

"Classical Conservatism" in the Political Thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr

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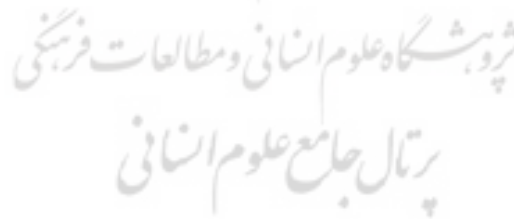
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Abstract

In this article, while briefly reviewing the traditional intellectual and philosophical foundations of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, we have expressed his political thought. Nasr's political thought is a kind of traditional conservatism, and his thought can be considered reminiscent of the thought of Edmund Burke after the French Revolution. In defense of the monarchy, Nasr described his favorite political model as "Islamic monarchy." He was opposed to any revolution and considered the basis of leftist and revolutionary ideas to be incorrect. In this paper, we have used a historical-analytical method based on documentary and library research.

Keywords:

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Classical Conservatism, Islamic monarchy, Political Thought.



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Introduction

The political thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr aligns with the traditional conservatism. This ideological stance emphasizes natural law, a transcendent moral order, the importance of tradition, social hierarchy, organic unity, agrarianism, reverence for the past, high culture (as opposed to mass culture), regional- civilizational patriotism (as opposed to nationalism), and a firm opposition to revolution (Heywood, 2000: 187–129).

Traditional conservatism, while rooted in history, gained specific traction after the French Revolution. It arose as a reaction to revolutionary and progressive ideas, which had spread across 18th-century Europe. Prominent European thinkers began formulating conservative responses, opposing individualism, libertarianism, equality, modernity, development-oriented progress, and the social changes that threatened traditional institutions, especially religion, education, and family. This conservatism, with its English and Irish roots, became associated with figures like Edmund Burke, who fiercely opposed the French Revolution. Burke, whose ideas bear remarkable similarities to Nasr's, wrote his "Reflections on the Revolution in France" (1790) in response to the revolution.

Burke compared the French upheaval with England's political reforms in 1660 and 1688, advocating the English model over the revolutionary chaos of France. In his critique of the revolution, Burke sanctified the monarchy, aristocracy, and tradition, viewing revolutionary movements from the lower classes as heretical. His famous quote illustrates this bond between tradition and power: "*We fear God; we look with love to kings, with reverence to parliaments, with duty to magistrates, and with awe to the clergy and nobility*" (Tabatabaei, 2015: 10). Burke's ideas resonated with many European and American conservative intellectuals, particularly among English-speaking Anglo-Saxons, all sharing a staunch anti-revolutionary stance.

Hossein Nasr's political thought reflects this tradition through the lens of an Iranian loyal to the monarchy. While his ideas share striking similarities with 19th-century European traditional conservatism, they also contain unique characteristics. European conservatives were rooted in Christian civilization, whereas Nasr emerged from an Islamic and Iranian context a century later. Unlike the secular underpinnings of the French Revolution, which drew from figures like Rousseau and Voltaire, Iran's political turmoil saw religious clergy leading the charge against the old order, adding a distinct contrast to the European model.

1. Historical Background of Nasr's Life, Social Class, and Psychology

Hossein Nasr was born on April 8, 1933, in Tehran. He attended elite schools in Tehran, before continuing his education in the United States, where he studied at the Peddie School in New Jersey. He spent over 12 years in the U.S., earning his bachelor's degree in physics and philosophy of science from MIT and completing his master's and doctorate in philosophy and history of science from Harvard University. After graduating in 1958, he returned to Iran (Political Research Institute, 1963).

Nasr comes from two influential families—the Nasr and Nouri families—both of which held significant power during the Qajar and Pahlavi periods. He often reflects on four key influences from his upbringing: 1) intellectual discipline, 2) a love for knowledge, with an emphasis on learning as superior to wealth or power, 3) the integration of ethics with knowledge, and 4) exposure to Iran's elite class, where he interacted with prominent statesmen (Nasr, 2014: 32, 37).

