A Critical Reading of the Elements of Iranshahri Political Thought in the Views of Javad Tabatabai

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Abstract: Reflection on Javad Tabatabai's views concerning Iranshahri political thought, along with certain critical remarks, constitutes the central focus of the present article. This article initially addresses the position of the discourse on Iranshahri thought and political thought within the entirety of Tabatabai's research project. Subsequently, following brief references to the characteristics of Iranshahri thought as its foundations, the elements (sing. mofrad) of Iranshahri political thought, based on these foundations, are extracted and inferred from his works. The most significant elements of Iranshahri political thought, according to Tabatabai, can be identified as follows: 1. Ideal kingship possessing divine farr (charisma/glory). 2. The institution of vizierate. 3. The absolute, but not autocratic, nature of Iranshahri monarchy. 4. Realism, expediency, and the precedence of observing justice over Sharia (religious law). 5. Unity in diversity centered on the institution of kingship. 6. Tolerance. 7. The education of princes and future rulers. 8. Law as the will of God, enacted by the royal institution as God's representative on earth. 9. Religion as a part of national affairs and in service of national interests. 10. Emphasis on the disorders of the age as a negative aspect of the rearticulation of Iranshahri political thought in the Islamic era. The ahistorical nature, subjective interpretation (tafsir bi'l-ra'y), imposition of presuppositions onto historical reality, ideological character, and the disregarding or omission of events and ideas contrary to his viewpoint are the most significant shortcomings in Tabatabai's views on Iranshahri political thought.

Keywords: Iran, Iranshahri Thought, Iranshahri Political Thought, Ideal Kingship, The New in the Old.

Introduction

Statement of the Problem: In recent years, Iranshahri political thought, particularly in the works of Javad Tabatabai, has been presented as an attempt to reconstruct a native tradition in the history of Iranian statecraft and as an alternative to the existing political order. Tabatabai, emphasizing concepts such as ideal kingship, the twinning of religion and state (*din va mulk*), and the role of the institution of vizierate, claims that this thought not only took shape in the ancient period but also continued into the Islamic era and now has the potential for reinterpretation within the horizon of modernity. However, his primary reliance on Islamic-era sources and disregard for the scarcity of primary sources from the ancient period have meant that this claim has not transcended the level of a theory and remains a collection of disparate propositions.

The central research question is whether Iranshahri political thought can be reconstructed as a coherent theory based on credible historical evidence and a consistent theoretical framework. This question raises further inquiries regarding the relationship of Iranshahri thought with diverse religions, its distinction from other Islamic political traditions, the extent of its correspondence with historical realities, and the possibility of its application in the contemporary horizon. Answering these questions is significant not only for the historical evaluation of this narrative but also for assessing its capacity to shape Iran's intellectual and political horizons today.

Significance: Firstly, in this research, the critical examination of Iranshahri political thought serves as a focal point that links three domains: the history of thought, national identity, and Iran's relationship with modernity. Exploring this intellectual framework provides an opportunity to extract the deep-rooted theoretical origins concerning the state, religion, and people in the Iranian tradition from ancient texts, especially *Siyasatnamehs* (mirrors for princes), thereby charting a more scientific, rather than ideological, pathway connecting ancient Iran, the Islamic period, and contemporary Iran. Such an understanding is of fundamental importance for re-examining the vicissitudes of Iran's political and cultural unity, both for historical analysis and for opening new theoretical horizons.

Secondly, the intellectual debate surrounding Javad Tabatabai's narrative of "Iranshahri continuity" has now become one of the central points of contention in Iranian political science and cultural studies. The present research, through a systematic assessment of the arguments of proponents and critics, can contribute to refining claims, clarifying ambiguities, and delineating the distinctions between the identarian, theoretical, and political dimensions of this discourse. This endeavor not only addresses an evident research gap in the critical evaluation of primary sources and concepts but also helps foster a common language for dialogue among historians, Islamic studies scholars, and political theorists in Iran.

Rationale: The first rationale stems from the manifest gap in primary sources and the methodology of textual criticism: a large part of the existing literature either relies on selective narratives from the Islamic period or assumes the claim of continuity without critically examining ancient sources. Without a systematic comparative analysis of archaeological data, Zoroastrian texts, Pahlavi *andarznamehs* (wisdom literature), and Islamic *Siyasatnamehs*, any claim of "continuity" lacks historical backing and is susceptible to becoming ideological. The second rationale relates to the contemporary implications of this discourse. Representing Iran merely as a "supranational civilization" or, conversely, reducing it to a "modern nation-state" can lead to public misconceptions that weaken social cohesion and the country's political integrity. The present research, by clarifying the boundaries and foundations of Iranshahri thought and critiquing its underpinnings, provides a means for the appropriate use of this heritage in contemporary domestic and foreign policy discussions and prevents one-sided identarian or ideological exploitations.

Objectives: The main objective of the present research is to re-examine Seyyed Javad Tabatabai's interpretation of Iranshahri thought and to evaluate the elements of Iranshahri thought within his interpretation.

Methodology: The methodology of this research is based on library studies and the analysis of written sources. In this process, the works and views of Javad Tabatabai have been examined to achieve a
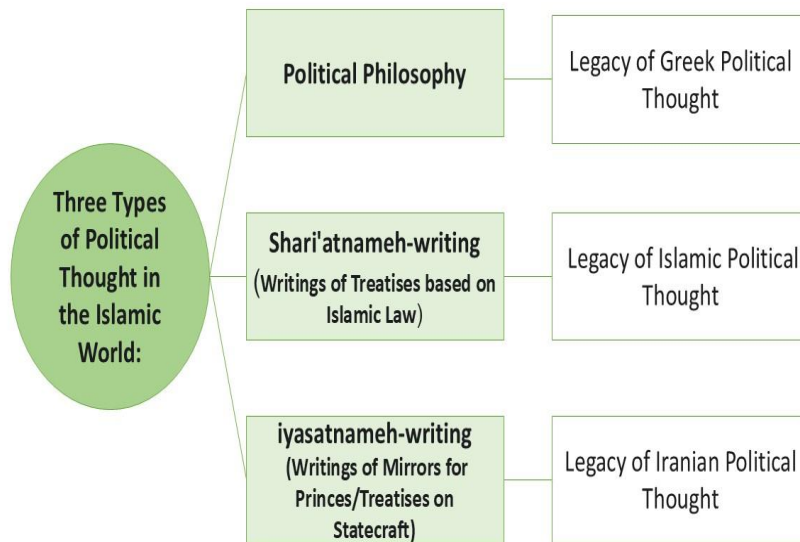
coherent and documented picture of Iranshahri political thought. The data obtained have been organized through comparative analysis and within the framework of qualitative analysis methodology.

1. Foundations of the Iranian Tradition of Political Thought

"In the dawns of history, the Persians invented the art of governing" (Foucault, 1978). Following this invention, the Iranian tradition of political thought began its arduous and uneven journey. Among the existing interpretations of the Iranian tradition of political thought, Iranshahri political thought is a form of political ideation that, according to some researchers and historians of thought, consolidated and endured in the pre-Islamic history of Iran. This formulation of political thought is situated within the entirety of Iranshahri thought and is related to its specific worldview and epistemology. This form of political thought, as claimed by some researchers—such as the late Javad Tabatabai (1945-2023 CE)—was also reproduced in a new form in the Islamic period of Iranian history, corresponding to the historical and cultural transformations that occurred in Iran, and has been a key to Iran's historical and cultural continuity. The most important manifestation of this political thought, according to these scholars, is the tradition of *Siyasatnameh*-writing (mirrors for princes), which developed in continuation of Iranian *Andarznameh*-writing (wisdom literature) and in distinction to *Shari'atnameh*-writing (books on religious law) and political philosophy.

