JTI

A Bi-Quarterly Journal of

Theosophia Islamica

Vol. 6, No. 1, 2026

11

Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

In The Name of God

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Theosophia Islamica EISSN: 2783-3240

Ḥaqq in the Qur'an as a Fitting Existential Position: An Ontological Introduction to Re-reading the Qur'anic Moral Order on the Basis of the Theory of Existential Fittingness*

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Abstract

This study seeks to elucidate the ontological foundations of ethics in the Qur'an through a re-reading of the central concept of Ḥaqq in light of the Theory of Existential Fittingness. Formulated in response to the challenge of grounding moral value while avoiding reductionist approaches, this theory conceives value as an objective reality arising from a fitting existential relationship among beings—one in which each being occupies its proper place. In this perspective, ethics may be understood as the extension of the wise order of being into the sphere of human voluntary action. The central question of the article is whether the Qur'anic concept of Ḥaqq can be understood as expressing this existential worthiness and as articulating the principle that regulates the

* Mohammad Ali, M. (2026). Ḥaqq in the Qur'an as a Fitting Existential Position: An Ontological Introduction to Re-reading the Qur'anic Moral Order on the Basis of the Theory of Existential Fittingness. *Theosophia Islamica, 6*(1), pp. 7-36. https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2026.74603.1121

▣ **Article Type:** Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

▣ **Received:** 2025/07/01 • **Revised:** 2025/09/15 • **Accepted:** 2025/11/12 •**Online Publication:** 2026/01/10

relations constitutive of the world. Adopting a descriptive–analytical method, the study employs the Theory of Existential Fittingness not as an a priori interpretive presupposition but as a posteriori explanatory framework for understanding Qur'anic data. Following a semantic analysis of Ḥaqq, the article examines its Qur'anic usages across three horizons: creation, becoming (takwīn), and resurrection (qiyāmah). The findings indicate that in the Qur'anic logic Ḥaqq extends beyond mere propositional truth and denotes existential worthiness. In the horizon of creation, Ḥaqq signifies the principle of the wise establishment of the world and the negation of futility. In the horizon of becoming (takwīn), it functions as the criterion of endurance and perishing, such that Bāṭil represents an unfitting realization destined to vanish. In the horizon of resurrection, Ḥaqq is manifested in the weighing of deeds, where the value of each human action is measured according to the degree of existential fittingness it embodies. Ultimately, the study argues that this re-reading presents the Qur'anic moral order not as a merely conventional construct but as the reflection of an ontological law rooted in the objective structure of reality. By bridging the is–ought gap, this approach provides a robust framework for resisting moral relativism within the Qur'anic paradigm.

Keywords

Qur'an, Ḥaqq, Theory of Existential Fittingness, ethical theory, ontological foundations of ethics, Qur'anic moral order.

1. Introduction

One of the most fundamental and at the same time most contested questions in moral philosophy concerns the grounding of moral value: why certain actions, independently of beneficial consequences or personal desirability, possess moral value and deserve praise or blame. The difficulty of this question lies in the fact that moral value is regarded, on the one hand, as something objective and discoverable, and on the other hand, as inseparably connected to the sphere of human motivation, inclination, and practical commitment. Theorizing in this field has continually oscillated between reducing moral value to such notions as pleasure, utility, or desirability, and defending its independence and reality.

In response to this challenge, the author has formulated the Theory of Existential Fittingness as an ontological theory of moral value through a series of independent studies and a gradual process that ultimately received endorsement in scholarly theory-development forums. Avoiding reductionist approaches, the theory emphasizes the independence and irreducibility of moral value and understands ethics not as something merely conventional or instrumental, but as the extension of the objective and aesthetic order of being into the sphere of human voluntary action. According to this theory, the source of value and beauty, whether in the order of takwīn or in the domain of human acts, is the fitting existential relation among beings—a relation in which each being occupies its proper existential position and its due is rendered.

On this basis, a moral act is one that, through the agent's free choice, contributes to the establishment or strengthening of existential fittingness among oneself, others, the world, and ultimately God; an immoral act, by contrast, is a form of disproportion, excess, or deficiency within this same existential network. Within this framework, moral value is neither reduced to the pleasurable or beneficial consequences of an act nor confined to mere conformity with external rules; rather, it is rooted in the existential worthiness of an act to be situated within the overall order of being. For this reason, the Theory of Existential Fittingness is not a semantic or psychological theory, but an ontological framework for explaining the reality of moral value.

It should be noted that, since discussion of the Theory of Existential Fittingness has already been presented in a number of previous studies (e.g., Mobini 2013; 2020; 2022a; 2022b; 2023; 2024; in press), the present study, in order to avoid unnecessary repetition and preserve the coherence of the text, refrains from devoting a lengthy and separate section to its theoretical foundations and confines itself to a brief indication. Nevertheless, because the approach adopted in this article is applicative and analytical, the central dimensions and key components of the theory will become clear in practice through the ontological analysis of the concept of Ḥaqq throughout the text, so that the reader, in the very process of analyzing the verses, may grasp the internal logic and function of the theory in an organic way.

One of the central concepts in this theory is the concept of Ḥaqq. In this conceptual framework, Ḥaqq does not merely mean a true proposition, a valid claim, or a normative judgment; rather, it signifies the existential worthiness of a thing for endurance, stability, and the fulfillment of its role within the overall order of being. A thing is Ḥaqq when it occupies its fitting existential position and is compatible with the total order of creation; that which is Bāṭil, even if it has objective and phenomenal realization, lacks this worthiness and is, from an ontological point of view, destined to perish.

The present article seeks to examine the possibility of a Qur'anic articulation of this understanding of Ḥaqq. Its aim is neither to impose the Theory of Existential Fittingness upon the Qur'anic text nor to offer an ideological reading of the verses; rather, it seeks to assess whether the internal logic of the concept of Ḥaqq in the Qur'an itself possesses an ontological structure that can, at the level of a posteriori explanation, converge with the Theory of Existential Fittingness. The central research question is therefore this: can the Qur'anic concept of Ḥaqq be understood as expressing existential worthiness and a fitting position within the order of being? And accordingly, how does Ḥaqq move beyond the level of a merely descriptive or normative concept and rise to the level of an ontological mechanism?

Accordingly, the article begins not with theory, but with the Qur'anic text. The method of the study is qualitative and analytical and is organized in three steps. First, the semantics of the term Ḥaqq in classical lexical and exegetical sources and in contemporary studies is examined in order to extract its semantic components and ontological import. Second, the Qur'anic usages of Ḥaqq are analyzed across the three horizons of creation, takwīn, and qiyāmah in order to show how Ḥaqq functions as a description of divine creation, the criterion of endurance and the negation of Bāṭil, and the measure for evaluating deeds and destinies. Finally, by means of a convergent arrangement of these findings, the unified logic governing the concept of Ḥaqq is reconstructed, and only at this stage is the Theory of Existential Fittingness introduced, as an explanatory framework, to interpret the coherence, stability, and teleological orientation of this logic.

The working hypothesis of this article is that, within the logic of the Qur'an, Ḥaqq refers to existential worthiness: whatever stands in fitting relation to the overall structure of reality and the wise divine order is Ḥaqq and partakes of stability and endurance, whereas whatever loses this fittingness, even if it attains phenomenal realization, is Bāṭil and destined to perish. On this basis, Qur'anic ethics is grounded in discovering, preserving, and committing oneself to this existential fittingness, and the present study seeks to bring this ontological foundation to light through an analysis of the concept of Ḥaqq. This study will show that rereading the concept of Ḥaqq on the basis of the Theory of Existential Fittingness is not merely a lexical discussion; rather, it can help unravel major problems in moral philosophy within the Qur'anic paradigm—such as the relation between is and ought and release from relativism—and show that, in this intellectual system, ethics is the extension of takwīn.

2. Semantics of Ḥaqq

Both lexical sources and recent scholarship have discussed the meaning of Ḥaqq in detail. What follows is a synthetic summary of these sources.

Under the root ḥ-q-q, Ibn Fāris explicitly states that this word has a single root that denotes "the firmness and correctness of a thing": "a single root, and it indicates the firmness of a thing and its correctness" (aṣlun wāḥid, wa-huwa yadullu ʿalā iḥkām al-shayʾ wa-ṣiḥḥatih). He regards Ḥaqq as the opposite of Bāṭil and takes ḥaqqa al-shayʾ to mean "it became necessary" (wajaba) (Ibn Fāris, 1984, vol. 2, p. 15). Ibn Manẓūr likewise defines Ḥaqq as the "opposite of Bāṭil" and as signifying "stability" and "necessity" (Ibn Manẓūr, 1994, vol. 10, p. 49). Other lexical works have also mentioned the meaning of necessity for Ḥaqq (Farāhīdī, 1989, vol. 3, p. 6; Fayyūmī, 1994, vol. 1, p. 144). On this basis, when we say that something is Ḥaqq, we mean that it is something that ought to be, and that its existence is firm and sound.

Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī takes the root meaning of Ḥaqq to be correspondence and conformity, and gives the example of the hinge-pin of a door fitting into its proper socket so that it may rotate upright: “The root of al-Ḥaqq is correspondence and conformity, like the fitting of the door’s hinge-pin into its socket so that it may rotate upright” (aṣl al-ḥaqq: al-muṭābaqah wa-l-muwāfaqah, ka-muṭābaqat rijl al-bāb fī ḥaqqih li-dawarānih ʿalā istiqāmah). On this basis, he calls belief in something Ḥaqq when it corresponds to the reality of that thing. Likewise, with respect to an act and the one who brings it about, he maintains that when an act is produced in accordance with wisdom, both the act and its producer may be called Ḥaqq. From another perspective, he holds that every act or statement that is issued in the proper measure, at the proper time, and in the proper manner is called an act or statement of Ḥaqq (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1992, p. 246).

ʿAllāmah Muṣṭafawī, by synthesizing the lexical roots, likewise identifies the single underlying meaning of this root as stability accompanied by correspondence to reality. He takes the use of Ḥaqq in some Qur’anic verses to stand in opposition to Bāṭil and misguidance. Bāṭil is that which has no stability, while misguidance is that which has departed from its proper course and deviated from it (Muṣṭafawī, 2009, vol. 2, pp. 306–307).

In al-Mīzān, in his commentary on Q 13:17, ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī regards the two opposing attributes of Ḥaqq and Bāṭil as originally pertaining to belief, and then, by extension, as being applied to things other than belief. According to him, the Bāṭil-ness of a thing means that one assumes for it a kind of existence and reality, while this assumption does not correspond to what exists externally. By contrast, Ḥaqq is that whose assumption corresponds to external reality. Thus, the statement that the sky is above us is Ḥaqq, because it corresponds to what exists externally. Likewise, an act is Ḥaqq if it is suitable for realizing the result intended for it and actually brings that result about; and it is Bāṭil if it is not suitable for realizing the intended result and does not bring it about. Similarly, a thing that exists externally is called Ḥaqq because it exists just as we believe it to exist. By contrast, something that does not exist, although we believe in its existence, is Bāṭil. Likewise, if a being, such as the human being, exists externally, but we ascribe to it attributes such as essential independence and permanence that it does not in fact possess, this assumption too is an instance of Bāṭil, because it does not correspond to the existential reality of that being (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1973, vol. 11, p. 335).

Other meanings have also been mentioned for Ḥaqq. For example, Ibn Manẓūr points to the association of Ḥaqq with "share" and "portion," and takes the meaning of Ḥaqq in the expression "to give someone his right" to refer to the share and portion that is necessary and obligatory for that person and must be given to him (Ibn Manẓūr, 1994, vol. 10, p. 51).

As is evident, lexicographers and exegetes have generally tried, by moving beyond the multiplicity of usages, to treat Ḥaqq as having a common underlying meaning and to trace it back to a single principle. Some have taken this single principle to be "firmness and correctness," while others have identified "correspondence to reality" as its fundamental root. Nevertheless, some researchers maintain that the breadth of the usage of Ḥaqq in cases such as property or bribery makes it difficult to accept a common underlying meaning in all instances (Nabavian, 2010, p. 176). Some contemporary studies have spoken of the semantic components of Ḥaqq and have undertaken a componential analysis of the concept (Seyed Khorasani & Fathi, 2019, p. 117). According to this analysis, stability, firmness, and correspondence to reality are among the most important semantic components of Ḥaqq, and Ḥaqq has been defined as "a stable thing corresponding to reality" (Fathi, Qasempour, & Seyed Khorasani, 2019, p. 178).

In lexical analyses, in addition to expressions such as firm, correct, existent, stable, corresponding to reality, and corresponding to wisdom, terms such as “necessary” and “ought-to-be” have also been used, and these seem to point to an important semantic component in Ḥaqq. Examination of its usages shows that Ḥaqq always carries a positive evaluative and normative force and refers to something whose existence is “necessary,” “worthy,” or at least “permissible.” For example, applying the name Ḥaqq to God, exalted be He, points to the necessity of His existence; and describing concepts such as justice, self-sacrifice, or beneficence as matters of Ḥaqq expresses their worthiness and deservingness. Even in the epistemological domain, there is a subtle difference between ṣidq and Ḥaqq: whereas ṣidq merely refers to the correspondence of a proposition to reality, Ḥaqq, in addition to indicating reality, also points to the aspect of justification and the worthiness of belief. When it is said that a belief is Ḥaqq, this means that, because it corresponds to reality, it is worthy of being preserved and accepted. Likewise, in legal contexts, such as “the right of divorce” or “the right of retaliation,” although there may not necessarily be a semantic burden of moral virtue, there is still an implicit normative judgment concerning permissibility and legitimacy. On this basis, it may be said that, from the normative point of view, the concept of Ḥaqq has a gradational nature and admits of degrees: it begins at the level of permissibility, such as the right of divorce; reaches the level of worthiness, such as the virtue of pardon, which is more Ḥaqq than retaliation; and ultimately culminates in the level of necessity and obligation, such as the existence of the Necessary Being. This gradation of meaning is also reflected in the Qur’an through the expression aḥaqq: “and God is more worthy that you should fear Him” (wa-Allāhu aḥaqqu an takhshāhu; Q 33:37).

By contrast, Bāṭil carries a negative normative force and indicates a lack of worthiness for endurance. Consequently, not everything that is realized may be called Ḥaqq merely because it exists. Something may exist externally, yet because it is not worthy of that existence, it may be called Bāṭil. From this point, the subtle and fundamental difference between Ḥaqq and ḥaqīqah also becomes clear: every existing thing is a ḥaqīqah in the sense of external realization, but it is Ḥaqq only when it possesses worthiness of existence. On this basis, the occurrence of oppression and injustice in the world, although an undeniable reality, is never Ḥaqq, because it lacks that existential fittingness and existential worthiness and, in the logic of the Qur'an, is destined to vanish.

3. Ḥaqq in the Horizon of Creation

The Qur'an repeatedly describes the creation of the heavens and the earth with the qualification of Ḥaqq and places this qualification in explicit contrast with "play" (laʿib), "diversion" (lahw), and Bāṭil. Verses such as "He created the heavens and the earth in Ḥaqq" (khalaqa al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ bi-l-ḥaqq) (Q 6:73; Q 14:19; Q 16:3; Q 39:5; Q 64:3), "God created the heavens and the earth in Ḥaqq" (khalaqa Allāhu al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ bi-l-ḥaqq) (Q 29:44; Q 45:22), and "God did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them except in Ḥaqq" (mā khalaqa Allāhu al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ wa-mā baynahumā illā bi-l-ḥaqq) (Q 30:8), together with verses that explicitly negate play and Bāṭil in creation (Q 21:16; Q 38:27), form a coherent constellation of Qur'anic expressions in which Ḥaqq functions as a primary description of the divine act of creation.

In his exegetical account of these verses, Ṭabarī interprets bi-l-ḥaqq as "truly and rightly" (ḥaqqan wa-ṣawāban) and sets it in opposition to Bāṭil and error. In reporting additional views, he also takes bi-l-ḥaqq to refer to the divine "word" and connects it with God's command and creative speech (Ṭabarī, 2001, vol. 9, pp. 335–336).

Zamakhsharī explicitly interprets bi-l-ḥaqq as "with a sound end" (bi-l-gharaḍ al-ṣaḥīḥ) and places it in direct contrast with play and Bāṭil. In his view, divine creation is free from futility because it is endowed with a sound purpose (Zamakhsharī, 1987, vol. 3, p. 455).

Similarly, Ṭabarsī, in *Jawāmiʿ al-jāmiʿ*, explains bi-l-ḥaqq as "with a sound end that is Ḥaqq" (ay bi-l-gharaḍ al-ṣaḥīḥ alladhī huwa ḥaqq), and then enumerates specific instances of this end: that the heavens and the earth serve as dwellings for God's servants, as a source of admonition for those who reflect, and as indications for monotheists of God's oneness and the perfection of His power (Ṭabarsī, 1992, vol. 3, p. 248). On this basis, Ḥaqq in creation refers to a sound purpose that is realized through forms such as dwelling, admonition, and indication of divine oneness and perfect power.

Zuḥaylī likewise emphasizes that the description bi-l-ḥaqq negates diversion, play, and futility from creation. He regards the creation of the heavens and the earth as manifesting God's immense power and accompanied by the bestowal of good, wisdoms, and religious and worldly benefits (Zuḥaylī, 1998, vol. 20, p. 247).

ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, in commenting on verses that describe creation as bi-l-ḥaqq, also stresses the conceptual opposition between Ḥaqq, on the one hand, and play and Bāṭil, on the other. In his view, Ḥaqq is the description of an act that possesses a real and determinate end; hence creation is called Ḥaqq because every being within it is directed toward a particular end, and the order of creation rests upon the connection of ends and the causal arrangement of beings. Referring to verses such as "We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them in play; We created them only in Ḥaqq" (Q 44:38–39) and "We did not create the heaven and the earth and what is between them in Bāṭil" (Q 38:27), he explains that if the divine act lacked such an end, creation would revert to play or Bāṭil. In contrast, the world is founded upon an ordered system in which some beings serve as premises and conditions for the realization of the ends of others. On this basis, creation is not a collection of aimless acts, but a firm act grounded in truth and culminating in a stable and meaningful world. Ṭabāṭabāʾī also states that the particle bāʾ in bi-l-ḥaqq is the bāʾ of accompaniment; that is, divine creation is consociated with and inseparable from Ḥaqq throughout, rather than Ḥaqq being merely its cause or instrument (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1973, vol. 12, pp. 41–42).

Ibn ʿĀshūr likewise understands bi-l-ḥaqq as indicating that the heavens and the earth were created in a perfected manner and in fidelity to the end assigned to them. He explains that Bāṭil is that in which a thing fails to fulfill its purpose; therefore, creation in Ḥaqq is a sign of God's oneness and of the wisdom of His acts (Ibn ʿĀshūr, 1999, vol. 20, pp. 176–177).

Taken together, these exegetical reports show that, in interpreting the verses on "creation in Ḥaqq" (khalq bi-l-ḥaqq), Ḥaqq is consistently placed against Bāṭil, play, and futility and is treated as a foundational description of the divine act of creation. Within this framework, exegetes enumerate multiple ends and functions of creation, including the realization of a sound purpose, the firmness and perfection of creation, the world's serving as a dwelling place for human beings, its providing admonition for those who take heed, its indicating divine oneness and perfect power, the bestowal of good, and, in some commentaries, the connection of creation with the final return of beings to God. Collectively, these expressions depict creation as an act characterized essentially by Ḥaqq and as a negation of play and Bāṭil.

3.1. Rethinking the End of Creation through the Theory of Existential Fittingness

As observed, one of the key concepts in the Qur'anic account of creation is the description of the divine act as Ḥaqq and the negation of play and futility from creation. Qur'anic exegetes have generally understood the being-Ḥaqq of creation as meaning that it possesses a sound end or desirable purpose. Yet the fundamental question begins precisely here: what exactly is this desirable purpose? In exegetical works, matters such as worship, trial, admonition, knowledge of divine power and oneness, attainment of otherworldly reward, or enjoyment of worldly benefits have been introduced as the end of creation, without it being made clear whether these are themselves the final end or serve a higher end. In other words, in many of these analyses, no clear distinction is drawn between intermediate ends and the ultimate end; consequently, the purposiveness of creation often remains at the level of functions and outcomes.

If the ultimate end of creation were matters such as worldly welfare, otherworldly reward, or everlasting pleasure in paradise, a fundamental question would arise: why did God not place the human being in that desirable state from the very beginning? Why did He choose the complex path of this world, interwoven with suffering and trial? This question shows that pleasure, reward, and even paradise cannot be the ultimate end, for all of them are the fruit and consequence of a certain existential condition, not that condition itself. Paradise answers the question of what awaits a human being who possesses a particular condition; it does not answer why creation itself occurred.

The Theory of Existential Fittingness opens a different horizon for understanding the end of creation. According to this theory, the ultimate end is neither a psychological state such as pleasure, nor a spatial location such as paradise, nor merely the performance of a set of devotional acts, but existence itself; not every mode of existence, however, but an existence that is fitting, harmonious, and well-proportioned, whose relation to other beings has been properly ordered. In other words, the end of creation is that every being should occupy its proper place. In this sense, the end of creation is the realization of worthy and beautiful modes of existence: beings that properly know their relation to the origin of being, to their own reality, and to other beings, and act accordingly.

A beautiful existence is an existence in which relations have not been distorted. This fittingness is realized, first and foremost, in the relation between God and the human being. If the end of creation is the realization of fitting existence, this fittingness must be established on both sides of the relation. On God's side, this fittingness is realized in the form of mercy: "except those upon whom your Lord has mercy; and for that He created them" (illā man raḥima rabbuka wa-li-dhālika khalaqahum; Q 11:119). Divine lordship, ownership, sustenance, guidance, and forgiveness are all manifestations of this same mercy; that is, the manner in which divine bestowal reaches the creature in a measured and wise way and places the relation between Creator and creature in a fitting condition.

In response to this mercy and lordship, fittingness on the human side is realized through the acceptance of the station of servanthood: "I did not create jinn and human beings except that they may worship Me" (wa-mā khalaqtu al-jinna wa-l-insa illā li-yaʿbudūn; Q 51:56). By virtue of his created condition, the human being is neither the Necessary Being, nor the true owner, nor independent, nor self-subsisting; therefore, his fittingness in relation to God consists in not making an unfitting existential self-assertion and not placing himself in a position that does not belong to him. Servanthood, in this sense, is not merely the performance of devotional acts; rather, it is the conscious expression of the existential reality of the human being: that he is servant, not Lord.

Yet existential fittingness is not limited to this vertical relation. Once the relation between servant and Lord has been established, the ordering of the human being's relation to other beings comes into view, and it is here that the notion of "becoming like God" acquires its meaning. In relation to others, the human being does not occupy the station of lordship, but the station of a moral agent, and he must act in a way that is consonant with the divine attributes. Mercy, justice, beneficence, and grace are among the attributes that the human being can actualize in interaction with others. Thus, the talk of resemblance to God in philosophical and mystical traditions becomes meaningful not in relation to God Himself, but in relation to creatures.

On this basis, a beautiful and worthy existence is one in which the human being is, before God, the least God-like of beings, and before others, the most God-like of moral agents. This apparently paradoxical conjunction in fact reveals the essence of existential fittingness. The ultimate end of creation is the realization of such a condition of existence: a condition in which everything occupies its own place and relations are properly ordered. In this horizon, Ḥaqq is not merely a description of the divine act, but the realization of worthy existence within being; an existence whose worthiness consists precisely in fittingness and in each thing's occupying its own existential position.

4. The Relation between Ḥaqq and Bāṭil in the Horizon of Becoming (*takwīn*)

Before entering into the Qur'anic analysis of the relation between Ḥaqq and Bāṭil, a fundamental distinction must be noted—one that the

Qur’an establishes between “creation” and “becoming” (takwīn). At first glance, this distinction may appear concealed, yet it plays a decisive role in understanding the ontological meaning of the verses. In the Qur’an, “creation” refers to the original bringing-forth and initial production of being: a level at which creation is ordered on the basis of divine knowledge, wisdom, and measure, and for that reason its very constitution is grounded in Ḥaqq. At this level, Ḥaqq signifies the principle of firmness and establishment: the bringing of a thing into its divinely determined and fitting position, without conflicting relations and without the possibility of Bāṭil.

By contrast, “becoming” (takwīn) denotes the flowing forth and actualization of being within the context of multiplicity, time, and interaction. In this horizon, beings appear not merely as fixed creatures, but as realities in motion—acting and being acted upon, and open to multiple possibilities. It is precisely in this domain that the ground for the emergence of Bāṭil appears: not Bāṭil in the sense of pure nonexistence or sheer nothingness, but as a mode of unstable, superficial, and lacking existential authenticity. From this perspective, Bāṭil in the Qur’an “appears,” but it does not “abide”; it “stands out,” but it does not endure.

On this basis, it may be said that creation is the scene of the “establishment of Ḥaqq,” whereas becoming is the field of the “distinction between Ḥaqq and Bāṭil.” In the horizon of creation, Ḥaqq is fixed as the foundation and ordering of being; but in the horizon of becoming, this very foundation discloses itself, within the process of the becoming of beings, in relation to that which lacks existential rootedness—namely, Bāṭil. For this reason, many Qur’anic verses formulate the relation between Ḥaqq and Bāṭil not at the level of creation, but within the expanse of becoming, and in order to explain this dynamic relation they turn to images and parables that render visible the logic of endurance and perishing, rootedness and rootlessness.

