

## **Allameh Tabataba'i's Political Philosophy and Islamic Revolution**

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**Research Article**



### **Abstract**

The present article poses questions about the relationship between Allameh Tabataba'i's political philosophy and Islamic revolution and answers them. The method of this article is using library resources and documents, and it uses them to answer the questions. The achievement of the article is that Allameh Tabataba'i was the theoretician and one of the founders of Islamic revolution and had a considerable presence in Iran's political arena as a political activist. Allameh Tabataba'i was a thinker with socio-political commitment and responsibility, and would attempt to perform his human, moral, religious and seminary duties. He had also political activities in proportion to his own situation. The present article is an introduction to this issue, and this subject deserves to attract some broad studies and inquiries.

### **Keywords**

Allameh Tabataba'i's political philosophy, Islamic revolution, social Islam, political Islam, social thought.

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## **Introduction**

Allameh Sayyid Mohammad Hossein Tabataba'i was one of the best-known scientific and religious figures of Islam and Shiism in Iran in the present era. He was one of the main and most important sources of reference to the Islamic and Shiite thought, and was an authoritative expert with numerous works especially in exegesis, philosophy, and Islamic doctrines. He was a commentator of the Quran and prominent educator of philosophy in seminary, and a prominent influential thinker since 1320s SH. In the discourse of political thought in the contemporary Iran, there are various and conflicting views regarding the relationship between philosophy and philosophers on the one hand, and politics, revolution and Islamic revolution in general on the other hand, as well as the relationship between Allameh Tabataba'i, philosophy and political philosophy on the one hand, and revolution and Islamic revolution in particular on the other hand. In view of the importance of this subject, here we have posed questions in three main axes regarding the relationship between philosophy and Islamic revolution, Allameh Tabataba'i's relationship with Islamic revolution, and the relationship between Allameh Tabataba'i's political philosophy and Islamic revolution. It is noteworthy that the relationship between Allameh Tabataba'i and his political philosophy on the one hand, and contemporary Iran and Islamic revolution on the other hand is much more than what can be posed here, and it deserves some more independent inquiries.

### **1. Political philosophy and revolution**

Is there a relationship between political philosophy and revolution in general? In answering this question, we must note that Kant's philosophy was seeking to rationalize government and politics. According to some studies, Kant's philosophy led to French Revolution, because he believed that mutual understanding is done in the framework of rational

topics and systems. Regarding the rationalization, a writer has said that philosophers maintained justice and welfare are established through rationalization of politics and government. Ensuing the negative consequences of French Revolution, Positivism emerged, which constituted somehow a turning away from and opposition to revolution and negation of it as well as denial of philosophy (Singer, 2001, pp. 58-59; 79-83; 86-87). In opposition to Kantian rationalization, Hegelian interpretation of rationality was offered that maintained what is a reality in the outside world is rational and enjoys rationality and rational justification; and "The rational is real, and the real is rational" (Burns, 2002, pp. 303-306). Hegel's statements in this regard need a variety of interpretations. Among them are the views of some who have maintained Hegel was to justify Prussia government in his time (Singer, 2001, pp. 86-87). This is while Hegel would ironically say that "The rational is real, and the real is rational". That is, "Everything that is rational must exist;" thus, the existing Prussia state which is not rational is not a real state (Burns, 2002, pp. 303-306). Similarly, Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal has been quoted to say, in answering a question about the powers of sultan and caliph, "sultan and caliph have these powers." (al-Fara' al-Hanbali, 1406 AH, p. 20):

و قد روى عن الامام احمد الفاظ تقتضى إسقاط اعتبار العدالة و العلم و الفضل ... و  
 قد روى عنه ما يعارض ذلك ... و قال ... فى إمراة لا ولى لها «السلطان» فقيل له  
 تقول السلطان و نحن على ما ترى اليوم؟ ... فقال: «... انما قلت السلطان»

It means "the one who is a real sultan or caliph, not this promiscuous corrupted and oppressive sultan who enjoys none of the qualifications of sultanate and caliphate, and just his title is sultan and caliph..."

