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# Examination of the Political and Social Thought of Mahmud Taleqani and Morteza Motahhari

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## ABSTRACT

Mahmud Taleqani and Morteza Motahhari made significant efforts toward the realization of the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of a religious and popular government, and during the Pahlavi era they endured repeated imprisonment and severe torture at the hands of the ruling regime. Examining the political and social thought of these two Islamic thinkers, as well as the position of their ideas and practices, is of considerable importance because introducing their intellectual profiles as contemporary thinkers and freedom-seeking elites holds substantial scholarly value. In Taleqani's political thought, religion is inseparable from politics; however, the establishment of despotism in the name of religion is likewise unacceptable. Motahhari, similarly, emphasized the reciprocal relationship between religion and politics in his political and social thought, viewing the two as fundamentally intertwined, and he placed strong emphasis on the role of the people in establishing and maintaining any political system. In line with conducting this research—written using a descriptive-analytical method—we seek to examine the political and social thought of Mahmud Taleqani and Morteza Motahhari.

**Keywords:** *Intellectual, religious intellectual, political thought, social thought, Mahmud Taleqani, Morteza Motahhari.*

## Introduction

A brief review of the decades preceding the Islamic Revolution, as well as the forty years following it, reveals that wherever intellectuals and the clergy, regardless of their ideological and political differences, have engaged with one another in a peaceful and sincere manner, the outcome has been beneficial for Iranian society and has led to purification and the emergence of a renewed cultural and social atmosphere (1). The constructive role of the clergy and intellectuals can be considered one of the significant elements in improving the cultural and social conditions of the society (2). Mahmud Taleqani and Morteza Motahhari are among those clerics whose profound insight and uncompromising thought contributed both to the success of the Islamic Revolution and to providing theoretical guidance for many of the current religious and political issues in the country (3, 4).

Master Motahhari began his intellectual and social efforts in the early 1950s and maintained relations with religious intellectuals such as Engineer Mehdi Bazargan—who was regarded as a godfather of religious intellectualism in subsequent generations and continuously reflected on reconciling tradition and modernity (5, 6).



Mahmud Taleqani was also active in various fields of religious reform; he was not only a theorist but also a leading figure among religious innovators. Rationalism, contemplation on educational and missionary reform within the seminary, revival of authentic religious thought, struggle for freedom and justice, efforts to unite the seminary and the university, promotion of Islamic ecumenism, enlightenment, and social guidance constitute some of the golden pages of his distinguished legacy (7, 8). The primary origin of his intellectualism was, above all, the seminary environment. The spiritual, scholarly, and open-minded teachings of his father, along with deep reflection upon the inspiring verses of the Qur'an and the illuminating sermons of *Nahj al-Balāgha*, opened the doors of insight and enlightenment before him and nurtured the seeds of rationalism and foresight in his heart (9). This inner spark originated from the warm atmosphere of his family home and the spiritually radiant presence of his father.

## Literature Review

In his book *The History of Political Thought in Iran and Islam* (2006), Kamal Pouladi presents a work originally compiled as a textbook for political thought in Islam and Iran, though it is also useful to any reader seeking information in this field. The author notes: "In this book, we consider any reflection on important political issues as political thought. One such major issue concerns who is entitled to administer the essential matters of a community that constitutes a distinct political unit, and according to what procedures." He further highlights that what is now referred to in contemporary terminology as authority and legitimacy has remained the core axis of political debates from antiquity to the present, encompassing fundamental questions regarding who has the right to govern and how, and who must obey and under what conditions (10, 11).