One of the most foundational examples of this takwīnī mode of expression is Q 13:17: “He sends down water from the sky, and valleys flow according to their measure … As for the foam, it passes away as scum, but that which benefits people remains in the earth” (Q 13:17).

This parable gives form to the conflict between two “modes of realization”: al-zabad (“foam”)—a phenomenon that appears, swells, and becomes conspicuous, yet lacks depth and rootedness; and “that which benefits people” (mā yanfaʿu al-nās)—a reality that is genuine, beneficial, and enduring.

In his commentary on the parable in Sūrat al-Raʿd, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī first explains the natural structure of flowing water: water settles in low-lying valleys according to their capacity, and with the force of the current, foam appears on its surface—a light, superadded, and rootless phenomenon that surges briefly but is eventually scattered and destroyed, while pure water remains. The same logic, he argues, is repeated in the smelting of metals: when a metal is melted, it expels worthless accretions and surface froth while preserving its pure substance. For al-Rāzī, the result of this natural process points to a takwīnī law: in everything that appears, that which is genuine and possesses substance “remains” (yamkuthu), whereas that which is parasitic and devoid of reality, even if it becomes prominent and dense upon the surface, ultimately “passes away as scum” (yadhhabu jufāʾan) and perishes (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, 1999, vol. 19, pp. 29–31).

ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, in his analysis of the parable in Sūrat al-Raʿd, explains Ḥaqq and Bāṭil on the basis of “stability” and “instability,” and shows that the verse seeks to articulate the takwīnī law governing the emergence and destiny of the two. The clear water that flows in each valley according to its capacity and ultimately remains is the manifestation of a reality that truly exists and whose inner stability is preserved. By contrast, the foam upon the water—which outwardly appears voluminous and striking—does not endure because of its lack of substance and quickly disappears. The same holds in the smelting of metals: the substance of the metal remains, while superficial accretions vanish. Ṭabāṭabāʾī concludes that the divine sunnah is such that whatever corresponds to reality and possesses substance remains in the world, whereas that which has only an outward and reality-disconnected existence, even if it displays itself at the outset, is ultimately effaced (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1973, vol. 11, pp. 334–337).

The upshot of these exegetical analyses is that the Qur'anic parable in Sūrat al-Raʿd portrays two kinds of realization within the domain of becoming: an original and enduring realization that is the ground of persistence and benefit, and an accidental and unstable realization that appears like foam upon the surface of water and quickly vanishes. From this perspective, Ḥaqq within the process of becoming is linked to stability, authenticity, and the capacity for endurance, whereas Bāṭil is a transient, rootless form lacking the capacity to remain.

4.1. Rethinking the Relation between Ḥaqq and Bāṭil on the Basis of the Theory of Existential Fittingness

The exegetical account of the verses and the analyses of the commentators have shown that, in the logic of the Qur'an, Ḥaqq and Bāṭil are not merely two evaluative or epistemic positions; rather, they are two modes of realization within the order of being: one original, stable, and beneficial, and the other derivative, unstable, and perishable. The Theory of Existential Fittingness elevates this distinction from the level of exegetical description to the level of ontological explanation.

Within the horizon of this theory, Ḥaqq means that each being stands in its proper existential position and in harmony with the totality of the order of being. Bāṭil, by contrast, is not pure nonexistence, but a mode of being whose relations have been disrupted and which has departed from its fitting position. Accordingly, the endurance and stability of Ḥaqq and the perishing of Bāṭil are not the result of a merely conventional reward and punishment, but the natural effect of existential fittingness or existential unfittingness.

The parable of water and foam in Sūrat al-Raʿd, within this framework, offers a clear image of the mechanism of fittingness: whatever is in harmony with the overall structure of the flow remains, while whatever is superadded, discordant, and devoid of existential function falls away of itself. This vanishing does not mean a negation of divine origination; rather, it means the negation of worthiness for endurance. In this sense, Bāṭil may appear within the domain of becoming, but it lacks the capacity for abiding and establishment.

From the perspective of the Theory of Existential Fittingness, it may be said that Ḥaqq and Bāṭil are two "existential states," not two merely conventional labels. Ḥaqq is the fitting existential state, and Bāṭil is the unfitting existential state. This also explains why instances of Ḥaqq do not conflict with one another: all of them stand in proper relation to the whole. By contrast, instances of Bāṭil—even if they temporarily spread—carry within themselves the possibility of vanishing precisely because they lack inner fittingness.

In this horizon, the Theory of Existential Fittingness does not claim to offer a new definition of Ḥaqq; rather, it shows that what the Qur'an reports concerning the stability of Ḥaqq and the vanishing of Bāṭil is rooted in the structure of being itself. Ḥaqq, in this sense, appears as the concrete realization of worthy existence within being—an existence whose worthiness consists precisely in fittingness and in each thing’s occupying its own existential position.

Even so, although in the horizon of becoming one may speak of the endurance and vanishing of Ḥaqq and Bāṭil, this horizon is still not the domain of the full and final manifestation of existential relations. Many fitting and unfitting relations, in the course of the world, are realized gradually, diffusely, and at times incompletely. For this reason, the Qur’anic logic of Ḥaqq requires that another horizon be opened for the final and complete disclosure of existential worthiness—a horizon in which what has taken shape in becoming is brought to the test of manifestation directly, beyond the veils of time and possibility. This horizon is precisely the horizon of resurrection (qiyāmah) and the weighing of deeds.

5. Ḥaqq in the Horizon of Resurrection and the Weighing of Deeds

Qur’anic eschatology is the domain of the final manifestation of Ḥaqq and the disclosure of relations concealed within earthly life. In this horizon, the verse “The weighing on that Day is truly Ḥaqq” (wa-l-waznu yawmaʾidhin al-ḥaqq; Q 7:8, al-Aʿrāf) occupies a central position and reveals the bond among truth, justice, and the objective reality of human actions. This verse follows upon verses that speak of questioning (suʾāl), reckoning (ḥisāb), and the all-encompassing knowledge of God over human actions (Q 7:6–7). The commentators have emphasized that the conjunction of this sentence with the preceding verses serves as an explanation of the “objective manifestation of divine knowledge”—that is, the absolute knowledge of God concerning the actions of His servants is manifested in resurrection in the form of an order of weighing that gives to each action a recompense proportionate to its existential truth, without the least wrongdoing (Ibn ʿĀshūr, 1999, vol. 8, p. 23).

In his explanation of what this “weighing” is, al-Shaykh al-Ṭabarsī, in Majmaʿ al-bayān, reports three views. First, “the weighing” signifies God’s absolute justice, a justice that removes every injustice and wrong in resurrection. Second, it is “the setting up of a real balance,” an instrument with pans and a tongue used for weighing good deeds (ḥasanāt) and evil deeds (sayyi’āt), though there is disagreement concerning the manner of the weighing: some understand it as weighing the scrolls of deeds, others as the embodiment of good and evil deeds in corresponding forms. Third, it is “the manifestation of the real value of human beings and their actions,” as the verse “And We shall not place for them, on the Day of Resurrection, any weight” (falā nuqīma lahum yawm al-qiyāmat waznan; Q 18:105) reports the worthlessness of the deniers and the loss of their existential truth. Relying upon the Arabic term mawzūn as an idiom for precision, moderation, and uprightness, al-Ṭabarsī regards the “justice” interpretation as superior: for in this station, “the weighing” is not a mere instrument, but the concrete realization of Ḥaqq and the exact execution of divine justice with respect to actions (Ṭabarsī, 1988, vol. 4, p. 616).

ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, relying upon the totality of verses that speak of the “heaviness” (thiqal) and “lightness” (khiffah) of scales, holds that the weighing in resurrection has an objective reality, and that good deeds truly cause the scales to become heavy, while evil deeds cause them to become light. In his view, in the weighing of actions, the unit of measure is Ḥaqq itself: that is, each action has weight to the extent that it contains Ḥaqq. Just as, in ordinary measurements, a thing is measured against a fixed standard, so in resurrection actions are measured against Ḥaqq. Therefore, good deeds, being possessed of truth and stability, possess heaviness, while evil deeds, being empty of Ḥaqq and containing Bāṭil, have no weight.

On this basis, the meaning of "The weighing on that Day is Ḥaqq" is that the measure of the weighing of actions on that Day is Ḥaqq, and the value of each action reverts to the degree of its correspondence to Ḥaqq (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1973, vol. 8, p. 12).

Thus, in the horizon of resurrection, Ḥaqq appears as the final criterion for the weighing of actions. The verse "The weighing on that Day is Ḥaqq" shows that on that day "the weighing" is identical with Ḥaqq and justice; that is, the measurement is grounded not in human conventions, but in the intrinsic reality of actions. Al-Ṭabarsī regards "the weighing" in this station as an idiom for the objective realization of divine justice: a justice in whose light the truth of human beings and the real value of their actions become manifest. ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī likewise stresses the objectivity of the weighing in resurrection and affirms that the heaviness of the scales belongs to those actions that are bearers of truth and stability, whereas the lightness of the scales belongs to actions that are empty of Ḥaqq and based upon Bāṭil. In this horizon, the "heaviness" and "lightness" of the scales are the Qur'anic ontological language for expressing the same existential relation of actions to Ḥaqq: the more an action accords with Ḥaqq, the weightier it is; and the more distant it is from Ḥaqq, the lighter and the more devoid of truth.

5.1. Rethinking the Truth of the "Weighing of Ḥaqq" on the Basis of the Theory of Existential Fittingness

In the two preceding stages it was established that, on the one hand, the Qur'an describes creation as "in Ḥaqq," and on the other hand, in the structure of becoming, it traces the distinction between Ḥaqq and Bāṭil as a distinction in the modes and degrees of being. In the logic of the Theory of Existential Fittingness, these two conceptions converge upon a single general principle: whatever in being is rooted in existential fittingness is Ḥaqq; and whatever loses this fittingness becomes empty of ḥaqqiyyah. Resurrection, in this horizon, is the final scene of the manifestation of this very law.

The verse “The weighing on that Day is Ḥaqq” is in fact the point of convergence of these two currents: creation, which is grounded “in Ḥaqq,” and the continuous separating of Ḥaqq from Bāṭil in becoming, reach their consummation in resurrection. What flows in the world in a relative and gradual manner is realized in resurrection in a final and manifest form, because resurrection is the moment of the complete disclosure of the existential condition of each thing.

From the perspective of the Theory of Existential Fittingness, “the weighing” in this verse must be understood as an existential language: an expression of the degree of fittingness or disharmony of actions and souls with the truth of being. Every human action, in its essence, is a mode of being; and this being is either in harmony with the overall structure of truth (and thus becomes Ḥaqq and “heavy”), or is distant from it (and thus becomes Bāṭil and “light”). The verse “The weighing on that Day is Ḥaqq” expresses precisely this ontological mechanism: the value of actions arises directly from their own level of being, not from external judgment or moral convention.

On the basis of what was clarified concerning “creation in Ḥaqq” (khalq bi-l-ḥaqq), every true action possesses within it a sound end; that is, it is in harmony with an aim proportionate to the total order of creation. But many human actions, in the sphere of voluntary choice, possess ends that are either discordant with the structure of creation or whose relation to it is disrupted. In the world, on account of outward coverings and social conventions, the confusion of Ḥaqq and Bāṭil is possible; but in resurrection, when the veils fall, only the truth of the action remains, and this disclosed truth is precisely what the Qur’an calls “the weighing.”

In other words, if creation in the divine logic is “in Ḥaqq,” the judgment of resurrection is also “in Ḥaqq,” with the difference that in creation God creates Ḥaqq, whereas in resurrection He discloses that very real Ḥaqq. At this stage, Ḥaqq is not an attribute of the divine act, but the form of the manifested reality of human beings and their actions. Human actions either possess a real share in the total structure of being (and consequently become heavy), or lack such a share (and become weightless).

From the perspective of the Theory of Existential Fittingness, the heaviness and lightness of the scales in resurrection mean a difference in the “degree of existential fittingness” of human beings. Those who in earthly life have harmonized their existential directions with the direction of creation will, in the state of resurrection, acquire weights that are noble and stable, for their existence shares in the substance and orientation of the truth of being. By contrast, those who have made themselves Bāṭil—that is, have severed their intrinsic fittingness with the truth of being—will in resurrection be not only weightless, but out of place and unsettled. The Qur’anic expression of “losing the soul” (khusrān al-nafs) points precisely to this emptiness of fittingness: the loss of one’s existential position and severance from the order of being.

In this manner, the “weighing of Ḥaqq” in resurrection may be understood as the final point of the current of “the being-Ḥaqq of creation” and the “vanishing of Bāṭil.” Creation begins in Ḥaqq; the history of becoming continues through the constant refining of Ḥaqq from Bāṭil; and resurrection is the very moment at which this refining reaches its term and every being stands in its true position. On that day, no thing will be measured by appearances or conventions; rather, the reality of the existence of human beings itself will speak.

For this reason, in the logic of the Theory of Existential

Fittingness, resurrection can be understood not as a moral court, but as an ontological field in which the truth that is in harmony or disharmony with Ḥaqq acquires its own weight. The weighing of resurrection reflects the same eternal rule that holds in creation and becoming: al-ḥaqq bāqin li-dhātih—Ḥaqq endures by itself because it is in fittingness with the order of existence; and al-bāṭil zāʾilun li-dhātih—Bāṭil vanishes by itself because its relation to that order is severed.

6. Conclusion

The present study set out to reread the concept of Ḥaqq in the Qur'an and to explain its ontological capacity for understanding the foundations of Qur'anic ethics. The central question of the article was whether Ḥaqq, within the logic of the Qur'an, can be understood as expressing existential worthiness and as a basis for regulating the relations of being. The semantic analysis of the term Ḥaqq in lexical and exegetical sources showed that, across its various usages, the term is associated with such elements as stability, firmness, correspondence to reality, necessity, and worthiness. From these elements, it becomes clear that Ḥaqq in the Qur'anic logic does not merely mean propositional truth or the correctness of a claim; rather, it points to a mode of stability and establishment that accords with reality and with the wisdom of creation.

The examination of the Qur'anic usages of this concept showed that Ḥaqq has a systematic presence in three horizons: creation, becoming, and resurrection. In the horizon of creation, the repeated description of creation as being "in Ḥaqq" (bi-l-ḥaqq) indicates that the order of creation is structured on the basis of a sound end and a wise order, and that it is free from every form of futility and Bāṭil. In the horizon of becoming, the relation between Ḥaqq and Bāṭil becomes manifest in the form of the law of endurance and disappearance: that which possesses authenticity and a bond with existential reality remains stable, whereas that which lacks this bond, even if it appears temporarily, ultimately passes away. The Qur'anic parable of water and foam in Sūrat al-Raʿd is a clear instance of this logic of becoming, in which the beneficial and rooted truth remains, while the accidental and rootless element vanishes. In the horizon of resurrection, this same logic appears in the form of the weighing of deeds, where the "weight" of actions is determined on the basis of Ḥaqq, and the value of each action depends upon the extent to which it possesses truth and existential stability.

Rereading these three horizons in light of the Theory of Existential Fittingness shows that Ḥaqq in the Qur'an can be understood as expressing existential worthiness: that is, a state in which every being occupies its fitting position and existential relations are properly ordered. On this basis, creation "in Ḥaqq" means the establishment of a world structured around existential fittingness and harmony; the relation between Ḥaqq and Bāṭil in becoming expresses the process through which this fittingness is disclosed and refined in the flow of being; and the weighing of deeds in resurrection is the final manifestation of this same law at the level of human actions, where the value of actions is disclosed according to the degree of their correspondence with the true structure of being.

In this horizon, Ḥaqq is not merely an epistemic or normative concept; rather, it expresses an existential law within the structure of the world—a law according to which fitting relations possess stability and endurance, while unfitting relations, even if they are temporarily realized, lack the capacity to remain. Thus, the concept of Ḥaqq may be understood as the link between the structure of being and the moral order of the Qur'an, showing that ethics in the Qur'anic logic is not merely a set of abstract obligations, but is rooted in the objective and wise order of being.

At the level of a broad philosophical analysis and within the horizon of ontology, formulating the concept of Ḥaqq on the basis of the Theory of Existential Fittingness opens new horizons for understanding the moral order of the Qur'an and yields fundamental epistemic consequences. This ontological reading can be explained along several essential axes.

First, this approach leads to the revival of the deep and historical bond between the two concepts of Ḥaqq and justice (ʿadl) within a teleological framework. In classical reason and Islamic philosophy, justice is defined by the well-known formula "placing each thing in its proper position" (waḍʿ kull shayʾ fī mawḍiʿih). This study shows that this "proper position" is neither an abstract nor a subjective concept; rather, it is derived precisely from the existential fittingness of each thing with the structure and end of its creation. On this basis, Ḥaqq consists in preserving this geometry and architecture of creation.

Second, explaining Ḥaqq as an "existential worthiness and fittingness" opens a firm path beyond one of the most serious challenges of moral philosophy—namely, the epistemic gap between "is" or facts and "ought" or values. The Theory of Existential Fittingness shows that, in the Qur'anic paradigm, the world of being is not a blind and purposeless machine, but an order created in Ḥaqq and structured around wisdom. According to this approach, moral values—the "oughts"—are not severed from takwīnī realities—the "is"; rather, moral and rightful action is precisely action that accords with the objective and generative fittingness of the world of being.

Third, this explanation is fully consistent with the lexical and semantic roots of the term Ḥaqq, for in language Ḥaqq consistently signifies stability, necessity, and "correspondence to reality." When an act or judgment arises from existential fittingness, it has in fact achieved complete correspondence with objective reality and thereby becomes worthy of the name Ḥaqq.

Finally, this reading stands against modern contractualist and subjectivist-existential approaches that regard rights and values as merely human, constructed, and conventional products of free human will. Reducing the concept of Ḥaqq to sheer conventions inevitably ends in moral relativism. Yet by rereading Ḥaqq through the scale of existential fittingness, this concept is released from contractualism and bound to an objective and prior truth. On this basis, the ḥaqqiyyah of an act or judgment in the Qur'an is rooted in its correspondence with the purposive structure of the world. This achievement provides a firm, objective, and relativism-resistant foundation for the moral order of the Qur'an and demonstrates that, in the Qur'anic worldview, ethics is the extension of takwīn into the sphere of human conduct.

The analysis offered in this article may be regarded as a first step toward reconstructing the moral order of the Qur'an on the basis of the Theory of Existential Fittingness. Within this framework, the concept of Ḥaqq was examined as expressing existential position; however, a complete account of this conceptual system requires further investigation of other concepts that, in the Qur'an, are related to the mechanism of regulating and realizing this fittingness. Accordingly, future studies may focus on concepts such as mīzān and qisṭ in order to clarify more fully the practical and normative dimensions of this existential logic in the domain of human action.

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Theosophia Islamica EISSN: 2783-3240

Governance in the Mirror of Metaphors: The Role of Language and Cognitive Mechanisms in Public Policy*

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Abstract

Traditional paradigms of public administration often rely on rational-actor models, assuming that policy formulation is a purely objective, logical process. This paper challenges that assumption by examining governance through the lens of Cognitive Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Utilizing Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), this study argues that the foundational architecture of public policy is intrinsically metaphorical (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors are not mere rhetorical embellishments; rather, they constitute the cognitive infrastructure that dictates problem definition, constrains epistemological horizons, and limits the spectrum of viable policy solutions (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff, 2004). By analyzing cross-cultural linguistic mappings, embodied cognition, and dominant policy frames, this paper explores how “Grand Metaphors” covertly structure macro-level political decision-

* Shafiei, F. (2026). Governance in the Mirror of Metaphors: The Role of Language and Cognitive Mechanisms in Public Policy. *Theosophia Islamica, 6*(1), pp. 37-70.
https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2026.74777.1122

▣ **Article Type:** Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

▣ **Received:** 2025/07/22 • **Revised:** 2025/09/25 • **Accepted:** 2025/11/10 •**Online Publication:** 2026/01/10

making in domains such as environmental crisis management, macroeconomics, and international relations. Ultimately, the paper advocates for “metaphorical literacy” among policymakers, arguing that the deliberate reframing of governance paradigms—shifting from militaristic and control-based metaphors to ecological and systemic ones—is an essential prerequisite for sustainable public administration.

Keywords

Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Public Policy, Cognitive Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, Metaphorical Literacy, Framing

1. Introduction

1.1. The Illusion of Objective Governance

The academic study of public policy, public administration, and political science has historically been dominated by institutional, legalistic, and rational-choice frameworks. Within these classical paradigms—heavily influenced by Weberian theories of bureaucracy and the neoclassical economic models of the mid-20th century—decision-making is conceptualized as a sterile, utility-maximizing process (Simon, 1957). Policymakers are presumed to act as "homo economicus," gathering exhaustive empirical data, weighing costs and benefits with mathematical precision, and executing policies that objectively solve pre-defined societal problems. Within this positivist epistemology, language is typically viewed as a neutral medium through which objective realities are communicated. However, developments in cognitive science, linguistics, and behavioral decision theory have challenged this assumption. Research on bounded rationality demonstrates that human decision-making is constrained by cognitive limitations and heuristic processes rather than purely rational calculations (Simon, 1957; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). Within this intellectual shift, Cognitive Linguistics has revealed that governance—before manifesting as a legal or institutional act—is fundamentally a cognitive and linguistic process. The mental frameworks through which policymakers interpret social problems are structured by conceptual schemas and metaphorical mappings embedded in language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 2008).

1.2. The Cognitive Boundaries of the "Thinkable"

To illustrate the implications of this cognitive infrastructure, consider a government confronting a socio-economic or public health crisis. When political leaders frame such a situation as a "war" against a threat—whether poverty, drugs, terrorism, or disease—they activate a conceptual mapping between the domain of conflict and the policy problem (Lakoff, 2004). Within this framework, the crisis becomes an enemy, victory becomes the desired outcome, and centralized authority becomes legitimate.

Conceptual metaphor theory explains that such mappings are not merely rhetorical strategies but cognitive structures that guide reasoning and decision-making (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Such effects may be partly related to how metaphorical meaning is organized and retained in memory in network-like ways (Ghassemzadeh, 2013, pp. 24–26). By activating the WAR frame, policymakers implicitly legitimize hierarchical command structures, emergency powers, and aggressive interventions. Related psycholinguistic work has also examined processing-time differences between metaphorical and literal meaning, often using semantic priming paradigms (Blasko & Connine, 1993; as discussed in Ghassemzadeh, 2019, pp. 53–57).

Conversely, if the same crisis is framed as a “journey” or “navigation through difficult terrain,” the activated cognitive schema emphasizes endurance, planning, cooperation, and long-term adaptation. Linguistic framing therefore shapes what policy options appear rational or legitimate (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974). These metaphorical frames define the cognitive boundaries of what is politically “thinkable” within bureaucratic and public discourse.

1.3. Research Objectives and Scope

This paper aims to analyze the role of conceptual metaphors in shaping public policy discourse and institutional decision-making. Drawing upon cognitive linguistics and critical discourse analysis, it demonstrates how metaphorical structures influence the construction of political reality and guide legislative responses (Charteris-Black, 2004;

Musolff, 2016). By examining multiple policy sectors—including economic governance, public health, immigration, and technology regulation—the study highlights how metaphorical frames shape policy outcomes across institutional contexts.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Philosophical Shift: From Aristotle to Cognitive Semantics

To fully grasp the profound impact of metaphors on governance, one must understand the epistemological shift that occurred in the study of language. The classical perspective, originating with Aristotle and Quintilian and persisting through Enlightenment thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke, viewed metaphors with considerable suspicion. Within this objectivist tradition, metaphors were often treated as deviations from literal truth—ornamental linguistic devices employed primarily for rhetorical embellishment or persuasive effect. From this standpoint, metaphor was primarily associated with rhetoric rather than with systematic knowledge production, and was therefore often viewed with suspicion in disciplines committed to rational inquiry, such as science, law, and governance (Aristotle, 2007; Hobbes, 1651/1996; Locke, 1690/1975; Quintilian, ca. 95 CE/1920).

This long-standing objectivist view was fundamentally challenged by developments in cognitive science and linguistics during the late twentieth century. The emergence of Cognitive Linguistics, particularly through the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, introduced a radically different understanding of metaphor. In their seminal book *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that metaphor is not merely a stylistic feature of language but a central mechanism of human cognition. According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), abstract reasoning is largely structured through systematic metaphorical mappings that allow individuals to understand complex domains of experience in terms of more concrete and familiar ones (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Kövecses, 2010).

Within this framework, a conceptual metaphor functions as a cognitive mapping between two conceptual domains. The abstract domain being understood is referred to as the *target domain*, while the concrete experiential domain used to structure that understanding is known as the *source domain*. Through repeated cognitive associations, structural elements from the source domain are projected onto the target domain, enabling individuals to reason about abstract phenomena using patterns derived from embodied experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010; Gibbs, 2017).