Regarding this form of political thought, efforts have been made to present a coherent formulation that could, as a system of thought, establish a relationship with political realities. One such endeavor is the effort of the late political scholar Javad Tabatabai (1324-1402 SH / 1945-2023 CE). For Tabatabai, the discussion of Iranshahri thought and political thought is part of a larger project he initiated for understanding the history, history of thought, and history of political thought in Iran. In this grand project, while discussing the history of thought and political thought in Iran, he—in his own estimation—encounters a domain of thought and political thought that he terms Iranian, and indeed Iranshahri, which is distinct from both Greek political philosophy and Islamic *Shari'atnameh*-writing.

This triad of *Siyasatnameh*-writing, political philosophy, and *Shari'atnameh*-writing as three forms of political thought in Islam was first employed by Erwin Rosenthal. Rosenthal considered the characteristic of the first form to be the idea of preserving power, the characteristic of the second to be rational thinking, and the characteristic of the third to be reliance on Sharia texts and the theory of caliphate (Rosenthal, 1962, p. 3).

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                                    ┌─────────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────────┐
                                    │ Political Philosophy │────│ Legacy of Greek      │
                                    │                      │    │ Political Thought    │
                                    └─────────────────────┘    └──────────────────────┘

    ╭───────────────╮               ┌─────────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────────┐
    │ Three Types   │               │ Shari'atnameh-writing│    │ Legacy of Islamic    │
    │ of Political  │───────────────│ (Writings of Treatises────│ Political Thought    │
    │ Thought in    │               │ based on Islamic Law)│    │                      │
    │ the Islamic   │               └─────────────────────┘    └──────────────────────┘
    │ World:        │
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                                    │ iyasatnameh-writing  │    │ Legacy of Iranian    │
                                    │ (Writings of Mirrors │────│ Political Thought    │
                                    │ for Princes/Treatises│    │                      │
                                    │ on Statecraft)       │    └──────────────────────┘
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A fundamental point for understanding Mr. Tabatabai's interpretation of thought, and particularly Iranshahri political thought, is the recognition that he dedicates all his efforts to deriving elements from such a system of thought that, on one hand, possess the form of a coherent discourse system (discours), and on the other hand, are linked to the thought of modernity and its institutions. This latter point is fundamental in that his position—or, in his own words, "where he stands"—is the thought of modernity, and the endeavor to present

elements of Iranshahri political thought that manifest "the new in the old" of Iranian history is Tabatabai's central concern: the re-articulation of Iranian political thought through this path.

The discussion of Iranshahri thought and political thought, for Tabatabai, does not possess an independent form, and his perspective on this issue is not significant merely from the standpoint of the history of political thought. Rather, the discussion of Iranshahri political thought and its dimensions is one of the main elements of his discourse on "Iran." His discussion on "continuity" led him to the domain of Iranshahri thought and its "continuity" in the Islamic period. Among the various facets of the continuity of Iranshahri thought, he focused on the discourse of Iranshahri political thought, which he considered one of the most important manifestations of continuity. He endeavored to present a picture of the dimensions and characteristics of this form of political thought by examining the views of Iranian thinkers of the Islamic era. This form, although attempts are made to elucidate its elements, still seems unable to consolidate into a "theory," and no independent, codified treatise on this subject was authored by him. Therefore, the effort here is to extract the characteristics of this political thought by searching through his works. This article also contains brief critical remarks—the detailed discussion of which is beyond the scope of this article—on Mr. Javad Tabatabai's interpretation of Iranshahri political thought.

If, in one respect, we consider Mr. Javad Tabatabai's "research project" to have both negative and positive aspects; in the negative part, in formulating and analyzing issues as well as critiquing the views of others, he engages in the critique and rejection of theories and ideas конкурент to his own. This critique encompasses the critique of foundations, methodology, analyses, and prescriptions of the "alterities" of his research project. In the positive part, he strives to present a form of a coherent system of thought and political thought that is formed by transcending those rival perspectives. Among these positive aspects, Tabatabai's discussion regarding Iranshahri political thought, relying on intellectual and historical analyses, should be considered the most important "prescriptive" facet of his research project. This political thought, it can be said, relies more than anything

on the concept of "the new in the old." Standing on the shoulders of this concept, Tabatabai attempts to offer an interpretation of Iranian history and Iranshahri thought that can also be functional in the present time and serve as an alternative to the established political system in Iran—namely, the Islamic Republic. Therefore, many of the characteristics he enumerates for Iranshahri political thought can be understood in opposition to the intellectual apparatus underpinning the established political system, and, of course, with an outlook open to the thought of modernity, as well as in an effort to synthesize a neo-traditional form of modern thought and Iranshahri thought.

According to Tabatabai, Iranshahri political thought is a part of Iranshahri thought, and therefore, before discussing political thought, the meaning of Iranshahahr and Iranshahri thought in the view of this scholar must be examined. Furthermore, political thought cannot be organized without reference to its foundations, and Iranshahri political thought, too, cannot be formed without relying on the foundations and sources of Iranshahri thought, just as Islamic political thought cannot take shape without reference to the foundations and principles of the Islamic religion.

2. Iranshahahr and Iranshahri Thought

Iranshahr, in Tabatabai's view, is Greater Cultural Iran, and the current geopolitical Iran constitutes only regions of this Greater Cultural Iran. Greater Cultural Iran does not belong solely to Iranians within the geopolitical boundaries of today's Iran; it is the heritage of all peoples who have contributed to creating that shared heritage, even if those peoples have politically transformed into independent nations and determined their own political destinies. Based on this premise, Tabatabai considers parts of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and even present-day Turkey as part of Iranshahahr (Tabatabai, 1395/B, p. 52). Therefore, Tabatabai's meaning of Iranshahahr is Greater Cultural Iran, about which, he claims, there are no political pretensions in the current conditions. Although this concept is frequently repeated, it cannot answer the question of where the geographical limits of this Greater Cultural Iran lie. While this concept has been applied to ancient Iran and the geography of the Achaemenid and Sasanian

periods, Achaemenid or Sasanian Iran had different geographies at different times and under different kings. For example, there was a difference between the geography of Iran during the time of Cyrus and Darius and Iran during the time of Cambyses and Artaxerxes. This cultural Iran cannot be without borders. Tabatabai does provide explanations in this regard, but these explanations are not clarifying either. He writes: "In any case, the political borders of Iran are those that exist now, but the cultural borders of the Iranian land are those that have been from the beginning." Therefore, Iran, unlike many countries, is not a country, but a civilization with an encompassing culture (Tabatabai, 1395/B, pp. 51-53).

In Tabatabai's view, Iran as Iranshahahr refers to the state of Greater Cultural Iran in its long history. Greater Cultural Iran is a country with many complexities and deviations from the norm (khalāf-āmad-e ādat-hā), and to understand these complexities and deviations, a general theory is needed to explain its characteristics. In his opinion, it is self-evident that this does not mean Iran is a "unique entity woven separately" (tāfteh-ye jodā bāfteh), but rather that to explain the regularities of Iranian history, one cannot utilize "universalist" theories, for example, of the Marxist historical theory type and its new byproducts, which historians have pre-formulated to explain the materials of Iranian history (Tabatabai, 1399, p. 3).