Before Kant and Hegel, we had Plato and his idea of 'the world of Ideas', which was – in its turn – a revolutionary idea, because it would criticize and negate the ruling system based on the world of ideals and

referring to it (Klosko, 1995, pp. 184-191). Similarly, Aristotle analyzes and criticizes the existing governments on the basis of the analysis of the relationship between the politics, revolution, economics, and government (Klosko, 1995, pp. 252-282). In the same vein, we may enumerate other cases in relationship of philosophy and political philosophy with revolution. In this regard, Yazdani Moqaddam maintains that Farabi, in addition to theorization in political philosophy, was in the position of a political-cultural activist (Yazdani Moqaddam, 1395 SH, p. 115).

Clearly, the relationship of a philosophical system (for instance, Kant's philosophy) with practice and political system (for instance, French Revolution) is not a part-to-part relationship; rather, it is a general and fundamental relationship. Similarly, the relationship of the Islamic revolution and the Islamic regime with political philosophy or transcendental political philosophy or Allameh Tabataba'i's political philosophy is a general relationship. For example, as we will state, [Mulla Sadra's] substantial motion shows itself in a particular way in this movement of Islamic revolution or Islamic regime and becomes useful there. Similarly, this is the case in discussions on causality or conventional things. We may also adduce or refer to a philosophical system or some of its special discussions for decision-making or analyzing subjects.

## 2. Allameh Tabataba'i's relationship with Islamic revolution

Allameh Tabataba'i was among the founders of the Islamic revolution in Iran. He was also present in the meeting – held with Imam Khomeini's invitation – and the declaration with nine signatures<sup>1</sup> in

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<sup>1</sup>On Mehr 16<sup>th</sup> night, a meeting was held in Qom in Ayatollah 'Abdul-Karim Ha'eri's house, wherein the host (Murteza Ayatollah-zada Ha'eri), Sayyid Mohammad Reza Golpayegani, Sayyid Mohammad Kazem Shari'atmadari, and Ruhollah Khomeini attended. <https://b2n.ir/n65770>.

Imam Khomeini and eight other great jurists wrote a letter of objection to the enactment of State and  
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opposition to the State and Provincial Associations Bill and opposition to the state.

It has been quoted that he was the first person or among the first individuals who went to welcome Imam Khomeini after returning from Tehran to Qom (Mas'udi Khomeini, 1381 SH, p. 271). In his interviews, Dr. Nasr also frequently quotes Allameh Tabataba'i as one of the critics of the status quo in that time and opposed to imperial government (Nasr, 1385 SH, p. 186). In reports of SAVAK and the intelligent services of that time, Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Sahari'atmadari and Ayatollah Tabataba'i were named as those who dealt with political issues of the day and critical matters (Ja'fariyan, 1386 SH, pp. 320-321).

From the Islamic international aspect, Allameh Tabataba'i's declaration in support of Palestinian revolution and gathering financial support for Palestine along with Ayatollah Sayyid Abul-Fazl Zanjani and Martyr Mutahhari is well-known.<sup>1</sup> Among the activist roles he played was that Ayatollah Milani appointed him as a referee in disagreements between Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Shari'atmadari that led to a concordat. Of course, the concordat was not implemented due to some reasons and Allameh Tabataba'i wrote a letter to Ayatollah Milani and explained the situation, expressing an excuse for giving up his role as referee.<sup>2</sup>

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Provincial Associations Bill on Bahman 28, 1341 SH, adducing the article 2 of the complement of Constitutional Law enacted in Dey 1285 SH as well as the articles seven and eight of State and Provincial Associations Bill and articles 15 and 17 of the Baladiya (mayoralty) Law enacted in Ordibehesht and Khordad 1341 SH, addressed to all people of Iran... that detailed declaration was signed by Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, Sayyid Murteza Hosseini Langarudi, Sayyid Ahmad Hosseini Zanjani, Sayyid Mohammad Hossein Tabataba'i, Mohammad Musavi Golpayegani, Sayyid Kazem Shari'atmadari, Hashem Amoli, and Murteza Ha'eri. <https://b2n.ir/e74346>

1. <https://fa.alkawthartv.com/news/125301> & <https://sdpn.ir/2808>

2. <https://historydocuments.ir/print.php?id=3420> & <http://revolution.pchi.ir/show.php?page=contents&id=15000> & <https://psri.ir/?id=mdlInxs3hsy> & <http://www.edalatonline.com/print.php?ToDo=ShowArticles&AID=4642>