This mapping is often expressed in cognitive linguistics through the formula TARGET = SOURCE. Because human beings cannot directly perceive abstract concepts such as inflation, justice, time, or national security through sensory experience, they rely on metaphorical projections grounded in physical objects, spatial relations, and bodily interactions with the environment. In this way, metaphor provides the conceptual architecture through which abstract political and social realities become cognitively intelligible (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Gibbs, 2017).

2.2. Neuropolitics and the Neural Theory of Metaphor

The assertions of CMT have since been validated by advancements in cognitive neuroscience, leading to the development of the Neural Theory of Metaphor (NTM) (Lakoff, 2008). According to this account, early embodied experiences play a crucial role in the formation of primary metaphors. When a child repeatedly experiences physical warmth in situations of parental affection, sensory and emotional systems are co-activated in a consistent pattern. Over time, this repeated co-activation contributes to the establishment of neural associations between the experience of bodily warmth and the feeling of interpersonal affection. This process is broadly consistent with the principle of Hebbian learning, often summarized as "neurons that fire together wire together," according to which repeated simultaneous activation strengthens neural connectivity (Hebb, 1949; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). On this basis, cognitive linguists have argued that primary metaphors such as AFFECTION IS WARMTH emerge from recurrent embodied correlations in experience (Grady, 1997; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

Later in life, these entrenched metaphorical associations continue to shape the interpretation of abstract social and political concepts. Expressions such as "a warm reception," "cold diplomatic relations," or "heated political debate" are not arbitrary linguistic figures; rather, they draw upon embodied conceptual mappings that enable individuals to comprehend social and political relations through sensory schemas of temperature and physical intensity (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010; Gibbs, 2017). Experimental evidence has also provided support for such associations. For example, Williams and Bargh (2008) found that physical experiences of warmth can influence judgments of interpersonal warmth, suggesting that metaphor-consistent embodied effects operate in social cognition.

Accordingly, when policymakers employ metaphorical frames, they are not simply appealing to the public's abstract reasoning; they are often activating deeply sedimented cognitive and neural associations. This helps explain why some political frames remain highly resilient even in the face of contradictory evidence. As research in political cognition and framing suggests, facts are rarely processed in a neutral vacuum; rather, they are interpreted through preexisting conceptual schemas that shape what appears coherent, plausible, or emotionally compelling (Lakoff, 2004, 2008; Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011).

In this sense, the durability of political metaphors is linked not only to rhetorical repetition but also to the embodied and cognitively entrenched structures through which individuals make sense of the political world.

2.3. Primary vs. Complex Metaphors in Institutional Thought

Grady (1997) significantly advanced Conceptual Metaphor Theory by distinguishing between *primary* and *complex* metaphors. Primary metaphors arise directly from recurring embodied experiences and are grounded in systematic correlations in everyday sensorimotor life. Because they are rooted in basic bodily interactions with the physical world, primary metaphors tend to display a high degree of cross-cultural stability (Grady, 1997; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Kövecses, 2010).

For example, the abstract concept of *quantity* is commonly structured through the embodied experience of *vertical elevation*. When liquid is poured into a glass, the level rises as the amount increases. Repeated exposure to such correlations contributes to the formation of the primary mappings MORE IS UP and LESS IS DOWN. These mappings are reflected in pervasive linguistic expressions such as "soaring inflation," "plummeting approval ratings," "rising unemployment," or "lowering taxes" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Grady, 1997). In governance discourse, such verticality metaphors structure how policymakers conceptualize growth, decline, stability, and crisis, often framing policy goals in terms of upward movement and threats in terms of downward trajectories (Kövecses, 2010; Charteris-Black, 2011).

Complex metaphors, by contrast, are structured networks that integrate multiple primary metaphors with culturally specific narratives, historical experiences, and ideological assumptions. This may be consistent with evidence suggesting that metaphor can influence offline cognitive processing, memory encoding, and semantic-network associations (Shafiei & Ghassemzadeh, 2021). They are not derived from a single embodied correlation but from layered conceptual integrations shaped by institutional discourse and collective memory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Kövecses, 2020).

An illustrative example is the complex metaphor THE STATE IS A BUILDING. This metaphor draws upon primary schemas of physical structure, balance, containment, and vertical stability. Governance is thus conceptualized in architectural terms: policymakers speak of "foundational principles," "pillars of democracy," "architects of reform," "structural adjustments," or "collapsing institutions." Such language reflects the projection of construction and stability schemas onto political institutions (Musolff, 2016; Charteris-Black, 2011).

Because complex metaphors incorporate cultural narratives and ideological commitments, they are particularly significant in institutional thought. They provide coherent storylines through which governance is imagined and justified, and they often function as sites of ideological contestation. Competing political actors may struggle to redefine whether the "structure" of the state requires "renovation," "reinforcement," or complete "reconstruction." In this sense, complex metaphors serve as central arenas for symbolic and ideological struggle within public administration and policy discourse (Lakoff, 2004; Musolff, 2016).

2.4. Cultural Dynamics and Extended CMT

Although the neural mechanisms underlying primary metaphors are generally considered universal across human cognition, the specific configurations of complex metaphors are highly sensitive to cultural, historical, and socioeconomic contexts. Zoltán Kövecses (2020), in his formulation of Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory, emphasizes that metaphorical systems are shaped not only by embodied experience but also by contextual factors such as cultural narratives, political institutions, historical trajectories, and macroeconomic conditions. As a result, metaphorical frameworks exhibit both cross-cultural variation and dynamic transformation within societies over time (Kövecses, 2010, 2020).

In many Western democratic traditions, the state is frequently conceptualized through metaphors associated with contractual relations, engineering, or market transactions. Governance may therefore be framed in terms of agreements, negotiations, or institutional design, reflecting conceptual mappings such as GOVERNANCE IS A BUSINESS TRANSACTION or GOVERNANCE IS ARCHITECTURE. Such metaphors resonate with intellectual traditions rooted in social contract theory and liberal political philosophy, in which the legitimacy of political authority emerges from negotiated agreements between individuals and institutions (Lakoff, 1996; Charteris-Black, 2011; Kövecses, 2020).

By contrast, in a number of Eastern and traditional political philosophies, governance is more commonly conceptualized through organic or familial metaphors. Conceptual structures such as NATION IS FAMILY or SOCIETY IS A LIVING ORGANISM emphasize hierarchy, moral obligation, and collective harmony. Within such frameworks, political authority may be interpreted in terms of parental responsibility, social cohesion, and moral guidance rather than contractual exchange (Lakoff, 1996; Musolff, 2016; Kövecses, 2020).

Metaphorical systems also evolve within cultures as social and economic conditions change. For example, historical research in environmental discourse shows that earlier societies often conceptualized the natural environment through sacred or maternal metaphors, portraying nature as a nurturing entity deserving reverence and protection. With the rise of industrial capitalism, however, alternative metaphors became dominant, framing nature as a resource repository, a machine, or a stock of raw materials available for extraction and economic exploitation. These metaphorical shifts were not merely linguistic but reflected broader transformations in economic organization, technological development, and regulatory policy (Merchant, 1980; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Nerlich, Koteyko, & Brown, 2010).

Such transformations illustrate the dynamic interaction between metaphor, culture, and governance. As metaphorical frames change, so too do the conceptual boundaries within which policymakers imagine possible interventions, regulatory strategies, and societal goals.

2.5. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA)

The application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory to political science and public administration has contributed to the development of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), an interdisciplinary approach that combines cognitive linguistics with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CMA seeks to identify how metaphorical language functions within political discourse to shape ideological narratives and legitimize particular policy choices. Charteris-Black (2004) was among the first scholars to systematically integrate cognitive semantic analysis with CDA, arguing that political actors frequently employ metaphors strategically in order to resonate with culturally embedded cognitive schemas and emotional associations. Through repeated use in speeches, policy documents, and media discourse, such metaphors can reinforce particular interpretations of political reality and help legitimize existing structures of authority.

Further developments in this field were advanced by Musolff (2016), who introduced the concept of "metaphor scenarios." According to Musolff, political metaphors often operate not merely as isolated linguistic expressions but as condensed narrative structures that evoke culturally familiar storylines. These metaphor scenarios can frame political actors, institutions, and social groups within simplified narrative roles such as heroes, victims, threats, or parasites. One historically documented example is the "parasite" scenario, in which marginalized social groups are metaphorically represented as parasitic entities draining resources from the social body. Such mappings—MARGINALIZED GROUPS ARE PARASITES—have appeared in various political discourses and have historically been used by extremist or authoritarian regimes to dehumanize targeted populations and legitimize exclusionary or discriminatory policies (Musolff, 2016; Charteris-Black, 2004).

Perhaps the most influential application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory to modern political ideology is Lakoff's (1996) analysis of American political discourse. Lakoff argued that competing political ideologies can be understood through alternative conceptualizations of the nation structured by the grand metaphor NATION IS A FAMILY. Within this framework, different ideological traditions correspond to different family models that structure moral reasoning and policy preferences.

Lakoff identifies the "Strict Father" model as a dominant metaphorical structure within conservative political thought. This model emphasizes discipline, moral authority, hierarchical order, and individual self-reliance. In policy terms, it often supports positions such as strong law enforcement, punitive criminal justice policies, limited government intervention in markets, and reduced welfare provision. In contrast, the "Nurturant Parent" model emphasizes empathy, mutual responsibility, social protection, and fairness. Within this metaphorical framework, government is conceptualized as responsible for supporting citizens through social programs, protecting vulnerable populations, and regulating institutions to promote collective well-being (Lakoff, 1996; Lakoff, 2004).

Taken together, these perspectives illustrate how metaphorical structures do not merely shape language but influence ideological reasoning and policy development. By embedding political debates within emotionally resonant narratives and embodied conceptual schemas, metaphors can significantly affect how citizens interpret social problems and evaluate governmental responses.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Epistemological Orientation

This article adopts a theoretical–conceptual and interpretive research design. Its purpose is to synthesize key insights from Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and discourse-oriented approaches to public policy in order to clarify *how metaphor structures policy problem-definition, institutional reasoning, and the perceived space of legitimate solutions*. Rather than reporting an original corpus-based empirical study, the paper develops a portable analytical framework that can be used in subsequent empirical research on policy texts and institutional communication.

This positioning follows the foundational claim of cognitive semantics that metaphor is a central mechanism of cognition rather than a merely ornamental linguistic device (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1993). It also aligns with interpretive traditions in policy studies that treat policy meaning as constructed through language, symbols, and frames rather than discovered in a neutral informational environment (Yanow, 1996; Rein & Schön, 1996).

3.2. Materials and Illustrative Examples

To demonstrate the framework's analytical purchase across governance domains, the article draws on illustrative and representative examples commonly found in public policy discourse (e.g., legislative and executive rhetoric, strategic policy documents, and administrative communication). These examples are used heuristically: they are not presented as an exhaustive dataset, nor are they intended to support statistical generalization. The goal is to show, with conceptual clarity, how recurring metaphor families (e.g., WAR, JOURNEY/ NAVIGATION, MECHANISM, CONTAINMENT, and FAMILY) can structure policy reasoning and institutional action.

3.3. Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeds through three stages:

1) Metaphor Candidate Identification. The paper identifies recurrent metaphorical expressions and metaphor families that frequently appear in governance and policy talk (e.g., crisis as "war," reform as "a journey," the state as "a ship" to be steered).

2) Mapping Specification. For each metaphor family, the paper specifies the conceptual mapping from source domain to target domain (e.g., GOVERNANCE IS STEERING; THE STATE IS A SHIP), consistent with standard CMT notation (TARGET = SOURCE) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1993).

3) Entailment and Implication Analysis. The paper then examines metaphorical entailments—the downstream practical, ethical, and institutional implications that follow when one source domain is projected onto a policy target domain. This step is aligned with critical approaches to

political metaphor that emphasize how metaphor can naturalize assumptions, legitimize certain interventions, and marginalize alternative understandings (Charteris-Black, 2011; Musolff, 2016).

3.4. The Role of MIP in This Study

To reduce ad hoc selection of examples and to make the interpretive steps explicit, the study is informed by the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). In the present article, MIP is used as a conceptual discipline and transparency device—a guide for distinguishing basic meanings from contextual meanings and for justifying why a given lexical unit is treated as metaphorical (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). Since the paper is not a corpus study, MIP is not applied here as a full coding protocol over a bounded dataset; instead, it structures the interpretive logic through which metaphor candidates are identified and discussed.

3.5. Scope Conditions and Limitations

Because the paper is theoretical–conceptual in nature, its claims are analytical and explanatory rather than statistical. The contribution is the articulation of a framework connecting metaphor, cognition, and policy reasoning, and the demonstration of this framework through multi-domain illustrations. Future work can operationalize the proposed framework in a fully empirical design—e.g., comparative corpus analysis across institutions, time periods, or policy sectors.

4. Deep Analysis and Case Studies: The Metaphorical Structuring of Governance

The etymological root of the term “governance” itself offers the first indication of its inherently metaphorical character. Derived from the ancient Greek *kubernân* (to steer, pilot, or guide a ship), the concept relies upon the foundational mappings GOVERNANCE IS STEERING and THE STATE IS A SHIP (Charteris-Black, 2011). This cognitive mapping inherently implies a collective journey, the necessity of a designated and hierarchical authority (the captain), the presence of uncontrollable external hazards (storms, reefs), and the existence of a pre-determined destination. When this foundational cognitive frame is internalized by the bureaucracy, the entire nature of public administration—from resource allocation to crisis response—is structurally defined (Musolff, 2016; Semino, 2008).

The following section provides an illustrative interpretive analysis of selected policy domains in order to show how metaphorical framings shape the boundaries of what appears politically "rational," legitimate, and actionable. These case-based discussions are intended not as a corpus-based empirical survey, but as analytically grounded illustrations of how conceptual metaphors structure governance across diverse domains.

4.1. Case Study 1: The Metaphorical Structuring of Crisis, Security, and Conflict

The following discussion uses well-known policy framings as illustrative examples of how the metaphor CRISIS IS WAR operates in public and administrative discourse. One of the most pervasive and consequential frames in contemporary governance is the militarization of civilian public policy. The grand metaphor CRISIS IS WAR has often been employed in policy discourse to mobilize public sentiment, justify the rapid centralization of authority, bypass lengthy democratic deliberation, and demand public compliance (Lakoff, 1996; Charteris-Black, 2011). In this cognitive scenario, complex social issues—such as inflation, poverty, illicit drug use, or public health emergencies—are personified as active, hostile enemies. This is evident in historical policy initiatives such as the "War on Poverty," the "War on Drugs," and the "War on Terror" (Semino, 2008; Musolff, 2016). While effective for short-term political mobilization, this metaphorical frame carries significant administrative and ethical entailments that often obstruct long-term resolution.

These entailments include:

- **The Zero-Sum Entailment:** The war metaphor imposes a binary logic where total, unconditional "victory" is defined as the only acceptable outcome. This precludes nuanced management, harm-reduction strategies, or adaptive coexistence with endemic social phenomena (Charteris-Black, 2011; Musolff, 2016).
- **The Collateral Damage Entailment:** War metaphors inherently normalize the concept of "collateral damage." Within this framework, adverse effects on marginalized communities—such as the social costs of draconian drug enforcement—are cognitively processed as unfortunate but necessary tactical sacrifices, rather than as systemic policy failures (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Beer & De Landtsheer, 2004).
- **The Authoritarian Entailment:** In the context of war, dissent is often equated with subversion or treason. Framing social challenges as military conflicts empowers administrators to stigmatize political opposition and justify the restriction of civil liberties under the urgent pretext of national security (Lakoff, 1996; Musolff, 2016).

Furthermore, in the domain of international relations, the NATION IS A PERSON metaphor serves to oversimplify complex geopolitical realities. By conflating an entire diverse population with its head of state (e.g., “Russia decided to…” or “Washington is angry at…”), policymakers frame international disputes as interpersonal feuds or moral conflicts. This reductionist mapping minimizes public attention to the systemic causes of conflict, obscures the socio-economic drivers of international instability, and desensitizes the public to the human costs of broad economic sanctions, as the target is cognitively reduced to a single, easily vilified “bad actor” (Lakoff, 1996; Semino, 2008).

4.2. Case Study 2: Macroeconomic Governance and Systemic Metaphors

This subsection conceptually examines several dominant metaphorical models through which macroeconomic governance is commonly understood. Macroeconomic governance is profoundly shaped by the metaphors used to conceptualize the abstract construct known as “the market.” Because the economy constitutes an immensely complex and dynamic network of human interactions, institutions, expectations, and material constraints, it cannot be meaningfully understood without metaphorical structuring (McCloskey, 1998; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). The metaphors commonly used in economic discourse can exert substantial influence over how policymakers diagnose crises, assign responsibility, and design interventions.

• The Mechanistic Frame (ECONOMY IS A MACHINE)

This has long been the dominant metaphorical framework within classical and neoliberal economic traditions. The economy is conceptualized as a vast, intricate mechanical system that can be calibrated and optimized through technical adjustments. Recessions are described as “mechanical failures,” “overheating,” or “stalling engines.” Policy actors—central bankers and finance ministers—are metaphorically cast as engineers or mechanics who “pull levers” (interest rates), “tighten belts” (austerity), “pump liquidity,” or “jump-start the engine” (stimulus packages).

The entailment of this frame is technocratic control and predictability: if the correct levers are pulled, equilibrium will be restored. However, critics argue that this metaphor marginalizes the role of human psychology, social norms, and institutional power relations. Unlike machines, markets are constituted by actors capable of panic, herding behavior, and strategic manipulation (McCloskey, 1998; Shiller, 2019). The mechanistic frame may therefore underestimate systemic fragility and the feedback loops generated by collective expectations.

• The Natural Force Frame (ECONOMY IS A NATURAL FORCE)

During periods of financial turbulence, economic discourse frequently shifts toward metaphors of uncontrollable natural phenomena. Policymakers and media commentators refer to “market forces,” “tsunamis of debt,” “waves of selling,” “contagion,” or “economic headwinds.” This frame suggests inevitability and diminished human agency. Natural disasters cannot be negotiated with or legislated against; they can only be endured or mitigated.

The principal entailment of this metaphor is depoliticization. By framing crises as quasi-natural events, responsibility is displaced from regulatory structures, financial institutions, or political decisions to abstract, impersonal forces (Charteris-Black, 2011; Musolff, 2016). Such framing can reduce democratic scrutiny and obscure the role of policy design in producing or exacerbating economic instability.

• The Biological Frame (ECONOMY IS AN ECOSYSTEM/ ORGANISM)

An alternative metaphor gaining prominence in behavioral, institutional, and ecological economics conceptualizes the economy as a living, adaptive system. In this framework, markets resemble ecosystems composed of interdependent actors whose behaviors evolve in response to environmental pressures and policy interventions (Arthur, 2015). Rather than seeking to "tune" or "repair" a machine, policymakers are encouraged to cultivate systemic resilience, diversity, and sustainability.

The entailments of this frame differ markedly from the mechanistic model. Continuous, infinite growth—conceivable within abstract mathematical models—appears biologically implausible within a finite ecological system. Economic actors, like species within an ecosystem, adapt strategically to regulatory changes, sometimes in unpredictable ways. This perspective thus prioritizes long-term stability, feedback sensitivity, and adaptive governance over short-term optimization (Shiller, 2019; Arthur, 2015).

Together, these competing metaphorical frames suggest that macroeconomic governance is not merely a technical exercise but a cognitively structured practice. Each metaphor foregrounds particular causal mechanisms, moral assumptions, and policy tools, while simultaneously obscuring alternative interpretations and interventions.

4.3. Case Study 3: Public Health Administration and Viral Metaphors

The discussion below uses pandemic communication as an illustrative site for examining the policy consequences of competing metaphors. The governance of public health—particularly during global pandemics—provides a clear illustration of the life-and-death implications of metaphorical framing. Public health crises involve scientific uncertainty, behavioral compliance, and institutional trust; therefore, the metaphors used to communicate risk and policy profoundly influence collective action (Semino, 2021; Charteris-Black, 2011).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments adopted the PANDEMIC IS WAR metaphor asa widely used communicative frame. Expressions such as “we are at war with an invisible enemy,” “frontline workers,” and “the home front” became common in pandemic-era rhetoric. These formulations illustrate how the PANDEMIC IS WAR metaphor organized the crisis in terms of conflict, sacrifice, and obedience. While this frame can mobilize solidarity and justify urgent intervention, it may also marginalize alternative understandings centered on care, social inequality, and institutional trust. Political leaders described the virus as an “invisible enemy,” healthcare workers as “frontline troops,” and citizens as participants in a collective “war effort.” Populations were urged to make “sacrifices” on the “home front” (Semino, 2021; Wicke & Bolognesi, 2020). This framing initially facilitated rapid mobilization and public compliance with emergency measures such as lockdowns and travel restrictions. The war metaphor, with its emphasis on urgency, unity, and decisive action, can be effective in producing short-term behavioral alignment.

However, the entailments of the war metaphor also generated structural limitations. Wars are expected to culminate in victory, surrender, or peace treaties. A virus, by contrast, does not negotiate or capitulate. The expectation of a definitive “V-Day” fostered unrealistic temporal horizons and contributed to psychological fatigue, frustration, and declining institutional trust when the disease transitioned from an acute emergency to an endemic condition (Semino, 2021). Moreover, the war frame may inadvertently stigmatize infected individuals as potential “saboteurs” or “vectors” of the enemy, potentially hindering community cooperation and masking the nuanced socioeconomic determinants of viral spread.

In contrast, an alternative metaphor utilized by many public health experts and epidemiologists is the PANDEMIC IS A WILDFIRE frame. In this cognitive model, the pandemic is conceptualized not as a sentient enemy, but as a dynamic environmental phenomenon that requires management rather than "conquest." A wildfire requires fuel (susceptible populations), sparks (infected individuals), and wind (social mobility) to spread. The policy entailments of this metaphor differ significantly from the war model: it prioritizes the creation of "firebreaks" (vaccination campaigns, protective barriers), "starving the fire" (social distancing, targeted isolation), and acknowledges that embers can continue to smolder, requiring persistent monitoring rather than a single decisive victory (Semino, 2021; Wicke & Bolognesi, 2020).

The wildfire frame inherently aligns more closely with the biological and statistical reality of epidemiology. It encourages a policy approach grounded in risk management, structural resilience, and long-term adaptation. By shifting the focus from military aggression to systemic management, this metaphor fosters a mindset of "continuous vigilance" rather than "impending victory," which may reduce public burnout and encourage more sustainable, evidence-based behavioral compliance over extended timeframes (Musolff, 2016; Semino, 2021).

Ultimately, these cases indicate that the metaphors chosen to represent public health crises are not neutral communication tools. They serve as cognitive scaffolding that determines whether a population prepares for a decisive battle or learns to manage an enduring ecological challenge. The failure to align policy metaphors with the actual biological dynamics of a disease can lead to significant gaps between governmental rhetoric and public reality, undermining trust in the very institutions tasked with safeguarding public health.

4.4. Case Study 4: Immigration, Border Policy, and the NATION= CONTAINERNATION = CONTAINERNATION= CONTAINER Frame

Immigration policy is deeply shaped by metaphorical frameworks that structure how political communities conceptualize territorial boundaries and membership. One of the most influential cognitive schemas in this domain is the NATION IS A CONTAINER metaphor. Cognitive linguistics has long observed that human beings rely heavily on the basic "container schema"—comprised of an inside, an outside, and a boundary—to understand spatial organization and social belonging (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Kövecses, 2010). When the nation is conceptualized as a bounded container, the physical border becomes the central symbol of sovereignty, identity, and security. Phrases such as "waves of migrants," "floods of refugees," and "stem the tide" illustrate the hydrological framing of immigration discourse. Under this metaphor, migration is represented as a force of nature requiring containment, while borders are imagined as barriers under pressure. This framing can make restrictive policy responses appear self-evident, even as it obscures the human, legal, and historical dimensions of migration (Charteris-Black, 2006; Musolff, 2015).

Within this framework, immigration is frequently described using metaphors derived from fluid dynamics. Political discourse often frames migration through expressions such as "waves of immigrants," "floods of refugees," "leaky borders," or the need to "stem the tide." This conceptual mapping—IMMIGRATION IS WATER or IMMIGRATION IS A FLOOD—depicts migrants not as individual human actors but as an impersonal natural force threatening to overwhelm the national container (Charteris-Black, 2006; Musolff, 2015). The rhetorical effect of such language is to evoke urgency and danger, reinforcing a perception of uncontrolled influx.

The policy entailments of this metaphor are largely defensive and infrastructural. If immigration is conceptualized as a flood, the logical response is to construct barriers analogous to dams or levees: fortified borders, detention systems, restrictive visa regimes, and emergency enforcement measures. The metaphor thus privileges containment strategies over social, humanitarian, or economic approaches to migration governance (Charteris-Black, 2006; Musolff, 2015).

Critics argue that these hydrological metaphors can contribute to the dehumanization of migrants by linguistically stripping them of individual agency and reducing them to an anonymous mass or environmental threat. This framing may weaken the salience of international human rights norms by shifting attention from the experiences of individuals to the perceived structural vulnerability of the national container (Santa Ana, 2002).