Regarding the geographical extent of Iranshahahr, Richard Frye believes that: "We may say that Iranshahr is the land where the Persians ruled or where Persian or Sasanian culture was generally dominant. There were Iranians who lived outside the borders of the Sasanian empire, such as the Sogdians in Central Asia and the Alans in the North Caucasus. Of course, there were also non-Iranians in Iranshahr, mainly Semitic speakers of Iraq. Nevertheless, these were considered part of Iran, and other peoples, despite Sasanian inscriptions, were outside Iran (Aniran). We cannot always say which part was Iran and which was Aniran... In other words, the concept of Iranshahr did not include the entire Sasanian territory, but perhaps this territory changed throughout history." According to Frye, Iranshahahr was essentially a variable unit where the Persian language and culture were dominant, but this does not mean that all people

within Iranshahahr spoke Persian, because the linguistic situation in
the Sasanian Empire was undoubtedly complex (Frye, 1388, p. 31).

It should be noted that emphasizing the idea of cultural Iran
without stressing and paying attention to Iran's political entity can
harm Iran. Discourses that address cultural Iran without emphasizing
and referring to Iran's [political] entity may lead to the notion that Iran
is fundamentally a culture, not a country; an international cultural
phenomenon, not an existing historical-political determination. The
consequence of this perception might be the diminishing importance
of Iran's [political] entity in public opinion, paving the way for
separatism, and reducing Iran to an intercultural category rather than
a political entity.

Tabatabai discusses Iranshahri political thought under the
rubric of "cultural continuity" and believes that a domain of Iranshahri
thought pertains to a coherent discourse of political thinking that
persisted in the ancient and Islamic periods of Iran. This coherent
system of discourse is a key to the continuity and interconnectedness
of ancient Iranian history, and without an understanding of this
Iranian mode of thinking, comprehending many aspects of ancient
Iranian history will not be possible (Tabatabai, 1395/A, p. 14). In this
regard, Tabatabai considers his book "A History of Political Thought
in Iran" as a preface to the logic of the continuity of Iranian history.

For Tabatabai, Iranshahri thought has a cultural standing, and
he explicitly writes: "A large part of the cultural heritage of ancient
Iran, which we have called Iranshahri thought, was transmitted to the
Islamic period" (Tabatabai, 1395/A, p. 44). Therefore, for him,
Iranshahri thought is part of the cultural heritage of ancient Iran that
was transmitted to the Islamic period. The two main representatives of
Iranshahri thought in the Islamic period, in Tabatabai's view, are
Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa' and Khwajeh Nizam al-Mulk. Based on the
works of these two writers, he presents an image of Iranshahri thought
and its formulation in this period. Tabatabai considers the content of
Ibn al-Muqaffa's treatise "Risāla fi'l-Ṣaḥāba," written for al-Mansur al-
'Abbasi, to be an Iranshahri andarznameh (book of counsel) that, based
on the experience of Sasanian bureaucracy, offers measures for the
overall reform of the caliphate apparatus (Tabatabai, 1395/A, p. 94).

Tabatabai views such efforts as "breathing Iranian spirit into Arabic words"; for instance, in the aforementioned treatise by Ibn al-Muqaffa', although the terms "Imam" and "Caliph" are used for the ruler, these two concepts were associated with the concept of "Shah" (King) in the andarznamehs of the Sasanian period. Tabatabai claims that Ibn al-Muqaffa', by transferring Iranshahri thought to the Islamic period, transformed Iranshahri thought into the prevailing theory of the caliphate. In his view, Iranshahri thought had a coherent political theory that could, with a new interpretation, be converted into the theory of the caliphate. Therefore, from the very first decades of the second century [AH], efforts began to transmit the sources of Iranshahri thought through the Arabic language to the Islamic period. Ibn al-Muqaffa's writings made it possible for the caliphate, while maintaining an Islamic appearance, to be administered internally according to Iranian methods (Tabatabai, 1395/A, pp. 46-47). This appropriation of the caliphate apparatus in favor of Iranshahri thought was pursued by Mr. Tabatabai, even though Iranian thought and practice throughout history have often been the "other" of the caliphate, and the caliphate apparatus historically faced many difficulties in this land. That the Iranian bureaucracy assisted the caliphate apparatus in normalizing this non-Iranian apparatus is one interpretation; that Iranshahri political thought continued within the caliphate apparatus and that the Iranian bureaucracy served this apparatus is another. Mr. Tabatabai's viewpoint deepens and refines the second interpretation.

Tabatabai believes that the three pillars of Iranshahri thought—as the foundations of Iranshahri political thought—between which an unbreakable bond exists, are: religion, state/dominion (mulk), and people.

Religion

Intellect

People   **State/Dominion**
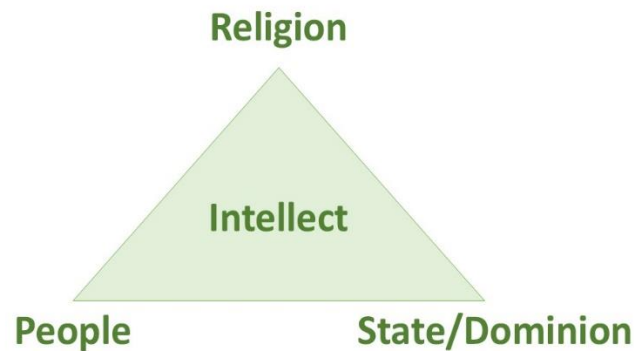
Pillars of Iranshahri Thought

In this view, religion is the foundation of the order of the state (mulk), and as long as the people remain steadfast in their king's religion, they do not abandon good customs (ādāb-dāni), and everyone is positioned according to the merit determined for them. Therefore, innovation (bid'a) in religion, as the basis of tradition, is the beginning of the disruption of social order, and any disruption in religion inevitably entails a disruption in social order. The twinning of religion and state is based on the principle that the king is the guardian of the foundation of religion so that the state does not perish, and it is "a system among the subjects and the cavalry (isfāhī), an ornament on the day of adornment, a refuge and sanctuary on the day of fear of the enemy." Religion, in the sense used by Ibn al-Muqaffa', is the universal law of the order of creation, and this law is the basis of the traditional order, the guardianship of which is considered the most important duty of the king. This understanding of religion is not in relation to the mundane world; rather, religion is the basis of tradition and, as the "primordial tradition" (sunnat-i avvalin), is the essence of justice in the sense of the order that governs the universe and is the antithesis of tyranny (Tabatabai, 1395/A, pp. 111-112). Therefore, what is meant by religion as one of the pillars of Iranshahri thought is religion in the sense of the universal law of creation, not a specific religion or sharia

like Islam, Christianity, or Zoroastrianism. In the words of one of Tabatabai's critics, in Tabatabai's narrative, the two main axes of Iranshahri thought are ideal kingship and the congruity or unity of religion and state (Qazimaradi, 1396, p. 153).

Tabatabai believes that in recent decades, ideologues—whether religious or nationalist—by creating an exclusive place for one of the spheres of social life, have undermined the pillars of social equilibrium and created contradictions among them. Whereas, in his view, in Iranshahri thought, the religion of Iranians has always been a part of their "national" culture (Tabatabai, 1399, p. 159). Tabatabai opines that if we consider Ferdowsi as the criterion for gauging Iranians' perception of the national matter, we must say that in Iran, the determining factor is "culture," in which each of its elements, including religion, "is good in its own place" (Tabatabai, 1399, p. 283). In fact, Tabatabai's endeavor is to position religion as part of Iranian culture, on par with other spheres of this culture, and to deem any attempt to enthrone it as, on one hand, doomed to failure, and on the other, condemned to upset social equilibrium. Religion as a component of the "national matter" is one of the foundations of Iranshahri thought in Tabatabai's interpretation.