Salmanpur (2005), in his article *Intellectualism and Its Components in Islamic Culture*, argues that intellectualism in its true sense is one of the noble values of Islamic culture. He states that the origins of intellectualism and enlightenment lie in the teachings of the divine prophets—especially the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) and the Imams. However, in the past two centuries, the term "intellectual" has been subject to distortion and misuse within Islamic societies, including Iran, becoming entangled in the conceptual web established by colonial powers. He emphasizes that certain individuals who lack genuine insight and spiritual depth have nonetheless appropriated the label of "intellectual." Although the Qur'an and ḥadīth literature do not explicitly contain a term equivalent to "intellectual," many words convey similar meanings and express the ethical, epistemic, and spiritual components of religious intellectualism. According to him, ten value-laden concepts—mercy, peace, growth, reconciliation, open-mindedness, eternity, universality, certainty, truth-seeking, and enemy-awareness—together form the components of authentic religious intellectualism, and the absence of any one of them becomes a source of corruption in the intellectual sphere, as demonstrated in Iran over the past two centuries (12, 13).

Kadivar (2000), in his article *Religious Intellectualism*, examines the three components of rationality, freedom, and reformism as central to the definition of intellectualism and explores the relationship between religion and intellectualism. He seeks to demonstrate how a meaningful connection can be established between faith and intellectual inquiry (14, 15).

Rahmati (2001), in his book *Master Motahhari and the Intellectuals*, compiles selected discussions from Motahhari's works that share a common theme: scholarly critiques of the assumptions held by Muslim intellectuals regarding Islamic issues. He reveals their intellectual errors, most of which stem from insufficient familiarity with the authentic teachings of Islam. This work introduces readers to Motahhari's intellectual precision and sharp insight in defending pure Islamic thought and confronting eclectic interpretations (4, 13).

Razavi (2007), in his article *Manifestations of Ayatollah Taleghani's Intellectualism in Thought and Practice*, describes Seyyed Mahmud Taleqani as one of the pioneers of the religious intellectual movement. He argues that Taleqani was not merely a theorist but also a leading figure in various realms of Islamic reform. Rationalism, reform of seminary education and missionary work, revival of authentic religious thought, struggle for freedom and justice, efforts to unite the seminary and the university, Islamic ecumenism, enlightenment, and guidance all form part of his luminous legacy (8, 16). Taleqani's intellectual origins were grounded primarily in the seminary. The spiritual, scholarly, and enlightened worldview of his father, combined with contemplative engagement with the Qur'an and *Nahj al-Balāgha*, opened new horizons of insight and spiritual illumination for him, sowing seeds of rationalism and foresight in his heart (9).

## Theoretical Framework

### *Political Thought*

Political thought, whatever form it may take, is a reflection on political phenomena. Political phenomena, whatever their nature, occur within a political society. Therefore, the starting point for examining the essence of political thought is to consider the political society and ascertain its nature. Human beings live alongside one another. The co-existence of living beings takes two forms: herd life and social life. In herd life, individuals live side by side, but each exists for itself and no particular status or role is defined for members in the life of the herd. In social life, however, relationships are structured, roles are defined, and if there is disruption or negligence in performing these roles, society experiences tension; and if that disruption surpasses a certain threshold, society may disintegrate. In the social life of animals such as bees or ants, these roles are defined instinctively; yet for human beings, no such roles are defined by instinct—no one is naturally or innately born a king, minister, tailor, or cook.

Although humans are social by nature, they possess individual consciousness and free will. This characteristic means that human society does not emerge from instinctive order but from rational interaction, and social relationships are shaped by conscious and deliberate engagement. This point is the source of the emergence of the political community (10).

Mohammad-Javad Larijani, in defining political society, writes: our co-existence (community) possesses specific characteristics: it is marked by organized interdependence. For instance, some individuals serve as military personnel or police whose duty is to maintain order and protect the lives and property of others. In return for their continuous effort, they receive wages—wages paid through taxation, meaning that you, I, and others contribute to this system. Similarly, in securing food, housing, medicine, and other essential needs, all members are interdependent. Furthermore, communities vary in size, in the type of interdependence, and in levels of intensity: villages are connected to cities, and cities to the capital. A “national community” is largely self-sufficient, at least in terms of governance. Nations also relate to one another in a uniquely structured manner. The main subject of political philosophy is this very community—termed the political or civil community—namely, organized co-existence founded on structured interdependence (Larijani, 2001:43) (10).