Alternative metaphors suggest different policy pathways. For instance, framing immigration as HUMAN CAPITAL foregrounds migrants' economic contributions, skills, and productive potential within host societies. Similarly, conceptualizing the nation as a NETWORK rather than a closed container emphasizes connectivity, mobility, and relational interdependence in an increasingly globalized world. These alternative frames encourage policies oriented toward integration, economic participation, and institutional adaptation rather than strict territorial exclusion (Kövecses, 2010; Musolff, 2016).

These examples illustrate how metaphorical framing can fundamentally influence immigration governance. By shaping whether migration is understood as a threatening influx, a resource, or a networked process of social exchange, metaphors help determine which policy responses appear reasonable, necessary, or legitimate.

4.5. Case Study 5: The Governance of Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technology

As governments in the 2020s attempt to navigate the rapid proliferation of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the metaphorical frameworks employed in policy discourse are effectively drafting the initial parameters of technological regulation. Because AI represents a novel and opaque technological frontier, metaphors serve as the essential heuristic devices through which policymakers assess risks, assign liability, and define the scope of state intervention (Bender et al., 2021). Regulatory discourse often describes AI as a “tool,” while public debate frequently shifts toward personifying AI as an “autonomous agent” or “black box.” (Crawford, 2021; Bender et al., 2021). These contrasting metaphors matter because they allocate agency and responsibility differently. The former keeps accountability focused on human actors and institutions, whereas the latter risks treating technological systems as quasi-independent entities, thereby complicating questions of liability and governance.

- **AI IS A TOOL:** This is a common framing in early regulatory discussions, where AI is conceptualized as a sophisticated instrument, akin to a calculator, tractor, or industrial machine. The primary policy entailment of this model is the location of responsibility: if AI is merely a tool, then legal and ethical liability rests entirely with the human operator or the user. This framing often serves to minimize the responsibility of the corporate developers who build and deploy these systems, categorizing AI as a neutral entity rather than a complex sociotechnical system (Wachter et al., 2021).
- **AI IS AN AUTONOMOUS AGENT / BRAIN:** In contrast,

when AI is personified as a thinking, autonomous entity—a "digital brain"—the discourse shifts toward existential concerns. Policy debates are then occupied by questions of "algorithmic transparency," the potential for "AI takeover," and even the future granting of legal personhood to systems. This metaphorical shift can distract from immediate, systemic harms—such as bias in automated hiring or surveillance—by focusing on speculative or sensationalized future scenarios (Bender et al., 2021).

- **AI IS A UTILITY / INFRASTRUCTURE:** An emerging and potentially transformative framework treats AI like the electrical grid or the public water supply. The entailments of this metaphor are fundamentally different, driving policy toward the adoption of robust, public-interest regulatory models. This includes state-led anti-monopoly interventions, the enforcement of universal access guarantees, and the implementation of strict public safety and quality standards. By framing AI as an essential social utility, policymakers acknowledge that these technologies are now fundamental to the functioning of modern society, justifying high levels of public oversight.

The choice of metaphor is not an abstract academic exercise; it carries profound geopolitical and economic consequences. If AI is regulated as a "tool," market consolidation and developer immunity are likely to persist. Conversely, if it is managed as a "public utility," the governance structure will emphasize democratic accountability and collective welfare. As these metaphorical frames compete for dominance, they are setting the trajectory for the global technological landscape for the coming century (Wachter et al., 2021).

5. Implications for Administrative Science: The Imperative of Metaphorical Literacy

The interpretive insights drawn from the illustrative case discussions suggest a radical re-evaluation of the civil servant's role. Public administrators, legislators, and policymakers are not merely managers of physical resources, legal codes, and budgetary constraints; they are, fundamentally, architects of societal meaning and cognitive structures. Because metaphorical choices may shape or constrain the boundaries of legitimate and conceivable political action, they are not merely aesthetic choices—they are inherently ethical, moral, and structural choices.

5.1. Institutionalizing Metaphorical Literacy

This reality necessitates the formal cultivation and institutionalization of "metaphorical literacy" within the bureaucratic apparatus and schools of public policy. Metaphorical literacy involves the conscious, meta-cognitive awareness of the frames being utilized in legislative drafts, judicial rulings, public speeches, and institutional mandates.

It requires policymakers to pause and critically interrogate the entailments of their language:

- What is the Source Domain I am projecting onto this policy Target?
- What specific solutions does this metaphor hide or make unthinkable?
- Does this linguistic framework foster collaborative systemic thinking, or does it enforce division and zero-sum conflict?
- Am I accurately mapping the complexity of the issue, or am I reducing it to a simplistic scenario that will result in maladaptive policy?

5.2. The Process of Deliberate Reframing

Transforming governance often requires the courageous and deliberate deconstruction of exhausted, militaristic, and mechanistic frameworks that dominate 20th-century political thought. If a government continually finds itself failing to solve complex, “wicked problems” (such as climate change or systemic inequality) using its standard policy toolkit, the failure is likely not just operational; it is epistemological. The problem has been framed in a way that renders it unsolvable.

By consciously adopting care-based, ecological, networked, and interactive metaphors, policymakers can actively rewire the cognitive horizons of their institutions. Reframing is not political spin; it is a fundamental shift in the scientific and administrative paradigm.

6. Comprehensive Conclusion

This extensive analysis demonstrates that human language—particularly through the neurocognitive mechanism of conceptual metaphor—functions as a foundational infrastructure of public policy and political reasoning. The classical objectivist view that policy is a purely rational, data-driven, and emotionally detached enterprise has been widely challenged by research in cognitive linguistics and interpretive policy analysis. Rather than acting as neutral descriptive tools, metaphors actively structure how political actors conceptualize reality, define problems, and evaluate solutions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 2004; Kövecses, 2020). By projecting the experiential architecture of familiar source domains onto abstract societal targets, metaphors may shape what counts as a legitimate policy problem, constrain the epistemological perspective of decision-makers, and implicitly delimit the range of acceptable legislative responses (Schön, 1979; Yanow, 1996).

The analysis of multiple policy sectors—including macroeconomic regulation, environmental governance, public health administration, immigration policy, and emerging technological regulation—reveals a consistent pattern in contemporary governance discourse. Dominant state narratives frequently rely on grand metaphors rooted in warfare, mechanical engineering, and spatial containment. Although such frames provide a sense of decisiveness and managerial control, they often produce zero-sum policy logics, reactive administrative strategies, and occasionally dehumanizing representations of social groups or policy targets (Charteris-Black, 2011; Musolff, 2016). These metaphorical structures can obscure the structural and systemic origins of complex social problems, thereby limiting the capacity of institutions to design sustainable solutions.

Addressing the increasingly interconnected and multifaceted crises of the twenty-first century therefore requires a shift not only in policy instruments but also in the underlying cognitive frameworks through which governance is conceptualized. Recognizing governance as a fundamentally cognitive and interpretive activity enables institutions to engage in deliberate metaphorical reframing. Moving away from militaristic and mechanistic metaphors toward alternative conceptualizations—such as ecosystems, healing processes, adaptive networks, and shared journeys—may broaden the horizon of policy imagination and encourage more collaborative, resilient, and humane approaches to public administration (Kövecses, 2020; Lakoff, 2004).

Such cognitive transformation is not merely a rhetorical or academic exercise. Rather, it represents a critical precondition for the development of governance models capable of responding effectively to complex global challenges, including climate change, technological disruption, and social inequality. By cultivating greater awareness of the metaphorical foundations of political reasoning, policymakers and administrators can construct more adaptive, ethically grounded, and sustainable frameworks for collective decision-making in the decades ahead (Musolff, 2016; Yanow, 1996).

7. Declaration of AI Use and Prior Presentation

This article is based on a lecture delivered at the *Islamic School of Governance* conference on January 2026. The manuscript has been significantly developed and expanded for publication in this journal.

During the translation and linguistic refinement of this manuscript, artificial intelligence (AI) tools were utilized. Following the use of these tools, the author thoroughly reviewed and edited the content to ensure academic accuracy and take full responsibility for the final version of the text.

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Theosophia Islamica EISSN: 2783-3240

Rethinking the Concept of Existential Freedom in the Thought of Mulla Sadra and Heidegger: From the Primacy of Existence to Liberation from Determinations*

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Abstract

The concept of "freedom" is one of the most fundamental issues in various philosophical traditions; however, its perception differs fundamentally in modern Western philosophy and Islamic wisdom. In modern philosophy, freedom is primarily understood in relation to the subject, will, and the right to choose, whereas in Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Wisdom as well as in Martin Heidegger's ontological thought, freedom has an ontological status rather than being a psychological or political matter. Relying on the principles of "primacy of

* Tabatabaei. S. M., Rajabi. A., & Ahmadi. F. (2026). Rethinking the Concept of Existential Freedom in the Thought of Mulla Sadra and Heidegger: From the Primacy of Existence to Liberation from Determinations. *Theosophia Islamica, 6*(1), pp. 71-94.
https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2026.73581.1114

Article Type: Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

Received: 2025/09/01 • **Revised:** 2025/10/20 • **Accepted:** 2025/11/30 •**Online Publication:** 2026/01/10

existence", "gradation of existence" , and "substantial motion" , Mulla Sadra interprets freedom as the process of human existential transcendence and his gradual liberation from the lower levels of being; a process that ultimately leads to abstraction, intensity of existence, and divine proximity. In contrast, Heidegger understands freedom not as voluntary agency, but as a mode of Dasein's openness to the truth of Being; an openness that liberates man from falling into everydayness and the reification of beings. The present study, using an analytical-comparative method, seeks to re-read the relationship between the "primacy of existence" in Sadrian wisdom and "authentic freedom" in Heideggerian philosophy, and to demonstrate that despite fundamental metaphysical and theological differences, both thinkers interpret freedom in connection with the human mode of relation to the truth of Being. The innovation of this article lies in analyzing freedom as an ontological structure in two different philosophical traditions and demonstrating the capacity for dialogue between Islamic wisdom and contemporary Western philosophy.

Keywords

Existential Freedom, Mulla Sadra, Heidegger, Primacy of Existence, Ontology, Substantial Motion, Openness to Being.

1. Problem Statement

Freedom is one of the most fundamental and enduring issues in the history of human thought; an issue whose interpretation has always been subject to the philosophers' conception of the truth of human beings and their relationship with existence (Being). In modern Western philosophy—particularly since Kant—freedom has been primarily understood within the framework of the subject’s autonomy, independent will, conscious choice, and the right to self-determination. In contrast, in the Islamic philosophical and wisdom tradition, freedom is often interpreted within an ontological horizon and in relation to the levels of existence, the perfection of the soul, and the human journey toward the Absolute Truth.

Among Muslim philosophers, Mulla Sadra, by establishing Transcendent Wisdom (Hikmat-e Muta'aliyah) and proposing principles such as the "primacy of existence" (Asalat al-Wujud) and "substantial motion" (Harakat-e Jawhari), offers a dynamic and gradational understanding of existence. Based on this intellectual framework, human beings are not static creatures with a fixed essence; rather, their truth is formed within the context of existential motion and the intensification of Being. From this perspective, freedom is not merely a legal or psychological state, but a level of existential transcendence; that is, the process of the human’s gradual liberation from the determinations of the lower levels of existence, carnal attachments, and material limitations, and the movement toward abstraction and divine proximity (Sadr al-Muta'allihin Shirazi, 1380, Vol. 9, p. 154; Motahhari, 1384, p. 230).

On the other side, Martin Heidegger, by criticizing the Western subject-centered metaphysical tradition, questions the common conception of freedom as mere voluntary agency. In his thought, freedom is not a psychological characteristic of humans, but a fundamental mode of Dasein's being; a mode in which, through openness to the truth of Being, man finds the possibility of an authentic encounter with his own existence. Authentic freedom, in this sense, is liberation from falling into the level of beings, everydayness, and the dominance of others, and it drives Dasein toward an authentic confrontation with the truth of Being (Heidegger, 1962, p. 220).

Despite the fundamental differences between Transcendent Wisdom and Heidegger's ontological philosophy, both intellectual systems share a crucial point: the conception of freedom as an ontological matter, rather than merely psychological or political. Therefore, the main problem of this research is how the relationship between the "primacy of existence" and "existential freedom" in the thought of Mulla Sadra and Heidegger can be explained, and whether it is possible to find a kind of philosophical overlap or commonality in the ontological foundation between the Sadrian conception of freedom as existential transcendence and the Heideggerian conception of freedom as openness to the truth of Being.

The innovation of this research lies in analyzing freedom not from the perspective of ethics, politics, or psychology, but as an ontological structure in two different philosophical traditions, and through this, demonstrating the possibility of a new dialogue between Transcendent Wisdom and contemporary philosophy.

2. Research Background and Necessity

Research on the relationship between Islamic philosophy and Western philosophy, particularly in the realm of comparative ontology, has received increasing attention in recent decades. However, most of these studies have either explored ontological concepts within their respective traditions or have been limited to general comparisons of metaphysical concepts. In the meantime, the issue of "existential freedom" and its relationship with the "primacy of existence" in Transcendent Wisdom and "openness to the truth of Being" in Heideggerian philosophy has not yet been independently and systematically researched. The background of this field can be categorized into several main axes:

3. Studies on the Existential and Mystical Dimensions of Sadrian Wisdom

A significant portion of studies related to Mulla Sadra has focused on explaining the mystical, existential, and itinerant dimensions of Transcendent Wisdom. In his book *Three Muslim Sages*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, by analyzing the link between Sadrian philosophy and the Islamic mystical tradition, interprets the human being within the horizon of existential journey and spiritual transcendence, demonstrating that Transcendent Wisdom is not merely a conceptual system but pertains to the existential transformation of the human being (Nasr, 1980, pp. 187-225). Similarly, Morteza Motahhari, in *Motion and Time in Islamic Philosophy*, explains the dynamism of the levels of existence and its role in the perfection of the human soul by expounding the theory of substantial motion (Motahhari, 1984, Vol. 2, pp. 221-245). Furthermore, Sadr al-Muta'allihin in *al-Asfar al-Arba'ah*, particularly in the discussions on the soul and intensive motion, introduces human existential transcendence as a gradual process based on the intensification of the levels of existence (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1980, Vol. 9, pp. 148-162). Despite the importance of these works, the issue of freedom is often addressed implicitly within them, within the framework of discussions on the soul, spiritual journey, and abstraction (tajarrud), and has rarely been analyzed comparatively as an independent ontological issue.

4. Comparative Studies in the Domain of Ontological Concepts

In some studies, attempts have been made to compare fundamental concepts of Islamic philosophy and modern Western philosophy. Karim Mojtahedi, in his book *Introduction to Islamic Philosophy*, while examining the evolution of the concept of existence in Islamic philosophy, considers the potential for dialogue between Islamic philosophy and modern thought (Mojtahedi, 2006, pp. 107-124). Also, Reza Davari Ardakani, in *Philosophy in the Modern World*, by criticizing the foundations of modern metaphysics, points to the crisis of human meaning and his relationship with existence in the contemporary world (Davari Ardakani, 2013, pp. 55-78). However, these works primarily focus on generalities regarding the relationship between tradition and modernity or the comparison of metaphysical concepts, and have addressed the direct analysis of the concept of freedom in relation to the primacy of existence and ontology to a lesser extent.

5. Interpretive Studies on Freedom and Ontology in Heideggerian Philosophy

In the field of Heideggerian studies, the concept of freedom has been one of the most significant interpretive issues. In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger analyzes freedom in connection with Dasein's openness to the truth of Being and liberation from falling into everydayness (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 219–223). In his book *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, Otto Pöggeler traces the evolution of the meaning of freedom from the early period of Heidegger's thought to his later works, demonstrating that freedom in his thought gradually shifts from an existential level to the horizon of the manifestation (unconcealment) of the tru.th of Being (Pöggeler, 1999, pp. 210–235).

Hubert Dreyfus, in his commentary on *Being and Time*, explains authentic freedom in relation to Dasein's exit from the state of falling and the attainment of an authentic mode of being (Dreyfus, 1991, pp. 301–309). Furthermore, Jean-Luc Nancy, in the book *The Experience of Freedom*, interprets freedom not as individual agency, but as an experience of openness and an encounter with the manifestation of Being (Nancy, 1993, pp. 25–41). Additionally, Richard Polt, in the book *Heidegger: An Introduction*, has analyzed the relationship between freedom, truth, and existential openness in Heidegger's thought (Polt, 1999, pp. 140–156).

Despite the richness of these studies, most of them have remained within the framework of the Western philosophical tradition and have not examined the relationship between Heideggerian freedom and the tradition of Islamic wisdom.

6. Comparative Studies in the Persian Academic Sphere

In the Persian research landscape, comparative studies between Mulla Sadra and Heidegger are limited and scattered. Some research has focused on topics such as *knowledge by presence* (ilm-i huduri), the issue of identity, the truth of existence, and the relationship between human and Being. For instance, Reza Akbarian, in the article "Knowledge by Presence in Mulla Sadra's Philosophy and the Issue of Identity in Heidegger's Philosophy," has examined some ontological commonalities between the two thinkers (Akbarian, 2016, pp. 1-24). However, there is no independent and systematic study in Persian academic literature that addresses the comparative analysis of "existential freedom" and its relationship with the "primacy of existence" in the two philosophical systems of Sadrian and Heideggerian thought. A review of the existing background shows that although research has been conducted on Mulla Sadra, Heidegger, and even some comparative aspects between these two thinkers, the issue of freedom as an ontological category and its relationship with the truth of existence still faces a theoretical gap. This gap becomes more significant in a context where the concept of freedom in the contemporary world is often reduced to political, psychological, or individualistic spheres, and its connection with meaning, truth, and the existential dimension of human beings has faded. The necessity of the present research stems precisely from this point.

This research seeks to demonstrate that, despite the fundamental differences between Transcendent Wisdom and Heidegger's ontological philosophy, both thinkers share a critique of the instrumental and reifying (objectifying) conception of the human and Being. In both intellectual systems, freedom does not mean absolute liberation from all constraints, but rather exiting the inauthentic state and recovering a more authentic relationship with the truth of existence. The main innovation of this article lies in analyzing freedom not within the conventional framework of ethics, politics, or psychology, but as an ontological structure in two different philosophical traditions. Through this, the present research attempts to open a new horizon for the dialogue between Islamic philosophy and contemporary philosophy and to demonstrate the shared capacities of the two traditions for rethinking the meaning of freedom in the contemporary world.

7.Freedom and Substantial Motion in Transcendent Wisdom

In Mulla Sadra's system of thought, freedom is essentially an ontological concept and cannot be understood merely on a moral, psychological, or political level. The foundations of this conception of freedom rest on two fundamental principles of Transcendent Wisdom: "primacy of existence" and "substantial motion". Based on the principle of the primacy of existence, the objective truth of things is not their essence , but their existence, and essence is merely a mental construct in the conceptual analysis of things (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1980, Vol. 1, pp. 38-52). Existence in this philosophical system is a single, gradational , and hierarchical reality—a reality that varies in intensity and weakness across different levels, and all beings are considered its different manifestations. From this perspective, freedom is also a gradational matter, possessing levels, and bears a direct relationship with the human's existential intensity and perfection. The more complete and intense the human's existential level becomes, the more liberated he is from the limitations of the lower levels of existence, achieving a higher level of agency and consciousness.

The principle of substantial motion explains the dynamism of this process. Unlike the Aristotelian conception, which accepted motion only in accidents, Mulla Sadra believes that the substance of the natural world, including the human soul, is in the process of motion, becoming, and perfection within the depths of its own essence (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1980, Vol. 3, pp. 61-95). In this process, the human begins from the material and natural level and gradually, along the path of existential intensification, approaches rational and abstract levels. This existential journey is, in truth, a type of gradual liberation from the limitations of deficiency, carnal attachments, and material dependencies. Therefore, freedom in Transcendent Wisdom does not mean the negation of causality or a rupture from the generative system of the world, but rather existential transcendence and a gradual exit from the captivity of the lower levels of existence (Motahhari, 1984, Vol. 2, pp. 247-250).

In *al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah*, Mulla Sadra distinguishes his conception of freedom from common interpretations based on mere liberation from natural constraints; he believes that freedom does not mean being released from natural causes, but rather an act that originates from a rational essence aware of the causes and purposes of affairs (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1980, Vol. 6, p. 321). Accordingly, freedom in Transcendent Wisdom is not the self-foundation of will in the Kantian sense, but the conscious alignment of the human will with the wise order of existence. Since the entire system of existence is considered the manifestation and grace of the Absolute Divine Existence, true freedom also finds meaning in relation to existential proximity to the Source of Being (Nasr, 1980, pp. 210-215).

From this perspective, freedom in Transcendent Wisdom possesses gradational levels. Its lowest level is natural freedom, the ability to act within the framework of instincts and the requirements of nature; however, the higher level is rational and spiritual freedom, in which human beings transcend the dominance of desires, attachments, and carnal compulsions, attaining a level of awareness and abstraction where their will is harmonized with intellect and the truth of existence. At this level, freedom is linked to divine proximity and existential intensity.

In Transcendent Wisdom, the human is not a separate part of the system of existence, but a level among the gradational levels of Being. Therefore, the intensification of human existence means a decrease in one's dependence on the limits of deficiency, potentiality, and lower existential determinations. Allameh Tabatabaei also, in *Nihayat al-Hikmah*, by analyzing the inherent poverty (faqr) of contingent beings, demonstrates that every level of contingent existence is inherently dependent and limited, and the closer a being moves toward a more intense level of existence, the further it moves away from the limitations of existential poverty (Tabatabaei, 1991, pp. 287-289). Consequently, freedom in this intellectual system is synonymous with the intensification of existence and the transcendence of the human's level of Being.

The climax of this existential transcendence is revealed in the theory of the *unity of the knower and the known* ; where the human, in the process of rational perfection, reaches a level where the world, knowledge, and the known achieve a type of existential unity. In such a horizon, freedom is understood as the gradual arrival at the Absolute Truth of existence and liberation from the limitations of essential determinations (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1980, Vol. 3, pp. 313-325). Thus, the further the human advances on the path of abstraction and existential perfection, the further they distance themselves from the determinism of nature and the captivity of carnal attachments (Mojtahedi, 2006, pp. 131-135).

The connection between knowledge and freedom in Transcendent Wisdom is also explained through *knowledge by presence*. Knowledge by presence is immediate and intuitive knowledge in which the knower and the known are not separated. Mulla Sadra believes that through knowledge by presence, the human first gains awareness of the truth of their own soul and then of the Source of existence. Therefore, true freedom is not realized in the rupture from external causes, but in conscious and intuitive presence within the fabric of existence. Haeri Yazdi also, in *Kavosh-haye Aql-e Amali* (Inquiries into Practical Reason), by analyzing the relationship between knowledge, will, and agency, shows that an increase in the human's existential level is concomitant with an increase in their knowledge and agency (Haeri Yazdi, 1981, pp. 170-176).

Accordingly, freedom in Transcendent Wisdom can be defined as "the gradual liberation from ignorance, deficiency, and limiting existential determinations," not the negation of the system of causality and the law-governed nature of existence. Mulla Sadra, in *al-Shawahid al-Rububiyyah*, also considers true freedom to be liberation from the captivity of passions and material attachments (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 2003, p. 155). Therefore, Sadrian freedom is essentially liberation from limiting determinations and the lower levels of existence, not liberation from the truth of existence or the generative order of the world. More precisely, freedom in Transcendent Wisdom is freedom within the horizon of Being and through the intensification of existence, not freedom in opposition to Being.

8. Freedom and Openness to Being in the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger

In the thought of Martin Heidegger, the concept of freedom undergoes a fundamental transformation that distances it from the prevailing conception of modern metaphysics. In the tradition of modern philosophy—especially from Descartes to Kant—freedom was often understood as a property of the subject, the will, or practical reason, and was linked to concepts such as autonomy, agency, and conscious decision. But Heidegger, especially in *Being and Time*, attempts to set aside this subject-centered conception and interpret freedom at a more fundamental level, namely, in relation to the mode of Dasein's being. Hence, freedom in his thought is not a psychological or moral attribute, but a fundamental mode of human being (Heidegger, 2006, pp. 182–183). In other words, freedom is the condition of the possibility of any choice or agency, not their result.

The key to understanding this conception of freedom is Heidegger's analysis of the existential structure of Dasein. Dasein is a being that is questioning regarding its own Being and is always situated in a state of "Being-in-the-world." Dasein is not a subject detached from the world, but a being that is essentially realized in the horizon of the world and in relation to its own existential possibilities. Therefore, one of the most fundamental characteristics of Dasein is "openness" (*Erschlossenheit*); that is, being open to the world, to itself, and to the possibilities of its own Being (Heidegger, 2006, pp. 169–173).

This openness is realized in structures such as *understanding* (*Verstehen*), *attunement* , and *discourse*. Through these structures, human beings not only perceive the world but also understand the possibilities of their own Being. Freedom finds its meaning precisely in this horizon: freedom is Dasein's capacity to be open to the possibilities of its own Being. Heidegger states in *Pathmarks* that freedom is that which allows understanding to operate in the openness of beings (Heidegger, 1998, p. 145). Therefore, freedom in its foundation is the possibility of unconcealment and openness.