Politically, Nasr looked up to Mohammad Ali Foroughi, one of his key role models, who like Nasr, represented a conservative, philosophical statesman in the Pahlavi era. Both Nasr and Foroughi shared a conservative worldview, though Nasr also demonstrated a unique affinity for Sufism and opposition to modern rationalism and positivism. While at MIT, Nasr connected with professors who shared similar intellectual tendencies, such as *Giorgio Di Santillana*, a critic of modern rationalism and positivism. Through Santillana, Nasr became acquainted with René Guénon and the Traditionalist School, delving deeply into traditionalist philosophy and mystical traditions, especially those of India. He devoted many hours studying the works of traditionalists, spending weekends at the library of Ananda Coomaraswamy, a leading figure in traditionalist thought (Nasr, 2014: 71, 73, 74).

2. Foundations of Traditionalist Thought

Understanding Nasr's political thought requires analyzing both his social and political context and his intellectual foundations. Central to his philosophy is the concept of Tradition, which serves as the cornerstone of his worldview.

2.1. Tradition: The Core of Nasr's Thought

For Nasr, tradition is the fundamental axis of his intellectual framework. He defines tradition as universal truths or principles transmitted to humanity through various figures, such as prophets, avatars, logos, and other mediating agents (Nasr, 2003: 155–156). Tradition, in Nasr's philosophy, transcends revelation in its conventional religious sense, encompassing a

broader scope. This interpretation distinguishes between traditional knowledge and the specific form of divine revelation understood within Abrahamic faiths. Thus, in Nasr's view, not all that is traditionally deemed revelation is necessarily tradition, and vice versa. The thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, religion has a broad and inclusive meaning. He views religion not only as encompassing the major world religions but also as extending to traditions like shamanism and Native American mysticism. Despite this broad understanding, Nasr places particular emphasis on the significance of the Semitic and Indian religions, considering them the most important. Among the Semitic religions, he highlights Christianity and Islam as the most prominent.

Nasr believes that the prophetic revelation in Islam, through the Prophet Muhammad, represents the final revelation of this era in human history. He asserts that it simultaneously synthesizes the preceding religions while also marking a return to the original and primordial source of revelation. As he puts it: "The Muhammadan revelation is the final revelation of this phase of human history, both a culmination of past religions and a return to the original source of revelation" (Nasr, 1962: 69). In Seyyed Hossein Nasr's philosophy, traditionalism is deeply intertwined with what he terms "sacred knowledge" (*ilm al-qudsī*). This sacred knowledge, according to Nasr, corresponds closely with theoretical mysticism (*'irfān nazārī*) or speculative Sufism (*taṣawwuf nazārī*). Nasr traces its roots in Islamic civilization back to figures such as Tirmidhi, 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, Ghazali, and Ibn 'Arabi, though he considers the entire history of Islamic mysticism and Sufism as a foundational pillar for this form of knowledge (Nasr, 2005: 11).

Nasr views the 14th century CE (8th century AH) as a critical period in history when Arabic mysticism merged with the Shi'a school of thought, which significantly shaped the religious and philosophical landscape of Iran, especially from the Safavid era onward. Nasr regards the Safavid era as a golden age and a model of Iranian civilization that actualized the integration of mysticism and governance. Among the intellectual legacies of this period, Nasr highlights Mulla Sadra and his *ḥikmat al-muta'āliyah* (Transcendent Philosophy) as historical embodiments of "sacred knowledge." He emphasizes Mulla Sadra's metaphysical contributions as crucial to the development of sacred knowledge and to understanding Nasr's traditionalist outlook.

Nasr, being deeply influenced by Sadra's philosophy, explains political leadership through the framework of Mulla Sadra's *Asfār Arba'a* (The Four Journeys). According to Nasr, Mulla Sadra's school of thought

flourished gradually over time, surviving various political regimes, including the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties, and continuing into the modern period. One notable follower of Sadra's thought, according to Nasr, was Ayatollah Khomeini. Mulla Sadra's *Asfār Arba'a* outlines the four stages of spiritual journey, with the final stage—"from the Truth back to creation"—providing the key to understanding the connection between mysticism and political action. It is in this fourth journey that the spiritual seeker is divinely commissioned to return to the world to guide and serve others. Nasr remarks: "Many are intrigued, and perhaps even astonished, to observe how Ayatollah Khomeini, who in his early life was deeply involved in both theoretical and practical mysticism—focused on asceticism, seclusion, and renunciation of the world—became fully engaged in political life in his later years. The key to this enigma lies primarily in the spiritual journey of the human soul, which moves from creation to the Truth, and then returns from the Truth to creation, a concept expounded upon by Mulla Sadra in his *Asfār Arba'a*" (Nasr, 2005: 16).