In addition to the three aforementioned pillars, Tabatabai, citing passages from Kalila wa Dimna, considers reliance on reason (khirad) as one of the most important characteristics of Iranshahri thought. From this perspective, reason is the sole criterion by which the wise can be distinguished from the ignorant (Tabatabai, 1395/A, p. 125). This very attribute of rationality, which lies outside the circle of religion, is one of the main foundations of Iranshahri thought and political thought through which Tabatabai intends to establish a link between Iranshahri thought and modernity under the aegis of the concept of "the new in the old."

Generally, it can be said that Iranshahahr in Tabatabai's interpretation is a present-day construct that suppresses the logic of Iran's historical evolution to create an ideological concept of nationality in opposition to the ideological concept of religiosity (Miri, 1399, p. 66). Therefore, Iranshahahr, according to Tabatabai, is Greater Cultural Iran; an Iran that is different from the current political Iran.

However, the geographical and historical limits of this Iranshahahr are not clearly defined. Iranshahri thought in this interpretation has at least four important characteristics that distinguish it from other systems of thought: this thought is based on the connection between religion, state (mulk), and people, and the basis for establishing this connection, and indeed the dominant epistemological element over these elements, is reason or intellect (khirad or 'aql).

The primary importance of Iranshahri thought in Mr. Tabatabai's research project and theoretical position stems from several aspects: Firstly, he considers the existence of such thought as the most important confirmation of his view regarding "continuity" in Iranian history from ancient times to the present. Secondly, Iranshahri thought, with characteristics such as the importance of the "national matter"—which accommodates the religious matter within itself—and reason as the criterion for evaluating all affairs, provides a basis for linking this thought with the thought of "modernity." Thirdly, Iranshahri thought, with a modernist interpretation and in a new form, can emerge and manifest as an alternative to Islamic thought and the political system derived from it in Iran.

3. Elements of Iranshahri Political Thought:

Iranshahri political thought is a specific design of political thought that, according to Mr. Tabatabai's interpretation, is distinguished from two forms of political thought in the Islamic period: namely, political thought based on Islamic Sharia (Shari'atnameh-writing) and political philosophy. His main discussion concerning Iranshahri political thought is to present the characteristics of such thought based on sources from the Islamic period of Iranian history, relying on the works of figures such as Ibn al-Muqaffa' and Khwajeh Nizam al-Mulk—who, in his view, are the most important representatives of such a system of thought.

According to Tabatabai, the ancient Iranians' perception of the system of government is one of the most stable elements of Iranian thought and has persisted despite significant historical events, each of which could have created a rupture in the Iranian idea of sovereignty. Therefore, it seems that any attempt to explain the theory of the state

in Iran, even in a later period of this country, is not possible except by returning to the origins of Iranshahri political thought and the reality of Iranian history (Tabatabai, 1395/B, p. 198).

In Tabatabai's view, Iranshahri political thought, despite its continuity in Siyasatnameh-writing, had this fundamental distinction: the essential element of Iranshahri political thought was the concept of "ideal kingship," whereas Siyasatnameh writers, by transforming the foundation of this concept, formulated a theory that can be called the "theory of the actually existing monarchy" (Tabatabai, 1391, p. 28). Tabatabai believes that from the beginning of the Islamic period, three forms of thinking in the political realm emerged. Siyasatnameh-writing, in particular, as a continuation of Iranshahri political thought, had no relation to Islamic Sharia as formulated in the ideal theories of the caliphate. In his view, this form of thinking, in the eastern lands of the caliphate, especially in Iran, gradually integrated other forms of thinking into itself. According to Tabatabai, contrary to the assertions of writers like Rosenthal and Lambton, political thought was not part of theology; rather, with the revival of Iranshahri political thought, a discourse independent of theology was formulated outside the theory of the caliphate. From the perspective of the history of political thought in Iran, it can be said that with the discrediting of the caliphate and the decline of its legitimacy, Iranshahri political thought became a dominant discourse in the history of political thought. In this respect, during the Islamic period, a type of political thought independent of theology was formulated, which, although it could not be political science in its new sense, was political thought in the old usage (Tabatabai, 1395/A, pp. 26-28). Therefore, he claims that Siyasatnameh-writing based on Iranshahri thought ultimately managed to become the dominant form of discussing politics and political thought.

Tabatabai believes that the attention to religious matters in Siyasatnamehs, including Khwajeh Nizam al-Mulk's Siyasatnameh, is not out of piety. Rather, in Siyasatnamehs, religion serves as a tool for legitimizing political power and as a mortar that strengthens the foundation of the state (mulk). According to Tabatabai's account, Khwajeh considered religion to be twinned with politics and, like it, a

sphere of social life; this congruence makes the legitimization of politics through religion possible. Religion and politics, without being identical, are necessary for each other, with the caveat that religion is an attribute of the king and ultimately must consolidate the foundation of the state and kingdom (Tabatabai, 1395/A, pp. 73-74). This characteristic, indeed, is one of the features of Iranshahri political thought according to Tabatabai, where religion is considered to serve the purpose of strengthening the foundation of the state and government, and this is essentially what "the twinning of religion and politics" means in Iranshahri thought. From this perspective, according to Tabatabai, religion—the universal law of creation—takes on a "pragmatic" form in relation to the state (mulk).

An important aspect of Iranshahri thought for Tabatabai, which he tries to explain through the words of Ibn al-Muqaffa' and Khwajeh Nizam al-Mulk, concerns the relationship between religion and politics and their connection to each other. In his narration of the views of the proponents of Iranshahri thought in the Islamic period, religion always has a rational hue. On the other hand, religion is mostly a factor for creating unity among political, military, and other forces. Therefore, the unity of religion and politics means placing religion at the service of statesmen for organizing and cohering society (Tabatabai, 1395/A, pp. 98-99). Tabatabai considers Iranshahri political thought as a political thought, meaning a thought of realism, which analyzed reality at the level of the ideal. He presents this formulation in distinction to the mystical ('irfāni) understanding of Iranshahri political thought, according to which the analysis of political reality is fundamentally not an issue in such thought (Tabatabai, 1390, p. 108).

The fundamental concept of Iranshahri political thought, unlike the thought of Shari'atnameh writers which is Sharia based on divine revelation, is the ideal king possessing divine farr (charisma/glory). There is no doubt that, given these two distinct concepts, two different ways of organizing political thought and institutions have emerged that are fundamentally different and even contradictory. In Iranshahri thought, the ideal king possessing divine farr is the Sharia, not its executor, and in this respect, the ideal king has

no relation to the caliph in Shari'atnamehs (Tabatabai, 1390, p. 131). In this view, the ideal king possessing divine farr acts like "God on earth" and possesses two attributes: majesty (jalāl) and beauty (jamāl). The ideal king in Iranshahri political thought is the manifestation and revealer (maẓhar va muẓhir) of God's attributes of grace and wrath, and such a king is the Sharia. These two expressions are, in fact, another way of stating the twinning of religion and state (mulk), as one of the most fundamental bases of Iranshahri political thought, found in all Siyasatnamehs of the Islamic period of Iran. What emerges from the edicts of the Shahanshahs of Iran and also from verses taken from the Avesta is that ideal kingship in the edicts and farr-endowment in the Avesta had a religious aspect, and the sovereigns of Iran were all religion-aware kings. Therefore, it was said that the rule of Iranians was based on law and justice (Tabatabai, 1390, pp. 164-167). Accordingly, in Iranshahri political thought, the ideal king is God's representative on earth, the legislator of Sharia/law, and also the executor of Sharia. According to Tabatabai, the king, in Iranshahri political thought, is not only at the apex of the power pyramid but also the organizer of social, political, and economic order and system. He considers this very element to be the factor of social cohesion and one of the most important factors in the continuity of Iran. In his view, in Greater Iran, according to the principles of Iranshahri thought, the "person" of the king, as "God on earth," was the cause of unity amidst the diversity of those peoples, and if the king was not the sole institution, he was certainly the most stable institution of the political system (Tabatabai, 1395/B, pp. 173-174).