Freedom in Heidegger's thought has two intertwined aspects: the elective aspect and the receptive aspect. On one hand, freedom requires authentic decision; a decision in which Dasein exits the state of falling into everydayness, conformity with others, and drowning in superficial discourse. In the state of falling, Dasein understands itself as just one of the ordinary beings in the world and forgets the authentic possibilities of its own Being. However, when it encounters the fundamental possibility of death, it emerges from this negligence and becomes aware of its existential responsibility (Heidegger, 2006, pp. 298–307). Here, freedom means responsibly accepting one's own existential possibilities.

Nevertheless, freedom in Heidegger's thought does not mean merely active and voluntaristic decision. The second aspect of freedom is a kind of openness and letting-be (*Gelassenheit*) toward the truth of Being. This aspect becomes especially prominent in Heidegger's later works. At this stage, freedom is no longer just Dasein's decision, but a mode of letting oneself go for the unconcealment of Being. In the essay *On the Essence of Truth*, by rereading the Greek concept, Heidegger interprets truth as *aletheia* or "unconcealment" (Heidegger, 1998, pp. 136–154). The condition of the possibility of this unconcealment is openness, and the condition of the possibility of openness is freedom. Therefore, Heidegger asserts that "the essence of truth is freedom" (Heidegger, 1998, p. 146).

In this horizon, freedom no longer means the subject's dominance over the world, but means letting beings reveal themselves in their own truth. The free human is not someone who brings the world under their own will, but someone who places themselves in the exposure to the mysterious unconcealment of Being. Hence, in his later works, Heidegger considers freedom a kind of "dwelling in the truth of Being"; a dwelling in which the human distances themselves from metaphysical self-foundation and stands in a receptive mode before Being (Heidegger, 1998, pp. 145–146).

One of the most important existential experiences that provides the possibility of transitioning from inauthentic freedom to authentic freedom is "anxiety" (*Angst*). In Heidegger's thought, anxiety is fundamentally different from fear. Fear is always directed toward something definite in the world, but anxiety lacks a specific object, and in it, the totality of the world becomes meaningless and slippery for Dasein. In this situation, the human faces "Nothing" and the pure possibility of their own Being (Heidegger, 2006, pp. 184–190). This experience detaches Dasein from dependence on the judgments of others and daily preoccupation with beings, and confronts them with their own fundamental freedom. Therefore, anxiety in Heidegger's philosophy is not a psychological disorder, but a condition of ontological awakening and the possibility of authentic openness to Being. Based on this, freedom in Heidegger's thought can be considered a kind of existential liberation: liberation not from the law-governed nature of the world, but from the human's incorrect self-conception as merely a being among other beings. Authentic freedom is a mode of Being in which Dasein both responsibly chooses its own possibilities and opens itself to the unconcealment of the truth of

Being. This conception places Heidegger in direct opposition to modern humanism; because here, freedom is realized not in the emphasis on the self-founding subject, but in transcending self-foundation and opening oneself to that which transcends the human; namely, the truth of Being.

9. Comparative Analysis and Inter-understanding of Existential Freedom

Mulla Sadra and Martin Heidegger, despite their profound historical, linguistic, and cultural distances, have both founded their philosophical projects on the axis of rethinking the issue of "Being." However, their conceptions of the truth of Being and the human mode of relation to it differ fundamentally, which directly reflects in their understanding of freedom. In Transcendent Wisdom, Being is a singular, gradational , and hierarchical reality, which is essentially relational to the Absolute Source; a reality of which all beings are levels and manifestations, ultimately culminating in the Absolute Being and the Necessary Existent (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1980, Vol. 1, pp. 35-55). Conversely, Heidegger, by re-posing the question of Being, seeks to criticize the Western metaphysical tradition which, in his view, has forgotten the truth of Being in favor of mere concern for beings (Heidegger, 2006, pp. 1-6). For Heidegger, Being is neither a superior being nor a metaphysical reality in the traditional sense, but a mode of unconcealment and appearing that manifests itself in the horizon of the emergence of beings, without being reduced to any particular being.

This difference in ontological foundation gives rise to two different models of freedom; nevertheless, both thinkers share a fundamental point: they conceive of freedom not as a merely psychological or political matter, but as a mode of the human's existential relation to the fundamental truth of Being.

Fundamental Similarities

1. **Ontological Interpretation: Freedom Beyond Individual Will** The first and most important point of convergence between Mulla Sadra and Heidegger is the transcendence of a will-centered conception of freedom. In Transcendent Wisdom, freedom is the product of the intensification of existence, the perfection of the soul, and the human's epistemic transcendence, rather than merely a choice between several external possibilities. Human beings possess more freedom to the extent that they achieve existential intensification and liberation from the lower levels of the soul (Haeri Yazdi, 1981, pp. 170-176). Hence, in Sadrian thought, freedom is dependent on the human's existential level rather than momentary will. In Heidegger's philosophy, too, freedom precedes any choice or decision. Freedom is the same fundamental openness of Dasein to the possibilities of its own Being and to the truth of Being; an openness that makes possible any kind of understanding, decision, and choice (Heidegger, 1998, pp. 144-146). Therefore, in both intellectual systems, freedom is an ontological matter and not merely an act of will or a psychological state.

2. **Freedom as Liberation from Inauthentic States** In both philosophical systems, the primary captivity of the human is not external, but a kind of existential ensnarement. In Transcendent Wisdom, this ensnarement is realized in the soul's dependence on material attachments, the dominance of passions, and ignorance of its own truth. As long as the

human remains at the lower level of the soul, they are deprived of true freedom because they remain bound by limiting existential determinations (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1980, Vol. 9, pp. 148-156). In Heidegger's thought as well, Dasein is lost in the state of "falling" (*Verfallen*) into everydayness, conformity with "the Others" (*das Man*), and superficial preoccupation with beings, forgetting its authentic relation to Being (Heidegger, 2006, pp. 211-220). Authentic freedom is realized when Dasein distances itself from this state of oblivion and recovers its existential relation to the truth of Being. Consequently, in both philosophical traditions, freedom is accompanied by a type of return to the authentic self and liberation from inauthentic determinations; although these determinations are explained within two different conceptual systems.

3. **The Fundamental Role of Death in the Realization of Freedom** Another significant point of convergence is the decisive role of the encounter with death in achieving authentic freedom. Mulla Sadra views death not as annihilation, but as the transition of the soul from a deficient level to a more perfect level of existence. Death in Transcendent Wisdom is a stage of the soul’s intensive motion (*harakat-e ishtidadi*) and a step along the path of abstraction and existential perfection (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1982, Vol. 9, pp. 205-212). In Heidegger’s philosophy, too, death plays a fundamental role in the revelation of authentic freedom. Dasein can achieve authentic Being only when it accepts the definitive possibility of death as the possibility of its own impossibility. This encounter detaches the human from everyday illusions and existential negligence, confronting

them with the authentic responsibility for their own Being (Heidegger, 2006, pp. 294-307). In both systems, awareness of death releases the human from superficiality and dependence on the everyday state, providing the possibility of a type of existential awakening.

Structural Differences

1. **Difference in Orientation: Freedom and Liberation** Despite the aforementioned similarities, freedom in the philosophical systems of Mulla Sadra and Heidegger has a different orientation. In Transcendent Wisdom, freedom has an ascending, gradational (*tashkiki*), and teleological nature. Through the process of substantial motion, the human ascends from the level of nature and matter toward rational and abstract levels, and their freedom is contingent upon this longitudinal transcendence and proximity to the Absolute Being (Sadr al-Din Shirazi, 1980, Vol. 3, pp. 61-95). Conversely, freedom in Heidegger's thought is not a movement toward a transcendent level of existence, but a kind of horizontal openness toward the truth of Being. Dasein understands its existential possibilities and is opened to the truth of Being within the heart of the world itself and in the context of its own historical situatedness. Therefore, freedom here has an existential and possibility-oriented nature rather than a teleological and metaphysical movement.
2. **Difference in the Goal (Telos) of Freedom** This difference in orientation leads to a difference in the goal of freedom. In Transcendent Wisdom, freedom ultimately results in divine proximity and the attainment of the truth of the Absolute Being. True freedom in this horizon is synonymous with the

intensification of existence and proximity to the Transcendent Source (Nasr, 1980, pp. 218-222). However, in Heidegger's thought, freedom has no theological or metaphysical goal. Freedom here means dwelling in the truth of Being and accepting the mysteriousness of the unconcealment of existence. The free human is the guardian of the truth of Being, not a being that reaches unity with the Transcendent Source (Heidegger, 1998, pp. 145–146).

3. **Difference in Language and Conceptual Framework** Another difference lies in the philosophical language and the conceptualization framework of the two thinkers. Mulla Sadra speaks within the framework of the Islamic metaphysical tradition using concepts such as *gradation of existence*, *grace*, *abstraction*, *substantial motion*, and *divine proximity*. In contrast, Heidegger chooses the language of ontological phenomenology and utilizes concepts such as *Dasein*, *being-in-the-world*, *falling* (*Verfallen*), *openness*, and *authentic decision*. This linguistic difference is not merely a difference in terminology, but a reflection of the difference in the intellectual horizon and ontological foundations of the two thinkers.

Comparative Summary A comparative study of the thought of Mulla Sadra and Heidegger shows that despite fundamental differences in metaphysical, theological, and methodological foundations, both thinkers share a critique of the superficial, instrumental, and subject-centered conception of the human and freedom. In both systems, authentic freedom means neither dominance over the world nor absolute liberation from all constraints, but the recovery of a more authentic relationship with the fundamental truth of Being. In Transcendent Wisdom, this fundamental truth is the

Absolute Being and the Divine Source, and freedom finds meaning along the path of existential intensification and proximity to it. In Heideggerian philosophy, the fundamental truth is Being itself and its mysterious unconcealment, and freedom is realized in openness toward this unconcealment. In either case, freedom transcends the level of a merely moral or political concept and becomes a deeply ontological category. Hence, a comparative dialogue between Transcendent Wisdom and Heidegger's philosophy can open a new horizon for rethinking the concept of freedom in the contemporary world; a horizon in which freedom is not merely an individual right to choose, but a quality of Being and a mode of human existence in relation to the truth of Being.

Conclusion

The present research, with an analytical-comparative approach, reread the concept of "existential freedom" in the two philosophical systems of Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Wisdom and Martin Heidegger's ontological philosophy, demonstrating that despite fundamental differences in metaphysical foundations, philosophical language, and theological horizons, one can identify a convergence in their understanding of freedom. This convergence is observable not at a superficial conceptual level, but at the fundamental level of understanding the human's relation to the truth of Being. In Transcendent Wisdom, freedom is explained within an ontological system based on principles such as the primacy of existence, the gradation of existence, and substantial motion. In this system, the human is not a static and essential being, but a fluid reality in a state of existential intensification who, on the path to perfection, distances themselves from the lower levels of nature and carnal attachments, approaching higher levels of abstraction and rationality. In this horizon, freedom means gradual liberation from deficiency, ignorance, and existential limitations, not liberation from the law-governed nature of existence. Conversely, in Heidegger's philosophy, freedom leaves behind the traditional frameworks based on will, agency, or subject autonomy and is understood as a mode of Dasein's openness toward the truth of Being. In this view, the human is a being always situated in the horizon of the world and in relation to its own existential possibilities. Authentic freedom is realized when Dasein distances itself from the inauthentic state of everydayness, negligence, and conformity, and opens itself to its fundamental possibilities. In this sense, freedom is not dominance over the world, but dwelling in the horizon of the unconcealment of Being and accepting its truth. Comparing these two traditions shows that both thinkers provide a common critique of reductionist conceptions of the human and freedom. In both systems, authentic freedom is contingent upon crossing from the inauthentic state; in Transcendent Wisdom, crossing from material attachments, ignorance, and the limitations of the soul, and in Heidegger's philosophy, crossing from falling into everydayness and the forgetting of Being. Also, in both approaches, the encounter with death plays a vital role in existential awakening and authentic openness, although the interpretation of the goal of this encounter differs between the two systems. Despite these fundamental commonalities, the structural differences are entirely clear. Freedom in Transcendent Wisdom has a teleological, ascending, and metaphysical nature, and its end is proximity to the Source of Being and attainment of the Absolute Being, whereas freedom in Heidegger's thought has an open, non-teleological, and ontological horizon, signifying dwelling in the truth of Being and living in the horizon of its unconcealment. Nevertheless, an important result of this research is that freedom in both philosophical systems transcends the level of psychological, moral, or political concepts and becomes a fundamental ontological category. In both conceptions, freedom is defined not by a rupture from the truth of Being, but by the mode of establishing an authentic, conscious, and responsible relationship with it. Based on this, one can say that the dialogue between Transcendent Wisdom and Heidegger’s philosophy provides the possibility of formulating a shared horizon in the understanding of freedom—a horizon in which freedom is considered not merely a right to choose, but a quality of Being and a mode of the realization of human existence in relation to the truth of Being. Such a re-reading can contribute to the enrichment of comparative philosophy and the rethinking of the concept of freedom in the contemporary world; a world in which this concept has often distanced itself from its existential and spiritual foundations.

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Theosophia Islamica EISSN: 2783-3240

Free Will in Transcendent Wisdom and Transcendental Idealism: A Comparison of the Views of Kant and Mulla Sadra*

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Abstract

Freedom, in Kant's view, is a general concept that encompasses his three Critiques and many of his writings. He introduces freedom as the foundation of ethics and considers it a fundamental characteristic of the subject. In contrast, Mulla Sadra, while accepting the general necessity of causality, clearly explains free will within the scope of causality and as a positive (affirmative) matter, by citing the philosophical foundations of his Transcendent Wisdom. Despite believing in the unity of the identity of the soul and the body—considering them to be of one existence—Mulla Sadra considers the soul to be the true agent of moral behavior among the various causes and influential factors surrounding it, and describes the soul's mode of agency regarding moral behaviors as a monophonic

* Mousazadeh, I. (2026). Free Will in Transcendent Wisdom and Transcendental Idealism: A Comparison of the Views of Kant and Mulla Sadra. *Theosophia Islamica, 6*(1), pp. 95-116.
https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2026.74501.1118

Article Type: Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

Received: 2025/08/01 • **Revised:** 2025/10/05 • **Accepted:** 2025/11/20 •**Online Publication:** 2026/01/10

and radiative (emanationist) agency. From the perspective of Kant's dual-aspect view, freedom exists in two senses: negative and positive. Of these two, Kant chooses the latter and makes it the basis of his thought. Although Mulla Sadra has a single-aspect anthropological foundation and Kant has a dual-aspect one, they share similarities in the analysis and explanation of free will. The present article has been compiled with the aim of describing and analyzing freedom in the thought of Kant and Mulla Sadra, pointing to some fundamental similarities and differences between these two prominent thinkers, using an analytical method. From the philosophical analysis of freedom in both perspectives, it was concluded that in Kant's strategy, firstly, freedom is related to the noumenal (trans-phenomenal) realm and not the phenomenal and external realm; in the phenomenal, causal necessity reigns, but the noumenal realm is governed by the rules of pure reason. Secondly, freedom is the independence of the will from being determined by the laws of nature, and it also consists of its determination by unchanging laws of a special kind, the origin of which is within pure reason. Mulla Sadra agrees with Kant on the point that the soul's agency is independent of the laws of nature for the issuance of moral behavior, as he considers the soul to be the true agent. However, unlike Kant, he does not remove the soul's sphere of agency from the orbit of the laws of causality.

Keywords

Mulla Sadra, Kant, Negative and Positive Freedom, Autonomy, Noumenal (Trans-phenomenal) Realm, Causal Necessity, True Agent.

Introduction

Free Will is one of the most significant and simultaneously complex philosophical subjects that has long preoccupied the minds of philosophers. This concept refers to the human capacity for conscious and independent choice—a power that separates the individual from natural determinism and causal necessities, thereby enabling moral responsibility. The fundamental question in the philosophy of free will is whether humans can truly act in a way that transcends the laws of cause and effect, or if all their choices and decisions are embedded in a chain of necessities. This issue has led to two fundamental perspectives: determinism, which views every action and reaction as subject to the laws of nature, and free will, which emphasizes independence and creativity in choice. Furthermore, the issue of free will is not only related to understanding human nature, freedom, and ethics but is also linked to the question of existence, the nature of the human self, and the human relation to the world. The philosophy of free will is the arena where two critical questions collide: one concerning the possibility of freedom in the natural world, and the other regarding the moral meaning of human responsibility. Thus, free will is not merely a cognitive issue but a fundamental inquiry into freedom, existence, and the meaning of human life.

Ancient Greeks, such as Plato and Aristotle, were among the first to address the issue of free will. Plato paid attention to agency and individual responsibility in some of his dialogues, although he did not put forward an elaborate discussion on free will (Plato, 2001, pp. 1234–964). Aristotle, however, referred to the concept of virtue ethics in his works and emphasized conscious and voluntary choice as the foundation of ethics. He attributed freedom to the ability to act based on intellect and reasoning (Aristotle, 1972, p. 58). With the expansion of Christianity, the issue of free will emerged as a key topic in theology.

Saint Augustine (4th century AD) played a significant role in shaping this debate. He believed that humans possess free will, and citing the Holy Scriptures (John 8:35), he maintained that human will is largely limited and prone to error due to Original Sin. Moreover, to resolve the contradiction between divine omniscience and human freedom, Augustine introduced the concepts of time and God's foreknowledge. Thomas Aquinas sought to harmonize free will with divine reason and will. He argued for a "concordance" between human will and divine will, such that human will operates within the framework of divine will while preserving freedom and responsibility. During this period, detailed debates regarding determinism and agency continued in Christian theology among various sects and thinkers (Gilson, 1991, p. 473).

With the rise of rationalism and empiricism in the modern era, the issue of free will was examined from a new perspective. René Descartes considered free will to be one of the main marks of human existence and viewed it as unlimited and infinite, unlike reason, which is limited (Descartes, 2011, "A", p. 395). Baruch Spinoza emerged as a determinist, believing that everything, including human will, is subject to the necessities of nature and that real freedom is nothing more than an illusion (Lloyd, 2001, pp. 50–100). John Locke and other empiricists viewed will as a product of motivations and desires formed under the influence of environment and experience. Finally, in the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century, Immanuel Kant became an important turning point in the discussion of free will. He distinguished between the phenomenal world, which is subject to the laws of causality, and the noumenal world or the "thing-in-itself," which is free (Kant, 2016, p. 72). Kant considered freedom to be a necessary condition for ethics and responsibility.

The discussion regarding free will and its relationship with determinism and agency also has a rich and challenging history in Islamic philosophical and theological tradition. Since the early centuries of the Hijra, Islamic philosophers and theologians have addressed the fundamental question of whether humans are autonomous or compelled in their actions, and if autonomous, how this agency is compatible with divine power and absolute knowledge. In the realm of Islamic theology , this issue is known as "determinism and delegation" and became one of the main problems of Islamic theology. The Mu'tazilite theologians (2nd to 4th centuries AH), who were among the first rationalist Islamic theologians, believed in *Tafwid* (delegation) (Rezanejad, 2003, Vol. 1, p. 296). They emphasized human free will and believed that humans are autonomous in their actions and that God has not compelled them to perform their acts. For the Mu'tazilites, human agency was a prerequisite for moral responsibility and divine justice; therefore, free will was counted among the five principles of their school (such as Justice and Monotheism). In contrast, the Ash'arites (3rd century onwards) proposed the theory of *Kasb* (acquisition). Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, to resolve the contradiction between God's absolute power and human agency, argued that humans "acquire" actions, while the true Creator of actions is God. According to this theory, the action is created by God but is attributed to the human. This view sought to synthesize determinism and agency, aiming to reach this point through the theory of *kasb*, the denial of causal necessity, and the possibility of selectivity (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 6, pp. 320–330).

However, Islamic philosophers such as Al-Farabi and especially Avicenna, influenced by Aristotelian philosophy, had a more rational and ontological view of the issue of agency. Avicenna believed in rational will and agency; meaning that humans, by recognizing good and evil, can choose rationally. But since he was committed to a rigorous system of causality, some commentators have stated that in his view, human choice is a type of necessity arising from knowledge, rather than absolute agency (Avicenna, 1997, pp. 480–500). Suhrawardi, the Master of Illumination, examined the issue of agency within an illuminative and Ishraqi framework. In his view, luminous beings possess varying degrees of will and consciousness, and the human, as a luminous being, possesses a type of transcendent will (Suhrawardi, 1994, pp. 203–204). Although this view is less concerned with the structure of philosophical causality, it strengthens the mystical and intuitive aspect of the issue of agency. Finally, Mulla Sadra, in his Transcendent Wisdom, provided a new explanation of the issue of agency by relying on principles such as the primacy of existence, the gradation of existence, and substantial motion (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 9, p. 93; Vol. 8, p. 136). By synthesizing mysticism, philosophy, and theology, he believed that humans are in a state of existential motion (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 8, p. 11), and in light of this, they reach a level of existence where freedom and true will are realized. At the same time, he attempted to reconcile human freedom with divine foreknowledge without sliding into absolute determinism or total delegation.

The present research, with the aim of a precise and profound comparative analysis of the views of Mulla Sadra, the founder of Transcendent Wisdom, and Immanuel Kant, one of the most influential rationalist thinkers in Western contemporary philosophy, hopes to be an effective step toward a deeper understanding and redefinition of the concept of freedom in the context of contemporary issues and challenges. It should be noted that although these two philosophers possess completely different philosophical foundations, each, by offering coherent and comprehensive intellectual systems, has made significant efforts to solve the problem of freedom. Since there are fundamental differences between their views and each has proposed a distinct solution for the problem of freedom, it is necessary to examine and explain the foundations and solutions of each independently and in detail, so that by combining and confronting these two perspectives, a new and deeper understanding of freedom can be offered. This approach can effectively provide the necessary groundwork for analyzing and upgrading the concept of freedom in accordance with the conditions and concerns of the contemporary era.

1. The Challenge of Nature and Free Will: Kant's Dual-Aspect Human

Reconciling the determinism of nature with human freedom has been one of the greatest philosophical enigmas throughout the ages. How can we regard ourselves as free beings responsible for our actions while living in a world governed by causal laws? Is every decision and action we take merely an inevitable result of a chain of prior causes, or is there room for choice and free will? This question has not only preoccupied philosophers but has profoundly influenced our understanding of ethics, accountability, and even the meaning of our existence.

Immanuel Kant, the great German philosopher, deeply grasped this dilemma and sought a solution. He rightly perceived that if every moral behavior were merely a necessary consequence of prior causes, there would be no room left for moral judgment and responsibility. How can one be blamed for an error if that error was an inevitable result of physical laws? (Kant, 2016, p. 159).

To resolve this conflict, Kant resorted to an ontological distinction. He divided the world into two separate realms: the **Phenomenal Realm** or the world of appearance, which is the world of our daily experience functioning under mechanical and causal laws. In this realm, everything, including the human body, is subject to the determinism of nature, and our behaviors appear not to be exempt from these laws. And the **Noumenal Realm** or the world of the thing-in-itself, which lies beyond our sensory experience and is the domain of rational beings and free will. According to Kant, as a rational being, the human belongs not only to the phenomenal world but also possesses a part of their existence in the noumenal world, where they can act based on reason and moral principles—and it is here that free will finds its meaning.

Thus, from Kant's perspective, agency and freedom are characteristics of the noumenal realm, while determinism and necessity govern the phenomenal realm (Beiser, 2017, p. 172). He believed that possessing agency elevates the human from a merely phenomenal being to a rational being (Kant, 2016, p. 72). This distinction allows Kant to posit two types of nature for rational beings: sensible nature, which is influenced by empirical conditions and laws of determinism and, from the standpoint of reason, appears "heteronomous" or inconsistent with rational autonomy; and supersensible nature, which is independent of any empirical condition and belongs to the autonomy of pure reason (Kant, 2016, p. 74).

In this regard, Kant points to two different levels of freedom: natural freedom, which is realized negatively, and civil and political freedom, which is realized positively. Negative freedom means that the human maintains their independence from anything that could influence them and strips those influences away. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he defines negative freedom as: a property by which one can act independently of being determined by alien causes (Kant, 2015, p. 123). Negative freedom leads to a type of freedom that views the human as entirely isolated from society; this type of freedom is only possible outside of society because it does not tolerate the freedom of any other individual and is constantly struggling with others to assert its individuality. In defining the positive concept of freedom, Kant argues that since the concept of will is a type of causality, and every concept of causality carries the concept of law with it, freedom cannot consist of independence from law in general—as negative freedom pulls itself out of all laws and remains bound to none—but freedom consists of the will's independence from being determined by the laws of nature and its determination by immutable laws of a special kind. Thus, in positive freedom, he tries to provide a design for freedom that can be realized under law by limiting the negative freedom that seeks to exist without bounds. This type of freedom is formed in comparison with the freedom of others, and every individual, by considering the freedom of others, establishes a law that also secures their freedom. Hence, this freedom is realized in society and can never be realized individually. He believes that only under social conditions can humans flourish their natural talents, of which civil freedom is one (Kant, 2015 "B", p. 14).

