philosopher-king or someone inherently superior. While Kutadgu Bilig distinguishes between the ruler and the ruled, or the King and the servant, the King's legitimacy does not stem from personal achievements or innate gifts. Instead, he is respected for his service to the people, striving to create a prosperous state where justice and the rule of law prevail.

Thus, in Yusuf's vision, governance is not an exclusive privilege but a role contingent upon justice and legitimacy. Anyone can govern, provided they adhere to certain principles: "The slave, in fact, can himself become a prince; but he can accomplish nothing unless his service is acceptable" (KB, 607). The fundamental condition for legitimate rule, then, is justice. A ruler remains legitimate as long as he governs justly and generously, as Yusuf explains:

If the prince dispenses justice, he keeps his realm in good order and causes its sun to shine…[and] as long as his servants pay the prince his due, he must pay their due according to their service (KB, 2014, 2950).

5.3. The Quality of Education as the Means to a Successful Rule

In the Republic, the philosopher-king can fulfill his role only through a structured educational system established and regulated by the state. In contrast, Kutadgu Bilig assigns the primary responsibility for education to the family, particularly the father, rather than to state institutions. According to Plato, those who aspire to rule must undergo a rigorous, state-controlled education designed to cultivate wisdom, discipline, and leadership. However, Yusuf Has Hacib emphasizes that education is primarily a paternal duty, highlighting the father's crucial role in shaping his child's character. He states:

If you have moonlike children, raise them in your own home; do not give them to others to bring up… When a father takes pains to bring up his son correctly, then the son learns proper behavior. As long as he keeps a tight rein, the son will turn out well... [However] if a child turns out bad, it is the fault of the father, who has squandered his rightful share (KB, 1215, 1222, 4504).

Second, a key aspect of Yusuf Has Hacib's political theory is the essential role of elders and wise individuals. These figures bear not only the right but also the responsibility to counsel others and guide them toward the right path. This explains why Rising Sun is eager to summon Wide Awake, and why Wide Awake willingly agrees to advise him, though only on his own terms. Through such mentorship, Rising Sun becomes acquainted with the Form of the Good and governs accordingly.

Wide Awake, for instance, offers the following counsel:

If you would secure the foundation of princely rule, establish law and hold to the path of rectitude and justice; if you would grasp the other world as well, again hold to righteousness—that is all I have to say! (KB, 5166).

6. Conclusion

While both Plato and Yusuf Has Hacib present similar accounts of the Cave, Line, and Sun similes, they ultimately offer fundamentally different prescriptions for a virtuous city. This divergence stems from key differences in their political philosophies, particularly regarding:

- The role of the individual who has seen the Sun,
- The relationship between the ruler and the ruled (or between the philosopher-king and the prisoners),
- The necessary qualities of a ruler,
- The type of education required to cultivate leaders and elevate individuals along the Line,
- The means of achieving and maintaining the city's welfare.

These distinctions give rise to two opposing models of governance, reflecting broader philosophical differences in conceptions of justice, authority, and societal structure. According to Plato, the philosopher-king must govern the city as the one who possesses knowledge of the Form of the Good. Such knowledge can only be attained through a rigorous, state-controlled education system. Moreover, the ruler is obligated to enlighten the prisoners, guiding them toward the upper world for the greater good of the city. Plato argues that "the overseers of [the] city must keep a firm grip on [the] system of education, protecting it above all else, and not allowing it to be destroyed accidentally" (Rep, 424b).

In contrast, Yusuf Has Hacib maintains that one who has seen the Sun need not return to the Cave, nor should he be compelled to do so. Instead, he must remain where he is and devote himself entirely to serving the Form of the Good. For Yusuf, then, the ideal ruler is not necessarily a philosopher but must be just, generous, and deeply grounded in the knowledge, love, and fear of God. Such a leader is not shaped by a rigid state system but is instead educated primarily by his family, guided by the counsel of elders, and corrected when necessary by the wisdom of the community's knowledgeable figures.

Thus, Plato's political system, as outlined in the Republic, resembles a highly

hierarchical regime, whether in the form of aristocracy or authoritarianism. In contrast, Yusuf Has Hacib outlines a participatory and non-theocratic model of governance, in which individual choice is respected, state-society relations are governed by just laws, and political and religious affairs remain separate. With these principles, Kutadgu Bilig offers valuable insights for fostering a prosperous and harmonious society. Moreover, the ethical values emphasized in the work are crucial for regulating social life and fostering meaningful relationships among individuals within society. For all these reasons, Kutadgu Bilig stands as a foundational work of political theory and a rich guide that invites continuous reinterpretation. The principles of governance it outlines remain relevant in today's Turkic states, where its teachings continue to inform debates on justice and authority.

In conclusion, Kutadgu Bilig addresses both the formation of the state and the principles that should govern social life, while also reflecting on the conditions necessary for a just and well-ordered society. States may draw on it as a valuable resource as they seek to shape their future. Yet despite its richness, Kutadgu Bilig is still largely unexplored and under-researched. In this context, it is fitting to recall the words of Reşid Rahmeti Arat, the scholar who dedicated his life to translating and interpreting the work: "Kutadgu Bilig still stands before us as an unexplored monument" (1970: 70).

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