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Social Policy Foundations: Rousseau's Social Contract and Tabataba'i's Practical *Iʿtibāriyyāt*

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ABSTRACT

Social policy, as the discipline of managing collective life, requires a precise clarification of its anthropological and epistemological foundations before practical application. Employing a descriptive-analytical method and a comparative-critical approach, this study examines the theoretical foundations of social policy within two paradigms: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract theory and Mohammad Hossein Tabataba'i's theory of practical *Iʿtibāriyyāt* (normative constructs). The findings indicate that Rousseau locates the origin of society in the voluntary agreement of natural human beings to overcome environmental obstacles, whereas Tabataba'i traces it to *Iḍṭirār* (necessity), which arises from the need to restrain the innate drive for *Istikhdām* (instrumentalization) and to prevent conflicts of interest. Regarding the origin of law and sovereignty, Rousseau's theory relies on the "general will" and popular sovereignty, in which the state serves merely as the agent of the law. Tabataba'i's framework, by contrast, holds that because the instrumentalizing intellect is inherently inadequate, ultimate legislation depends on divine revelation and Sharia, and government functions as the executor of justice. In the teleological dimension, both thinkers criticize the proliferation of false needs and consumerism, but Rousseau's ideal telos is defined as securing civil liberty and legal equality. Tabataba'i, transcending material reductionism, conceives the telos of social policy as the instrumental management of practical *Iʿtibāriyyāt* toward securing both material and spiritual felicity, grounded in a monotheistic worldview and the primacy of the Hereafter.

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Introduction and Problem Statement

Social policy, the management, regulation, and systematic organization of social relations, needs, and services within collective life, is always conditioned by antecedent assumptions in anthropology, ontology, and epistemology. Without clarifying these foundations, social policy remains an abstract and truncated discipline. The conception one adopts of human reality, the origin of society, the telos of human life, and the source of legal validity directly determines the model for organizing public affairs. In Western philosophical and social thought, the formation of civil order is frequently explained through Rousseau's "social contract." Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 to 1778), through a profound critique of the civil condition of his time and by positing an original state of nature in which humans lived free and good, presents the transition to society as a necessity in the face of obstacles to survival. In his thought, only by forging a universal contract and submitting to the "general will" can lost natural freedom be regained as civil liberty. Conversely, within contemporary Islamic philosophy, Allameh Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabataba'i, through his theory of *Iʿtibāriyyāt* (practical/normative constructs), provides a profound framework for understanding the genesis of society. From Tabataba'i's perspective, grounded in self-love (Ḥubb al-Dhāt) and genuine existential needs, human beings possess a natural disposition toward *Istikhdām* of other phenomena and fellow humans. Human society is formed not by a mere voluntary decision, but through the necessity of repelling instrumental conflicts and via a system of normative perceptions that reaches perfection under the guidance of Sharīʿah and revelation.

The central problem of this research is to identify the structural and foundational differences in the analysis of social policy within these two intellectual systems. The questions are how the transition from Rousseau's natural man to Tabataba'i's instrumentalizing, construct-creating man, and the dichotomy between the "human general will" and "*Iʿtibāriyyāt* aligned with *Fiṭrah* and revelation," transform the nature of the state, law, justice, and the telos of social policy. A comparative rereading of these two models can illuminate hidden theoretical layers and provide a clear basis for diagnosing the shortcomings of conventional social policy models.

Main Questions

Fundamental Question: What is the nature of the theoretical foundations of social policy in the thought of Rousseau, centered on the social contract theory, and Tabataba'i, centered on the theory of practical *Iʿtibāriyyāt*, and what are their points of convergence and divergence?

Sub-questions:

The origin of society and anthropology: How are the genesis of society and the conception of human nature explained in the perspectives of Rousseau and Tabataba'i?

The origin of law and sovereignty: How is the source of the legitimacy of laws and the duties of government organized, based on the dichotomy of the "general will" and "divine revelation and Sharīʿah"?

Teleology and the restraint of needs: How are the goals of social policy conceptualized in the contrast between civil liberty oriented toward worldly life and material and spiritual felicity centered on the primacy of the Hereafter?

Theoretical Framework: Explication of Key Concepts

For a precise and scientific analysis, it is necessary to elucidate the core terms and concepts that constitute the pillars of the theoretical formulation of this research, with reference to the foundational texts of both thinkers.

The Concept of the Social Contract in Rousseau's Thought

The "social contract" in Rousseau's thought is the key term for the transition from the "state of nature" to the "civil state." From Rousseau's perspective, humans in the state of nature lived in independence, equality, and freedom. However, the emergence of environmental obstacles, the division of labor, and the advent of property rendered individual survival impossible. Rousseau explains the nature of the social contract as follows: "The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before" (Rousseau, 1968, p. 34). The essence of this mutual agreement is the total alienation of individual rights and powers to the whole community and absolute subordination to the "general will." As a result, a moral and collective body called the "government" or "state" emerges, whose primary duty is to execute the law derived from the general will, safeguard civil liberty, and protect legal equality.