It appears that this definition is incomplete and does not adequately address the essential qualifier of “political.” “Living together with organized interdependence” describes social life in general; the political dimension refers to something more specific. Dr. Sadra offers a definition that avoids this shortcoming: a political society is the human

community described as political due to certain considerations. Although this definition circumvents the earlier limitation, it does not specify what considerations render a human community political. Considering various definitions of politics, two key concepts emerge: power and governance; yet a more precise analysis identifies the central concept as dignity (*'izzah*) or authority. Since human society arises from rational interaction, it cannot come into existence or persist without reference to such concepts. Therefore, any human society guided by the conscious will of its members, oriented toward such goals, becomes characterized as political. Thus, the political society is the human community insofar as it is steered by the conscious will of individuals toward dignity (or power, governance, or whatever concept stands at the core of politics). Accordingly, we can understand what constitutes a political phenomenon: any matter arising within the political society by virtue of its political nature is considered a political phenomenon, and such phenomena are the subject of political thought (Larijani, 1991:230) (17).

## Discussions on the Intellectual

### *Lexical Meaning of Intellectualism*

The term *intellectualism* consists of the words *roshan* (bright) and *fekr* (thought), along with the relational suffix *-i*. Its meaning is clear: a thought that is illuminated, enlightened, non-obscure, connected to light—meaning that it perceives realities, is realistic, understands benefit and harm, and distinguishes between friend and enemy. It also dispels darkness and ignorance, illuminates, and views realities with a brightened intellect and spirit exactly as they are (6). Intellectualism in this sense represents the ideal sought by sages and the virtuous. Imam Ali (PBUH) identifies the path to realism and intellectual clarity as piety, stating: “One who practices piety and fears God, God will deliver him from tribulations and grant him a light in the midst of darkness” (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, sermon 182).

In general, synthesizing all diverse definitions, an intellectual can be described as a member of the educated class who, driven by human, social, ethical, cultural, and political concerns, takes positions on sensitive and significant issues facing his society and the world. An intellectual assumes responsibility for societal issues as well as broader ideals and imperatives (18).

Historically and theoretically, intellectualism is a phenomenon with Western origins, emerging from the humanist movement and belonging to the modern era. However, similar notions of intellectual engagement can also be traced in earlier historical periods. Some scholars, drawing from Greek philosophers—especially Socrates and Plato—define the intellectual as the “critical conscience of society.” Others believe an intellectual is “one who possesses the capacity to articulate a message, perspective, philosophy, or belief to the public” (7).

An intellectual is one who, through independent reasoning without imitation, analyzes everything; one who has attained awareness and, as a result, possesses an open and dynamic worldview and the ability to comprehend and logically analyze the conditions of the time and the society in which he lives (14).

### *Indicators of Intellectualism*

Analysts have identified numerous indicators of intellectualism, but the most significant may be summarized as follows:

1. **Critical Inquiry:** Maintaining a critical stance toward power and preferring truth-telling in the face of authority.
2. **Thoughtfulness:** Engaging in reflective thought to elevate society intellectually.

3. **Aesthetic Sensibility:** A sense of social responsibility that transcends professional duties.
4. **Independence:** Avoiding submission to power structures and receiving mandates from no one (19).
5. **Message-Bearing:** Conveying messages artistically and effectively to the audience (2).
6. **Freedom from Prejudice:** Realism combined with ethical insight (1).
7. **Rejection of Fanaticism:** Avoiding violent responses and upholding ethical presence beyond rigid political absolutes.
8. **Disenchantment:** Removing false sanctity from ambiguous and truth-deprived conditions.
9. **Authenticity:** The moral courage to raise difficult questions.
10. **Transformability:** Recognizing the shortcomings of the present and identifying pathways for transition.
11. **Cultural Agency with Social Commitment:** Possessing the capacity to orient social vision and conduct.
12. **Inclination toward Ethics and Spirituality:** Articulating truth and alleviating suffering (14).

However, intellectuals have also demonstrated other tendencies—such as utopianism, overgeneralization, leadership-seeking, ideological construction, polarization, and totalization. In today's context, none of these qualities are effective or appealing, for the age of grand ideologies that once shaped the horizon of political systems has ended (1). Today, avoiding ideological tensions and myth-making has become a defining characteristic of the modern intellectual. Yet despite this shift, the intellectual does not abandon social critique and continues to function as the articulate and expressive voice of civil society.