### 1. The theoretician of the Islamic revolution

In late fifties SH, the late Dr. Shari'ati became famous as the teacher of revolution. After martyrdom of Master Mutahhari, he was sometimes proposed as the teacher or master of the revolution. Introducing those thinkers as the teachers or masters of the revolution was based on some considerations. Some analysts introduced Allameh Tabataba'i as the theoretician of the main groups and determiner and leader of the Islamic revolution, considering him as the main authority of the revolution or even the initiator of a cultural revolution (Borujerdi, 1384 SH, pp. 129, 137, 138, 149; Mirsepasi, 1384 SH, pp. 152-161). According to some authorities and analysts of the issues of Iran, the most important work in the recent decades – which has been ignored – is the book entitled *Marja'iyat wa Rowḥāniyyat* (Borujerdi, 1384 SH, pp. 128-131). Allameh Tabataba'i's view in that book about government, legal reasoning, fixed and altering things, plays a prominent and decisive role.

Theorization is not created in the vacuum and is not set free in the space and time. Allameh Tabataba'i's theorization is placed in the continuation of theorization by the thinkers of contemporary Iran before Constitutionalism and has continued in the thoughts of his pupils such as Mutahhari. Allameh Tabataba'i's discourse in *Marja'iyat wa Rowḥāniyyat* can be considered as a declaration of the Islamic revolution and Islamic government. It is noteworthy that analysis of Allameh Tabataba'i's discourse in *Marja'iyat wa Rowḥāniyyat* is its rereading and reinterpretation based on his discussions in *Uṣūl Falsafa wa Rawish Ri'ālism* and *Tafsīr Al-Mīzān*. As Ayatollah Javadi Amoli states, "Mulla Sadra's philosophy is like a mountain or a mine of gold and jewelry, and it is up to the political thinker and philosopher to process a ring or a piece of jewel from that mine" (Javadi Amoli, 1387 SH, pp. 77-78 and 121-122). This is what shows itself in an analytical and theoretical process that passes from *Uṣūl Falsafa wa Rawish*

*Ri'ālism* through *Tafsīr Al-Mīzān* and in Allameh's articles in *Marja'īyyat wa Rowḥāniyyat*.

In this regard, the analysis presented by Allameh Tabataba'i in the 3<sup>rd</sup> volume of *Al-Mīzān* means negation of despotic government and confirmation of political and liberation movements as well as Constitutional movement and opposition to royal government and preference of republic government. Thus, Allameh Tabataba'i opposed the hereditary lifetime sultanate and was in favor of republic, temporary and periodic government (Tabataba'i (n.d.) B, vol. 3, pp. 145-147).

It is noteworthy that in his political philosophical analysis, Allameh Tabataba'i does not move directly from the individual man to political system; rather, he goes from individual to social life and from social life to establishment of political system (Tabataba'i (n.d.) B, vol. 3, pp. 148-149). Accordingly, Allameh Tabataba'i does not go towards a totalitarian government that dominates all states of life. Rather, he goes towards a government that is just one aspect of social life and is the product of community and, thus, it leads to community of individual men. In this way, the state that Allameh Tabataba'i speaks of is an instrumental state, not an organic Hegelian state.

Allameh Tabataba'i pays attention also to the individual man and considers him the foundation of social life and political government and regime (Tabataba'i (n.d.) B, vol. 9, p. 388). Thus, he maintains that the political system is responsible before the man, just as he regards the religion responsible before him. In this way, Allameh Tabataba'i's principality of society, wherein he considers an existential order for society, is not in opposition to principality of individual. Rather, in Allameh Tabataba'i's thought, society also leads – in its turn – to individual (Tabataba'i (n.d.) B, vol. 9, p. 386). Also, the political system leads, due to being among the conventional ideas of society, to individual (Tabataba'i (n.d.) B, vol. 3, pp. 148-149). Thus, as we can speak of principality of

society in Allameh's thought, we may speak of principality of individual in his thought as well.