Nasr, following his traditionalist approach, offers a distinct interpretation of philosophy. He categorizes Islamic philosophy into various schools, such as those of Baghdad, Azerbaijan, Andalusia, and Khorasan. He writes: "The primary concern of these philosophers was not only to establish a rational worldview and provide a framework for understanding the reality of things but also to respond to the truth of divine revelation and the knowledge derived from it, including illuminative knowledge (*ma'rifat ishraqīyah*). They also sought to address the religious challenges posed to them, which presented itself as a sure path to ultimate knowledge through human intellect" (Nasr, 2007: 65).

Although Nasr acknowledges that traditionalist philosophy shares a common ground with Islamic philosophy in its pursuit of *ma'rifat ishraqīyah* (illuminative knowledge), he believes that its ultimate goals differ from those of classical Islamic philosophy.

Within Islamic philosophy, Nasr favors the Illuminationist school (*ḥikmat al-ishraq*) over the Peripatetic tradition (*mashshā'ī*). Furthermore, he does not limit himself to this preference but offers an illuminative interpretation of well-known Peripatetic philosophers, suggesting that their true aim was to attain ultimate knowledge through mystical insight: "to reach the ultimate truth through the attraction of mysticism and Sufism" (Nasr, 2007b: 7).

2.2. Anti-Historical and Anti-Empirical Philosophy

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's traditionalism is fundamentally anti-historical, anti-inductive, and anti-empirical. Although his works extensively draw on historical narratives and often rely on them, he does not adhere to the scientific principles of history, which are grounded in rationality and empirical observation. Instead, Nasr turns to illuminative interpretations (*ta'wīl ishraqī*), often bypassing historical evidence.

For example, in his conversation with philosopher John Hick, Nasr defends the Christian doctrine of the Trinity not through historical analysis but by claiming that, since it has existed for two thousand years, God would not allow so many people to live in such an error for so long. He reduces the issue to a mere interpretation of the belief, without examining how the doctrine of the Trinity actually emerged in Christian history. Hick, however, counters by pointing out that early Christianity did not hold the belief in the Trinity; it was later developed by Christian theologians (Nasr, 1997: 73-74). Nasr's writings are filled with similar arguments that rely more on subjective interpretation than on historical analysis.

This "new interpretation" raises important questions: on the one hand, what should we call this approach? On the other, how does Nasr use it to support the pluralistic beliefs of traditionalism? He employs this method to argue that all religions can be seen as completely true, allowing every individual to be both correct and deserving of reward. This kind of interpretive maneuvering obfuscates the pursuit of truth, burying it under layers of subjective interpretations and effectively removing the concept of error from the history of religions. It also fails to address the numerous innovations and deviations that have occurred throughout the history of religious traditions.

Nasr's traditionalism does not engage with the history of religions to understand their historical realities, but rather to offer "illuminative interpretations" that align with the preferences of the interpreter. For Nasr, what ultimately matters is not the historical truth of religions, which is often tied to historical studies, but rather the confirmation of traditionalist beliefs. Historical studies of Islam as a method emerged early in Islamic civilization. However, Nasr's traditionalism, in its broader critique of modern sciences, also dismisses the value of historical science, thereby refusing to employ it for religious understanding. By distinguishing between "historical reality" and "trans-historical reality," Nasr claims that the former cannot be described in a complete and definitive manner, which is why he focuses his intellectual efforts on the latter. His commitment to this approach is so deep that he considers conflicting descriptions of a particular phenomenon—such

as the differing portrayals of Jesus in Islam and Christianity—as equally valid (Nasr, 1997: 75).