### *Religious Intellectual*

If we assume that intellectualism is a current originating in the West, grounded in the Renaissance, devoid of religious identity and essentially opposed to religion, and that communist intellectualism is likewise anti-religious and stands in opposition to every form of religion, then “religious intellectual” would be a meaningless concept and could not be employed—even if a given intellectual personally believed in religious doctrines. Some have explained religious intellectualism as a specific model by appealing to the relationship between the signifier and the signified. They argue that although meaning and identity arise from the relation between signifier and signified, there is no intrinsic or pre-determined relationship between the two. What links concept and referent is a conventional and fluid relation. In short, identities are formed within dynamic, variable, transformative, and non-fixed discourses whose warp and weft rest on differing elements, moments, nodal points, power relations, and regimes of truth (20).

In other words, the concept of intellectualism, like all other concepts, is an “empty and floating signifier” that can be repeated within different discursive contexts and come to signify diverse referents. Therefore, from a logical and linguistic standpoint, religion cannot be defined as the absolute “other” of intellectualism, nor can a completely external and dualistic relationship be drawn between them (15).

### *Religious Intellectualism in Taleghani's Thought*

Ayatollah Taleghani consistently praised intellectuals such as Bazargan and Shariati. In a message issued in June 1979 on the occasion of the commemoration of Dr. Ali Shariati, he likened Shariati to an olive tree that, nourished by authentic Islamic culture, revolutionary teachings, and the legacy of the Prophet's Household, quenched the soul and spirit of the thirsty generation. He also considered Shariati among those figures who strove to present Islam as it truly was and to discover the straight path amid the confusions of left and right. Ayatollah Taleghani likewise had extensive contact with another pioneer of this current, Jalal Al-e Ahmad. While criticizing

Jalal's turn toward leftist currents in Iran, he stated that Jalal, toward the end of his life, returned to Islam, the Qur'an, and his authentic religious roots. Regarding Jalal's works, he remarked: "His two best books, in my view, are *Westoxication* and *A Straw in Mecca*. He wrote *A Straw in Mecca* during his pilgrimage to Hajj; it is both political in aspect and, in some passages, offers a fine exposition of the philosophy of Hajj" (3).

In reality, Ayatollah Taleghani valued this current because of its capacity to revive Islam and religion for the younger generation and to attract youth toward faith, and he consistently drew on its methods to restore authentic Islam. Throughout his life, he cooperated with Bazargan in various domains and, in dealing with the youth, consciously drew on Shariati's approaches—especially his mode of presenting Islam and his use of modern sciences in explaining religion (8).

### *Rationality and Reasoning in Taleghani's Thought*

Rationality occupies a special place in the realm of Ayatollah Taleghani's thought and practice. Many of his characteristics—such as his living understanding of Qur'anic verses and narrations, his deep comprehension of social issues, and his forward-looking outlook—are rooted in this fundamental trait, which served as the measure for his movement, thinking, and perspective. In approaching any religious teaching, he placed reason and rational reflection at the center and never departed from this axis.

Taleghani believed that the fabric of Islamic teachings and doctrines is interwoven with reason and rationality. In his view, the Qur'an calls human beings, more than anything else, toward understanding, reflection, contemplation, and thought so that they may find direction and attain perfection. All beliefs, values, and programs of Islam are, in his eyes, grounded in wisdom and sound reason; thus, they admit no genuine doubt or flaw, nor do they accommodate superstition, fantasy, or claims lacking logical foundation. For him, Islam is synonymous with wisdom, truth, and rectitude, and reason has no affinity with anything other than truth. The Qur'an is entirely truth and argument, and materials laced with superstitions and Isra'iliyyat that sound reason cannot accept must not be imposed on the Qur'an or recorded as its miracles (9).