The Concept of *Iʿtibāriyyāt* and *Fiṭrah* in Tabataba'i's Thought

In the philosophical system of Tabataba'i, *Iʿtibāriyyāt* (practical/normative constructs) constitute a distinguished category in the realm of practical reason. Tabataba'i views *Iʿtibāriyyāt* as constructed entities superimposed on external realities, which the human mind posits and creates in order to fulfill natural needs, preserve the self, and attain existential perfections (Tabataba'i, 2009, pp. 50–54). Although *Iʿtibāriyyāt* have no objective external referent, humans, in their practical constructs, are subject to nature and follow the guidance of innate disposition (*Fiṭrah*) and instinct (Tabataba'i, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 212). In this framework, the human being possesses a fundamental and divine *Fiṭrah*. However, in the realm of worldly life, humans possess a disposition for *Istikhdām*. This means that humans, based on self-love, are inclined to subjugate all other objects and humans to serve their own interests (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, p. 175; Tabataba'i, 2008, Vol. 1, p. 253). This primary instrumentalization, owing to the friction of interests, leads to conflict and chaos. Therefore, out of necessity (*Iḍṭirār*), humans resort to creating normative concepts such as "property," "leadership," and "law" so that collective life can be sustained (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, pp. 177–178). Hence, society, in Tabataba'i's view, is an establishment by necessity and a normative intermediary for the preservation of life and the facilitation of movement toward authentic otherworldly and innate ends.

Social Policy

Social policy, within the theoretical framework of this article, is a systematic complex of principles, measures, and institutions whose goal is to restrain social conflicts, manage and guide

human needs, distribute resources, and establish justice in order to achieve peace, solidarity, and the ultimate felicity of the members of society.

Research Methodology

The method employed in this research is descriptive-analytical with a comparative-critical approach. To avoid the disconnect between theoretical foundations and objective consequences, the traditional model of separation, in which theories are presented independently and then superficially compared, has been avoided. Instead, the philosophical, anthropological, and epistemological foundations of both thinkers are extracted, conceptualized, and evaluated contextually within a comparative analysis of the axes of social policy. The executive mechanism of this method is organized in four steps: textual extraction (precise rereading of primary sources); problem-oriented alignment (articulating thematic axes oriented toward social policy, including human nature, the origin of society, the source of law's legitimacy, the scope of state authority, and the ends of collective life); foundational comparative analysis (simultaneous exploration of both thinkers in each axis); and synthesis and critical inference (explicating points of convergence and divergence, and extracting the implications of each approach for designing social policy models).

Findings

Comparative Analysis of the Origin of Society and Human Nature

Anthropological Examination: Rousseau's Natural Man vs. Tabataba'i's Innate (Fiṭrī) Man

The analysis of the origin of society would be incomplete without examining the image each theory presents of the human being. In the thought of Rousseau and Tabataba'i, the point of departure for social theory is the human being. However, the two thinkers begin with different conceptions of human nature, needs, freedom, and perfection. This anthropological difference yields different accounts of the causes of the genesis of society, law, and government.

In his hypothetical reconstruction of the state of nature, Rousseau distinguishes between natural man and social man (Rousseau, 1986, Part 1). From Rousseau's perspective, man in the state of nature is a primitive, self-sufficient, low-need, and peaceful creature who lives free from the moral vices, conflicts, and complex dependencies of civil society. Two fundamental motives, self-preservation and natural pity, govern his behavior (Rousseau, 1986, pp. 68–74). He is not involved in organized competition, domination, the pursuit of glory, or institutionalized inequality. Rousseau's natural man is often described as a "noble savage," a term Rousseau himself does not use but one that captures his depiction of a free individual, unrestrained by civil laws, who is capable of seeking his own happiness. In this framework, primary human nature is not the source of social evil but the ground for a kind of simplicity and moral health.

In his educational work, Rousseau states explicitly that God makes all things good and that man meddles with them and corrupts them (Rousseau, 1911, p. 5). For this reason, natural man, before becoming entangled in social, economic, and political structures, remains distant from the corruptions arising from comparison, property, dependence, and domination. In explaining this

transformation, Rousseau distinguishes between natural self-love (*amour de soi*), the authentic instinct of self-preservation, and social egoism (*amour-propre*), which is born of comparison and competition in civilized life. He regards the former as the source of purity and the latter as the root of psychological and moral tension (Rousseau, 1911, pp. 173–174). In his *Confessions*, he recounts his well-known observations in Venice, where he came to see that many human vices are rooted in the structure of social institutions and that man's original nature is deformed by these relations (Rousseau, 1923, Vol. 2, p. 77). This does not entail a complete denial of reason or morality. It expresses instead the historical and conceptual primacy of nature over civilization: many things introduced as virtues or necessities in civil society may themselves be products of unhealthy social relations (Rousseau, 1986, Part 1).

From this perspective, Rousseau opposes Hobbes's conception of natural man (Ryan, 2012). Hobbes views pre-social man as a belligerent creature engaged in a war of all against all. Rousseau, by contrast, believes that man in nature is fundamentally peaceful and timid, and that he acquires a warlike disposition only after entering society. In Rousseau's own words, Hobbes and other philosophers have confused natural man with a man who has been kneaded and fermented many times in the dough of society (Rousseau, 1986, Part 1). Therefore, in Rousseau's theory, widespread evil and conflict are more the product of social and civilizational transformations than of man's original nature.

In contrast, Tabataba'i does not consider man merely a natural and self-sufficient being. He introduces him as a being endowed with *Fiṭrah* (innate disposition), consciousness, perception, and diverse existential inclinations. On the one hand, man has material needs and instinctual faculties. On the other, he possesses an innate perceptual capacity that calls him to knowledge, choice, cooperation, and movement toward perfection. Upon creating man, God endowed him with consciousness and placed within him the instruments of perception (hearing, sight, and the heart), so that a power of perception and thought emerged that enables him to know and act upon beings (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, pp. 171–172).

From Tabataba'i's perspective, this perceptual capacity is directly linked to action and the preservation of human existence. On the basis of internal feelings and the requirements of his active faculties, man forms perceptions whose value becomes apparent in the realm of action. These perceptions are the practical sciences and *Iʿtibāriyyāt* through which man regulates his relations with objects and other humans (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, pp. 172–175). Thus, in Tabataba'i's thought, man is from the outset a construct-creating and active being, not a passive creature who acquires reason and morality only after entering society.