3. Key Components of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Political Thought

The Traditionalist School, to which Seyyed Hossein Nasr belongs, has a distinct political philosophy that is shared among its adherents. This philosophy fundamentally opposes egalitarianism, democracy, and populism, and is built on a platform of pure conservatism. In fact, it can be considered one of the most significant conservative political philosophies of the 20th century.

3.1. Conservatism: The Nature of Traditionalist Political Philosophy

Like all Traditionalists, especially René Guénon, the founder of the Traditionalist School, Nasr views democracy as a symptom of modernism and is fundamentally opposed to it (Guénon, 1993: 112, 113, 122, 213). Throughout his various writings, Nasr critiques the pillars of modernism, including the utopian ideals of modernity, and rejects the concepts of "progress" and "development" (Nasr, 2011: 159). In his own words, Nasr admits to never having participated in any elections, reflecting his opposition to democracy (Nasr, 2014: 93).

Nasr also critiques the political and social freedoms in the West, which he sees as rooted in modernist ideology. According to Nasr, the Western concept of "freedom" is largely about the freedom to act or do as one pleases, a notion influenced by the Renaissance view of humanity. In contrast, "freedom" in Islam and traditional thought is about experiencing the essence of existence itself, rooted in a different understanding of human nature. This form of freedom, which views humans as manifestations of the Divine, involves a type of participation in God's own freedom. As such, Nasr argues that true freedom is achieved through spiritual purification and submission to the Divine will. He describes this as the "deepest" form of freedom, one that has been largely forgotten today. In this framework, "pure existence" is equated with "infinite freedom," meaning that the closer one draws to pure existence, the more freedom one possesses (Nasr, 2005b). Beyond his advocacy for sacred freedom, Nasr's views imply that modern political and social movements seeking freedom have ultimately gone astray, bringing nothing but trouble for contemporary humanity.

3.2. The System of the Spiritual Guide (Pīr) and Disciple

In Nasr's ideal social structure, which aligns with his Sufi and spiritual tendencies, there is a belief in a hierarchical, mentor-based system embodied

in the *pīr* (spiritual guide) and *murshid* (teacher). This is a key component of his thought. Nasr has frequently and explicitly referred to this idea, defending the concept of the *pīr* and *murshid* relationship. In his writings, Nasr introduces the term *Murshid-e A'zam* (Supreme Guide), who is spiritually united with an invisible spiritual chain and the absolute truth. As Nasr explains, the *Murshid-e A'zam* "appears in the external world as a sign of God's infinite mercy and serves as a means through which man can access the spiritual realm and be accepted as a companion of the prophets and saints." Nasr continues: "To be initiated into the Sufi order and accepted as a disciple of the guide, one must adhere to specific rules and customs until the end of one's life. From the disciple's perspective, the Sheikh is ever-present, especially during the performance of these rites. For the disciple, the Sheikh is never truly dead, even after physical death, as his spiritual guidance and support continue" (Nasr, 2003: 149). The inevitable outcome of such beliefs is the formation of a "sect." If this sect becomes politically active, it transforms into a politically functional faction. It is at this point that movements based on a cult of personality, rooted in monarchical structures, may emerge.

3.3. "Islamic Monarchy": Nasr's Ideal Political System

Seyyed Hossein Nasr advocates for a monarchical and aristocratic form of government, shrouded in a sacred aura. In his book *Hikmat va Siyasat* (Wisdom and Politics), he explains his ideal political system as an "Islamic Monarchy." During the Pahlavi era, Nasr envisioned the establishment of such a monarchy but admitted that he never explicitly discussed this idea with the Shah until shortly before the 1979 revolution. Nasr describes his main mission during the Pahlavi era as reviving Islamic culture and promoting anti-secularism within the government, a goal he believed aligned with the objectives of the Islamic Revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini. According to Nasr, before Khomeini's movement gained momentum, he was already working within the Pahlavi government to combat secularism.