He emphasized that all commands and teachings of the Sharia possess wisdom and rationale, and that reason, once it pays attention to the wisdom and underlying philosophy of legal rulings, will accept them or, at the very least, will not reject them. Those who accuse Islam of superstition or hostility to reason are either ignorant of the philosophy of religious rulings and the conditions governing their implementation or else act out of malice; behind such claims stand impure, Islam-hostile colonial interests seeking to drive Islam from the arena of life, for as long as Islam remains present in social life, there is no room for their encroachment. Of course, misunderstandings and the improper conduct of Muslims have contributed to these criticisms. As a result, in addition to backwardness and sinking into the mire of ignorance that has afflicted us Muslims, our superstitious thinking and improper practices have become tools for discrediting Islamic teachings and the Qur'an. Taleghani points to numerous examples of the astonishing achievements of Muslims in scientific and social fields—achievements realized through rationality, intellectual effort, and correct understanding. Proper comprehension of fundamental principles and immutable divine laws of destiny, he says, leads to dynamism, movement, and action, granting the Muslim intellectual power. Conversely, erroneous understanding of destiny and providence and a turn toward illusions, superstitions, and worn-out customs paralyze people, leaving them at the mercy of chance, accident, and natural events to "make" their fate (5).

### *Freedom of Thought and the Pursuit of Freedom in Taleghani's Political Thought*

Taleghani was a scholar devoted to freedom of thought and to the struggle for liberty. He discovered the path of development for his own thinking and, from an Islamic standpoint, strove to create a healthy and free environment, devoting his entire life to the fight against despotism and oppression. Alongside other religious scholars and contemporary intellectuals, he played a crucial role in establishing the Islamic Revolution and in shaping a religious government. He regarded all forms of intellectual and social freedom as rooted in spiritual and inner freedom. In his view, a person can only be truly open-minded and allow others to be free if he has liberated himself from the shackles of egoism and self-interest (9).

In his view, such a person may or may not gain the opportunity and power to tyrannize over others, but in any case, he is, by his very nature, rebellious and despotic. In Taleghani's understanding, one who allows every impulse, desire, and whim to impose itself upon his conscience, duties, and responsibilities is inherently tyrannical (3). From his Qur'anic perspective, the human being is a choosing agent; the conditions of life and the cultural and social environment must therefore be organized in such a way that people can, with serenity and without constraint, reflect on and decide about their beliefs and their social destiny. Habits, cultures, and despotic systems sterilize people's talents and strip them of freedom. For this reason, Islam opposes coercion in religion and calls its followers to awareness, understanding, and conscious choice.

In the midst of the clash of Eastern and Western ideologies and schools—each claiming to champion freedom and democracy while competing for the allegiance of the youth—Taleghani cried out that Islam is the most open-minded of doctrines and never turns away from hearing the views of others. To those believers who, fearing for the faith of the youth, were anxious about the presentation of Marx's ideas in religious gatherings, he replied that Marxism is the offspring of political, social, and religious despotism and flourishes under conditions of repression; in a free and prosperous society, it withers on its own. Rather than closing channels of expression, he said, one must produce awareness. "Some said: the communists will infiltrate... The same fear of communism that existed under the former regime still persists. Communism is the product of political, social, and religious tyranny; wherever there is despotism and deprivation and the visage of religion is distorted, communism arises. They said: 'Opponents must also be allowed into our assemblies. And if they do not come, we must invite them. Their words must be heard. We must never be afraid that other groups will find a way in and express their views'" (16).

Taleghani was a populist intellectual: he spoke in the language and idiom of the people, gave voice to their demands, lived among them and as one of them, wished for their well-being, and longed for a life of felicity for them. For this reason, the masses loved him, seeing in him their refuge and protector. He regarded himself as responsible for the fate of the people and, despite his scholarly and social stature, always remained at their side, sharing in their pains, sufferings, hopes, and aspirations. The destitution, abandonment, and lack of protection suffered by the people—together with the pervasive discrimination that had worn them down—deeply wounded him, inflamed his inner being, and consumed his soul. His devotion to the people sprang from the depth of his faith and conviction; it was not a slogan or ceremonial posture for self-promotion. His popular orientation was a commitment to deepen their religious and social awareness and to improve the material conditions of the deprived. Love for the people, for him, meant enlightening them and laboring for their happiness.