Kant emphasizes that if a human employs their reason merely for material and instinctual goals like animals, they will have no essential difference from them. Reason excels when it grants the human goals beyond mere animal needs (Kant, 2016, pp. 104-105). In other words, Kant believes that the human is not a being guided by instinct or one that has organized its affairs through innate knowledge and training; rather, they must derive everything from within their own essence. The provision of food and clothing, self-protection against the dangers of other beings, the attainment of all life's pleasures, the power of perception and discernment, and even benevolence and the "good will"—all must be entrusted to the human themselves. In the third principle of his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, he states: "Nature has intended that man should draw everything from himself which exceeds the mechanical ordering of his animal existence and that he should partake of no other happiness or perfection than that which he himself, independently of instinct, has created by his own reason" (Kant, 2015 "B", p. 12). Kant calls this principle "autonomy" and contrasts it with all other views regarding the will, which he terms "heteronomy." Positive freedom of the will can be nothing but the "autonomy" of the will—that characteristic of the will by which it is a law unto itself (Seif, 2010, p. 81). Autonomy of the will is the sole principle of all moral laws and all duties consistent with them.

Therefore, Kant's image of freedom is that of a subject who acts according to laws; because a being that does not act according to law is not free, but acts in a disorganized, accidental, and forced manner—like a die rolled aimlessly—and this law must be self-imposed; for the agent acts only according to laws that they have first formed a conception of and then applied to themselves. Hence, in Kantian thought, freedom does not mean the absence of necessity but signifies a special type of necessity (Cassirer, 2006, p. 362). Autonomy and freedom are realized within the law, and it is not the case that freedom arises by escaping all limitations. Freedom is realized by the will taking refuge within the boundaries of law. In short, freedom means that the law we follow in our actions is not imposed from the outside, but the moral mind has posited this law for itself. The moral law signifies nothing but the autonomy of pure reason, which is agency (Kant, 2013, p. 58).

However, ultimately, although Kant’s ontological duality opens a way to explain free will, we witness that this very factor itself becomes a new enigma: how do these two separate realms—nature and freedom—interact with one another? This is one of the greatest challenges facing Kantian thought.

2. Mulla Sadra: Unity in Multiplicity, a Path toward Freedom

In contrast to Kant's dualistic approach toward the soul and body, which leads to a fundamental separation between the two, Sadr al-Muta'allihin (Mulla Sadra) proposes an original and integrated solution: the "substantial unity of the human" (Mulla Sadra, Vol. 8, p. 6). Inspired by Aristotelian philosophy, he does not view the human as merely a collection of soul and body, nor does he privilege one over the other; rather, he considers the human a single, coherent, and dynamic being whose life and totality are the product of the inseparable interaction between soul and body. This unity, however, does not imply uniformity or simplicity. With his characteristic genius, Mulla Sadra introduces the concept of "hierarchical identity" for the human. Unlike reductionist perspectives (such as materialists, who view the human merely as a collection of matter), the human possesses a "single reality with different levels" (Mulla Sadra, 2007, Vol. 9, p. 93; Vol. 8, p. 136).

From Mulla Sadra's perspective, human life begins with the emergence of the physical body, and after passing through various stages, the "perceiving soul" is realized. Initially, the human enters the realm of existence with a simple and material identity. This initial formative realm is the domain where natural and biological laws prevail, functioning under the determinism of nature. However, this "primordial substance," through continuous and endogenous transformations, grows and gradually achieves unprecedented flourishing. With every sensory perception, a new and "abstract" dimension is added to the human essence, and as dormant potentials are activated, new actualities are realized one after another. This flourishing is the result of the soul's voluntary and conscious actions, which operate beyond natural determinism.

This is the point where the domain of human agency and freedom manifests itself. For this reason, Mulla Sadra believes that any agent that does not act in a mechanical and uniform manner, and demonstrates different actions based on its own will, has a "soul-based" root (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 8, p. 6). While the body and its faculties can be examined from the perspective of natural sciences, the "reality of the soul" can only be researched by considering "abstract principles"—principles that operate beyond the determinism of matter and physical causes, making the domain of agency possible for the human (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 8, p. 10).

Mulla Sadra emphasizes that the connection between soul and body is never accidental, and in his view, no soul establishes companionship with just any body. From a philosophical standpoint, an "essential proportion" between soul and body is necessary, as the soul is considered the "formal perfection" for the body (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 8, p. 382). This proportion ensures that the natural domain (the body) has the necessary readiness for the manifestation of the free domain (the soul). He is so committed to both sides of this mutual connection that he explicitly rejects the idea that the body is merely a tool for the soul to be discarded after its task is finished (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 8, p. 384).

Rather, he depicts the mode of connection between them as the proportion between matter and form, where each is in need of and dependent upon the other. This means that nature (the body) is the substrate in which freedom (the soul) manifests; without this substrate, freedom has no possibility of expression. He also explains that the mode of this connection is neither in the form of the body being the cause of the soul (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 8, p. 383) nor the soul being the cause of the body. The soul belongs to the body, is individuated by it, and its connection to it is in the form of "body management"—meaning the soul requires a body commensurate with its flourishing to issue transcendent actions. Thus, the soul, within the substrate of nature (the body), manages its faculties to actualize its free will. The body has the capacity to receive the soul (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 8, pp. 389–390), just as it possesses the capacity to accept various states and actualities, and it progresses along with the soul. The soul, in terms of activity, is material, appears after the body, and is therefore considered "body-originated" (*jism al-huduth*) (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 8, p. 392).

Based on Mulla Sadra's "single-aspect" view, the soul and body are realized through a "single existence" (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 9, pp. 98–99). This clearly shows that, in his view, there is no need to separate two distinct realms in human moral actions; rather, it is the single agent (the soul) that bears responsibility for the action, and the moral act is the result of the complex interaction between natural faculties and the soul's will. External and internal factors play a role in the formation of moral action only to the extent of "providing the substrate" and "necessitation."

Given that the soul, in Mulla Sadra's view, encompasses the body and its faculties within its own single identity, his works emphasize that the soul is the "principal agent" of all bodily actions and the actions of the intellectual, estimative, imaginative, and sensory faculties (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 9, pp. 86–87, 91–92). For instance, when a person uses their vision faculty and its instrument (the eye) to see a needy person, reflects on helping them with their rational faculty, intends to help with their practical intellect, and finally provides aid with their bodily faculties, two points are fundamental: first, the person's soul is the "agentive factor" of all these steps; and second, the person traverses these stages with their "agency" . As previously stated, other factors such as the needy person, bodily faculties, and internal soul faculties all merely play the role of "preparation" and "necessitation." Since the most precise criterion of need in any needy being, from Mulla Sadra's perspective, is "essential and ontological poverty" (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 6, p. 323), the will, conception, decision, and other internal human actions that all originate entirely from the soul and have no independence of their own, are all under the control and "comprehensive agency of the soul" (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 9, p. 379). This means the soul employs natural faculties (determinism) to realize its free will (agency), and this is how Mulla Sadra succeeds in resolving the contradiction between determinism and agency.

Therefore, the "single-aspect" nature of the human in Mulla Sadra's view does not mean the negation of freedom, nor does it mean denying the influence of nature; rather, it signifies that these two realms—the material/natural realm on one hand, and the voluntary/free realm on the other—are intertwined in human existence. This perspective, especially relying on the fundamental principle of "primacy of existence" in Sadrian philosophy, is clearly understandable; for existence is the foundational reality, and the various levels of nature and freedom are all manifestations of a single truth.

On the other hand, according to Mulla Sadra, agency is the result of the soul's "resolution and determination" , not the soul's "doubt." Ash'arite thinkers, to explain the freedom of the agent, believed that the mere existence of "priority" was sufficient for willing. In other words, they believed that a voluntary agent should not reach "necessity"; because in their view, "necessity" was in complete contradiction with "agency" (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 9, p. 320). They built upon the assumption that agency is possible for a voluntary agent only when there is "doubt" before the agent. This doubt allows the agent to manifest their agency by choosing one of the available options (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 9, p. 321). Hence, to avoid compelling the voluntary agent, the Ash'arites turned to denying causal necessity.

However, Mulla Sadra, with his particular keenness, challenges this belief of the Ash'arites. He considers the belief that "a voluntary agent has agency only when they have multiple options" to be "void" (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 9, p. 317). From his perspective, a human does not exercise agency until they reach "resolution and determination." That is, voluntary will is realized only when the individual is in the circuit of determination, and this "determination" is the root and basis of agency (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 9, p. 323). Therefore, the existence of doubt between options is not a condition for the issuance of voluntary will; it merely causes "the display of the role of agency to be highlighted." Mulla Sadra, citing the objective principles of existence, points to a subtle point: just as the external person of *Ihsan* is not *Daniel*, and the knowledge of *Ihsan* is not the knowledge of *Daniel*, every objective reality or scientific matter must be inherently "determined" and precisely "its very self." Will is no exception to this objective law of existence; for voluntary will to be issued, the object of the will must first be "determined and precisely specified" so that it can be willed. In other words, due to the governance of the "universal laws of existence" (such as the synonymy of existence with necessity) over all objective, scientific, and voluntary realms, any doubt or hesitation prevents the issuance of will. Voluntary agency is realized only when it becomes "determined" (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 1, p. 223).

3. The Challenge of Determinism Arising from Sadrian Necessity and Mulla Sadra’s Response

A fundamental question arises here: Does the necessity that Mulla Sadra posits as governing the single identity of the human (akin to the existential necessity prevalent in all beings) not lead to "absolute determinism" and the "negation of free will"? In such a case, the concepts of "moral responsibility" and "free will" for humans would turn into hollow myths.

Mulla Sadra’s response to this challenge is rooted in the distinction between "longitudinal causality" and "latitudinal causality" and his "profound ontology."

A) **Distinguishing Longitudinal and Latitudinal Causality:** In the Sadrian ontological system, philosophical and necessitating causality flows and exists only within the "longitudinal tree" of beings. This means that every existence at a higher rank is the existential cause of that at a lower rank, and this causality is inherently "necessitating." However, among latitudinal material beings existing at the same existential rank, only "requirements" and "the properties of natural qualities" of objects and phenomena hold (Sadr al-Muta'allihin, 1989, Vol. 8, pp. 6–10). For example, a stone has the property of hardness, and a plant has the property of growth. These are their essential requirements, not causal necessities imposed from a higher rank. Understanding these requirements forms the basis of natural sciences such as physics, chemistry, and biology. While the "natural requirements" of objects in relation to one another pose no problem for free will, the main challenge concerns the "necessity governing the longitudinal ranks of existence," which originates from the initial supreme principles; this remains the primary problem.

B) **Existential Breadth of the Cause and Providing Possibilities:** Mulla Sadra emphasizes that every existence, from the Supreme Origin to the lowest rank of existence, is a "specific person" , and until something becomes "specific," it does not exist. Furthermore, every specific existence is the cause of the creation of another specific existence. This specific connection between cause and effect complicates the issue: if every person from the higher ranks of existence is the cause of creating a human person, does this not mean that all their moral behaviors are predetermined under the very necessity governing their existence? As if the individual’s moral destiny were predetermined in higher ranks.

Mulla Sadra’s response in his system is explainable by relying on his explicit foundations and the concept of the "existential breadth of the cause." An "intellectual universal existence," due to possessing "existential perfections beyond the effect," has greater breadth and scope compared to its lower-ranking effect. In other words, "the existence of the cause encompasses all perfections of the effect, and in addition, possesses supplementary perfections." This point is easily conceivable within Mulla Sadra’s "existential gradation channel," where existence extends through ranks of intensity and weakness, from pure perfection to relative deficiency.

Accordingly, the "personality of the cause’s rank" of a human (i.e., their intellectual universal rank) possesses "philosophical universality" and "existential capacity" regarding the human. This existential breadth provides the very substrate that paves the way for "complete freedom of human will." This means that the "person at the intellectual universal rank" (which is the human's existential cause) can provide all the "existential possibilities" required for the human to choose the path of "virtue" and live a moral life through their "free will." Likewise, that same intellectual universal rank, with its breadth, can provide the necessary conditions for the same human to choose an "inappropriate will" and an "immoral" life.

In other words, just as existences at higher stages possess more existential capacity than lower-down existences, the "necessity and personality" of higher existences also have "breadth" relative to the necessity and personality of lower ones. The person of the human's higher cause is never limited to a deterministic behavior from the perspective of the effect; rather, the cause, due to its "trans-effect existence," has numerous possibilities at hand to open "many paths" before its effect, so that the effect, through the "determination of its will" regarding one of these paths, can shape its own existential future. This key point completely resolves the issue of free will in relation to necessitating causality in Mulla Sadra’s Transcendent Wisdom.

Therefore, according to Mulla Sadra’s foundations, there is no need to assign exceptions to the "law of causality and philosophical necessity"—which is the foundation of all Aristotelian philosophies, including Transcendent Wisdom. This law remains in its generality. Thus, the "realm of human will," while situated within the "sphere of causal necessity," will not create any limitations for free will. "Our will is, in fact, an manifestation of this very breadth and scope of our cause." This explanation not only removes the challenge of determinism but also places free will within a deeper and more comprehensive ontological context.

4. Highlights of Mulla Sadra’s Thought

- **Ontological and Single-Aspect Analysis:** Unlike previous sages who mostly focused on the conceptual analysis of fixed nature, Mulla Sadra’s soul-related analyses are "ontological" and "single-aspect" (Mulla Sadra, Vol. 8, p. 11). Instead of dissecting a fixed concept, he addresses the dynamism of human existence.
- **Fluid and Ever-New Reality:** Despite his strong emphasis on the unity of truth and the individual identity of each human throughout life, Mulla Sadra innovatively considers the human a "fluid and ever-new reality." To prove this, he uses the "unity of the human soul in traversing transformational stages." Every "new acquisition" for the

human is like turning on a dormant dimension, gradually leading to the expansion of the ranks of human truth and their "existential intensification."

- **Unity of the Essence's True Attributes with Addition:** Mulla Sadra posits a kind of unity for all the true attributes of the essence, such as the unity of the intellect , the intellectual , and the intelligible ; love, the lover , and the beloved ; and knowledge , the knower , and the known. This unity extends to the "union of the will with the agent of the will and the object of the will." He believes that if the bond between the will and the intended object is broken, the "identity" between the agent of the will and the acted-upon object disappears.
- Based on this, Mulla Sadra attributes "significant importance to voluntary and agentive acts, as well as beliefs and emotions, in shaping human reality" (Mulla Sadra, 1989, Vol. 9, pp. 293–378). This means that free will is not only not in conflict with human nature but is an inseparable part of the process of evolution and identity-formation.

Conclusion

This article compared two philosophical approaches to the issue of free will: the approach of Immanuel Kant and the approach of Mulla Sadra.

Kant divides the world into two parts: the *phenomenal* (appearance), the world we experience which is subject to causal laws (the determinism of nature), and the *noumenal* (essence), a world beyond experience where human reason and free will reside. Kant then proposes two types of freedom: negative (natural) freedom, meaning independence from external causes, and positive (civil/autonomous) freedom, meaning adherence to rational laws that the human sets for themselves; this type of freedom is meaningful only in the context of society and by accepting limitations. However, Kant faced a serious challenge: how to link these two separate realms (nature and freedom).

Contrary to Kant, Mulla Sadra considers the human a single and coherent being whose soul and body are inseparable (hierarchical identity). The human begins with a physical body (nature's determinism) but gradually moves toward abstraction and the emergence of agency as the soul's potentials flourish and voluntary actions occur. In this approach, the soul is the "formal perfection" of the body, and the body provides a substrate for the manifestation of the soul. This relationship is bidirectional, and the soul manages the body in the direction of its free will; agency is the result of the soul's resolution and determination, not its doubt. The soul, even with the necessary laws of existence (longitudinal causality), can choose freely among numerous possibilities by utilizing the existential breadth of the high cause. The advantage of Mulla Sadra's view is that he solves the problem of determinism and agency with an ontological and single-aspect approach, introducing nature and freedom as two sides of the same coin (the appearance of a single reality). Thus, while Kant divides the world into two realms to reconcile determinism and agency, Mulla Sadra explains them within the framework of a single, dynamic reality by emphasizing the existential unity of the human.

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Theosophia Islamica EISSN: 2783-3240

The Possibility of Recourse to the Religious Other in Islamic Comparative Theology: An Analysis Grounded in the Qur’an, Hadith, and Reason*

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Abstract

Within the confessional approach to comparative theology, epistemic recourse to engagement with other religious traditions aims at attaining a deeper understanding of the home tradition while maintaining fidelity to the boundaries of its orthodoxy and orthopraxy. In this framework, the religious data of other traditions are consulted, examined, and brought into comparison with those of one’s own tradition. From the standpoint

* Rastegar. M., Hosseininasab. S. M. & Sayyid-Hosseini. S. A. (2026). The Possibility of Recourse to the Religious Other in Islamic Comparative Theology: An Analysis Grounded in the Qur’an, Hadith, and Reason. *Theosophia Islamica, 6*(1), pp. 117-152. https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2026.74509.1119

▣ **Article Type:** Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

▣ **Received:** 2025/07/25 • **Revised:** 2025/09/26 • **Accepted:** 2025/11/22 •**Online Publication:** 2026/01/10

of Islamic orthodoxy, however, such engagement requires theoretical justification. This foundational epistemological concern constitutes the central problem addressed in the present study. The guiding question is therefore: within Islamic comparative theology, how can engagement with and benefit from the religious data of other traditions be justified? The study employs a descriptive-analytical and comparative method. Its findings suggest that the legitimacy of such engagement may be inferred through the cumulative force and mutual corroboration of evidences derived from the Qurʾan, the hadith, and reason. Elements of truth present in other religious traditions may be understood as vestiges of humanity's historical and prehistorical encounters with the Sacred Source, as well as products of human reason and *fiṭrah* (the primordial human disposition). Such elements are dispersed across diverse times and places, yet remain accessible to discerning theological inquiry. Furthermore, interreligious learning is not limited to drawing upon the object of comparison—that is, appropriating religious data from another tradition. The act of comparison itself also possesses intrinsic epistemic fecundity. Accordingly, this study concentrates on establishing the justificatory grounds for such engagement, while leaving the systematic articulation of the methodological and inferential frameworks required for interreligious learning to future research.

Keywords

Islamic comparative theology, confessional approach, engagement with the religious other, interreligious learning

A. Introduction

1. Statement of the Problem

Within the confessional approach to comparative theology, the theologian seeks to attain a deeper understanding and articulation of his or her own religious tradition (the home tradition) through engagement with the data of another religious tradition. Despite this engagement with the religious other, the ultimate aim remains the exploration and clarification of the home tradition itself, accompanied by a firm commitment to it—a commitment that safeguards the boundaries of its orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The underlying methodological premise of this approach is that, through careful study of the self-understanding of another religious tradition, the theologian may arrive at a fuller apprehension of the truths contained within his or her own faith, gain new insights, and thereby contribute to the enrichment of the theology of the home tradition. The potential for epistemic enrichment thus emerges through a renewed reading of one's own tradition within the broader theoretical and practical horizon of another religion.

From the standpoint of traditional Islamic orthodoxy, however, a prevailing doctrinal presupposition maintains that the sacred texts, theological teachings, and religious practices of other religious traditions generally lack epistemological credibility. Consequently, the very principle of engagement with such sources cannot proceed without sound theoretical grounding and authorization derived from the authentic sources of Islam. A fundamental question therefore arises: how can a source regarded as unreliable simultaneously serve as a resource for refining, deepening, or even correcting one's own theological understanding?

The central problem of the present study may therefore be formulated as follows: within a confessional framework of Islamic comparative theology, on what theological grounds can the legitimacy of engagement with and benefit from the data of another religious tradition be established, and interreligious learning thereby justified?

2. Literature Review

Within the field of Islamic comparative theology of a second-order type, which reflects upon the discipline itself, several scholars have addressed aspects of the problem examined in the present study. Their discussions, however, have generally remained unsystematic and have been limited to broad observations and general considerations rather than sustained theoretical analysis.

For example, Mustafa Abu Sway regards the authentic and undistorted messages of the divine prophets as forming a historical continuum that remains accessible to examination and reflection. On this basis, he presents balanced dialogue as both a theological duty and an ethical necessity, oriented toward peaceful coexistence and the protection of human dignity (Abu Sway, 2009).

Similarly, Asma Afsaruddin argues that respectful and dialogical engagement with non-Muslims, particularly the People of the Book, has a firm grounding in Qurʾanic teachings. She prioritizes reconciliation and tolerance over claims of superiority and polemical approaches, and views interreligious dialogue as a means of strengthening mutual understanding and fostering constructive transformation (Afsaruddin, 2009).

Mouhanad Khorchide and Ufuk Topkara, drawing especially on the example of al-Ghazālī’s method, argue that Islamic theology historically developed not in isolation but through critical engagement with other intellectual and religious traditions. They therefore present Islamic comparative theology as a faith-based and reflective approach that, through engagement with other religious traditions, particularly Christianity and Judaism, can both enrich Islamic thought and contribute meaningfully to broader interreligious theological discourse (Khorchide and Topkara, 2013).

Muna Tatari, approaching the acquisition of knowledge as a dialectical process, contends that without comparative inquiry and interreligious dialogue there is a persistent risk that human understanding will remain confined to a one-dimensional perspective. At the same time, she explicitly rejects any movement toward relativism (Tatari, 2018).

In addition, Vahid Mahdavi Mehr has examined the possibility of Islamic comparative theology and argues that supersessionism, understood as the abrogation of an earlier religion by a later one, is not a defensible position. The model of comparative theology he proposes is grounded in a form of non-supersessionist Abrahamic theology (Mahdavi Mehr, 2022), a view that, however, cannot be regarded as consistent with Islamic orthodoxy.

Accordingly, no comprehensive and systematically articulated precedent has been identified for justifying engagement with the data of other religious traditions within Islamic comparative theology. This absence constitutes a significant gap that the present study seeks to address. The research therefore aims to establish a foundation for the justification of engagement with the religious other, grounded in Islamic revelation, including the Qurʾan and the hadith, as well as in reason.

The significance of this study lies, first, in its contribution as an initial step toward the articulation of an Islamic comparative theology and, second, in its potential to assist Islamic seminaries in engaging more fully with contemporary global developments in theology.

It should be emphasized that the present study is concerned exclusively with justifying the principle of constructive theological engagementwith the religious other from an Islamic standpoint and does not attempt to address other theoretical foundations of comparative theology. Among the various approaches to this discipline, including confessional, meta-confessional, interreligious, and postcolonial models, the study adopts the confessional approach, as this is the framework most commonly embraced by orthodox theologians. Furthermore, key concepts such as religion, religious tradition, theology, constructive theology, normativity, faith seeking understanding, reason, and *fiṭrah* are understood within the parameters of this approach. For this reason, the study does not undertake a conceptual analysis of these terms, since such discussions have been treated extensively in the existing literature.

In addition, the study presents several examples of engagement with the religious other aimed at achieving a deeper understanding of one’s own religious tradition, drawn from both Christian and Islamic contexts. These examples are offered solely to illustrate the possibility of such constructive theological engagementand the pursuit of constructive theological inquiry. The inferential methods employed in these cases are not evaluated, nor are their conclusions assessed. Accordingly, the author assumes no responsibility for the theological judgments or outcomes associated with them.

B. Research Findings

As an initial step, it is necessary to clarify the Christian approach to the question of epistemic engagement with the religious other. Christianity constitutes the historical context in which what is now known as “new comparative theology” first emerged and remains the setting in which the largest body of research on this subject has been produced. Clarifying this background helps orient the present study in an appropriate direction.

1. The Existence of Truth in Other Religions from a Christian Perspective

Throughout history, various forms of theological engagement with other religious traditions have existed, and new comparative theology continues this trajectory in a more systematic manner, without the intention of undermining other religions but rather with an attitude of respect and appreciation toward them (Cornille, June 25, 2023). Friedrich Max Müller regarded not only learning “about” other religions but also learning “from” them as desirable (Müller, 1874, p. xxv). He further maintained that the comparative study of religion could infuse Christianity itself with renewed vitality (Müller, 1874, p. xix).

In the second half of the twentieth century, the term comparative theology came to designate a theological and normative discipline that generates theological insights through the process of interreligious comparison (Cornille, July 2019, p. 2). In this regard, the Catholic theologian and priest David Tracy describes comparative theology as a truth-seeking endeavor in which the theologian undertakes comparative inquiry on the basis of the theological foundations of his or her own faith (Tracy, 2005, p. 9126). According to the Catholic theologian and priest James Fredericks, comparative theology seeks to clarify the meaning and truth of the home religious tradition through the establishment of a critical correlation with the primary texts of another religious tradition (Fredericks, 2010, pp. x–xi). Catherine Cornille likewise notes that comparative theology enables theological reasoning to grow and develop by drawing upon insights found in other religious traditions and by rediscovering the theological standing of one’s own tradition within a broader religious and theological horizon (Cornille, 2019, p. 150).

Similarly, Francis Clooney maintains that religious believers must learn from the possibilities and resources of other religions without falling into relativistic generalizations (Clooney, 2010, p. 7). He further argues that comparative study, when undertaken properly as a form of religiously committed reading, does not weaken religious commitment but instead strengthens and deepens it (Clooney, 2010, pp. 20–21).