Tabatabai believes that the theory of ideal kingship transformed into absolute monarchy in the Islamic period, but he does not discuss the relationship of the theory of ideal kingship with Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanian kings. In his view, the theory of the caliphate was also a re-articulation of the theory of absolute monarchy with the exigencies of the religious viewpoint of the Sunni community (Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jamā'a), and the Turkic ghulams (slave soldiers) turned a combination of this theory and the practical necessities of centralized Iranian monarchy into the Iranian mode of governance (Tabatabai, 1395/B, pp. 233-234). Tabatabai opines that

although Iranshahri political thought continued into the Islamic period, it lost its ideal aspects through historical transformations and became the theory of independent monarchy (Tabatabai, 1395/B, p. 468). The logical flaw in Tabatabai's narrative of Iranshahri political thought is that he presupposes the existence of such thought without proving it from the texts of ancient Iranian works. In the author's [of this article] belief, his scattered references to works like the "Letter of Tansar" or the "Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān," as well as brief allusions to "Khwaday-Namags" and "Ā'in-Namags," cannot substantiate such a claim with such characteristics.

According to Tabatabai, the institution of vizierate (wizārat) in Iranian history was one of the most important institutions of rule and, in a way, a counterpart to the institution of kingship. In the Islamic period, until the Mongol invasion, when not all Iranian dehqāns (landed gentry) and vizier-producing Iranian families had yet perished, the vizierate of Iranians was a source of Iran's social, political, and cultural continuity. With the end of Mongol dominance in Iran, the vizierate also lost its former importance, and especially with the rise of the Safavids, the institution of vizierate gave way to the royal harem and the council of eunuchs (khwāja sarāyān). Tabatabai considers the absence of an aristocracy as a factor limiting power—as existed in European monarchical systems—to be one of the obstacles to the formation of the institution of the state in Iran (Tabatabai, 1395/B, pp. 264-265). According to Tabatabai, the basis of Iranian rule was competence and efficiency, and the vizier, in fact, represented this fundamental inclination of Iranshahri governance. In the Islamic period, especially with the dominance of Turkic ghulams over Iran, the position of vizierate was necessarily established, because the newly risen rulers were devoid of any art of governance. However, in practice, the consolidation of the position and status of vizierate in the political system of the Turkic ghulams was not without flaws and far from being free of conflict (Tabatabai, 1390, p. 47), to the extent that vizier-killing became a custom, and all 26 viziers of the Seljuk period were eliminated.

According to Tabatabai's account, in Khwajeh Nizam al-Mulk's theory, the vizierate is, in a way, an alternative or complement to a

monarchy whose connection with the ideal kingship of ancient Iran has been severed. Khwajeh's repeated emphasis on the importance of the vizier in governance, that in his view, in some cases, the foundation of government depends solely on one person, and in the Seljuk governmental apparatus, he himself is that person, indicates that in Khwajeh's opinion, the theory of ideal kingship and generally Iranshahri governance requires a fundamental shift. The Siyasatnameh, in fact, is the first attempt to formulate a theory that Tabatabai, in contrast to the ancient Iranians' theory of ideal kingship, calls "the actually existing absolute monarchy" (Tabatabai, 1390, pp. 56-57). Tabatabai believes that during the Seljuk period, when the revival of ideal kingship was not possible, Khwajeh, by emphasizing and relying on the importance of the vizierate, sought to formulate a theory that would lead to the expansion and consolidation of the vizierate's power in the actually existing absolute monarchy—i.e., the Seljuk monarchy—and thereby set Iranshahri political thought on a new path. Tabatabai, however, later claims that Khwajeh's "Testament" (Waṣiyat-nāma) best demonstrates Nizam al-Mulk's profound awareness of the conflict between Iranian vizierate and Turkic monarchy. Tabatabai, of course, expresses regret that this conflict between Turkic monarchy and Iranian vizierate did not find a solution compatible with the interests of Iran, and each time the endeavors of Iranian viziers were undone following their assassination, just as with Khwajeh's killing, his family was also ruined, and the vizierate passed to another family (Tabatabai, 1390, p. 59). Therefore, one of the important elements of Iranshahri political thought, after ideal kingship, is the institution of vizierate. A vizierate whose theoretical position in Iranshahri thought Tabatabai, nowhere in his works, clarifies by referring to ancient Iranian sources, nor does he practically and historically introduce the vizier-producing structure or important viziers of ancient Iran. Thus, it can be said that his recourse to such a view is resorting to "commonly known things" (mashhūrāt) without historically substantiating them.

Tabatabai believes that an examination of the content of Wittfogel's theory of "Oriental Despotism" and the characteristics of the ancient Iranian empire has rightly highlighted the point that the

power of the king in Achaemenid Iran, although absolute, was not "autocratic" in the technical sense, as the theory of independent monarchy was in its future development. Tabatabai, however, in contrast to Wittfogel, considers Hegel's statement about the Iranian mode of governance—that the Persians' subjugation of various peoples was coupled with respect for their characteristics—to be more consistent with the reality of Iranian history (Tabatabai, 1395/B, p. 201). For Tabatabai, this very respect for plurality is one of the instances of "the new in the old" in Iranian history.

Based on Tabatabai's interpretation of the "Siyasatnameh," the observance of political exigencies (maṣāliḥ-i siyāsī) and the benefits derived from them, as a fundamental principle, governs all levels of the Siyasatnameh and determines Khwajeh's stance everywhere. Unlike Shari'atnameh writers who consider the implementation of Sharia in all cases to be prior to the execution of justice, or more precisely, in their view, justice outside or beyond the implementation of Sharia cannot exist, Khwajeh, in the realm of political thought, considers the observance of justice prior to the implementation of Sharia and believes that the stability of the state (mulk) depends on the observance of justice. Tabatabai claims that Khwajeh, like all Siyasatnameh writers, by emphasizing the twinning of religion and state, understands religion according to the characteristics of politics and within the gravitational field of political thought and practice. Khwajeh's repeated considerations of expediency (maṣlaḥat-andīshī), which are mentioned in historical reports, can be understood in light of such a viewpoint (Tabatabai, 1390, pp. 44-45). This very realism, expediency, and the precedence of observing justice over Sharia are other elements of Iranshahri political thought according to Tabatabai, which he tries to discuss by referring to thinkers like Khwajeh.

Unity in diversity centered on the institution of "Shahanshahi" (kingship/empire)—which is very important to Tabatabai and he constantly repeats it—he has derived from Hegel's interpretation of Iranian history. In the Hegelian view of the Iranian mode of governance, the Shahanshahi is not a state, but a "state" of states, and this form of state is incompatible with autocracy and unity without the plurality of states. Inspired by this Hegelian expression, Tabatabai

ventures to propose the "theory" that the main trend in the evolution of the state in Islamic Iran, in practice, during decades when a powerful king was at the head of affairs, was the consolidation of unity and the elimination of pluralities. During this period, although Iranshahri political thought was revived, the basis for its re-articulation was more the realities of independent monarchy than Iranian thought (Tabatabai, 1395/B, p. 205). Unity in diversity is one of the important elements of Iranshahri political thought according to Tabatabai; meaning that in Iranshahri political thought, the exigencies of political power and the "national matter" caused the Iranian king to view all ethnic groups and religions existing in the land of Iran with an equal eye, and indeed, such a king himself was the axis of social cohesion, around whom ethnic and religious pluralities unified.