Another important element of Tabataba'i's anthropology is the disposition toward *Istikhdām*. Driven by self-love and the need to secure his needs and perfections, man tends to exploit nature, animals, and other humans. Tabataba'i explains that man regards whatever is effective in his path to perfection as something that must be subjugated to his service, from nature and animals to fellow humans. He may even seek to dominate and exploit other humans, manipulating their existence and labor as far as possible (Tabataba'i, 1973, Vol. 2, p. 388).

Therefore, man in Tabataba'i's view is neither the isolated, low-need natural man of Rousseau nor an inherently evil being in the Hobbesian sense. He is a being possessing *Fiṭrah* and the capacity for perfection, in whom the disposition toward instrumentalization is active at the level of material life. If this disposition is not placed within the framework of justice and proper guidance, it leads to conflict and exploitation. If it is regulated by reason, law, and revelation, it can provide the ground for cooperation and civilization. The fundamental difference lies here: Rousseau views corruption primarily as the result of man's entry into society, whereas Tabataba'i considers the humans' own instrumentalizing inclination one of the primary causes of social discord.

Analysis of the Causes of Society's Formation

Overcoming Natural Obstacles and Survival in Rousseau's Approach

In Rousseau's theory, society is the product of an objective and historical need. Isolated humans, at a certain stage of natural life, encounter obstacles they cannot overcome alone. The growth of natural obstacles, the difficulty of meeting needs, and the threat to individual survival drive humans toward the union of forces. Rousseau holds that individuals are free and independent in the state of nature, but obstacles arise that no single individual has the power to confront. Hence, to preserve themselves and sustain life, humans turn to cooperation and society (Rousseau, 1979; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2010).

Rousseau formulates this situation as a fundamental problem: how can humans unite their scattered forces without completely losing their natural freedom? When the resistance of obstacles makes survival in the state of nature difficult, and the force of each individual alone is insufficient, humans have no way forward but to form an aggregate of forces and gather around a common will so that they can act together (Rousseau, 2000, p. 98).

Thus, the primary cause of the formation of society in Rousseau's thought is not conflict among humans but the incapacity of isolated individuals against the power of nature and the need to preserve survival. Society, in its inception, is a rational and voluntary response to an external threat. The transition from the state of nature to the civil state also produces a remarkable change in human character: justice replaces instinct, and behavior is placed within the framework of moral rules. The individual who previously thought only of himself is obliged to heed principles beyond personal inclination and to consult his reason before following his impulses (Rousseau, 2000, pp. 120–121).

Here, the social contract plays a fundamental role. Rousseau's ideal society is not merely the forced gathering of individuals under the domination of an external power; it is the result of a universal agreement. He specifies that the only contract that inherently requires unanimous consent is the social contract, which means participation in the formation of political society and the realization of popular sovereignty (Rousseau, 2000, p. 96). Consequently, the legitimacy of the social order stems not from nature, tradition, or the will of a ruler, but from the free agreement of individuals.

Fulfilling Needs and Repelling Conflict Arising from the Disposition toward Instrumentalization in Tabataba'i's Approach

Tabataba'i seeks the origin of society in a broader set of necessities. Man alone cannot acquire all the perfections and needs compatible with his essence, and the totality of these needs compels him toward society, cooperation, and civilization (Tabataba'i, 2009, p. 54).

In Tabataba'i's explanation, man initially, on the basis of the disposition toward instrumentalization, subjugates nature and other beings to his service. But this process quickly encounters an internal obstacle: other humans have the same inclination. Every individual wants to exploit others, while others strive to exploit him. From this intersection of interests, discord and conflict arise. Tabataba'i explains that this discord, especially when accompanied by an inequality of power, leads to the exploitation of the weak by the strong and ultimately drives society toward chaos and the ruin of humanity (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, pp. 175, 177).

Therefore, society in Tabataba'i's thought is not only a response to natural obstacles. It is a solution for regulating instrumental relations and preventing the conflict of powers. Man realizes that if he acts solely on unilateral instrumentalization, others will do the same to him, and the result will be mutual insecurity and destruction. Consequently, out of necessity, he accepts that just as he wishes to benefit from others, he must allow them to benefit from him to the same extent. Tabataba'i regards this acceptance as the origin of civil and cooperative society, and specifies that man, due to necessity (*Iḍṭirār*), submits to limiting the scope of his choice and freedom (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, p. 176).

In this theory, social justice emerges at the point where mutual and equal instrumentalization replaces unilateral instrumentalization. However, this level of agreement is insufficient to guarantee ultimate justice, because man's instrumentalizing disposition can itself become a source of discord. Hence, to fully rectify social relations, man requires the guidance of revelation and Sharīʿah. Natural society and customary contracts can restrain only part of the conflicts. Determining the true telos of man and regulating *Iʿtibāriyyāt* on the path to perfection requires an authority beyond the variable desires of individuals.

Analysis of the Type of Cooperation: From Voluntary Contract to Compulsory Acceptance

A comparison of the two views shows that Rousseau and Tabataba'i both consider society a response to the limits of individual life, but they differ fundamentally in explaining the nature of social cooperation. In Rousseau's thought, cooperation rests on a voluntary contract: free and independent individuals, recognizing their incapacity against natural obstacles, consciously agree to unite their forces in a political whole. In contrast, Allameh Tabataba'i emphasizes necessity (*Iḍṭirār*). Humans submit to society because of mutual need and the fear of conflict and destruction. If necessity did not exist, the instrumentalizing human would not readily agree to limit the scope of his choice (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, p. 176). In Tabataba'i's theory, cooperation, although it can take the form of agreement and contract, is at its root the product of existential and social necessity, not merely a free and abstract choice.