**A) Social and political Islam.** Based on Allameh's emphasis on existential priority of society over government (Tabataba'i (n.d.) B, vol. 3, pp. 148-149) and in view of the importance and high position and role of society in Allameh's political philosophy and its implications, as well as his frequent emphases on the decisive role of education and its reference to social structures (Tabataba'i (n.d.) B, vol. 4, pp. 107-109; 126-131), we must inevitably enumerate him among the authorities in social Islam. It is necessary to pay attention to the point that social Islam in his view does not negate the political aspects of Islam. Allameh Tabataba'i introduces establishment of government among the necessary duties of society (Tabataba'i (n.d.) B, vol. 3, pp. 144-149). As we will say in more detail, he deals with the principles, foundations and features of Islamic government in his works (Tabataba'i (n.d.) B, vol. 4, pp. 121-125; Tabataba'i, 1388 SH, vol. 1, pp. 177-178).

**B) The rule of religious and revolutionary action.** Allameh Tabataba'i asserts that – based on the necessity of homogeneity between cause and effect in discussions of causality – we may not make use of evil and wrong means to achieve good and right ends (Tabataba'i (n.d.) B, vol. 4, pp. 155-156; vol. 11, pp. 103-104). As Ayatollah Mas'udi Khomeini reports, Allameh Tabataba'i has stated these points under the conditions of 1350s SH when Mujahedin Khalq and some of revolutionary forces would perform wrong actions (Mas'udi Khomeini, 1381 SH, p. 352). In his classes, Allameh would frequently say that right result comes from right preambles, and goal does not justify the means. Thus, among the rules of religious and revolutionary action are desirable action and rightness, goodness and justice of the action. This can be concluded from the relationship between action and its effect on exaltation of human's character in Mulla Sadra's works (in Mulla



Sadra's view, the soul and the body are mutually affected; thus, any physical attribute or sensory form that climbs to the world of the soul takes a sensual form, and any character or sensual feature that comes down to the body makes the body passive) (Mulla Sadra, 1386 SH, pp. 423-424 and 431; and Mulla Sadra, 1381 SH, vol. 2, p. 817).

**C) Substantial motion in the sphere of social life.** In Allameh Tabataba'i's analysis, a part of substantial motion in the human's world is done on the basis of conventional perceptions (Tabataba'i, 1375 SH, pp. 767-769; Tabataba'i, 1375 SH, pp. 769-775; Tabataba'i (n.d.) A, pp. 232-234). By covering the path of three stages (emergence of conventional knowledge, plurality in conventional sciences, the relationship of conventional sciences with real and true effects, i.e. human's external actions), the man relates himself to truths, i.e. his own real characteristics; and in other words, he makes the sciences he has made a means to go towards perfection... the knowledge that is directly a means to the man's active perfection and that of other animals is the conventional knowledge, not true knowledge... those sciences that are the relationship between the man and his actions are conventional sciences. The conventional perceptions are – in a general division – of two types: public fixed conventional perceptions before society, and private altering conventional perceptions after society (Tabataba'i, 1375 SH, pp. 428-430; Yazdani Moqaddam, 1399 SH, pp. 35-37). Among the private altering conventional perceptions after society is the convention of government and ruling (Tabataba'i (n.d.), B, vol. 3, pp. 144-145). Thus, realization of substantial motion in human society must be sought in the convention of government and ruling.

According to the theory of 'substantial motion', the moving object enjoys many diverse and contrasting facilities; and based on how it moves, one of the facilities is realized and others are negated (Tabataba'i, 1375 SH, pp. 729-730; pp. 735-747). Based on the fact that substantial motion in the universe and human community is realized through conventional

perception, and among those perceptions in the government and ruling, the nature of government and even other conventions such as appropriation and ownership and the like reveal some facilities for the man and human community and negate some others. Thus, the oppressive irrational government and ruling has one result for the substantial motion of the man and society, and the rational social just government and ruling has another result for the substantial motion of the man and the society (Tabataba'i, 1383 SH, vol. 2, pp. 190-192).