According to Tabatabai, the backbone of the ancient Iranian Shahanshahi was the Zoroastrian religion, which believed in the struggle between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman and, without considering ethnic distinction—in the racial sense—as the foundation of distinction and tensions among humans, considered religious principle as the cause of differentiation among individuals. Ancient Iranians did not have an exclusivist understanding of religion and "the saved sect" (firqa-yi nājiya). This perception of religion appeared very late in ancient Iran, when the presence of divine religions reached a level where the formulation of Zoroastrian theology became necessary. In ancient Iran, as long as religion was not mixed with politics and had not become a tool for political goals, an exclusivist perception of religion had not emerged, and belief in a kind of "religious tolerance" was the chosen creed. Tabatabai considers this religious tolerance as one of the main constituent elements of the Iranian collective conscience. He regards diversity as the firm foundation of Iran's political and religious unity, which he terms "unity in diversity" (Tabatabai, 1395/B, pp. 526-527). Tabatabai defines his meaning of tolerance in Iranian history as unity in the linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity of the people, which has been the main origin of Iran's political unity.

Tabatabai, in the manner of many Orientalists, mentions religious tolerance or forbearance as important aspects of Iranshahri

thought and political thought and cites Cyrus as an example of such tolerance. From Cyrus's conduct with the Babylonians, he infers the general rule that Iranians—in the ancient period—were liberal-minded and tolerant people in their beliefs (Tabatabai, 1395/B, pp. 522-523). He claims that the origin of Iran's political unity has been unity in the linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity of its people, which he terms "tolerance." Iran can neither be reduced to its rulers nor to its political system; throughout history, even the best rulers of Iran have been its worst representatives. Thus, Tabatabai distinguishes between rulers and the reality of the country and believes that despite the autocratic system that ruled over Iranians, the nature of Iranians and their culture were in conflict with the Iranian government. Tabatabai, in the manner of the Frenchman Chardin, attributes the origin of Iranian religious tolerance not merely to religion, but to their perception of religion (Tabatabai, 1395/B, pp. 528-530). The deviation from religious tolerance in the Safavid period—after the era of Shah Abbas, similar to the late Sasanian period—is one of the reasons for Iran's historical decline, according to Tabatabai. The weakening of the spirit of tolerance, in his view, was accompanied by historical decline and the decay of thought in Iran. This very elimination of ethnic and religious diversity and the weakening of the spirit of tolerance—according to the Polish Jesuit missionary Krusiński during the late Safavid period— due to the mismanagement of Shah Abbas's successors, destroyed national unity and cohesion and the cement of ethnic bonds. Simultaneously with the Afghan invasion, none of the national-religious groups had any interest or stake in preserving the territorial integrity of the country (Tabatabai, 1395/B, pp. 534-536).

Tabatabai distinguishes between the "Shahanshahi" of ancient Iran and the "Padeshahi" (monarchy) of the Islamic period, considering one of their major differences to be that in the ancient Shahanshahi, the king was the institution and recognized unity in diversity. However, in the Padeshahi of the Islamic period and the independent monarchies of this era, the person of the king replaced the system, and pluralities were eliminated. In Tabatabai's view, the Shahanshahi system in ancient Iran, rather than being an equivalent to the Roman Empire, has links with the German Reich, which does not dissolve pluralities into

a forced unity. Therefore, regarding Iran, one cannot speak of a pax Persica. He considers passages from the "Cyrus Cylinder" as evidence for this statement. While even the kings of the Old Testament, when they overcame their enemies, took harsh revenge on them, Cyrus entered Babylon in reconciliation and to bring peace, allowing everyone to be free in their religious practices and to worship their own gods. In his view, the political order that was established as an empire in Rome was an all-encompassing state; the Roman peace or pax Romana made it possible, and Roman law was the theoretical foundation of this very empire. Ancient Iran, however, was not a "state of law" (Rechtsstaat) in the sense that the Roman Empire was. Ancient Iran was the birthplace of the Zoroastrian religion, and in this respect, in fact, rather than its political order taking the form of a "state of law," it was, in the interesting expression of a contemporary historian, an "Empire of the soul and spirit" or "Empire of the mind" (Tabatabai, 1399, pp. 128-130). Therefore, the state in the thought and history of ancient Iran did not take an imperial form; rather, by recognizing the plurality of ethnic groups and religions, it was able to be an "Empire of the soul and spirit," meaning, in a somewhat lenient interpretation, it ruled over minds and hearts. This claim and conclusion, however, are nothing more than an undocumented and at times romantic assertion.

Tabatabai claims that the education of princes and future rulers was one of the most important institutions of the political system of ancient Iran, and through this, the continuity of the country's political system was guaranteed. However, the autocracy of powerful kings had led to the imprisonment of all princes and members of the royal family, in a way, within the royal harem, so that no danger from them would threaten the king (Tabatabai, 1395/B, p. 238). He, of course, does not prove this claim with historical benchmarks and documents, nor does he speak of the manner or method of educating princes in ancient Iran for rulership, contenting himself merely with stating the claim. This very repetition of claims and failure to substantiate them is one of Tabatabai's fundamental flaws in terms of research methodology, and his treatises are replete with these unsubstantiated assertions.

In Iranshahri political thought, the law established by the ideal king is the very will of God, and in this respect, law is what preserves the country from disorder, chaos, and rebellion. It is also worth remembering that what is meant by order in Iranshahri political thought, like ancient political thought, is the existing ancient order of human society and a return to it, and not a "new order" in its modern sense, i.e., the creation of a new social and political order from scratch, which has no origin other than modern theories. Thus, with the implementation of law, bad deeds give way to good deeds, and as stated in the Siyasatnameh, "affairs are brought to their proper course" (Tabatabai, 1390, p. 155). If Mr. Tabatabai's explanation regarding law and order in Iranshahri thought and political thought can be organized and consolidated "ontologically" and "theoretically" as an abstract theoretical formulation, as a theory—though it is still far from being a theory and is merely a collection of some propositions and elements placed together— "probatively" and as a guiding theory for action, it leads to nothing but a dead end. The entire dispute lies in how this law, or the will of God, is transmitted to humans. Fundamentally, how can an individual—for example, an ideal king—prove his possession of divine farr, or how can others prove or believe in the existence of such a characteristic in him? How can this king, in accordance with God's will, enact human laws suitable for the needs of the time? Essentially, who is the authority for verifying whether these laws conform or do not conform to God's will? Does this description of divine farr and law not pave the way for the king's power to become absolute, as well as autocratic and despotic? These and dozens of other questions and issues are raised regarding Iranshahri political thought and its central core, namely the theory of ideal kingship and law, which ultimately render Iranshahri political thought as a non-existent thought—in terms of becoming a guide for action.

4. Critical Remarks

1. Paucity of Attributable Sources in Iranshahri Political Thought: The claim of Tabatabai or any other researcher regarding Iranshahri thought is justified only when references are made to the sources of that period; sources, some of which are mentioned in historical books

like the second part of Arthur Christensen's "L'Iran sous les Sassanides," which is a collection of Sasanian inscriptions—as well as inscriptions remaining from the Parthians and Achaemenids—coins of this period, religious sources of this period such as the Zoroastrian Avesta, Denkard, Arda Viraf Namag, and the like, books of theoretical and practical ethics such as andarz or pand-nāmag (wisdom literature) like the Andarz-i Ōshnar-i Dānā, Andarz-i Khusraw ī Kawādān, and Andarz-i Ādurbād ī Mahraspandān, and similar works (Christensen, 1378, pp. 30-37). Of course, some of these sources existed completely and some incompletely in the Islamic period, and some still exist. Among these sources, if we overlook Mr. Tabatabai's limited references to some of them in the treatise "Khwajeh Nizam al-Mulk," his main effort is to prove the existence and continuity of Iranshahri thought and political thought from the texts of sources available in the Islamic period.