In Rousseau, the individual, through the social contract, alienates a portion of his natural freedom to gain civil and political liberty. In Tabataba'i, the individual, because of his needy and instrumentalizing structure, realizes that the continuation of life is impossible except through cooperation and the mutual limitation of desires. Despite this difference, both thinkers agree that the individual alone is incapable of securing his needs and sustaining his life, and is inevitably bound to live within society. There is also an overlap between the two theories: in both, society is formed to solve a real problem. In Rousseau, the problem is incapacity against natural obstacles. In Tabataba'i, it is securing needs, attaining perfections, and repelling the conflict arising from instrumentalization.

It can be said that Rousseau considers the point of departure for society to be the necessity of uniting forces for survival, and Tabataba'i considers it to be the necessity of regulating instrumentalization and realizing cooperation. In the first theory, the contract is the main mechanism for the transition from dispersion to political unity. In the second, social *Iʿtibāriyyāt* are the tools for regulating human relations, which must ultimately be placed on the path of true felicity under the guidance of revelation. This distinction provides the basis for the subsequent differences between the two views regarding the origin of law, legitimacy, justice, and the telos of social policy.

Comparative Analysis of Law, Government, and Social Justice

The Origin of Legislation: General Will vs. Revelation and Sharīʿah

The difference in the anthropological foundations of Rousseau and Tabataba'i is also reflected in their conceptions of the origin of law. In Rousseau's thought, law is the product of the general will of the citizens. By entering political society, humans organize a portion of their natural freedom within a collective agreement and, through the general will, create the binding rules of common life. A law is therefore legitimate when it expresses not the will of an individual, group, or ruler, but the general will (Rousseau, 1968, Book 2, Chapter 6).

According to Rousseau, law must concern public matters and apply equally to all. It expresses the "will of the whole" and serves public interests, and it must not be directed at the private affairs of particular persons. If it establishes a right, that right must belong to everyone; if it prescribes a duty, that duty must bind everyone equally (Rousseau, 1968, pp. 210–213). A law has a public character when its subject is general, its addressees are universal, and its aim is to secure the common good.

Legislation in Rousseau's thought depends directly on the principle of popular sovereignty. Only through a contract grounded in the general will can a society be formed in which man finds the opportunity for growth and flourishing (Mohammadpour, 2016, p. 19). Rousseau is also attentive to the difficulty of discerning the public good. Since the social body may be unable to identify and draft laws aligned with the common good on its own, a wise legislator becomes necessary: a sage who, considering all aspects of social relations, drafts the laws and presents them to the social body for the final approval of the general will (Rousseau, 1968, p. 46; Foroughi, 1988,

Vol. 2, pp. 198–199). The legislator is not the independent author of the law. His role is to understand and formulate public interests and to present them to the general will.

In contrast, Tabataba'i does not restrict the origin of legislation to the general will or the collective reason of humans. In his view, human *Fiṭrah* and reason, though capable of cognition and discernment, cannot fully resolve conflicts on their own. The instrumentalization and conflicting interests of humans are the main source of discord, and a faculty that is itself a source of conflict cannot alone serve as the ultimate arbiter of disputes. On this basis, Tabataba'i affirms the necessity of divine law:

And it is evident that man himself cannot compensate for this deficiency of his, because his own nature has created this deficiency; how can he himself eliminate it and pave the way for his felicity and perfection in his social life? When human nature creates this discord and causes man to be deprived of reaching the perfection and felicity he is worthy of and prepared to attain, and he himself cannot rectify what he has corrupted, the rectification must inevitably come from a direction other than the direction of nature, and that will exclusively be a divine direction, which is prophethood and revelation. For this very reason, God the Exalted referred to the uprising of the prophets for reform as "sending" (*Baʿth*), and throughout the Qurʾān He has attributed this sending to Himself, stating that it is He who sends prophets among the nations. Although the issue of the uprising of prophets, like other matters, is also related to matter and spatiotemporal relations, He has attributed the sending to Himself everywhere to convey that only God can resolve human disputes. Thus, prophethood is a divine and unseen state whose relation to the general state of humans, meaning their perception and action, is like the relation of wakefulness to sleep, through which the person of the prophet perceives cognitions by means of which the disputes and contradictions in human life are elevated (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, pp. 195–196).

In this conception, Sharīʿah is not merely a set of ritual or moral regulations but a system for organizing social *Iʿtibāriyyāt*. Divine law regulates the material needs and social relations of man, but in this regulation material needs are not the ultimate end. *Iʿtibāriyyāt* are posited to fulfill needs and must not be organized in such a way that they acquire primacy in themselves and generate proliferating and complex needs. Religious social policy responds to material welfare but gives primacy to spiritual perfection and otherworldly felicity.

The main difference is that Rousseau considers the origin of law to be the general will, whereas Tabataba'i traces its source to divine revelation and Sharīʿah. In Rousseau's theory, law is formed from below, from the will of the citizens. In Tabataba'i's theory, divine law descends from the Transcendent Source and then organizes human social *Iʿtibāriyyāt* along the path of *Fiṭrah* and perfection.

The Nature of Government: Agent of the Law vs. Executor of Divine Justice

In Rousseau's thought, government does not possess sovereignty. It is an agent tasked with executing the law. Sovereignty belongs to the people, and the government is merely an executive institution that actualizes the general will in the realm of action. Because executing the law concerns particular individuals and cannot be performed directly by everyone, the social body

selects persons for this duty, and they form the government (Rousseau, 1968, p. 46; Foroughi, 1988, Vol. 2, p. 199).