**D) Society and the desirable government.** In Allameh Tabataba'i's view, all corruptions and sins are rooted in a dichotomy of poverty and wealth (Tabataba'i (n.d.), B, vol. 9. P. 248): "At that point, the affliction spreads corruption and the spread of moral degeneration in society, and the transformation of the human environment into a bad animal environment in which there is no concern except for the belly and what is below it, and in it no one has the will of politics or education, and there is no understanding of wisdom in it, nor listening to a sermon". Therefore, the society and the government favored by Allameh Tabataba'i is the society and government wherein there are no considerable economic and class differences; and if there are, that society and regime are not – for Allameh – Islamic, humane and just. And in such a society and regime, there will be no attention paid to being human, human perfection, perfective motion and exaltation of intellect and soul as well as proximity to God (Tabataba'i (n.d.), B, vol. 9, p. 248). At any time and condition, based on divine favors, there are talented human beings that need desirable conditions to achieve the flourishing of talents. Besides, the unjust society and regime wherein there are considerable economic and class differences afflict harms to the man's intellect and his intellectual life and growth, because illicitness of committing sins is for protecting and reinforcing the intellect (Tabataba'i (n.d.), B, vol. 2, p. 188). Such a society is not Quranic, because the Quranic society is the one that follows the Quran as the

strongest path; that is, the Quran is the strongest intellectual path (Tabataba'i (n.d.), B, vol. 5, p. 255). And the society whose rationality is negated, its rational strength is also negated.

Allameh Tabataba'i's view about Islamic government and his analysis of Islamic government as well as the features he enumerates for it are his suggestions for establishing an Islamic government and a guidance for it. In Allameh's view, Islamic government is a social religious one; that is:

- a) It observes the rights of all individuals and social classes (Tabataba'i (n.d.), B, vol. 9, p. 264).
- b) It considers proximity of social classes and seeing into lower classes (Tabataba'i (n.d.), B, p. 259).
- c) It establishes legal, social, economic, and political justice (Tabataba'i, 1388 SH, vol. 1, pp. 177-178).
- d) It makes political, social and economic decisions based on referring to social consultation and deliberation (Tabataba'i, 1388 SH, vol. 1, p. 177-178).
- e) It observes people's interest and expediency in making political, social and economic decisions (Tabataba'i, 1388 SH, vol. 1, p. 177-178).

**E) Jurist's authority (*wilāyat faqīh*).** Is the Islamic government just in the form of the jurist's authority? The 'jurist's authority' is a jurisprudential issue, and Allameh Tabataba'i introduces it as a subject out of the scope of social philosophy or political philosophy of Islam (Tabataba'i, 1388 SH, vol. 1, p. 176). Thus, he refers this discussion to jurisprudence (Tabataba'i, 1388 SH, vol. 1, p. 176). He also emphasizes that '*faqīh*' is a term different from its literal meaning or the title *faqīh* in early Islam (Tabataba'i, 1388 SH, vol. 1, p. 176). Nevertheless, Allameh asserts that in the time of Imam Mahdi's absence, the government is entrusted to people, and they have the duty to establish the government based on the Prophet's Sunnah. He also enumerates and explains the features of government in the Prophet's Sunnah (Tabataba'i, 1388 SH, vol. 1, pp. 177-178).

Altogether, it seems that the form of the state – that is, whether the government is in the form of the jurist’s authority or not – is, for Allameh Tabataba’i, dependent on the expediency of the Islamic society. In other words, if the expediency of the Islamic society demands, the Islamic government will be in the form of the jurist’s authority (*wilāyat faqīh*). In answering Ayatollah Rakhshad’s question, he asserts the expedient nature of the government for persons other than the Prophet and the Infallible Imams (Rakhshad, 1386 SH, pp. 410-411).

Similarly, In Imam Khomeini’s view, the government is not restricted to jurist’s authority, because apart from the fact that he explains various forms of government in order of priority in *al-Bay’* (Khomeini, 1434 AH, vol. 2, p. 713), he confirmed the draft Constitution of the Islamic Republic prepared by Dr. Habibi and his friends including a group of lawyers such as Dr. Katuziyan and inspired by the French model of state – i.e. presidency along with prime ministry as an integration between the presidency model and parliament model – and intended to hold a polling on that draft to enact and implement it, a draft wherein there was no reference to *wilāyat faqīh*.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the form of Islamic government in IRI is not restricted, for Imam Khomeini, to *wilāyat faqīh*. Afterwards, Dr. Bazargan and his friends insisted that you promised people to establish the Constituent Assembly for Constitution and you must establish it. But Imam Khomeini refrained from doing so and argued that (a) the legitimacy of constituent assembly refers to people; thus, people themselves are permitted to enact constitution; and (b) establishing a constituent assembly takes a long time and is time-consuming. With intermediacy from the late Ayatollah Taleqani, they decided to establish a small constituent