Taleghani did not regard a society permeated by poverty, discrimination, and class divisions as a godly society. He insisted that human dignity, honor, and religiosity are trampled in such an environment. Islam, he stressed, does

not accept empty stomachs and does not permit a situation in which some are driven into the graves by poverty and deprivation while others are immersed in wealth and comfort (Razavi, 2007:93) (8).

### *Justice in Taleghani's Political Thought*

In Taleghani's view, the Qur'an is, before any other designation, a "Book of Guidance," for it introduces itself to us with precisely this title. Accordingly, this comprehensive charter of guidance is oriented toward the individual and collective felicity of the human being, and justice and equity (*'adl* and *qist*) in the collective sphere are among the necessary conditions for realizing the full happiness of humankind. For this reason, by reviving Qur'anic sciences, he endeavored to prepare the ground for such guidance, whose essence is the blossoming of the inner capacities of the human being: "This monotheism in belief and purpose, this opening of the eyes of world-view, this inner transformation and harmony of psychic faculties, the awakening of latent capacities and the bubbling forth of the springs of virtues, the removal of illusory and artificial distances, the extension of the shade of justice, and the power of creativity and initiative—all of these were among the effects of the direct radiance of the Qur'an upon the recesses of souls and the beams of its guidance" (9).

He believed that Islam possesses its own distinct social system, whose various elements are all governed by a single axis and fundamental logic: *tawhīd* (divine unity). In his interpretation, *tawhīd* is not merely an abstract theological discussion; rather, it is a reality directly connected to the soul and personality of the monotheistic human being. Consequently, the value of equity and justice—as the primary aim of the sending of messengers according to the principle of *tawhīd*—takes on a fully tangible and concrete character and stands in direct opposition to despotism, colonialism, and exploitation. On the basis of this Qur'an-based ontology and anthropology, social development and the realization of social justice are intermediate goals, while the ultimate purpose of creation is the perfection of each and every human being. It was precisely this cognitive capacity and Taleghani's militant approach to the Qur'an that allowed him to articulate a lofty understanding of democracy and socialism (read: freedom and justice): an understanding that, while critically engaging prevailing interpretations of these notions, did not reduce Islam to the version of religion envisioned by these epistemic paradigms. In a passage from his introduction to the book *Tanbīh al-Ummah wa Tanzīh al-Millat*, he writes:

"The rise of Islam brought about a great and profound transformation and revolution in thought, morals, and the social order, and established governments that embodied the highest examples of justice and devotion to truth—governments surpassing ordinary human thought and power... The luminous world and radiant environment into which the Qur'an invites humankind is the world of *tawhīd*: the unity of Essence, the unity of power, the unity of life, guardianship, the unity of systems, relations, and laws of the universe, the unity of will, and the unity of human thought, faculties, and will. This environment and goal, in spite of all its clarity, radiance, truth, and inner secret, remains hidden and veiled from the public. The rulings, ethics, social teachings, relations, and narratives of the Qur'an are all permeated by and veiled within the light of *tawhīd*. The first call of the prophets is knowledge of God and worship of the One" (11).

### *Freedom and Human Will in Motahhari's Thought*

It is self-evident that, although the human being is free to shape the structure of his inner life, to transform the natural environment into a form suited to his purposes, and to build the future as he wishes, he nonetheless faces

numerous constraints; his freedom is a relative freedom—that is, freedom within a bounded circle. Within this limited sphere he can choose for himself either a felicitous future or a future filled with misery.