To prevent government from becoming a self-founded power, Rousseau insists on its subordination to the law. The rulers are the executors of the law, not its arbiters. All the obstacles that a republic places against the authority of the rulers serve to prevent their encroachment upon the domain of the laws (Rousseau, 2000, pp. 94–95). Therefore, government can neither substitute its private will for the general will nor interpret or execute the law for the benefit of a specific group. A nation is free when it sees in its ruler not a superior person and master, but the agent of the law.

In Tabataba'i's view, government must likewise be the executor of the law and the expander of justice, but law and justice here are rooted in *Fiṭrah* and divine Sharīʿah. Government has the duty to prevent the transgression of the strong against the weak, to regulate social relations on the basis of truth (*Ḥaqq*), and to execute divine ordinances in the public sphere. On this basis, government in Tabataba'i's thought is the executor of divine justice. It actualizes justice according to revelatory criteria and the true structure of human existence.

Consequently, government in both theories is subject to law, but the reference point for that law differs. A further difference concerns supervision. In Rousseau's theory, supervision of government is carried out primarily through political structures and the will of the citizens. In Tabataba'i's theory, religious and moral supervision is important in addition to institutional oversight.

The Relationship of Law with Freedom and Equality

Return to Freedom through the Social Contract

Rousseau does not regard the social contract as a means of destroying freedom. He sees it as the way to reconstruct freedom at a higher level. Man enjoys freedom in the state of nature, but this freedom is accompanied by insecurity and instability. The social contract transforms natural freedom into civil and political liberty, which is realized within the framework of law and public participation. This fundamental pact is the basis of a union in which each individual puts his person and all his powers under the supreme direction of the general will, and in which, receiving each member as an indivisible part of the whole, the body gives back the individual the civil liberty he had lost in the state of nature (Rousseau, 1968, Book 1, Chapter 6).

According to Rousseau, obedience to law does not contradict freedom when the law is the product of the general will. In such a state, man does not obey an alien will but follows a law in whose enactment he has participated as a member of political society. A free people obeys but is not enslaved. It has leaders but not masters, and it obeys the laws rather than persons. Mere appetite is slavery, whereas obedience to a law we prescribe for ourselves is liberty (Rousseau, 1968, Book 1, Chapter 8; Book 2, Chapter 1).

Equality is also a requirement of this logic. The people, in the position of legislator and in the position of individual, are subject to the law. Everyone therefore shares in legislating and in

obeying. This universal participation prevents a small group from subjecting society to its own whims and desires (Foroughi, 1988, Vol. 2, p. 199). Justice, in this framework, emerges from the equality of citizens before the law and their equal participation in forming the general will. Rousseau even accepts that a dissenting individual may be compelled to preserve public freedom. Whoever refuses to obey the general will may be compelled to do so by the whole body. In Rousseau's words, this compulsion means forcing the individual to be free, because it prevents his dependence on a private will and on the domination of others (Rousseau, 1968, Book 1, Chapter 7).

In Rousseau's thought, civil liberty is not liberation from all law but obedience to a law in whose enactment the individual participates. On this basis, the phrase "forcing the individual to be free" is defensible only if the individual's private will opposes the general will while his true and rational will coincides with it. This presupposition raises three critical questions:

1. The epistemological question: Who, and by what criterion, distinguishes the general will from the private will?
2. The institutional question: If government or the legislator claims to interpret the general will, what guarantee prevents the "government as agent of the law" from becoming a "government as interpreter and owner of the general will"?
3. The normative question: Can collective coercion in the name of "true freedom" become a tool for legitimizing restrictions on individual freedom, when the dissenting individual has no means to express his dissatisfaction within the framework of that same general will?

Rousseau's safeguards, namely the generality of the law (general in subject and universal in addressees), popular sovereignty, and the subordination of government to the law, reduce this danger but do not eliminate it. The identification of the general will and the boundary between private and general will remain a point of tension. Therefore, despite his emphasis on civil liberty, Rousseau's model remains vulnerable to the risk that collective coercion becomes "imposed freedom."

Organizing *Iʿtibāriyyāt* and Reaching Perfection through Sharīʿah

In Tabataba'i's thought, freedom has no meaning in a vacuum or apart from the truth of the human being. The freedom he desires is the freedom to move along the path of innate perfection, not absolute liberation from every law and obligation. Sharīʿah, by regulating social *Iʿtibāriyyāt*, does not restrict human freedom in order to keep man from perfection. Rather, by restraining unilateral instrumentalization and excessive desire, it creates the conditions for the realization of true freedom.

Divine laws must spring from the true *Fiṭrah* of man and the system of creation so that they agree with the soul and nature of society. These laws must also consider worldly and otherworldly interests, material welfare, and moral virtues simultaneously (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, p. 178). In this system, equality does not mean the mechanical leveling of all individuals. It means observing

true rights and preventing exploitation and transgression. Every individual must enjoy facilities and legal protection commensurate with his true position and right.

Mechanisms for the Realization of Justice: From General Will to Supervision over Enjoining and Forbidding

Social justice in Rousseau's theory is realized through the general will, the universality of the law, and the equality of citizens in political participation. The law must apply equally to all, government must be the agent of the law, and citizens must be able to preserve the general will against private wills. Justice is guaranteed through the political structure, legal obligation, and civil punishment.

In Tabataba'i's theory, the realization of social justice requires a set of complementary mechanisms (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 1, p. 282):

1. A government that executes the law and expands justice, preventing the transgression of the strong against the weak.
2. Laws rooted in the true *Fiṭrah* of man.
3. A comprehensive law encompassing material and spiritual, worldly and otherworldly interests.
4. Penal rulings and deterrent punishments that restrain the rebellion of man's instrumentalizing nature.
5. Universal supervision through enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong (Amr bi al-Maʿrūf wa Nahy ʿan al-Munkar), as a public duty that subjects the conduct of citizens, and even of rulers, to moral and religious vigilance.
6. Faith in the Origin and the Resurrection as the internal guarantee of justice, because belief in otherworldly reward and punishment obliges man to respect the rights of others even in private and in the absence of external observers.

