

Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari and the Future of the Islamic Revolution

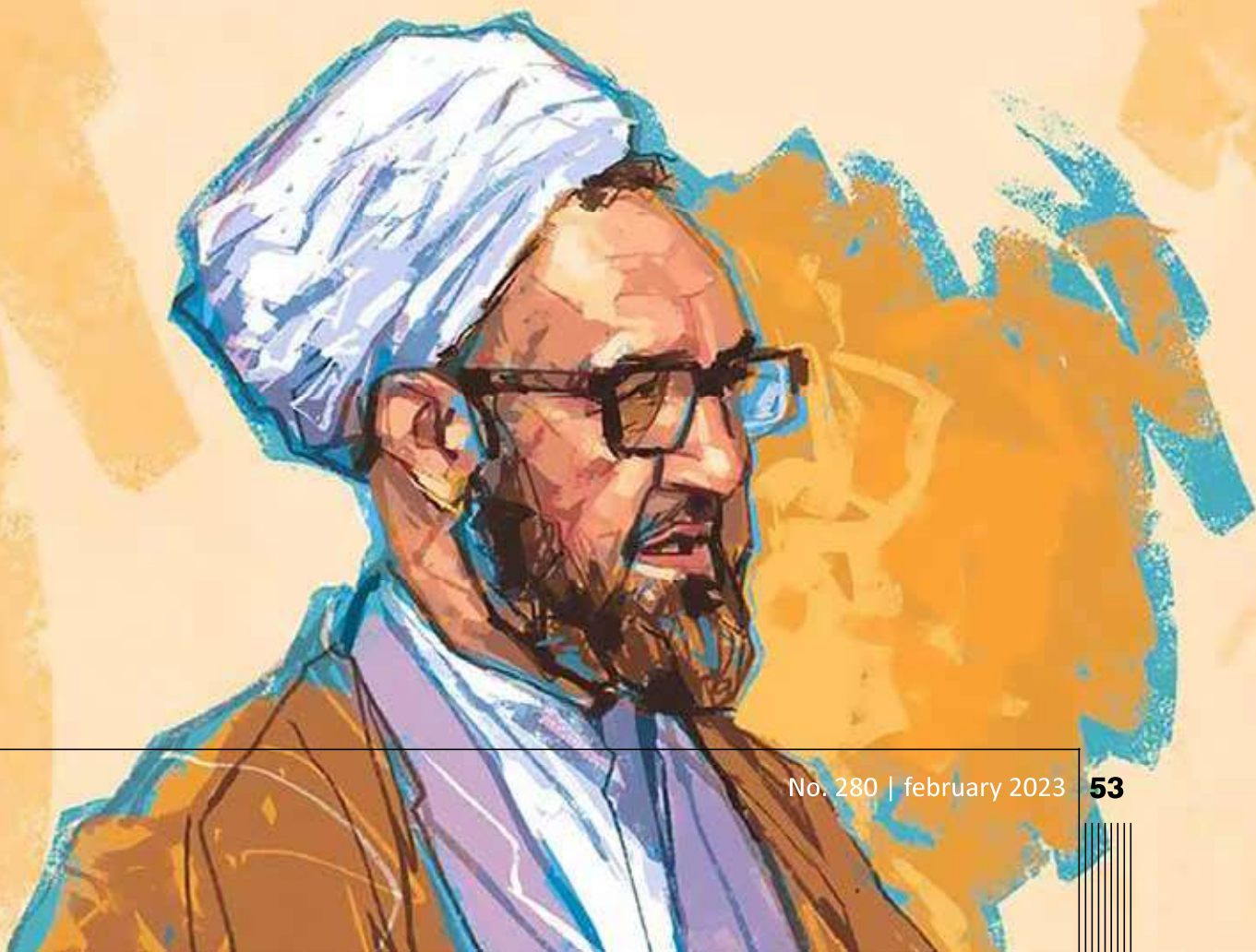
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Introduction

If we were to compare the Islamic Revolution of Iran with other great revolutions such as the 1789 French Revolution or the October Revolution of 1917, we would notice that in the case of the French Revolution, the views of thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Diderot, Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim and other European thinkers such as Friedrich Hegel, i.e., “liberty, equality, and fraternity”, formed the foundation of this revolution and in the case of the October Revolution of 1917

the views people like Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels transformed street movements and disturbances into an influential civilizational revolution.

From this point of view, in the case of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, thinkers such as Martyr Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari played a role similar to Western thinkers and tried to change the uprising of the Iranian nation into a global and influential revolution. The time lag between the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the martyrdom of Ayatollah Motahhari was less than



three months, and during this period, he gave five very important speeches at the University of Tehran about the philosophy of history and the Islamic Revolution.

In the last years of his life, he continuously and critically reflected on the philosophies of modern western history and sociological theories. In his works, he has always tried to throw light on the Great Islamic Revolution as a civilizational revolution in the history of Islam by using the intellectual capacities of the Islamic-Iranian heritage, especially the “Transcendental Theosophy” of Mulla Sadra. What follows is a review of Ayatollah Motahari’s reflections, which show that in his opinion the Islamic Revolution was the outcome of a kind of philosophy of religious history and will take a different civilizational path compared to the modern western civilization.

■ Philosophy of Religious History and Islamic Revolution

Motahari’s focus on the philosophy of history was formed through the critical evaluation of the works of Western thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, and Comte, and he correctly realized that, like other human sciences, historical developments are subject to certain laws that the theoretical philosophy of history is responsible for understanding them.