Nasr believes strongly in the connection between governance and monarchy. He views the separation of governance from monarchy as a consequence of secularization, which weakened royal institutions in Europe. Thus, his defense of monarchy is fundamental; he argues that opposing monarchy inevitably leads to secularism, even if done under the banner of an "Islamic revolution." According to Nasr, any ideology opposed to secularism must reject populism and cannot challenge monarchy. He asserts that such opposition only empowers leftist ideologies, which he views as inherently antagonistic to Islam and religion. Nasr claims that this is what happened

during the Islamic Revolution, where leftist forces—though acting in the name of religion—seized power. Nasr viewed any revolution against monarchy as inevitably leading to the victory of leftist movements—"left" in the international sense of the term, not as it specifically developed in Iran. He believed that undermining the monarchy would open the door for leftist ideologies, which he saw as fundamentally opposed to Islam and traditional values. This perspective reflects Nasr's broader critique of modern political movements, which, in his view, often pave the way for secularization and materialism under the guise of progress or revolution. "As the revolution proved, the mere abolition of the monarchy did not eradicate modernism in Iran; it simply shifted to another form. Today, intellectuals in Iran are more interested in Richard Rorty than Suhrawardi. In the past, at least in the seminaries of Qom, everyone discussed Islamic philosophy, but now they want to mimic Western trends. They talk about Western agnostic philosophers to show how educated they are. This has led to a different kind of modernism, including the expansion of Western technology, which we now pride ourselves on. However, there is a strong presence of anti-spiritual, materialistic values in this modernism" (Nasr, 2014: 274).

Just as Nasr sought to preserve the traditional order in society and knowledge, he aimed to maintain the political order of the past. He believed that the traditional balance between monarchy and religious authority was an ideal equilibrium that was disrupted by secularism. Nasr sees Western-educated elites as the primary force that destroyed this balance, and he argues that "once that balance began to erode, the monarchy's survival became increasingly unlikely." He considers Reza Shah's push for constitutionalism and republicanism as early attempts to undermine this balance, but he views communism, or leftist ideologies, as the greatest threat to the monarchy. Nasr suggests that part of the clergy's opposition to Reza Shah's republicanism stemmed from their fear that communism would infiltrate Iran (Nasr, 2014: 272).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr does not view the connection between monarchy and religion as merely a relic of the past. He believes this interaction remains relevant and necessary. In Nasr's perspective, the bond between monarchy and religion is indissoluble, and to substantiate his argument, he refers to the historical developments in Europe. He highlights his opposition to revolutions, democracy, and republicanism, favoring the historical trajectory of England over that of France or Russia:

"In Europe, monarchy had a divine aspect... In the constitution [of the era of the Great Kaiser], it was stated that monarchy is a divine gift. This divine aspect gradually diminished after the Renaissance. What was the

result? Either catastrophic revolutions like the French and Russian revolutions occurred, with great bloodshed, or the remaining monarchies in Europe became so weakened that they lost their influence, but those that survived maintained their connection to religion. For instance, in England, the Queen is still the head of the Anglican Church, and in Germany, the government financially supports churches” (Nasr, 2014: 272).

Nasr's fundamental and intense opposition to democracy and republicanism may stem from his deep skepticism toward the masses. From an aristocratic perspective, the masses lack a profound understanding of complex issues, and associating matters such as politics, governance, religion, art, and knowledge with them only diminishes their value. Just as aristocrats defend "high art" against "popular art," they similarly distance themselves from any phenomenon that arises from mass culture, believing it leads to a degradation of those phenomena.

Nasr, who sees his mission as countering secularism and "creating an anti-materialistic wave," regards the revival of the "Islamic monarchy" as the most effective way to achieve this. In this endeavor, his thinking aligns with Machiavellianism and the notion of using religion instrumentally through "pretense" of piety. As reflected in his memoirs, Nasr made recommendations to Mohammad Reza Shah that echo Machiavelli's teachings in *The Prince*:

"Throughout Islamic history, it has been the duty of the Sultan to feign piety, regardless of what he did in his private life. [The Shah] said, 'I dislike pretense.' I replied, 'It's not a personal matter. Many Sultans attended Friday prayers publicly while indulging in corruption privately the rest of the week.'... We had a bit of an argument about this. I said, 'Anyone who wants to be the ruler of an Islamic country must show reverence for religious rituals.' He said, 'But I always do religious things; I attend Mosque every Ashura and visit Mashhad once a year.' I replied, 'That's not enough. Has there ever been a Sultan who didn't lead congregational prayers?!'" (Nasr, 2014: 198).