If, among the names of sources mentioned by researchers like Christensen as sources of ancient Iran, such as Āyīn-nāmaghā, Khwadāy-nāmaghā, Gāh-nāmag (which was a list of Sasanian dignitaries), Tāj-nāmaghā (containing speeches, orders, and commands of kings), and Pīshīnīgān-nāmag, he only makes references to the content of the "Letter of Tansar" and, regarding the rest, merely mentions their names (Christensen, 1378, pp. 38-43); this is because the content of those sources is not currently available, and researchers have only mentioned them based on Islamic-period sources like Ibn al-Nadim's "Al-Fihrist."

Richard Frye, in his article "The Achaemenid Imperial Organizations," points to the problem of the scarcity of sources regarding this period of history and writes: "Any attempt to discuss the organizations of the Achaemenids is necessarily provisional, because the lack of sources prevents us from presenting a clear and complete picture of the Achaemenid state and society. Moreover, even what is available must be used with utmost caution, because in an empire as vast as that of the Achaemenids, a diversity from one land to another and from one province to another makes any general survey almost impossible" (Frye, 1354, p. 24). This poverty and lack of primary sources and the absence of well-founded citations to them are major

weaknesses in Mr. Tabatabai's research and that of other researchers when discussing the thought and political thought of ancient Iran. Since Tabatabai lacks these sources, he tries to extract the framework of Iranshahri political thought from references found in the writings of Iranian thinkers of the Islamic period, which, it seems, leads nowhere, especially since he also interprets these sources selectively, according to his theoretical assumptions and intellectual-research inclinations, and not as those sources truly were. Thus, a form of subjective interpretation (tafsir bi'l-ra'y) is evident in his research project. Mr. Javad Tabatabai's selection of history is more like buttons for which Mr. Tabatabai has tailored a coat with his own formulation.

2. Lack of Historical Proof for the Theory-Practice Relationship in Iranshahri Political Thought: According to Tabatabai's interpretation of Iranshahri political thought, the ideal king possessing divine farr is at the heart of this thought, and all aspects of a political order and system are organized around this focal point. Whereas, what is important from the perspective of the history of political thought is the relationship of this thought or theoretical apparatus with political systems in their historical realization. Tabatabai, it seems, tries to prove that the kings of ancient Iran acted according to this theory, and this theory was the ruling spirit throughout this long period. The point of contention here is the discussion of the "theory and practice" relationship. This is a claim that seems historically unprovable. If, in cases like the kingship of Cyrus, traces of its realization exist, it cannot be applied to this entire long period. One instance disproving it is the long and bloody wars and conflicts over kingship during the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanian periods, an example of which is the murder of Bardiya, son of Cyrus, by his brother Cambyses, which led to Cambyses becoming ruler.

In the shadow of the discussion of ideal kingship and its characteristics, Tabatabai, on one hand, does not discuss aspects of this theory that could lead to despotism or absolute monarchy—in practical terms. On the other hand, he ignores the despotic actions of ancient Iranian kings who behaved tyrannically and created unjust relations in society. The audience of his works, when stepping outside

his perspective, finds an idealized and utopian image of ancient Iran, which is, of course, undocumented and ahistorical.

In ancient Iranian doctrine, the king is God on earth and the manifestation of Beh-dīn (the Good Religion). He determines which thought belongs to the Ahuric religion and should be preserved and propagated, and which belongs to the Ahrimanic religion, and itself and its bearers must be suppressed as brutally as possible. The king also presents this suppression as conclusive proof of his duty and openly declares that he is responsible only to God. In this entirely state-centric doctrine, power is absolute and reliant on the arbitrary will of the king. An example of suppression under such an approach can be seen in the suppression of the Mazdakites on charges of heresy during the time of Anushirvan the Just, whom Tabatabai considers the "supreme example of ideal kingship" (Qazimaradi, 1396, pp. 157-159). Regarding the relationship between king and people in ancient Iran, the principle is "obedience" or the shepherd-flock relationship; the king, as God's representative on earth, has the duty of shepherding the flock, and the flock, or subjects (ra'iyyat), has the duty of obeying his commands. This very ethical and political basis should and can be considered a serious obstacle to Tabatabai's attempt to establish a link between Iranshahri thought and the thought of modernity. This belief is one of the instances that Tabatabai deliberately bypasses because it seriously undermines his viewpoint. Muhammad Abed al-Jabri, in his treatise "Arab Ethical Rationality and the Influence of the Khosrowani Tradition," believes in this regard that Arab-Islamic culture—in many areas, including "ethical rationality"—was influenced by Iranian values. He calls the most important aspect of Persian ethical rationality the "ethics of obedience," which, in his view, gradually entered Arab culture from the Umayyad period and was reproduced in various forms, including absolute obedience to the caliph and rulers in the Islamic period (Al-Jabri, 1396, pp. 195-225).

To prove his claim, Al-Jabri cites, among other things, passages from Abu'l-Hasan al-'Amiri in the treatise "Al-Sa'āda wa'l-Is'ād fi'l-Sīra al-Insāniyya." Al-'Amiri attributes this saying to Anushirvan: "King and servitude are two names that each reinforces the other, and it is as if both emphasize a single meaning, because king requires servitude,

and servitude requires king. The king needs servants, and servants need the king. The highest characteristic of the king is foresight in the outcome of affairs, and the most praiseworthy characteristic of servants is steadfastness in obedience to the pleasant and unpleasant, and fidelity to the good and bad of the king. And the king is more entitled to the affairs of the servants than the servants are to their own affairs." Al-'Amiri also attributes this statement to Anushirvan: "God created kings to carry out His will among His creation, so that their interests may be met and they may be protected. Therefore, we say kings are God's caliphs on earth, and in another sense, God created them as superiors who command and are not commanded, who rule and are not ruled, and who are self-sufficient and not needy. Their need for the subjects is for the management and welfare of the subjects' affairs, while God created the subjects to be ruled and submissive to their monarchs" (Al-Jabri, 1396, p. 244). Therefore, in the master-slave relationship (in Hegel's terms), the principle is obedience.

Al-Jabri believes that Khosrowani values permeated not only ethics but also the state and all pillars of Arab culture. In his view, Khosrowani values are entirely contradictory to Greek political-ethical values; in Khosrowani values, the "Khosrow" (king) is the central value, and the goal is "obedience to the sultan," but in Greek values, the individual is the central value, and the goal is the individual's happiness. Al-Jabri believes that in Iranian values, the individual is fundamentally ignored because, in his view, in Persian texts, everything revolves around the Khosrow, and everyone and everything is defined in relation to him. In such an atmosphere, there is no room for the individual and his rights to be seen. In this view, everything revolves around the Khosrow, and he is present everywhere and in everything, and his presence rivals and interferes with the presence of God in the conscience of Persians. The reality is that the twinning of "kingship and religion" was so entrenched not only in the socio-political system of the Sasanians but also in the hearts of the subjects that if someone claimed to worship Khosrow, no one else would be surprised or condemn him (Al-Jabri, 1396, pp. 377-380).

Regarding the discussion of vizierate, which Tabatabai considers one of the most important elements of Iranshahri political

thought, there are also historical doubts. Richard Frye believes: "We have no evidence that Darius or Xerxes had a grand vizier, although later it seems that the 'Hazārapati' or 'Hazārbed,' literally meaning 'commander of a thousand,' had powers that would belong to a higher-ranking and more important official than a military commander or the head of the royal guards. But all our sources for the Hazārapati belong to the post-Achaemenid period, and one must be careful not to wrongly consider later situations as valid for earlier times." According to Frye, it is evident that in the court of the Great King, Achaemenid princes (vispuhr) and other Persian and Median nobles resided. They did not hold high positions; non-Iranian rulers and nobles had even less standing (Frye, 1354, p. 29). Tabatabai also discusses neither the content of the institution of vizierate in Iranian history and the sources of the ancient period of Iranian history, nor does he speak of the great viziers of that period spanning over a thousand years, merely assuming its existence and importance.