However, unlike Comte’s positivism and Hegel’s and Marx’s dialectics, he tried to explain the historical philosophy based on the sublime Islamic wisdom of Mulla Sadra and benefiting from its principles such as doubting existence, substance theory, and the like. Thus, what needs to be paid attention to, before anything else, is the difference in Motahari’s anthropology in explaining the position of man in the Islamic Revolution.

Evolution of Man’s Innate Nature

Ayatollah Motahari had a genuine belief in man’s innate nature. He believed that people enter society with a divine capital, which is called “innate nature”. In his view, the innate nature of every person consists of certain talents that invite and lead him toward perfection, i.e., man is not like a blank paper in the hand of a writer or a tape recorder recording sounds. From Motahari’s point of view, man’s innate nature is not merely a fixed viewer of

the principle of human life but is of potential talent and power that man should try to actualize during his lifetime in the history of this world. According to him, three factors are involved in the formation of human personality: his innate nature, society, and nature. These three factors affect each other and it is the sum of these factors, especially man’s innate nature, that forms the culture and soul of a society.

■ The Relationship between the Individual and Society on the Basis of Transcendent Theosophy

After explaining Motahari’s concept of anthropology, we will explain the relationship between the individual and society. While, like Emile Durkheim, he accepts society as a reality independent of individuals and a true composite, he criticizes Emile Durkheim’s view on the primacy of society and explains the relationship between the individual and the society based on a hadith from Imam Sadiq (a.s.), the sixth Imam of Shiites, that “La jabr wa la tafwiz bal amr bein al amrayn” (there is no absolute determinism and no absolute delegation of power but something between the two). Therefore, human beings have the right to move along the historical path of their society or stand against it, i.e., an individual’s soul is not forced to surrender to the collective soul of society and can have an effect on it.

■ The Driving Factor of History and the Occurrence of Religious Revolutions

Based on the teaching of humanism, revolutions, and historical changes are completely human-oriented that are often guided by intellectuals. However, in Motahari’s opinion, historical developments have a driving factor that is often influenced by the teachings of divine prophets. Unlike some western theories that explain the driving factor of history in terms of racial, geographic, economic factors, and heroism, Ayatollah Motahari explains his theory on the basis of man’s innate nature. He explains that man has certain

characteristics by way of which the characteristics of his social life get complete. The ability to preserve and maintain experiences, in addition to the ability to transfer experiences to each other, and the ability to innovate and the desire for creativity and innovation, are forces that always push man forward. In the opinion of Motahhari, this evolutionary history is formed by a human being who has understood his innate nature in the most complete way, and such a human being is a “perfect human being”, which is exemplified by the divine prophets and especially, the last of them, Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and the Shiite Infallible Imams.

■ The Era of the Reappearance of the 12th Shiite Imam, the Religious End of History

While emphasizing that the living example of a perfect human being is the 12th Shiite Imam who is presently in occultation, Ayatollah Motahhari considered the goal of overall evolution to be the victory of truth over falsehood and this means that the totality of history is ultimately good and true, which will be realized with the reappearance of the 12th Shiite Imam. He further stressed that mankind is destined for such a future. In other words, the current struggle between right and wrong continues and moves forward until, according to the predictions made by the Prophet of Islam and the Shiite Imams, it will eventually lead to the establishment of the government of Imam Mahdi (AS).

The ultimate goal of this overall evolution is the actualization of man's innate talents, and, therefore, giving up on this evolutionary flow, although maybe considered possible - based on human discretion - means deviating from the path of man's innate nature. He, further, emphasized that the secret of evolution should be sought in man's innate nature and that as per this innate nature man seeks and pursues perfection.

Thus, the age of the reappearance of the promised Mahdi (AS) is also the age when man's innate nature reaches maturity and it is in line with the movement of the divine prophets intended to return man to his innate nature.

■ Islamic Revolution, the Instrument of Ensuring the End of Religious History

In the opinion of Ayatollah Motahhari, the Islamic Revolution of Iran is one of the instruments and mechanisms that Muslim people looked forward to in the course of the evolution of human history and in order to perfect their innate nature on the basis of the Islamic perspective they embarked on this Revolution and formed an Islamic society. As a matter of fact, the Islamic Revolution is the glad tiding of the revival of man's innate nature and its perfection. The realization of such an ideal would not be possible in the absence of a social movement on the part of human beings, because the actualization of man's innate nature requires the formation of a religious society in which human beings actively participate in doing good deeds.

■ Concluding Remarks

Unlike Western thinkers who made modern revolutions such as the French Revolution a subject for theorizing, Ayatollah Motahhari engaged in explaining the Islamic Revolution on the basis of Islamic principles and transcendental theosophy, until the last moments of his life. In the days when few people thought about the “future of the Islamic Revolution”, he devoted himself to explaining the philosophy of the religious history of the Islamic Revolution so that he could present the original message of this Revolution to people of all ages in all human societies. In his opinion, the Islamic Revolution is a revolution for the evolution of man's innate nature and the achievement of all good goals in the human world, which is tied to the principle of Mahdism. According to him, the general direction of the movement of individuals and societies in history is to be towards evolution and perfection, but at some stages of history, people abandon this good path and create societies the essence of which is impure. Therefore, from his point of view, the Western revolutions and the thinkers who formulated them were actually moving against the course of the evolution of history, and the Islamic Revolution was formed as a critique of these revolutions and their thinkers in order to provide the path of the natural movement of human history towards good ends.

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