Thus, Rousseau explains justice through the general will, equal participation, and obedience to the self-founded law of the citizens. Tabataba'i places justice within a constellation of *Fiṭrah*, revelation, a just government, comprehensive law, penal guarantees, public supervision, and faith in the Resurrection. In Rousseau's theory, justice rests primarily on voluntary and political mechanisms, whereas in Tabataba'i's theory it also requires moral, doctrinal, and otherworldly guarantees.

Comparative Analysis of Culture and the Telos of Social Policy

Explaining the Relationship between Culture and Society in Rousseau: Culture as a Factor of Deviation from Good Nature

Rousseau's analysis of culture and civilization rests on a fundamental distinction between "natural man" and "social man." Natural man is a simple, independent being with modest needs who enjoys original freedom. Social man, by contrast, becomes entangled in a network of dependencies, comparisons, competition, and artificial desires. In his autobiography, Rousseau

repeatedly insists that society is the abode of constraint and artificiality, and that man is freed from artificial dependence only in solitude and natural independence (Rousseau, 1923, Vol. 2, pp. 58, 188). On this basis, culture in its common meaning is not necessarily a sign of moral progress. It is one of the factors that distance man from his original nature and innate health (Rousseau, 1968, pp. 120–121).

In his critique of modern civilization, Rousseau distinguishes between apparent progress and true human elevation (Rousseau, 1968, p. 122). In his view, science and literature may adorn the exterior of people, but they corrupt their interior because they divert natural dispositions and create an artificial state in the human heart and mind. The further man advances in science and industry, the further he moves from his nature and the deeper he sinks into corruption (Foroughi, 1988, Vol. 2, pp. 195–196).

In this view, culture, when linked with science, industry, property, and social distinctions, produces artificial needs and escalating competition. Man is no longer content with his natural and real needs. He measures his worth against others and strives for prestige, wealth, and social superiority. Civil culture thus not only distances man from nature but also gives rise to mutual dependence and inequality.

In Rousseau's thought, culture and civilization must be approached with caution. The issue is not the complete elimination of culture but preventing its achievements from replacing freedom, virtue, and the public good. The ideal society is not simply the one with the greatest production, wealth, or institutional complexity. It is a society in which man, while living socially, preserves a portion of his moral independence and freedom.

Explaining the Relationship between *Iʿtibāriyyāt* and Society in Allameh Tabataba'i: *Iʿtibāriyyāt* as Tools for Managing Needs

In Tabataba'i's theory, society is inconceivable without *Iʿtibāriyyāt*. To preserve his existence, fulfill his needs, and attain perfection, man uses the power of perception and thought to posit practical and social concepts. *Iʿtibāriyyāt* are the intermediaries between man's real needs and his social behavior. Through them, man regulates his relationships with objects, other individuals, and goals. Tabataba'i presents man as a being who can establish a relationship with all objects in the universe and, through thought, create tools and methods for subjugating nature. With the power of perception, man classifies the sciences in order to preserve his existence and survival in manipulating objects, spending the least time and gaining the most benefit (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, pp. 171–172). In this conception, science and industry are not inherently negative. They are a manifestation of man's perceptual power and his capacity for subjugation.

Iʿtibāriyyāt expand as a chain in response to needs. Tabataba'i explains that, on the basis of human needs and deficiencies, constructs multiply. The sharing of efforts in life's affairs and the allocation of each individual to what he produces give rise to the construct of property. The need of individuals for each other's property gives rise to the construct of exchange and transaction, and preserving the ratio among objects leads to the construct of monetary units (Tabataba'i, 2009, p. 55). Therefore, ownership, transaction, money, division of labor, political organization, and many

social institutions are normative matters (Iʿtibārī) formed to manage needs and regulate human relations. While they remain in their instrumental position, they can support cooperation, order, and social welfare. But if man regards them as authentic and independent of true ends, the means becomes the end, and *Iʿtibāriyyāt* escape moral and religious control.

In his analysis of the expansion of *Iʿtibāriyyāt*, Tabataba'i also emphasizes their pathological aspect. As needs grow, these constructs continually find a broader scope and penetrate every general and specific dimension of human life. Normative matters then take on the color of illusion and imagination, and man becomes dependent on mirage-like and illusory meanings (Tabataba'i, 2009, pp. 54–56). In such a situation, instead of using *Iʿtibāriyyāt* to reach perfection, man himself is placed in the service of normative systems.

From this perspective, culture in Tabataba'i's thought is an organized network of *Iʿtibāriyyāt*, but its value depends on how it is directed and on its telos. Culture can serve the realization of justice, cooperation, and perfection, or it can become a factor in the expansion of worldliness and consumerism and in the neglect of the truth of the human being. Divine Sharīʿah, by guiding *Iʿtibāriyyāt* toward *Fiṭrah* and human perfection, prevents this deviation.

Analysis of the Telos of Social Policy

The Realization of Civil Liberty and Material Welfare in Rousseau's Thought

The telos of social policy in Rousseau's theory is the creation of an order in which individuals' lives and property are protected and, while obeying the law, they do not lose their freedom. The goal of the social contract is to form a society in which the individual obeys only the general will, of which he himself is a member (Rousseau, 2000, p. 103).