3. Disregard for Ancient Iranian Religious Sources: Another noteworthy point is that despite his extensive efforts to present a picture of the history of thought and political thought in ancient Iran, in the absence of primary sources from Iranian thinkers, Mr. Tabatabai does not refer to the religious sources remaining from that era, including Zoroastrian, Mazdakite, and Manichaean sources, especially sacred Zoroastrian texts like the "Avesta," which has survived to this day. This is a serious deficiency in his depiction of Iranshahri thought. In some of his works, he only provides a description of the "Letter of Tansar"—who was a Zoroastrian mowbed (priest) in the Sasanian period—and Kalila wa Dimna—originally an Indian work translated into Pahlavi, to which a chapter was added by Ibn al-Muqaffa'. This, it seems, is insufficient to prove such a claim, namely, the existence of an independent domain in ancient Iranian thought, i.e., Iranshahri political thought.

4. Ambiguity in the Historical Continuity of the Idea of Ideal Kingship: Mr. Tabatabai considers the idea of ideal kingship as the main theory of that political thought and deems it historically applicable to kings like Cyrus and Darius the Achaemenid. However, he engages in neither a theoretical discussion nor a discussion of the

theory-practice relationship concerning the historical period he speaks of and over which he considers Iranshahri thought to be dominant. In fact, he does not clarify whether this theory was prevalent and continuous throughout that period of over a millennium or not. Was this the only existing theory, and did the actions of Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanian kings conform to its requirements? If the answer is affirmative, how does he explain the situation of kings who were corrupt, inefficient, or incompetent—such as Khosrow II, the Sasanian king whom Ghirshman describes with attributes like greedy, ill-tempered, duplicitous, and lacking courage (Ghirshman, 1398, p. 353)? Who and where exactly is the authority for this thought and political thought? Is the authority for this thought Iranian sages, religious figures, or political figures? Given the plurality of religions, and especially since at certain points in Iranian history, particularly in the Sasanian era, some kings deviated from Zoroastrianism and followed Mani or Mazdak, what relationship does this thought have with these religions, or is this thought based on their common denominators? These are questions and ambiguities that find no clear answers in Mr. Tabatabai's explanation.

5. Disregard for Inconsistent Historical Evidence: In Mr. Tabatabai's account of Iranshahahr and Iranshahri thought, evidence that could create a breach in his viewpoint is overtly omitted and disregarded. An example is kings who, unlike Cyrus or Darius, did not tolerate unity in diversity and did not treat others with tolerance, and whose conquests were accompanied by destruction—such as the devastation of Syria and Cappadocia by Shapur, and, of course, his defeat by the Emir of Palmyra (Ghirshman, 1398, p. 339). Or, Mr. Tabatabai easily and without any mention passes over the class-based nature of Iranian society and the impossibility of inter-class mobility (Ghirshman, 1398, pp. 355-358), or the hereditary nature of civil and military positions, which were held by certain aristocrats and courtiers. The reason for this oversight or feigned ignorance can be attributed to the fact that the aforementioned evidence could create a breach in Mr. Tabatabai's attempt to present an image of "the new in the old," which is a major obstacle to establishing a link between Iranshahri thought and the thought of modernity.

In sum, Tabatabai pays no heed or attention to historical realities. He prefers to engage in imaginative descriptions of ancient Iranian monarchical systems, which he constructs based on Iranshahri political thought. An example is Tabatabai's imaginative descriptions of the divine farr of ideal kings. Whereas, not in the realm of imaginative descriptions, but in the arena of history, the reality is otherwise. In the arena of actual history, the realization of "farr" was subsequent to, not antecedent to, the "acquisition of power." An individual who seized power by some means would then claim to possess farr; it was not that he first showed his farr to the people and grandees so that everyone would submit to him and he would become king. Qazimaradi, in a correct critique of Tabatabai's approach to Iranshahri political thought, rightly believes that "Tabatabai pays no attention to historical reality" (Qazimaradi, 1396, pp. 161-162).

Conclusion

This article has attempted to briefly examine Mr. Javad Tabatabai's views on Iranshahri thought and political thought. According to Tabatabai, Iranshahri political thought is situated within the context of Iranshahri thought and is based on its foundations. One of the most important foundations of this thought is its basis on "the twinning of religiosity and politics." Furthermore, this political thought is founded on the triad of state (mulk), religion, and people, and its epistemological basis is reason or intellect (khirad or 'aql).

Based on Tabatabai's narrative of Iranshahri political thought, the following elements can be considered the most important components of such political thought: 1. Ideal kingship possessing divine farr. 2. The institution of vizierate. 3. The absolute, but not autocratic, nature of Iranshahri monarchy. 4. Realism, expediency, and the precedence of observing justice over Sharia. 5. Unity in diversity centered on the institution of Shahanshahi. 6. Tolerance. 7. The education of princes and future rulers. 8. Law as the will of God, enacted by the royal institution as God's representative on earth. 9. Religiosity as a part of national affairs and in service of national interests. 10. Emphasis on the disorders of the age as a negative aspect of the rearticulation of Iranshahri political thought in the Islamic era.

The most significant criticisms of such a narrative of Iranshahri political thought can be summarized as follows: 1. Ahistorical nature; in fact, what Mr. Tabatabai narrates about Iranshahri political thought is not based on historical sources, but rather the imposition of his desired presuppositions onto historical fact. Based on this approach, a large part of the sources and narratives that contradict his viewpoint are either completely ignored or omitted. 2. Tabatabai does not present a picture of Iranshahri thought and political thought based on sources from the ancient period of Iranian history—because in many cases, such sources either do not exist at all or do not have the capacity for such an undertaking. Instead, his entire viewpoint is based on sources from the Islamic period of Iranian history, which are capable of various interpretations completely contrary to his view. 3. For Tabatabai, Iranshahri political thought is not a narrative of the history of Iranian political thought, but rather an ideological form of his effort to establish a link between Iranshahri thought and modernity. In such a narrative, the "national matter" is paramount, and religiosity also operates within it and in its service. On the other hand, it is an attempt to present a theoretical apparatus as an alternative to the existing political system, which, in his belief, is "non-national." Therefore, despite his efforts to "conceal" such a matter, the ideological and political aspect of his viewpoint is very prominent and potent. 4. Mr. Tabatabai's discussion regarding Iranshahahr and Iranshahri political thought, especially where he tries to establish a link between that "ancient matter" and the "new situation," is more of a general "idea" for which he tries to derive elements from the heart of the history of thought in Iran, rather than a coherent "theory" that ultimately has a specific output. 5. Tabatabai's key to presenting such a narrative of Iranshahri political thought is the concept of "the new in the old," which is, in fact, a main pathway for offering an interpretation of the thought of Iran's "ancient period" to establish a link with the thought of modernity. In addition to the aforementioned criticisms, this approach also has the flaw that, on one hand, it is a subjective interpretation (tafsir bi'l-ra'y) and ignores many historical events and ideas of Iran, and on the other hand, all the criticisms he levels against the conflation of concepts by figures like Shariati, Shayegan, Nasr, and

many other intellectuals who sought to establish a link between "old and new" concepts, apply equally to himself, the discussion and elaboration of which are beyond the scope of this brief paper.

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