1–1. Open Inclusivism as the Basis for Engagement with the Religious Other

The comparative theology of Francis Clooney, as one of the principal architects of the confessional approach to comparative theology, resonates with forms of inclusivist theology associated with the Jesuit theologians Karl Rahner and Jacques Dupuis. These approaches seek to maintain a balance between the claim of the uniqueness of Christianity and the need for openness toward other religions as sources from which one may learn (Clooney, 2010, p. 16). Open inclusivism has thus become the theological foundation for much of the work produced by confessional comparative theologians. Within this framework, the comparative theologian remains faithful to the self-understanding of his or her own particular tradition while remaining open to constructive engagement with other religious traditions (Cornille, 2019, p. 59).

According to Paul J. Griffiths, the Church has come to acknowledge that it must learn part of what it ought to teach from those who stand outside its own boundaries and that other religious traditions also convey certain truths. Consequently, it becomes difficult to deny that some of what the Church must learn may already be present in the teachings of other religions. This recognition captures the essence of what is meant by open inclusivism (Griffiths, 2001, p. 63).

Cornille further observes that within the Christian tradition theologians have frequently appealed to the concept of the Logos, understood as the Word or will of God active in the world prior to the Incarnation, as well as to God's continuing activity in the world through the Holy Spirit. As a result, pneumatology, the theology of the Holy Spirit, or Spirit-Christology has served as one of the principal theological resources for an open inclusivist approach to other religions (Cornille, 2019, p. 58).

1–2. The Desirability of "External Sources"

Klaus von Stosch, a theologian and ordained deacon of the Catholic Church in Germany (Universität Bonn, n.d.), argues that even if Christianity alone contains the revelation of God, the Church can never fully comprehend what it has received from God. Given the limitations inherent in human cognitive capacities, humanity's witness to the divine Word may remain incomplete. It therefore remains possible that something decisive for the Church may be disclosed elsewhere in the world and, accordingly, within other religious traditions as well (von Stosch, 2014, p. 63).

Most comparative theologians belong to the Catholic Church and seek to introduce new insights into Catholic theology by drawing upon ideas that have proven compelling to Hindus, Muslims, Jews, and adherents of other religious traditions (Legenhausen, April 14, 2023). Von Stosch maintains that comparative theology, understood as a practice of interreligious learning, possesses a particular affinity with catholicity in the original sense of the term, as well as with Catholic Christianity in its more specific meaning. Among the considerations he advances is Christianity's longstanding openness to non-theological sources of knowledge, namely "external sources" (*loci alieni*), and its recognition of their value for theological reflection (von Stosch, 2014, p. 59). He further argues that under contemporary interreligious and intercultural conditions, a theology that claims catholic universality cannot refrain, in its search for knowledge, from considering the religious and cultural perspectives of other traditions regarding humanity and the world as potential loci alieni (von Stosch, 2014, p. 63).

According to the Protestant Methodist theologian and pastor, Robert Neville, for Catholics who have reached theological maturity the theology of the Church represents a synthesis of numerous traditions, ranging from the Judeo-Gentile theologies of the first century to patristic, Augustinian, Thomistic, Tridentine, Kantian, Neo-Thomist, and twentieth-century existentialist theologies, among others. Throughout its history, the Catholic Church has engaged in fruitful dialogue with Syriac, Orthodox, Asian, African, and other theological traditions. Its engagement with Hinduism and the Chinese religious traditions also dates back to the Jesuit missions. Such interactions have added subtle yet significant dimensions to the theological horizon of Roman Catholicism (Neville, 2017, March 6).

1–3. Vatican II's Endorsement of Engagement with the Religious Other

The Spanish Dominican friar and scholastic theologian, Melchior Cano (c. 1509–1560), enumerated ten sources of Christian theology (*loci theologici*): the Scriptures, the Catholic tradition, the ecumenical councils, the Church of Rome, the Church Fathers, the scholastics, natural reason, philosophers and jurists of civil law, and history. The first seven constitute the primary loci of theological reflection, while the final three function as useful auxiliary resources (Wilhelm, 1910). Cunningham and others refer to these last three as loci alieni, adding that since the Second Vatican Council the category has also come to include various aspects of contemporary non-Christian cultures, as well as the findings of the social sciences (Cunningham, Hofmann, & Sievers, 2007, p. 117).

Since the convening of the Second Vatican Council, the teaching authority of the Catholic Church has invited its members to view other religions with appreciation and to consider the possibility of learning from them (von Stosch, April–July 2023). Referring to the Vatican II declaration on world religions, *Nostra aetate*, Clooney highlights a positive and open attitude in which one may remain fully Catholic while acknowledging the truths present in other religions:

> The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men (Clooney, 2010, p. 17; *Nostra aetate*, 1965, para. 2).

Clooney interprets this passage as an expression of the "great tradition of Christian learning," a tradition to which the Catholic Church belongs and which resonates with the exhortation in Paul's Epistle to the Philippians (Clooney, 2010, p. 17). Accordingly, he cites Philippians 4:8–9 at the beginning of his book *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*:

> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you (Clooney, 2010, p. vi).

Cornille likewise cites the statement "[t]he Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions" as acknowledging the possibility that truth may be found in other religions (Cornille, 2019, p. 59). Subsequent Vatican documents, such as *Dialogue and Proclamation*, have also opened the way for engagement with other religions and for learning from them. According to this document, Christians should be ready to learn both "from" others and "through" others the positive values present in their traditions (Pontifical Council, 1991, sec. 4, no. 82). Cornille regards this statement as facilitating constructive engagement with other religions (Cornille, 2019, p. 59).

1–4. Examples of Christian Engagement with the Religious Other

Example One: The Swiss Catholic priest, Hans Küng, in his well-known project World Ethos, sought to highlight the importance of fundamental moral principles by demonstrating the shared ethical commitments found across various religious traditions (Cornille, 2019, p. 120).

Example Two: Through observing the Islamic Ramadan fast and experiencing the spiritually charged moments preceding the breaking of the fast, Klaus von Stosch came to a renewed appreciation of an older Catholic tradition concerning the Eucharist. In that earlier tradition, believers were not permitted to eat or drink until the late morning, when the liturgy was celebrated. This relatively brief period of fasting caused the consecrated bread received during the ceremony to carry greater significance for believers than it often does under present practices (von Stosch, April–July 2023).

Example Three: The engagement of some Christian theologians with Hinduism has led them to suggest that Jesus's statement about being "one with the Father" may be interpreted through the category of non-duality (*advaita*) in *advaita vedānta* (Dupuis, 1997, pp. 268–275).

Example Four: Holly Hillgardner conducted a comparative study of the thirteenth-century Flemish Christian mystic Hadewijch and the sixteenth-century Hindu mystic Mirabai. In contrast to Augustine's traditional ideal of attaining final rest and repose in God, Hillgardner, drawing on the example of Mirabai, seeks to highlight Hadewijch's emphasis on the centrality of the act of longing itself rather than on the notions of possessing or consuming the desired beloved (Hillgardner, 2016, pp. 149–170).

Example Five: Some Christian comparative theologians, through engagement with Hindu and Buddhist forms of meditation, have rediscovered early forms of hesychastic contemplative practice within Christian spiritual traditions. These practices center on the repetition of a simple Christian invocation: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." This form of the Jesus Prayer has continued within certain strands of Eastern Orthodoxy, but before contact with Asian religious traditions it had not spread widely into other branches of Christianity. Through such engagement with Asian traditions, however, the prayer came to be practiced within the World Community for Christian Meditation (Cornille, 2019, p. 127).

2. The Existence of Truth in Other Religions from an Islamic Perspective

In light of discussions within Christian comparative theology concerning the permissibility and desirability of constructive theological engagement with the religious other, the issue may now be reconsidered within the horizon of the Islamic religious tradition.

2–1. The Possession of Truth by the Religious Other in the Qur'ān

From the perspective of the Qurʾan, the existence of truth in the pre-Islamic divinely revealed religions, particularly Judaism and Christianity, is self-evident and requires almost noargument. In addition to the numerous verses that affirm the originally undistorted character of their sacred scriptures and the partial authenticity of the scriptures available at the time of the Qurʾan's revelation, other verses clearly indicate the presence of truth within those religions: "Had God not repelled some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the name of God is much mentioned, would surely have been destroyed" (Qurʾan 22:40). "Indeed, those who believe, and those who are Jews, Christians, and Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord …" (Qurʾan 2:62). "And the magicians fell down in prostration. They said: 'We believe in the Lord of the worlds … Our Lord, pour upon us patience and cause us to die as Muslims'" (Qurʾan 7:120–126). "The disciples said: 'We are the helpers of God. We believe in God; bear witness that we are Muslims'" (Qurʾan 3:52). "He has ordained for you of the religion what He enjoined upon Noah, and that which We have revealed to you, and what We enjoined upon Abraham, Moses, and Jesus …" (Qurʾan 42:13). "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but rather a *ḥanīf,* a Muslim, and he was not among the polytheists" (Qurʾan 3:67). "And Abraham instructed his sons, and Jacob likewise: 'O my sons, indeed God has chosen for you the religion, so do not die except as Muslims'" (Qurʾan 2:132).

Moreover, the plurality of religions throughout history does not imply that human beings have been left to themselves, nor does it necessarily indicate that religions not explicitly referred to in the Qurʾan and hadith as divinely inspired are merely human constructions. Such abandonment would appear incompatible with the divine attributes. The Qurʾan explicitly states that every community throughout history has had divinely appointed guides: "There was never a nation but that a warner passed among them" (Qurʾan 35:24), and "You are only a warner, and for every people there is a guide" (Qurʾan 13:7). In this way, the Qurʾan affirms the universality of the divinely instituted office of prophethood throughout human history. This doctrine may serve as a central principle in Islam's epistemological outlook toward other religions.

2–2. The Possession of Truth by the Religious Other in the Hadith Tradition

With regard to the number of divinely appointed prophets, the hadith literature mentions the figure of 124,000, a number intended to convey their great multitude. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq reports Prophet Muḥammad as saying, "Indeed, God, Exalted be He, has one hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets, and I am their master, the most excellent among them and the most honored …" (Ibn Bābawayh, 1983 b, vol. 2, p. 48). It is also reported from Imam ʿAlī that "The earth is never devoid of one who stands for God with His proof (*ḥujjah*), either manifest and well known or fearful and hidden, lest the proofs and clear signs of God be rendered void" (Nahj al-Balāghah, Saying 147).

In *al-Kāfī*, there is a chapter entitled "If there remained on earth only two persons, one of them would be the divine proof (ḥujjah)." In this chapter, for example, Imam al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said, "If there were only two persons left on the earth, one of them would be the ḥujjah" (al-Kulaynī, 1986, vol. 1, p. 179). Another report from him states, "The last one to die will be the Imam, so that no one may argue before God, the Mighty and Exalted, that He left him without a divine proof" (al-Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 1, p. 180). It is likewise reported from Imam al-Bāqir that "The earth never remains without an

Imam, whether manifest or hidden" (Ibn Bābawayh, 1983 a, p. 31).

Moreover, the statement "Were it not for the ḥujjah, the earth would collapse with its inhabitants" is reported in a quasi-*mutawātir* manner (al-Majlisī, 1982, vol. 60, p. 213). Accordingly, the divine proof has always existed throughout history, and even in prehistory, and many of the sound teachings found in various religions may be regarded as traces of these divine proofs.

In addition, numerous hadiths recommend acquiring wisdom (*ḥikmah*), knowledge (*ʿilm*), and truth (*ḥaqq*) from any source whatsoever. The Prophet is reported to have said, "Take wisdom; it will not harm you from which vessel it emerges" (Muḥammadī Reyshahrī and Berenjkār, 2010, p. 245). From Imam ʿAlī it is reported, "Take wisdom from whoever brings it to you; look at what is said, not at who says it" (Āmidī, 1989, hadith 5048). He is also reported to have said, "Wisdom is the lost property of the believer; take wisdom even from the people of hypocrisy" (Nahj al-Balāghah, saying 80). Another report states, "Knowledge is the lost property of the believer; take it even from the hands of the polytheists, and let none of you feel ashamed to receive wisdom from whomever he hears it" (Muḥammadī Reyshahrī and Berenjkār, 2010, p. 246). It is also reported from Imam al-Ṣādiq, "Seek knowledge, even if it requires plunging into the depths of the seas" (al-Majlisī, 1982, vol. 71, p. 277). Finally, a hadith attributed to ʿĪsā (Jesus) states, "Take the truth from the people of falsehood, and do not take falsehood from the people of truth; be discerning critics of speech" (al-Barqī, n.d., vol. 1, p. 359).

2–3. The Possession of Truth by the Religious Other from the Perspective of Religious Scholars and Other Thinkers

In *Biḥār al-Anwār*, ʿAllāmah al-Majlisī recounts the story of Bilawhar and Būdhāsaf, a narrative describing the life of the

Buddha and the wise counsels of his spiritual guide Bilawhar. He draws this account from Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's *Ikmāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Niʿmah*. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, in turn, transmits this highly admonitory story from Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā (Ibn Bābawayh, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 11–26).

Āyatollāh Moḥammad-Hādī Maʿrefat regards engagement with the works of earlier civilizations, including those of the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Jews, and even ancient Iranians and Hindus, as not merely permissible but necessary. Consulting ancient religious texts, which are often surrounded by layers of inherited superstition, should be undertaken with caution, patience, and careful scrutiny, particularly when the aim is to uncover the revelatory truths that may lie within them. Such engagement, he argues, constitutes both a cultural and an existential necessity (Maʿrefat, 2009, vol. 10, pp. 90–91).

Āyatollāh Javādī Āmolī interprets the word "knowledge" (ʿilm) in the prophetic hadith "Seek knowledge even if it be in China" (al-Majlisī, 1982, pp. 177, 180) in a broad sense, encompassing the various human, empirical, mathematical, and other sciences (Javādī Āmolī, 2005, p. 218). He further maintains that it also includes knowledge pertaining to ethics and beliefs (Javādī Āmolī, n.d. b, pp. 165–167). Similarly, ʿAllāmah Ḥasan-Zādeh Āmolī, who likewise regards this hadith as transmitted from the Messenger of God, reports that Imam al-Ṣādiq explained this "knowledge" as follows: "This knowledge refers to self-knowledge, and within it lies the knowledge of the Lord" (Ḥasan-Zādeh Āmolī, 2005, p. 143).

Āyatollāh Javādī Āmolī states elsewhere:

> Every sound word found anywhere in the world ultimately derives from revelation. Imam al-Bāqir (peace be upon him) told two of his students that wherever a sound piece of knowledge is found in the

east or the west, it comes from us; that is, it has reached humanity through the chain of messengership and prophethood: "Travel to the east and the west, and you will not find any sound knowledge except something that has emerged from us, the People of the House" (al-Majlisī, 1982, vol. 2, p. 92). Just as the prophets were sent one after another without interruption, "Then We sent Our messengers in succession" (Qur'ān 23:44), so too the words of the prophets form an unbroken continuity: "And indeed We have conveyed the word to them in continuity so that they may take heed" (Qur'ān 28:51).

In his interpretation of the verse "And indeed We have conveyed the word to them in continuity," he adds that the Exalted God has never left humanity without guidance. Heavenly scriptures have continually been revealed, and the chain of prophethood has never been interrupted. Even in the intervals between prophets, their successors and pious and knowledgeable individuals, as guardians of the religious tradition, preserved and transmitted their teachings. In the verse "Then We sent Our messengers in succession," the term "in succession" signifies the uninterrupted continuity of the chain of prophets, divine scriptures, and the words issuing from the Divine (Javādī Āmolī, n.d. a).

Āyatollāh Vāḥid Khorāsānī, after referring to India as a "center of wonders" and an "abode of marvels," and noting the existence of civilizations and many forms of knowledge that have been buried and lost over time, transmits, through an intermediary, a remarkable report from the philosopher Abolqāsem Mīrfendereskī concerning astrology: "It is narrated from Abū ʿAbd Allāh (peace be upon him) that he was asked about astrology. He said, 'None knows it except a household from among the Arabs and a household from among the people of India'" (al-Kulaynī, 1986, vol. 8, p. 330) (Vāḥid Khorāsānī, 2002). In his commentary on this hadith, ʿAllāmah al-Majlisī explains, “His statement, ‘a household from among the Arabs,’ refers to the household of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family)” (al-Majlisī, 1984, vol. 26, p. 458). That mastery of a particular field of knowledge should be confined to the Household of Infallibility (the Ahl al-Bayt) and to a household from India suggests the presence of significant capacities within the religious other.

Daryush Shayegan recounts that when he would read the Upanishads to ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, the latter would remark, “These are the very same teachings as our own Islamic doctrines.” In response to various passages from the Upanishads, Ṭabāṭabāʾī would recite a passage from a supplication, a statement from Nahj al-Balāghah, or a verse from the Qurʾan, and a genuine and substantive act of comparison, without precedent, would unfold. Ṭabāṭabāʾī even encouraged Shayegan to translate the Upanishads into Persian (Kadivar, 2023). In *al-Mīzān*, Ṭabāṭabāʾī writes, “The contents of the Upanishads are exalted truths that a small number of individuals, those endowed with divine guardianship (*wilāyah*), have discovered and borne” (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 2008, vol. 10, p. 431).

Sayyid Mohammad Hosseini Beheshti describes the milieu in which Islam emerged as a historically rich environment shaped by diverse religious and intellectual currents. He maintains that the Qurʾan and the hadith address this plurality and argues that even a minimal understanding of the Qurʾan is not possible without familiarity with its cultural contexts. He writes, “A prerequisite for interpreting the Qurʾan is familiarity with the Old and New Testaments, for the Qurʾan has been revealed with reference to these texts.” He further notes that in some works of Qurʾanic exegesis numerous pages have been devoted to explaining a point that could have been clarified in a few lines had the exegetes consulted the Bible. He also considers a certain degree of familiarity with Zoroastrianism and the Avesta, and even with Indian religions, to be necessary. Likewise, he regards the critique of hadiths as inappropriate without sufficient knowledge of now-extinct religions, arguing that without such awareness a researcher "cannot understand the language of many hadiths" (Hosseini Beheshti, 2020.).

According to Ahmad Paktachi, one may confidently claim that the Qurʾan itself authorizes the comparison of the Qurʾan with the scriptures of earlier religions. This becomes evident when one considers verses such as "Indeed We wrote in the Psalms after the Reminder that My righteous servants shall inherit the earth" (Qurʾan 21:105) and "Indeed this is surely in the former scriptures, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses" (Qurʾan 87:18–19). The Qurʾan explicitly refers to the Psalms (Zabūr) and the scrolls of Abraham and Moses. Since the Qurʾan does nothing in vain, such references point to the importance, and even the necessity, of comparing the Qurʾan with earlier revealed scriptures (Paktachi, 2024.).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, at the beginning of his translation and commentary on the Tao Te Ching, cites the prophetic hadith "Seek knowledge even if it be in China" and offers the following supplication: "O Lord of the two easts and Lord of the two wests, open for us the gate of knowledge" (Izutsu and Nasr, 2021, pp. 11–13). He describes the Tao Te Ching as "one of the most famous sacred books of the religions of the world," a short text dating to the fifth or sixth century BCE in which "every sentence is full of meaning and, in terms of the length of its chapters, it more closely resembles the sūrahs of the final section of the Qurʾan." Nasr explains that his aim in translating and commenting on the work is "to illuminate some of the truths of the Tao Te Ching in the philosophical and mystical language of Islam" (Izutsu and Nasr, 2021, pp. 12–21). In this work, he makes extensive use of sources from Islamic mysticism and the poetry of Muslim gnostics and Sufis, thereby demonstrating the affinities between certain Taoist teachings and Islamic spiritual doctrines.

Muḥammad Dārāshukūh regards the presence of the religious other as an almost imperative necessity, an “other” without whose existence each person would remain forever imprisoned within the vicious circle of self-centeredness (Shayegan, 2003, pp. 3–4). In his Persian translation of the Upanishads, he renders a number of Indian ontological or mythological concepts through Islamic equivalents: the “four states of Ātman” are equated with the “four worlds of Islamic cosmology,” the Trimūrti trinity with the three archangels, *mahākāśa* with the Supreme Throne (al-ʿArsh al-Akbar), *māyā* with divine love, and *pralaya* with the Resurrection (Shayegan, 2003, pp. 18, 30–32).

Mostafa Malekian regards indifference to the intellectual heritage of humanity, and the sense of self-sufficiency that dismisses the works of sages, philosophers, mystics, theologians, and the founders of religious traditions throughout the world, as nothing short of foolishness and self-deprivation. The inheritance of our predecessors, he argues, must be examined and sifted so that its genuine jewels may be preserved (Malekian, 2010/04/10). One must attend to the sacred texts of all religions and traditions, attention in the sense intended by Simone Weil: not necessarily accepting those views, but recognizing that their presence or absence matters for us. In other words, we should not live as though figures such as Kant, Shakespeare, Dante, Buddha, Muḥammad (peace be upon him), Socrates, or Plato had never existed; such a way of living would be profoundly irrational. Rather, after subjecting them to critical examination, we ought to make the fullest possible use of what is contained in the sacred texts of all religions and traditions (Malekian, 2010/04/10).

In addition to the foregoing considerations, one may also point to a practical principle in the discipline of the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), namely the presumption of continuity (*istiṣḥāb*) of the rulings of previous religious laws. This principle is a form of istiṣḥāb applied to legal rulings and is invoked when a ruling is known to have been established in a previous revealed law, while after the advent of Islam no reliable proof of its abrogation is available, leaving doubt as to whether it remains valid for Muslims. In such a case, the continuation of that ruling is presumed. For example, some jurists, in arguing for the validity of a *juʿālah* contract with an unspecified reward, have cited part of the story of the Prophet Joseph (Qurʾan 12:72). They reason that such a contract was certainly valid in that earlier dispensation, and since Muslims now doubt whether its validity has ceased, the presumption of continuity applies. A number of prominent scholars of uṣūl al-fiqh, among them Ākhond Khorāsānī and Shaykh Anṣārī, consider this type of istiṣḥāb to be operative (Markaz-e Eṭṭelāʿāt va Madārek-e Eslāmī, 2010.).

C. Analysis and Discussion

1. The Imperative of Universal Learning

According to the testimony of the Qurʾan, the hadith, and human reason, elements of truth are divine endowments—scattered pearls distributed across humanity. Consequently, the pursuit of truth is commendable and desirable regardless of its location or the person who possesses it.

On the Christian side, the merit of learning from any source is underscored by Karl Barth’s celebrated assertion:

> God may speak to us through Russian communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub or a dead dog. We do well to listen to Him if He really does… God may speak to us through a pagan or

> an atheist, and thus give us to understand that the boundary between the Church and the secular world can take at any time a different course from that which we think we discern (Barth, 1936, p. 55).

John Thatamanil, an American Anglican Christian of Indian origin whose comparative theological work engages especially with Hinduism, draws on Barth's expression to suggest that truth may also be found outside the Church. He remarks, "If God can speak through a dead dog, why could He not speak through a Hindu?" (Thatamanil, 2023). Although the wording is hardly courteous, it points to an important reality.

Interestingly, similar ideas appear within the Islamic tradition. The Qurʾan recounts that God raised a crow to teach Qābīl (Cain) how to bury his brother (Qurʾan 5:31). Hadith literature also enumerates praiseworthy traits found in animals and even recommends learning from them. Some hadiths speak, for instance, of acquiring specific virtues from the crow[1] and commend lessons to be learned from the rooster.[2] Moreover, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) calls attention to lessons that may be drawn from creatures such as the hedgehog, snake, ant,

1. It is reported from Imam al-Riḍā, from his forefathers, from Imam ʿAlī that the Messenger of God said, "Learn three qualities from the crow: its concealment during mating, its early rising in the search for provision, and its caution" (Ibn Bābawayh, 1983, vol. 1, pp. 99–100, hadith 51).
2. Imam al-Riḍā said concerning the white rooster, "It possesses five qualities from the qualities of the prophets: its awareness of the times of prayer, protective honor, generosity, courage, and great attentiveness to its household" (Ibn Bābawayh, 1983, vol. 1, pp. 298–299, hadith 70). Among the counsels of Luqmān to his son is the following: "My son, do not let the rooster be wiser than you or more vigilant in observing the prayers. Do you not see that at the time of every prayer it calls out for it, and at dawn it raises its voice while you are asleep?" (Daylamī, 1991, vol. 1, p. 72).

scorpion, birds of the sky, ostrich, viper, salamander, and bat (Ibn Sīnā, 1036, p. 8). Commentators and interpreters have elaborated extensively on the mysteries of their creation, discerning in them lessons that strengthen and balance the human soul. Such reflections, they claim, assist the ascent of the rational soul from the level of bodily attachments to higher stages of spiritual perfection, ultimately reaching the station of conjunction with the Active Intellect (Ibn Sīnā, 1991).

God created the human being as a seeker of perfection. Human beings therefore ought to acquire perfections from every possible path and learn from every creature in proportion to the capacities that God has bestowed upon it. If learning even from animals is recommended, then the legitimacy of learning from and through rational human beings, including peoples and religions that, according to the testimony of the Qurʾan and the hadiths, have encountered divine teachings throughout history and prehistory, becomes self-evident.