Nasr's conception of an "Islamic monarchy" does not involve the enforcement of Islamic social and civil laws as state legislation. Instead, he advocated for a reliance on traditional interpretations to legitimize the monarchy's political foundation. He advised the Shah to utilize Islamic symbols and maintain engagement with traditional clergy, as had been the norm in the past. Thus, in Nasr's political thought, the concept of "Islamic monarchy" consists of three key components:

1. Utilizing classical and traditional interpretations to legitimize the government, while distancing it from modern forms of legitimacy, such as republicanism and democracy.
2. Employing religious symbols to ensure the monarchy's continuity, such as constructing religious sites and participating in religious ceremonies.
3. Maintaining a relationship with clergy who do not oppose the monarchy, as this strengthens the monarchy's foundation of power.

Nasr was also a strong opponent of religious ideologies in the form of political movements, believing that such an approach distanced religion from its essence. Furthermore, due to his opposition to legalism and strict jurisprudence, he did not advocate for the implementation of Sharia-based laws in governance. As a result, the Islamic monarchy in Nasr's view would focus on the cultural and nostalgic aspects of Islamic civilization without being committed to the enforcement of jurisprudential laws in its policies.

"I told the Shah, 'Your Majesty, this is the first royal palace in Iran's history, dating back to Cyrus the Great, that does not have a place of worship. All palaces from the Sassanian and Achaemenid periods had fire temples, and in the Islamic era, mosques.' Despite being ill, he was very upset. He said, 'I have had the Hosseinieh renovated. Don't you hear the call to prayer in the distance?' I replied, 'That has nothing to do with the Niavaran Palace. That's outside the palace.' He immediately ordered [the construction of a mosque]" (Nasr, 2014: 197).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr posits that the concept of Islamic monarchy, which has historically existed within Islamic civilization, was a balance between Ulamas and the monarch (Nasr, 2014: 196). However, with the onset of Pahlavi modernization—driven by the infiltration of Western culture into Iran during the late Qajar period—this political system gradually encountered significant challenges, leading to the destabilization of the traditional Iranian system. In other words, one of Nasr's major critiques of the Pahlavi era is that the Westernized modernization efforts led to the decline of the traditional monarchy in Iran. As one of the oligarchs of the Pahlavi era, Nasr does not delve into the political or economic corruption of the regime but fundamentally criticizes the Pahlavi reforms for undermining the ancient political system of monarchy in Iran.

Nasr elaborates on this critique by discussing the role of the ruler in Islamic political philosophy, both Sunni and Shia, noting that while historically Sunnis held power and Shias were a minority, the Safavid period marked a significant shift with Shia Islam becoming the state religion in Iran. He explains: "When examining Islamic political philosophy, whether Sunni or Shia—though these are not identical due to Sunnis traditionally

holding power and Shias being a minority—one finds that the ruler's role was not merely to interact with Ulamas but also to uphold Sharia and preserve Islam. For Sunni rulers, whether they were called Sultan, King, or Emir, and even for Zaydi Shias in Yemen, the ruler was expected to establish order based on Sharia and preserve Islam, though this eventually became hereditary. When the Safavid era began in Iran, the situation changed as Sunni ulamas became a minority and Shia ulamas gained power. Initially, the Safavids had significant authority and even the most devout Safavid rulers like Shah Abbas were deeply involved with ulamas, considering themselves protectors of Islamic law” (Nasr, 2014: 270).