Material welfare is part of the public good, but welfare must not lead to the concentration of wealth or to severe inequality. Rousseau emphasizes that the social state is advantageous to men only when all have something and none has too much (Rousseau, 2000, p. 135). Social policy must therefore create a balance among property, welfare, and equality, and prevent the wealth of some from threatening the freedom and security of others.

The telos of this policy is the realization of civil liberty within the rule of law. By entering society, man loses his natural freedom but gains civil and moral liberty, a liberty in which the individual is freed from the domination of private wills and is subject to a law in whose formation he participates.

The Realization of Material-Spiritual Perfection and Security Centered on the Hereafter in Tabataba'i'

In Tabataba'i's thought, the telos of social policy is not limited to securing material welfare and worldly security. Fulfilling social needs is valuable when it takes place within a monotheistic worldview and with attention to the otherworldly telos of man. The question, therefore, is not only how human needs are met but also by what path, with what priorities, and toward what end.

In this view, Tawḥīd (monotheism) is the foundation of divine Sharīʿah. God established Sharīʿah on Tawḥīd so that human beliefs, morals, and behavior are reformed, and so that man knows his true nature, where he comes from, where he is going, and which path he must choose in

this temporary abode so that it benefits his future (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, pp. 179–180). Social policy must follow this same semantic and teleological horizon.

In Tabataba'i's view, material and spiritual felicity are like the two wings of a bird; man needs both to move toward perfection. If moral virtues and spiritual perfections are absent and his actions are not righteous, he will be like a bird trying to fly with one wing (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 1, p. 279). Hence, the ideal society is not merely a prosperous one but one that places material welfare in the service of moral and spiritual growth.

Tabataba'i also opposes the materialist account of the evolution of laws. He explicitly states that the criterion is social man perfected by religious virtue, not a man who has merely progressed in industry and politics. Contrary to views that subordinate social law to changes in industry, Islam has based its legislation on both the body and the soul of man and has a program for all his existential dimensions (Tabataba'i, 1995, Vol. 2, pp. 199–200).

The Challenge of Consumerism and the Unbridled Production of *Iʿtibāriyyāt* vs. the Management of Needs

One of the most important points of connection and, at the same time, difference between Rousseau and Tabataba'i is their critique of the expansion of unbridled artificial needs. Rousseau raises this issue as a critique of civilization, property, luxury, and social dependence. In his view, the more man is placed in a network of social comparison and competition, the more he creates new needs for himself and loses his natural freedom and peace (McLendon, 2014, p. 341).

Tabataba'i explains this process through his analysis of *Iʿtibāriyyāt*. From needs, *Iʿtibāriyyāt* are formed, and from *Iʿtibāriyyāt*, new needs and further *Iʿtibāriyyāt* are produced. Simple needs turn into complex ones, and man becomes trapped in an endless cycle. If society seeks only to fulfill worldly needs, it will never attain the peace it seeks, because satisfying each need creates a new one. Like salt water, this condition intensifies man's thirst.

On this basis, ideal social policy must distinguish between "real need" and "produced need." Managing needs does not mean negating welfare or opposing science and industry. It means placing production, consumption, property, and technology in the service of human perfection. In Tabataba'i's thought, *Iʿtibāriyyāt* must be tools, not ends. Sharīʿah, by setting priorities, limiting extravagance, and giving moral direction to economic behavior, prevents man from being consumed by the system of unbridled consumption and production.

Rousseau, too, offers a cultural and moral critique of civilization and defends a return to natural simplicity and freedom. Tabataba'i, through a philosophical analysis of *Iʿtibāriyyāt*, locates the solution in managing and guiding needs on the basis of *Fiṭrah*, Sharīʿah, and the otherworldly telos. The ultimate difference between the two views is that Rousseau focuses on reducing artificial dependence and reforming the social structure, whereas Tabataba'i emphasizes reforming the direction and telos of *Iʿtibāriyyāt*. In the first view, social policy must secure civil liberty and balanced welfare. In the second, it must make these matters a prelude to the comprehensive material and spiritual perfection of man.

Conclusion and Theoretical Implications

The comparative exploration of the theoretical foundations of social policy in the thought of Rousseau and Tabataba'i showed that both thinkers, despite belonging to two distinct intellectual traditions, take the point of departure for social policy to be the incapacity of the isolated human being to attain perfection and survival. Both view society as a mechanism for restraining conflict and establishing order. However, the fundamental difference in their ontological and anthropological foundations leads to two different models for organizing collective life.

Comparative Synthesis of Foundations

The origin of society and the motive for collective life. Rousseau considers society to be the product of a historical transition from the "state of nature" to the "civil state," based on a voluntary contract that aggregates forces against natural obstacles. Allameh Tabataba'i, by contrast, explains the necessity of society through the ontological and innate compulsion (*Iḍṭirār*) to restrain the disposition toward *Istikhdām* (instrumentalization) and to prevent conflicts of interest through a system of practical *Iʿtibāriyyāt*.

The convergence between Rousseau and Allameh on the point that society is a response to the limitations of individual life pertains to the level of the genesis and function of society, not to the level of the causal explanation of corruption and conflict. Rousseau regards the limitation as primarily external, arising from natural obstacles and, subsequently, from social transformations. He treats corruption as the product of entry into society and civil relations. Allameh, however, sees the limitation as more internal. He regards the human being's disposition toward *Istikhdām*, alongside the need for perfection, as the source of the *Iḍṭirār* that drives man toward social life and of the necessity of regulating practical *Iʿtibāriyyāt*. Therefore, the convergence of the two theories on the necessity of society does not negate their difference regarding the image of the human being and the origin of conflict.

