

# The dangers of dogmatism with approaches adopted by martin luther king jr and pla...

[History](#), [American History](#)



Dogmatism essentially refers to strict adherence to rules and procedures at the expense of reason and alternative views. The opposite of dogmatism can therefore be referred to as rationalism. Dogmatism is essentially a leadership approach practiced by many leaders across the globe and has its own advantages and disadvantages.

This study will however focus on the dangers of dogmatism with regards to the leadership approaches adopted by Martin Luther King Jr and Plato. This analysis will be analyzed in two segments of the study where the first approach will analyze Martin Luther King Jr and the second part will analyze Plato.

Martin Luther King contributed a lot to America's civil rights movements and because of his contribution; he continues to receive immense acclamation to date. Some of the most memorable iconic events in King's life were the Montgomery bus boycott and the historic march to Washington where he addressed close to a quarter million people in the "I have a dream" speech (Hall 1). Most of King's beliefs can be traced to the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi who also fought for the same course he did (Hall 1).

King's time as a civil rights leader was characterized by fearless fights against the government and social injustices which evidently brought him a lot of trouble in the eyes of the law and which ultimately caused him his life. Some of King's boldest opposition against social repression and the government earned him the title of the "most effective and notorious Negro leader" who existed in his time (Hall 10).

However, it is important to note that King had an unfound positivism in reason that consequently provides the background to this study because he was in open opposition to dogmatism which was advocated by leaders who tried to silence his activities.

The letter from Birmingham is one main event which is characteristic of King's civil rights movements. The letter from Birmingham is essentially a representation of King's opposition to dogmatism which was also being advocated by other civil rights leaders.

The letter of Birmingham was a letter written in response to specific clergymen from Alabama who were in contempt of King's civil rights actions which were being carried out in the streets. It was written in April 12th 1963 in response to recommendations by the clergymen that King should have undertaken his civil rights fight in court and not on the streets (Hall 17). This point of view was characteristic of dogmatism where the law was upheld at the expense of reason.

The courts signified an oppressive channel where civil rights causes could not be achieved because of the prejudice and injustices that existed in the judicial systems at the time. In fact, this sentiment was also harbored by King because in a section of the letter, he made the clergymen know that the aims of his civil rights movements could not be achieved in the courts but on the streets (Hall 17).

This viewpoint can be equated to reason because the Alabama clergymen were not heeding to reason when advising King to take his civil rights fights

to court. Moreover, King justified his pursuit of justice on the streets from the fact that the protests he organized were essentially peaceful and nonviolent; meaning that all he was trying to do was get his message across to the leaders in the most peaceful manner possible.

Moreover, King justified his street actions through the letter after identifying that the courts were basically very slow and therefore, waiting to get justice through the system almost meant that the people would not get justice altogether. According to him, he was justified to protest on the streets because he was essentially advocating for the repeal of unjust laws which were repugnant to justice. In fact, the letter is quoted as having contained the famous statement, “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice anywhere” (Hall 18)

King’s refusal to pursue other means to undertake his civil rights activities exposed his inclination to reason (a diversion from dogmatism) which was blind to any alternative means to coerce him out of his main objective of liberating the oppressed. This is the scenario evidenced from the Letter from Birmingham jail where he wrote to express his opposition to people who thought that his civil rights acts were unwise and untimely (Hall 24).

In fact, his unstoppable quest to liberate the oppressed can be generally perceived as inconsistent with the will of a minority people who wanted to maintain “status quo” by denying the people justice through the courts. The diversionary tact advocated by the clergymen was blatantly illogical,

considering the courts were also a means to oppress the poor and deny them justice.

Plato was a world-renowned Greek philosopher who had a significant contribution to basic disciplines such as epistemology, metaphysics and other others (Hare 1). Most of the current western philosophic composition and scientific developments were basically built on Plato's philosophies.

There is enough evidence (based on Plato's' life) of his open refusal to heed to unjustified claims to convict Socrates, who was one of his teacher (through an analogy of the Trial and death of Socrates). The trial and death of Socrates essentially talks of two unjustified claims that were used to try and sentence Socrates to death (Jowett 1).

Since Plato was one of Socrates' students, Plato gives a firsthand account of the trial of Socrates, although evidently, through his narration of the trials, he portrays Socrates in a positive light. This portrayal categorizes Plato as a unique leader who essentially fights dogmatism (though not firsthand).

This fact is affirmed by the fact that Socrates' trial and death was essentially aimed at upholding dogmatism because it was not based on reason but rather a bunch of false allegations that were aimed at silencing him. Plato's open portrayal of this fact clearly manifests his intention to uphold reason in the midst of mediocrity.

These factors withstanding, it is important to note that Plato significantly underscores the dangers of dogmatism because they essential go against it,

even though the issue in contention was essentially highly politically charged and with significant consequences. This can be evidenced from the fact that Socrates was sentenced to death on false grounds because he was also against dogmatism (Jowett 1). Plato upholds this view.

In Plato's Republic, we can also see how Plato underscores the dangers of dogmatism when he tries to establish the concept of justice by identifying whether just people are happier than unjust people (Cornford 2). After undertaking this research, Plato identifies that justice is better than injustice.

From this point of view, we can see that Plato is more sympathetic to reason as opposed to rules and procedures which essentially define the concept of dogmatism. However, the empirical reality is that justice is not an obvious reality for most people and even though many people struggle to attain it, it comes at a high price. This is comparatively the concept Plato tried to underscore in his republican excerpt, where he advocates for justice (which comes at a high price) (Cornford 2).

This study notes that dogmatism has a lot of dangers if it is succinctly followed. However, Plato and King actually underscore its dangers by advocating for principles that are against dogmatism. King underscores the dangers of dogmatism from the fact that he heeds to reason at the expense of bureaucracy and the law. This is evidenced from the fact that he refuses to listen to the Alabama clergymen who proposed that he takes his civil rights fights to the corridors of justice, as opposed to the streets.

He therefore writes the Letter of Birmingham to protest against this view, even though he was in jail for organizing such protests in the first place. The danger of dogmatism can be evidenced from the fact that he was jailed for organizing civil rights protests in the first place, but his quest to fight on, against all odds, is a significant diversion from the ordinary (because he was oblivious to the consequences that may befall him if he continued to do so).

Plato also exposes the same concept of anti-dogmatism approaches from the trial of Socrates because Socrates was tried and sentenced to death for advocating for reason, in spite of the fact that most people at the time were not for the idea of reason over law. Portraying Socrates in a positive light was therefore a big risk for Plato because he could have been pursued in the same manner as Socrates. The same cause is also pursued from excerpts of the Republic where Plato advocates for justice at the expense of injustice.

Comprehensively, we can conclude (by learning from King and Plato's bravery in the mid of mediocrity) that though dogmatism has its dangers, it always pays to heed to reason because this is what essentially sets leaders apart from the rest. Evidently, we can see that Martin Luther King is a legend to date and Plato is equally celebrated in his own light. These acclamations are traced from their fight against dogmatism and their bravery as well.

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