Nasr compares himself with Imam Khomeini and says that he first proposed the idea of Islamic monarchy before Imam Khomeini. Nasr refers to Imam Khomeini’s letter to the Shah, where the Imam demanded that the monarchy should be Islamic and the Shah should be the protector of Islam. Although this claim is not the primary focus of this article, it is important to note that Imam Khomeini’s interpretation of Islamic governance differed significantly from Nasr's vision. For Imam Khomeini, monarchy was not an ideal system; rather, in the context of a monarchical regime, he sought to at least have Islamic laws observed. Imam Khomeini’s preferred system was "Wilayat-e-Faqih," which is distinct from monarchy. Nasr, on the other hand, viewed "monarchy" as the preferred political system and model. Imam Khomeini sought a Shah who would uphold Islamic laws, not merely act as a figurehead pretending to be religious.

Nasr asserts that during the Safavid era, a balance was achieved between ulamas and the monarchy, with both parties having significant authority. He remarks: "This balance between ulamas and the monarchy began with Shah Ismail and continued with the most powerful Safavid monarchs, like Shah Abbas, who was deeply devout and considered himself a guardian of Islamic law. The principle of Islamic monarchy meant that the ruler had a duty to uphold Islamic symbols and laws, even if it was a modern symbolic monarchy rather than the traditional European monarchies. This balance is akin to the historical interplay between rulers and ulamas, where each side both monitored and relied on the other for maintaining authority” (Nasr, 2014: 271).

Nasr, who aimed to revive the authority of ulamas reminiscent of the Safavid and Qajar eras, acknowledges criticism from those who argue that the concept of Islamic monarchy is outdated and has reached an impasse. Nasr reluctantly agrees with this critique, recognizing its validity (Nasr, 2014: 199). Nasr also reflects on the impact of secularization on European monarchies: "The separation of government from monarchy is a result of

secularization, a materialistic worldview that weakened European monarchies. The idea was to retain a monarch as a national symbol, similar to the Queen of the Netherlands or the King of Sweden, but with political power residing in the people. In traditional societies, both Islamic and non-Islamic, the ultimate ruler was seen as God's representative, and the monarch's power was considered a reflection of divine authority. Western political philosophy shifted power from God to the people, leading to the weakening of the monarchy, as seen in the French Revolution, which marked the first coup in Europe, overthrowing the monarch and dismantling the institution of monarchy" (Nasr, 2014: 273).

Conclusion

During the final years and the zenith of the Pahlavi monarchy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr lived out his political life as a prominent thinker, serving as the head of Farah Pahlavi's office. He endeavored to present a new interpretation of conservative political philosophy that differed somewhat from previous political thought. It cannot be claimed that Nasr's political philosophy became the ideological foundation of the Pahlavi regime. Nevertheless, he competed with specific interpretations of monarchy. Nasr was a prominent philosopher who defended the monarchy, but his historical interpretation of the monarchy diverged from the prevalent Hellenistic revivalism of the Pahlavi era. This divergence indicated an informal and implicit rivalry among monarchy advocates—those who emphasized ancient Iran in opposition to the Islamic period and engaged in theorizing and historiography against the Islamic era. For Nasr, the grandeur and nostalgic portrayal of the Safavid period surpassed even that of the Achaemenid era. This interpretation and portrayal of the monarchy were intertwined with many other epistemological elements and were not merely historical or political disputes but were connected to Nasr's worldview, theology, and philosophical foundations. During the Pahlavi era, Nasr's political philosophy was not central to Pahlavi ideology, but he made efforts to propagate his interpretation of monarchy within the Pahlavi system, though with limited success. Despite this, Nasr engaged in and later defended this collaboration throughout. He justified his cooperation with the Pahlavi government under the concept of "Islamic monarchy" with the following points:

1. Despite his collaboration with the Pahlavi government, he consistently criticized its developmental and modernization policies.
2. The Pahlavi regime did have traditional inclinations, and the Shah himself was not inherently anti-religious, although he prioritized development.

3. Nasr's role was primarily to moderate these characteristics and counter the anti-religious elements of the Pahlavi regime.

4. "Monarchy" was essentially a traditional concept, which Nasr felt obliged to defend.

In summary, Nasr's political thought during the Pahlavi era manifested as a conservative political philosophy. He sought to preserve the monarchical political system and maintain the social order and hierarchy in a state he regarded as traditional. From this perspective, Nasr was opposed to any ideology that sought to change the social system of the time and labeled all such ideologies as "leftist."



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