The origin of law and sovereignty. In Rousseau's theory, the legitimacy of law and the validity of the state are formed from below and rest exclusively on the general will and the collective sovereignty of the citizens. In Allameh's system, however, human reason and will, being intertwined with *Istikhdām*, lack the inherent sufficiency to resolve disputes ultimately. They require the transcendent guidance of divine revelation and Sharīʿah.

The telos of social policy and the restraint of needs. Rousseau considers the telos of social policy to be the realization of civil liberty, the protection of equal rights, and the prevention of domination arising from civilizational inequalities. Allameh, by contrast, defines social policy as a tool for regulating normative needs, advancing developmental justice (justice understood as the progressive realization of human perfection), and simultaneously securing material and spiritual felicity centered on a monotheistic worldview and the primacy of the Hereafter.

However, Rousseau's model, despite its emphasis on the generality of law and popular sovereignty, contains an unresolved tension between individual freedom and collective coercion. The justification for compelling an individual who refuses the general will to be "forced to be free" depends on identifying the general will with the individual's true will (Rousseau, 1968, Book 1,

Chapter 7). By contrast, Allameh's model justifies social coercion not as imposed freedom but as restraining the disposition toward *Istikhdām* and guiding *Iʿtibāriyyāt* along the path of *Fiṭrah* and Sharīʿah.

Theoretical Implications and Design Criteria for Social Policy

The synthesis of the two approaches reveals theoretical implications that can be reformulated as mid-level design criteria for social policy. These criteria are not empirical policy prescriptions. Rather, they are analytical benchmarks derived from the anthropological and epistemological foundations of the two models, which can guide the comparative evaluation of social policy designs. The specific mechanisms listed below are the author's extrapolations from the two theoretical frameworks, not positions stated explicitly by either thinker.

Legitimacy and the limits of state authority. In the model based on the social contract, the state is the agent of the general will, and social policy remains confined to the orbit of conventional agreements. No independent criterion is available for critiquing the general will itself. This feature grounds a form of contractualism and leaves the model vulnerable to moral relativism, though it does not necessarily lead to full moral relativism. By contrast, the *Iʿtibāriyyāt* model links social policy to fixed ontological and innate principles. It makes the function of government not merely a response to conventional demands but the realization of objective justice and developmental guidance. Translated into a design criterion, a policy is legitimate only if it passes a "generality test": its subject is general, its addressees are universal, and its orientation is toward the public good. In the *Iʿtibāriyyāt* model, the corresponding criterion is a "*Fiṭrah*-Sharīʿah conformity test," meaning that the policy must align with the true structure of human existence and restrain the disposition toward *Istikhdām*. The executive mechanisms on the Rousseauian side include the public justification of policies, independent legal review, universal eligibility rules, and periodic review by the general will. On Allameh's side, they include impact assessment of policies on restraining *Istikhdām* and protecting the weak, and oversight based on revelatory and moral criteria.

The crisis of consumerism and the distinction between real and artificial needs. Both theories critique the infinite proliferation of artificial needs. Rousseau, by critiquing luxury-oriented culture, advocates a return to simplicity. Allameh provides a systematic model for managing and limiting consumerist constructs through the ordinances of Sharīʿah, so that welfare policy does not itself become a factor in human alienation. Translated into a design criterion, social policy must distinguish between "real needs" and "artificial needs" and keep *Iʿtibāriyyāt* in their instrumental position. The proposed mechanisms include needs assessment based on *Fiṭrah*; regulation of advertising, luxury consumption, and easy credit; priority-setting in public spending for basic needs; and Sharīʿah-based limits on extravagance and moral direction of economic behavior, so that *Iʿtibāriyyāt* remain tools rather than ends.

The comprehensiveness of justice mechanisms. Rousseauian social policy relies primarily on legal, structural, and political guarantees. Social policy in the horizon of Tabataba'i's wisdom (ḥikmah) employs a multi-layered network of guarantees that extends to religious and moral supervision. Translated into a design criterion, the realization of justice requires such a network

rather than legal-political mechanisms alone. This network includes a legal structure ensuring equality before the law; deterrent penal restraint; public supervision through Amr bi al-Maʿrūf wa Nahy ʿan al-Munkar (enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong); internal guarantees through faith in the Origin (God as the source of creation) and the Resurrection; and accessible complaint and accountability mechanisms. Together, these layers address the inability of legal-political guarantees alone to restrain the strong against the weak.

These criteria show that the difference between the two models is not merely theoretical. In the Rousseauian model, the primary design test is procedural and political: the generality of law, popular participation, and the government's status as agent of the law. In the *Iʿtibāriyyāt* model, the primary design test is teleological and normative: conformity with *Fiṭrah*, revelation, and the true perfection of the human being, alongside institutional and moral guarantees.

Taken as a whole, the comparison conducted across the three axes of this study shows that Rousseau's contract theory, despite its enduring achievements in grounding legitimacy in the will of the governed and in the generality of law, remains structurally insufficient as a foundation for social policy. Within the framework of the *Social Contract*, it lacks an independent criterion for critiquing the general will, cannot substantively distinguish real from artificial need, and relies on procedural-political guarantees alone. The *Iʿtibāriyyāt* model, by grounding legislation in *Fiṭrah*, the true structure of human existence, and revelation, supplies precisely these missing elements. This superiority is one of foundations and comprehensiveness, not of empirical exclusivity: Rousseau's procedural safeguards are retained as necessary elements of the legal structure that the *Iʿtibāriyyāt* model itself requires. Accordingly, the design criteria developed in Section 5.2 (the *Fiṭrah-Sharīʿah* conformity test, the distinction between real and artificial need, and the multi-layered guarantee network) are coherent only within the *Iʿtibāriyyāt* framework, which thus offers the more adequate theoretical foundation for social policy.

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