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1. Introduction and text of IRI Constitution is accessible at <https://b2n.ir/u77895>. Also available at <https://b2n.ir/m88541> and <https://b2n.ir/q80745>.

assembly for investigating the draft of Constitution. That assembly was later called 'assembly for the final investigation of the IRI Constitution'; and since Imam Khomeini had said, 'a group of experts and authorities must gather in that assembly', it was also called the Assembly of Experts or the Assembly of Constitutional Law Experts.<sup>1</sup>

**F) The origin of deviation in Islam.** In Allameh Tabataba'i's view, deviation in Islamic nation, in general, starts from deviation in social orders of Islam (Tabataba'i, (n.d.) B, vol. 3, pp. 58-60). Among the social orders of Islam, Allameh Tabataba'i puts especial emphasis on referring to social thought (Tabataba'i, (n.d.) B, vol. 5, p. 283: "All this because of the nation disobedience on the first day of the Quran's call to social reflection...." And also Tabataba'i, 1388 SH, vol. 1, p. 120; Tabataba'i, 1387 SH, pp. 71-72: disagreements and disorders in religious order... all returns to one principle, and that is fall of an order among the Quran's orders according to which Muslims had the duty to make social reflections. And also: Tabataba'i, 1387 SH, pp. 73, 191-193). Referring to social thought is, in one sense, an instance of social and political justice as well, because it means that the social life belongs to all individual members of the society and all have the right to give comments on it. As a result, administering the society and politics is the product of collective thought and will and free rational decision-making; and this means social and political justice; otherwise, if the ruler and the ruling class consider society and policy as belonging to themselves, referring to public thought and social thinking and using other's ideas and opinions would be meaningless. At best, the ruling class refers to its consultants for preserving its own interests, and this is something other than social thinking intended by Allameh Tabataba'i.

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1. An investigation of the course of formation of the Experts Assembly is available at <https://b2n.ir/a44599> and also at <https://b2n.ir/p16883>.

### Conclusion

In view of the historical reality, there is a relationship between philosophy and revolution. The relationship between a philosophical system and a political system and practice is a general and foundational relationship, not a part-to-part one. Considering the role of Allameh Tabataba'i's theorization, we can call him the prominent theoretician of revolution. In addition to theorization, Allameh was also a social and political activist; and considering the letter with nine signatures, we may call him as one of the founders of the Islamic revolution. The social and political activism of Allameh Tabataba'i is in close ties with his theoretical, Quranic, philosophical and political philosophical views. In his *Tafsīr Al-Mīzān*, Allameh negates despotic government and presents an analysis and confirmation of political liberation movements. Allameh Tabataba'i's political philosophical analysis puts society between the individual man and the government. Thus, the state originated from his political philosophy is a social and instrumental state. It is noteworthy that Allameh Tabataba'i's view about society and its principality is not opposite to principality of individual. Rather, whether in philosophical analysis or in analysis of political philosophy, he tries to reconcile principality of society and principality of individual. No doubt, Islam in Allameh Tabataba'i's view is a social Islam, but it is not restricted to it and contains political Islam as well. Allameh Tabataba'i refers the discussion on *wilāyat faqīh* to jurisprudential discussions; and his view on Islamic government is similar to Imam Khomeini's view. Considering Allameh Tabataba'i's analysis on the philosophy of religious laws in the Quran, he considers all corruptions and sins as rooted in dichotomy of poverty and wealth. Thus, his desired society and government is placed in opposition to that dichotomy. Allameh Tabataba'i introduces the origin of deviation in the Islamic nation to be deviation in obeying social orders of Islam; and among the social

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orders of Islam, he puts special emphasis on social thought. Social thought is among the instances of social and political justice. In Allameh Tabataba'i's view, based on the philosophical discussion on the relationship between cause and effect, achieving good and right divine goals is not possible with evil and wrong means. In his works, Allameh Tabataba'i has ideas on Islamic government that can be a guide for Islamic state. Based on Allameh Tabataba'i's analysis on the relationship between substantial motion and conventional perceptions, the substantial motion and the man's existential evolution in the society and the desirable government are different from substantial motion and the man's existential evolution in the society and the undesirable government.

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