Human limitations arise from several sources:

1. **Heredity:** A person is born with a human nature. By virtue of having human parents, he necessarily and involuntarily comes into the world as a human individual. Moreover, parents bequeath to their children a range of hereditary traits—such as skin color, eye color, and physical characteristics—that may in some cases be transmitted across several generations. None of these are “chosen” by the individual; heredity imposes them upon him.
2. **Natural and geographical environment:** The natural and geographical environment in which a person grows and develops inevitably leaves its mark on his bodily constitution and temperament. Cold, hot, and temperate climates each call forth particular dispositions and moral tendencies, just as mountainous, desert, and other regions do in their own ways.
3. **Social environment:** The social environment is a major factor in the formation of a person’s psychological and moral traits. One’s language, customary and social practices, religion, and denomination are, in most cases, what the social environment imposes upon the individual.
4. **History and temporal factors:** From the standpoint of social environment, the human being is not only under the influence of the present; the past—its events and occurrences—also exerts a substantial effect on his formation. In general, there is a firm and certain relation between the past and the future of every being; past and future are not two isolated points but two segments of a continuous process (5).

Freedom, within the lexicon of political thought, has captured deep attention and interest among thinkers. Numerous authors and scholars, stemming from diverse orientations and aims and resting on different philosophical foundations, have discussed and debated it. From Motahhari’s perspective, freedom is of such significance that it is counted among the aims of the prophetic mission. He notes that, according to the Qur’an, one of the objectives of the prophets has been to grant social freedom to humanity—that is, to rescue individuals from enslavement and servitude to one another. Referring to the verse, “Say, O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we worship none but God, that we associate nothing with Him, and that none of us take others as lords besides God” (Āl ‘Imrān, 3:64), he explains: none of us should consider another person his slave, nor should anyone take another as his lord and master. The master–servant system is annulled; the system of exploiter and exploited is annulled; the system of inequality is annulled. No one has the right to exploit or enslave another. In Motahhari’s view, “freedom is one of the requisites of life and perfection” which, together with other factors such as education and security, can guarantee the perfection of human life.

He writes: “One of the needs of a living being is freedom. It makes no difference whether the living being is a plant, an animal, or a human being; in any case, it is in need of freedom... It is possible for a living being to enjoy security and possess the means of growth, yet at the same time to face obstacles that block its development” (4).

Freedom, in itself, is not a right but rather a duty that is directed toward others, and the ground of this duty lies in a right embedded in nature—namely the innate capacity of the human being *qua* human. Creating obstacles in the path of this capacity leads to the deprivation and loss of the human person. The reason why freedom is inalienable is that it is a duty falling upon others; duties, as such, are not subject to annulment or forfeiture. It is only with respect to rights that one may speak of waiver or relinquishment. Even there, however, a distinction must be

drawn between natural rights—which, though rights of the individual, are at the same time rights of nature—and social and positive rights, which are established by human beings and positive law (4).

In Motahhari's view, freedom has two pillars: rebellion and defiance on the one hand, and submission and obedience on the other. Without rebellion and defiance, there is stagnation and bondage; without submission, discipline, and principled commitment, there is chaos. The free human being, he argues, turns away from all that is non-divine and rises in rebellion against such forces, whether they reside within his own self or manifest in the social realm; yet, in relation to truth and to God, he bows his head in reverence and submits only before the Divine. In Motahhari's thought, the human being is created free and endowed with choice, and the very essence of humanity is constituted by freedom. Only within this condition does divine punishment and reward in the hereafter become meaningful, for God does not punish a compelled, irresponsible being, nor does He grant reward without accountability. Punishment and reward have value for the human being only if he has first been created free and has chosen his own way of life, such that if he deviates from the path, deliberately and knowingly turning away from truth, he incurs otherworldly punishment, and if he inclines toward truth, he attains reward and reaps the fruits of his righteous deeds (21).

Accordingly, in Motahhari's view, the root of respect for freedom lies in the necessity of respecting the intrinsic dignity of the human being. The difference, however, is that the basis for the obligation to respect human dignity, from his standpoint, is the teleological law of creation and the purposive order of existence: honoring the human being is, in reality, a requisite of his attaining the perfection befitting him. Respecting freedom of will and choice is appropriate insofar as it aligns with the perfection of human nature; but if, in certain cases, a person's will and desire turn against the freedom of that very nature, then it is the will and desire that must be sacrificed for the sake of human nature, not the reverse. Just as observing personal hygiene takes precedence over a person's whims and bodily inclinations—not the other way around—and just as even the method of observing hygiene depends on the judgment of the physician rather than the individual himself, likewise, whenever preservation of an individual's freedom is clearly contrary to that person's vital interests (as in cases of compulsory education or compulsory health measures), mandatory education or health may be prescribed. A valid perspective must be able to interpret human intrinsic dignity and its implications in such a way that everyone recognizes the obligation to honor it, and it must also be capable of explaining the rationale and basis of freedom and the reason for its necessary protection (21).

### *The Place of Justice in Motahhari's Political Thought*

Regarding the place of justice in political thought, it suffices to observe that justice has accompanied political reflection since its very emergence—just as the surviving works from ancient eras testify. In the modern period as well, justice has played a central role as one of the most fundamental principles of political thinking. For example, Plato, the renowned philosopher of ancient Greece, regarded justice as the foundation of virtues, the harmonizer of the three parts of the *polis*, the source of unity and equilibrium—similar to the harmony of musical notes in producing a single composition—and equivalent to health in the human body (21).

Morteza Motahhari, in his lectures and discussions, extensively addressed the concept of justice, such that it may be said that the issue constituted one of his central intellectual concerns. For example, after quoting a narration from Imam Ali (AS) in which the Imam prioritizes *justice* over *existence* within society, Motahhari presents a vivid analogy to depict the importance of justice within the social order. Justice in society, he states, is like the foundation of a building, while affection and sentiment are like painting and ornamentation. The foundation must first be sound;

only then do decoration and painting become meaningful. If “the house is ruined from the foundation,” what benefit is there in being preoccupied with decorating its façade? Yet if the foundation is firm, life remains possible even without external ornamentation. A building may have a beautiful, attractive exterior, yet because its foundation is weak, a single rainfall may collapse it upon its inhabitants (4).

## Conclusion

Intellectualism is one of the most contentious concepts that has continually challenged Iran's intellectual and cultural community, and it appears that no precise definition of the term has yet been universally accepted. After the Islamic Revolution, and with changes in certain concepts such as culture, art, freedom, thought, religion, and politics, the notion of intellectualism became even more ambiguous. Some consider intellectualism alien to religion and, consequently, alien to the Islamic system, attempting to use it as a weapon against the Islamic Revolution; in contrast, certain thinkers argue that the consequence of true intellectualism is nothing other than the realization of the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the system that emerged from it.

Figures such as Martyr Motahhari, Martyr Beheshti, and the late Ayatollah Taleghani—who, from the perspective of the leaders of the Islamic Revolution, embody the model of the religious intellectual—believed that intellectualism can serve religion and politics, guiding society toward its deserved destination. Without doubt, Martyr Motahhari may be regarded, on the one hand, as a founder of the correct current of religious intellectualism, and on the other hand, as a serious critic of eclectic, secular, and atheistic forms of religious intellectualism. Unlike certain intellectuals who sought an “Islam without clergy,” he emphasized the central role of the clergy and warned strongly about the dangerous consequences of such a notion. Motahhari was a Muslim thinker, a discerning cleric fully aware of contemporary issues and circumstances, who, through deep and precise understanding of Islam, addressed all intellectual needs of his time from a religious perspective. Just as he criticized religious traditionalists and rigid conservatives, he likewise critiqued and rejected extremist, Westernized modernists, defending genuine Islam with powerful reasoning and argumentation.

His serious intellectual and cultural struggle against eclectic and deviant currents ultimately led to his martyrdom at the hands of the deviant Furqan group, rendering both his life and his works eternal in history. The new movement of religious intellectualism in Iran was founded in September 1941 by three individuals—Ayatollah Taleghani, Engineer Bazargan, and later Dr. Ali Shariati. Martyr Motahhari himself expressed this truth in another form: the pioneers who first introduced the younger generation to Islam were neither he nor Shariati; rather, it was Taleghani and Bazargan who opened the path, and they merely followed them afterward. Seyyed Mahmoud Taleghani was among those clerics who shunned coercion and rigid fanaticism and opposed compulsory imposition of beliefs.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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