One may therefore employ the sieve of reason to distinguish the genuine from the spurious. Every belief or tradition must be weighed against the standard of one's own authentic and sound religious beliefs and practices: whatever accords with that standard may be affirmed, whereas whatever contradicts it must be set aside. It is reported that Jesus and his disciples once came upon the carcass of a dog. While the disciples remarked on its foul odor, Jesus instead drew attention to the whiteness and brightness of its teeth.[1]

2. The Meaning of "Truth" in Confessional Comparative Theology

In confessional comparative theology, only those elements and

1. It is narrated that Jesus, peace be upon him, passed by the carcass of a dog with the disciples, and the disciples said, "How foul the smell of this is." Jesus, peace be upon him, said, "How intensely white its teeth are" (Shahīd al-Thānī, 2000, p. 11).

teachings in another religion that are consonant with one’s own home tradition, or at least not in conflict with it, may be regarded as true (Cornille, 2019, p. 54). Put differently, within the literature of the confessional approach to comparative theology, “truth” denotes truth that is compatible with, or grounded in, the accepted revelation of the theologian’s own religious tradition, rather than truth derived from neutral inquiry conducted without doctrinal presuppositions.

According to Catherine Cornille, confessional comparative theology examines normative questions and religious truths on the basis of the theologian’s own religious tradition. Normativity arises from the home tradition, and the theologian seeks to articulate the truth of that tradition. The comparative theologian’s task, therefore, is to reflect on truth from within a particular tradition, namely, his or her own (Cornille, September 27, 2024).

Jacques Dupuis, writing from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy, similarly argues that divine truth must be carefully sifted from non-truth and that, in this process, Christ remains the *norma normans*, the supreme norm and criterion of all criteria. Whatever stands in contradiction to the Word, cannot come from the God who sent him (Dupuis, 1997, pp. 249–252). Accordingly, the confessional comparative theologian remains fully committed to the normative teachings of his or her own religious tradition in discerning truth in other religious traditions (Cornille, 2019, p. 162).

Within the Islamic context, the matter may be expressed in Islamic terminology as follows: a Muslim comparative theologian is obliged to remain committed to the core, inviolable principles and prescriptions of the religion, namely *uṣūl al-dīn* and *furū*ʿ *al-dīn,* and to observe the divinely prescribed limits governing obligations, prohibitions, and the essentials of faith. Such a theologian must strictly avoid unacceptable innovation (*bidʿah*) and deviation. These frameworks define the religious boundaries within which he or she operates, and fidelity to them safeguards the preservation of Islamic identity. What is beyond dispute is the impermissibility of transgressing the essentials of religion or contravening the definitive rulings of the Sharīʿah.

3. Focusing on the "Object of Comparison"

In engagement with the religious other, attention is sometimes directed to the data themselves, that is, to the object of comparison, so that something is learned precisely "from" the other. A simple example may be found in the various arguments for the existence of God developed within Christian natural theology. The writings of Christian theologians contain numerous such arguments from which one may profit. Even if some of such arguments were originally adopted from the works of Muslim thinkers, they may have been further refined by later authors and thus acquired additional value. Christian theodicies addressing the problem of evil in the order of creation provide another example of this kind.

A far more complex illustration, one that assumes a juridical (*fiqhī*) dimension, is mentioned here solely to demonstrate the seriousness of the discussion. It should be emphasized that no evaluative judgment is offered regarding this example and that any normative assessment properly belongs to jurists (*fuqahāʾ*) and *mujtahid*s alone.[1] The example concerns Saqib Hussain's article on

1. The authors emphasize that the determination of whether the results of comparative theological reflection possess doctrinal and practical validity rests solely with the mujtahids. If comparative theologians are not mujtahids, they serve only in an advisory capacity. Following the completion of their scholarly inquiry, they must defer the establishment of authoritative proof and the issuance of final legal rulings to those qualified to exercise *ijtihād*.

Qurʾan 4:34. Drawing upon Jewish legal sources, Hussain undertakes a detailed discussion of the Islamic jurisprudential concept of *nushūz*, seeking to challenge the meaning traditionally assigned to it in Islamic jurisprudence and proposing instead that it be interpreted as "sexual infidelity."

Relying on evidence from pre-Islamic Arabian literature and offering a comparative analysis with Jewish law, especially the rabbinic *sotah* ritual described in Numbers 5:11–31 and in the Mishnah concerning a wife suspected of adultery, he argues that the Qurʾanic procedure for addressing a woman suspected of nushūz closely parallels the rabbinic legal treatment of a woman suspected of infidelity. In his view, both legal traditions address the same underlying concern, namely marital betrayal.

Within the sotah ritual, a three-stage process is likewise observed. The husband first warns his wife, then abstains from marital relations with her, and finally brings her before a priest who administers the ordeal of drinking the bitter water. Hussain notes the similarity between this sequence and the three Qurʾanic stages of admonition, separation, and striking. He concludes that in both legal systems two principles apply: first, that punishment of such a woman cannot be imposed without the testimony of witnesses; and second, that the Qurʾanic term *ḍarb* should be understood not as domestic chastisement but as a judicial measure (Hussain, 2021).

4. Focusing on the "Act of Comparison Itself"

In engagement with the religious other, it is sometimes the very act of comparison that generates knowledge: learning occurs "through" the other rather than "from" the other. The epistemic force of comparison can deepen theological understanding without necessarily requiring the adoption of elements from the other tradition. Attention to the act of comparison itself has the additional advantage of making learning possible even through aspects of the other’s thought that are judged unacceptable by the home tradition.

In this connection, and without any intention of offering evaluative judgments, two examples may be cited simply to illustrate the method.

Example One: Yusuf Daneshvar Nilu argues that the excessive emphasis placed by some contemporary Muslim thinkers on human dignity is rooted more in the intellectual currents of the Enlightenment than in the Qurʾan and the hadiths. At times, on the basis of Qurʾanic verses that speak of human dignity and excellence, such as Qurʾan 17:70, 95:4, and 23:14, a thoroughly optimistic view of the human being is adopted. Yet comparison with the Christian doctrine of original sin may redirect attention to other Qurʾanic verses, such as 33:72, 2:74, and 7:179, and thereby lead to the conclusion that Qurʾanic anthropology is by no means uniformly optimistic about humanity. From an Islamic perspective, such Christian doctrines may indeed have developed in an erroneous form; nevertheless, they may still contain traces of truth. When one returns to the Qurʾan in light of such a comparison, a kind of rediscovery may occur. Instead of centering attention on verses that praise the human being, one comes to emphasize those that censure humankind and to recognize that even in verses that appear to praise the human being, the true object of praise is not humanity itself but God. This shift in perspective is not something learned directly from Christianity. Rather, through the process of comparison, one views one’s own religious sources from a different angle and derives this renewed understanding from the Qurʾan itself. The condition of the contemporary world likewise lends support to such a more pessimistic view of humanity (Daneshvar Nilu, 2023).

Example Two: A reluctance to endure the hardships of pilgrimage, together with indifference to the proper etiquette of visiting the graves of the *awliyāʾ* of God and a tendency to suffice with inward attachment and salutations offered from afar, may amount to a form of spiritual deficiency. Numerous traditions, for example, encourage physical presence at the graves, placing one's hands and face upon them, and benefiting from the spiritual effects associated with being present beneath the dome and at the head of the grave. Thus, for example, ʿAllāmah Majlisī states, "It is more precautionary not to perform prostration upon the grave; however, placing the sides of one's face upon it and supplicating and imploring there is part of the tradition" (Majlisī, 2007, p. 26).

Familiarity with certain teachings in other religious traditions may influence some individuals who have previously been indifferent to such practices. For example, in the Jewish Kabbalistic doctrine of *ibbur,* an incomplete soul attains perfection through attachment to the soul of a *ṣaddīq*, that is, a righteous person. According to this belief, the souls of virtuous individuals remain present above their graves after death, and whoever visits the grave and casts themselves upon it may be entered by that soul, which then assists them in walking the path of goodness (Stewart, 2009, p. 121).

D. Conclusion

This study has shown that, within Islamic comparative theology, epistemic recourse to, or engagement with, the religious other is grounded in the Qurʾan, hadith, and reason. The central question has been how such engagement and the benefit derived from it can be justified within a tradition that generally regards the data of other religions as, in principle, unreliable. The findings indicate that such engagement is neither categorically rejected nor uncritically accepted. Rather, it is approached in a measured, critical, and confessional manner.

On the one hand, the Qurʾan and the hadiths emphasize the universality and historical continuity of divine guidance, as well as the enduring presence of divine proofs among human societies. On the other hand, numerous hadiths encourage the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and truth from any source. These teachings strongly suggest that elements of truth are not confined to a single historical period or geographical region. Rather, owing both to humanity's historical and prehistorical encounter with the Sacred Source and to its endowment with reason and fiṭrah, such elements are dispersed among diverse peoples and religious traditions. From this perspective, the presence of elements of truth in the sources of the religious other may be understood as an assumption deeply rooted in Islamic teaching.

The views of Muslim scholars and thinkers likewise demonstrate that constructive theological engagement with the intellectual and religious heritage of others is not unprecedented in the history of Islamic thought. Indeed, it has at times been regarded as necessary for attaining a deeper understanding of Islamic sources. Such engagement, however, has consistently been accompanied by an emphasis on caution, critical evaluation, and assessment in light of intra-religious criteria. It has never been understood to imply a slide into religious relativism.

It is also important to note that, in confessional comparative theology, only those elements and teachings of another religion that are compatible with, or at least not in conflict with, one's home tradition may be regarded as true. Here, “truth” refers to truth that is consonant with, or grounded in, the accepted revelation of the comparative theologian’s own religious tradition. Accordingly, a Muslim comparative theologian remains bound to the core principles and precepts of the home religion, observing the divinely prescribed limits concerning obligations, prohibitions, and the essentials of faith, while rigorously avoiding bidʿah and deviation. The final judgment regarding the outcomes of this form of theological reflection necessarily belongs to those who possess the faculty of ijtihād.

Moreover, the study has shown that deep learning across religious borders is not limited to the reception of data from another religion. The act of comparison itself also possesses epistemic force. Comparison can open new horizons for rereading one’s own religious sources, generate new questions, and lead to the discovery of neglected possibilities within the sources of the home tradition, without requiring acceptance of the teachings of the other.

Ultimately, the cumulative force and mutual corroboration of revelatory and rational evidence support the legitimacy of epistemic engagement with, and learning from and through, the religious other. Such engagement constitutes not a threat to faith but an opportunity for the deepening, refinement, and enrichment of theology. By laying the foundations for this form of engagement, the present study represents an initial step toward the construction of an orthodox Islamic comparative theology, while leaving the detailed articulation of its methodological and inferential frameworks to future research.

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Theosophia Islamica EISSN: 2783-3240

Critical Examination of the Cognitive-Analytic Approach to Moral Self-Deception*

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Abstract

The problem of moral self-deception has always been one of the complex puzzles in the philosophy of mind and ethics due to its entanglement with epistemic paradoxes—a phenomenon that seemingly requires the simultaneous acceptance of two incompatible cognitive states, meaning that the agent believes in a proposition while possessing strong evidence to the contrary. Focusing on the cognitive-analytic approach, this article demonstrates that within this framework, the problem transcends mere explanation of neurobiological mechanisms and centers on evaluating the logical possibility of self-deception and the endeavor to escape static and dynamic paradoxes. In the first step, while distinguishing self-deception from similar phenomena such as wishful thinking, the current research emphasizes the central role of motivational components in the formation of beliefs contrary to evidence. In the main section, two

* Danesh. J. (2026). Critical Examination of the Cognitive-Analytic Approach to Moral Self-Deception. *Theosophia Islamica, 6*(1), pp. 153-186.
https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2026.74406.1117

▣ **Article Type:** Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

▣ **Received:** 2025/07/22 ● **Revised:** 2025/09/14 ● **Accepted:** 2025/11/15 ●**Online Publication:** 2026/01/10

prominent models of this approach—the Canfield-Gustafson linguistic model and the Jeffrey Foss epistemological model—are formulated and critiqued. Examinations show that the former, despite attempting to dissolve the paradox through the dissection of ordinary language, falls into reductionism and reduces the phenomenon merely to a belief contrary to evidence. Furthermore, by applying thought experiments such as the swimmers' scenario, it is argued that the evidence-based criterion of Foss also leads to unreasonable and counter-intuitive epistemic consequences. The final conclusion of the article indicates that the cognitive-analytic approach, despite its conceptual precision and logical sensitivity, faces inherent limitations in providing a comprehensive explanation of moral self-deception; because resolving the paradox solely at the cognitive level, while neglecting the normative and phenomenological layers of the agent’s moral experience, leads to overlooking the fundamental dimensions of self-deception.

Keywords

Moral self-deception, Cognitive-analytic approach, Static and dynamic paradoxes, Jeffrey Foss, Wishful thinking, Canfield, Gustafson.

1. Introduction

Defining self-deception and determining its scope and instances have always been fraught with deep conceptual challenges and widespread theoretical disagreements. Despite this diversity of opinion and philosophers such as Champlin, who fundamentally regarded the occurrence of moral self-deception as impossible (Champlin, 1979), it can be briefly accepted that self-deception at least includes a situation in which an individual, under the influence of a prior desire, motive, or intention, comes to believe in proposition p while the evidence and signs available to them support ~p. However, the precise formulation of this process, depending on the adopted methodology, yields entirely different results. In his seminal analyses, especially in the article "Real Self-Deception" (1997) and the book "Self-Deception Unmasked" (2001), Alfred Mele identifies three distinct approaches to defining this phenomenon, each of which has its own specific logical consequences. The first approach, which Mele calls the "lexical approach," begins the analysis with the meaning of the verb "to deceive" in an interpersonal context. In this view, person A deceives person B only when they already know that proposition p is false and intentionally act to make B believe in p. As we will see, the application of this rigid, stereotypical definition to self-deception—where the deceiver and the deceived are one and the same person—faces the paradox that the person holds two contradictory beliefs at the same time, which is logically impossible.

In contrast to the impasse of the lexical approach, Mele defends two other approaches: the "example-based approach" and the "theory-guided approach." In the example-based approach, instead of abstract definitions, the analyst focuses on objective and common instances of self-deception, such as a spouse who ignores evidence of infidelity or parents who deny their child's addiction. Analysis of these cases shows that the main feature of self-deception is not necessarily "knowing the truth and lying to oneself," but the formation of a belief contrary to evidence, which is motivated by the individual's desires, without necessarily involving a conscious deceptive intention (Mele, 2001: 16-17). By expanding this view within the framework of the theory-guided approach, Mele argues that the best definition of self-deception is one that is consistent with valid psychological theories. Accordingly, he proposes a "deflationary" view in which self-deception is not a paradoxical puzzle, but the product of a natural interaction between desires and "cognitive biases" such as selective attention and biased interpretation of evidence (Mele, 1997, pp. 93-95).

However, not all philosophers are sympathetic to this deflationary view, and this is where substantive classifications become important. Opposed to Mele’s purely motivational models are "conflict models," which continue to insist on the dualistic and paradoxical nature of self-deception. In his model of "intentional conflict," Davidson argues that the self-deceiver genuinely "intends" to create a belief for which there is counter-evidence. To resolve the resulting paradox, he resorts to the idea of a "partitioned mind," or the division of the mind into semi-independent subsystems, to keep contradictory beliefs and intentions separate (Davidson, 1985). David Pears and psychologists such as Gur and Sackeim, by defending the "belief conflict model," also consider the simultaneous existence of two contradictory beliefs a necessary condition for self-deception (Pears, 1984; Gur & Sackeim, 1979).

Apart from analytical and cognitive approaches, phenomenological and existentialist currents have also offered profound definitions of this phenomenon, focusing on lived experience and the structure of consciousness. In his seminal work, *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre, by rejecting the possibility of hiding the truth in the unconscious due to the transparency and integrity of consciousness, introduces the concept of "bad faith." In his view, self-deception is an escape from the anxiety of freedom and the ignoring of one of the two aspects of human existence: "facticity" or "transcendence" (Sartre, 1956). Although Herbert Fingarette belongs to the analytical tradition, he approaches self-deception with a quasi-phenomenological perspective, analyzing it not at the level of "belief," but at the level of "skill" and "attention." From his perspective, the self-deceiver does not necessarily hold a contradictory belief; rather, they adopt a specific attentional policy to avoid "spelling out" and acknowledging the reality with which they are engaged (Fingarette, 1969).

Finally, evolutionary and social approaches, such as Robert Trivers' view, by linking self-deception to the deception of others, argue that the primary function of self-deception is to hide the signs of lying from oneself in order to more effectively deceive others; a perspective that underscores the social and interpersonal nature of this phenomenon (Trivers, 2011). As we can see, the definition of self-deception fluctuates along a spectrum from motivated cognitive errors—which Mele emphasizes—to an existential project of escaping the truth—which Sartre puts forward.

It is clear that moral self-deception is different from the phenomenon of "wishful thinking." Both self-deception and wishful thinking are the result of motivated cognitive bias and, in turn, lead to the formation of false beliefs; however, firstly, the strength and clarity of counter-evidence in self-deception are greater than in wishful thinking, and the individual believes what they desire while facing strong and obvious contradictory evidence. And secondly, wishful thinking is inherently dependent on positive desire, meaning: "I believe p is the case because I want p to be the case." But in some instances of self-deception, which Mele calls "twisted self-deception," an individual believes in false things that they fundamentally fear or despise; in other words, in twisted self-deception, "I believe p is the case, while I wish p were not the case."

2. The Paradox of Self-Deception[1]

The classification of dominant approaches in explaining self-deception lies in how they confront the common types of interpersonal deception and the resulting presuppositions in the occurrence of self-deception. The conceptual or lexical approach, represented by thinkers such as Davidson, Pears, and Fingarette, by accepting a structural isomorphism between the two phenomena of deceiving others and deceiving oneself, is preoccupied with the question, "What is self-deception and how is it logically possible?" In this approach, just as in deceiving others, the deceiver knows the truth and intentionally tells a lie, self-deception is also predicated on the individual being, on one hand, in the position of the deceiver who is aware of the falsity of a particular proposition, and on the other hand, simultaneously in the position of the deceived who believes in the truth of that proposition. In contrast to this conceptual approach, we have witnessed the

1. For more on "Twisted Self-Deception," see: Mele, A. R. (2001). *Self-deception Unmasked*. Princeton University Press, pp. 94-118.

empirical and explanatory approach of individuals such as Alfred Mele, Quattrone, Tversky, and Robert Trivers, who examine self-deception not through the linguistic analysis of the word "deception" and by focusing on interpersonal deception, but through the observation of the actual mechanisms of human behavior, and their fundamental question is, "How does self-deception occur in practice?"

However, the conceptual formulation of self-deception faces the paradox that the moral agent must both deceive and be deceived regarding the same subject. They must be aware of the falsity of proposition p in order to act to deceive like any other deceiver, and they are also compelled, as the deceived, to consider p to be true. It seems that Sartre (1943) was among the first philosophers to address this conceptual contradiction of self-deception. In his famous formulation of the paradox of "bad faith" or self-deception in the book *Being and Nothingness*, he writes:

> "The one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person, which means that I must know in my capacity as the deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived. Better yet, I must know the truth very exactly in order to conceal it more carefully—and this not at two different moments, which would allow us at least to reconstruct a duality at a pinch—but in the very structure of a single project. How then can the lie subsist if the duality which conditions it is suppressed?" (Sartre, 1956, p. 49)

After Sartre, some analytic philosophers in the 1960s, such as Canfield, through a logical analysis of the nature of deception, and others, such as Davidson (1985), by partitioning the mind, attempted to somehow overcome this paradox. However, Alfred Mele (1997) is the first philosopher to distinguish between the two logical impasses in the conceptual account of self-deception[1]. In the conventional model of interpersonal deception, there are two fundamental components: first, a deceiver who believes in the truth of a proposition (such as p) tries to make the deceived believe in its negation ~p; second, this process is inherently an intentional and conscious activity. Applying this model to the intrapersonal situation—where the agent who is the deceiver and the one who is the deceived are one and the same person—brings us, according to Mele, face-to-face with two

1. For these two types of logical paradox in the conceptual approach to self-deception, see:

Mele, A. R. (1997). Real self-deception. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 20(1): 92-3.

Mele, A. R. (2001). *Self-deception Unmasked*. Princeton University Press, pp. 5-10.

Although Mele addresses the content of both the paradox of contradictory belief and the paradox of intentional deception in his article "Real Self-Deception" (1997), he does not use specific names for them. In that article, he merely criticizes the "paradox of self-deception" that arises from the interpersonal deception model. In the book *Irrationality: An Essay on Akrasia, Self-Deception, and Self-Control* (1987), although he identifies the static paradox with the descriptive phrase "The Paradox of Belief" and the dynamic paradox with "The Strategy Paradox," he does not use the short, formal labels "static" and "dynamic" in this book, which became part of his standard terminology from 1997 onwards. His goal in this book, as in his 1983 article, is to dissolve these paradoxes by offering a deflationary model based on motivational biases.

However, after Mele, numerous philosophers have addressed the static and dynamic contradictions using his terminology; see:

Tamar Szabó Gendler, SELF-DECEPTION AS PRETENSE, *Philosophical Perspectives*, 21, Philosophy of Mind, 2007, pp. 232-233.

Jose Luis Bermudez, Defending intentionalist accounts of self-deception, in Alfred R. Mele, Real self-deception, *BEHAVIORAL AND BRAIN SCIENCES* (1997) p. 107.

Funkhouser, Eric, 2019, *Self-Deception*, New York: Routledge, pp. 25-40.

paradoxes, which became known as the static paradox and the dynamic paradox (Mele, 2001, pp. 7-8).

The first dilemma, i.e., the static paradox or the puzzle of the cognitive state, deals with the analysis of the final mental state of the self-deceiver. This paradox states that in order to deceive oneself into believing proposition p, the person must initially believe in the truth of its negation, and if this process is successful, the result is a state in which the agent (S) has simultaneously maintained both contradictory beliefs in their cognitive system. It is clear that such a static and bifurcated state in a single mind is not only an obvious contradiction from the perspective of formal logic, but also seems highly improbable from the standpoint of cognitive psychology.

Beyond the problem of the final state, the dynamic paradox or the strategy puzzle focuses on the process and dynamics of the formation of self-deception and stems from the assumption that deceiving is inherently an intentional act. If self-deception is a voluntary and intentional project, the individual must inevitably and consciously employ a strategy of deception and concealment against themselves to lead themselves to a belief they know to be false. But on the other hand, a fundamental condition for the success of any deception is the deceived's ignorance of the deceiver's intention, and the agent's awareness of their own intention to deceive should, in principle, neutralize the entire project from the very beginning! Eric Funkhouser, to demonstrate the apparent impossibility of this process, writes:

> "Concealing the truth from yourself is like a hopeless endeavor, something like tickling yourself. It cannot be successful because, unlike your mother [whom you can easily lie to], you know exactly what you are doing." (Funkhouser, 2019, p. 3)

Thus, the dynamic paradox raises the question of how an agent can consciously and intentionally carry out a process whose necessary condition for success is their own ignorance of that process.

3. Moral Self-Deception from a Cognitive-Analytic Perspective

To accurately understand the status of self-deception in contemporary thought, it is necessary to draw a clear demarcation between the two main currents in cognitive studies of this phenomenon, namely the cognitive-empirical approach and the cognitive-analytic approach. While the empirical current, with philosophers and psychologists such as Alfred Mele and Albert Bandura, focuses on psychological mechanisms, information processing biases, and emotional motives, the cognitive-analytic approach, which flourished in the 1960s to 1980s, has a completely different concern. Thinkers in this tradition—three of the most important of whom we discuss here, namely John Canfield, Don Gustavson, and Jeffrey Foss—employ the tools of linguistic and logical analysis to show that the dilemma of self-deception, before being a psychological puzzle, is a conceptual knot resulting from the improper use of language. It is clear that the goal of this approach is not to explain how brain processes or emotional reactions involved in deception function, but to examine the logical possibility of propositions regarding self-deception and to resolve its static and dynamic paradoxes.

Within this analytical paradigm, two completely distinct and competing approaches can be traced, the differences between which have a direct impact on the moral evaluation of the self-deceiver.

3.1. The Dissolutionist Approach: Canfield and Gustavson's Evidence-Based Model

John Canfield and Don Gustavson, in their seminal article (1962), established an approach aimed not at solving the paradox of self-deception, but at its complete dissolution through the dissection of ordinary language (Canfield & Gustavson, 1962). They argue that the paradox of self-deception is merely a philosophical illusion and a category mistake resulting from the inappropriate application of the logic of deceiving others to the intrapersonal situation. Their primary strategy for escaping this linguistic impasse is to employ a subtle conceptual analogy with the concept of "compelling" and "commanding." To demonstrate the logical error inherent in the conventional understanding of self-deception, Canfield and Gustavson first compare the verb "to compel" at the interpersonal and intrapersonal levels. At the interpersonal level, when we say "Smith compelled Jones to stay awake and study," we encounter a clear structure. In this structure, there are two distinct agents, one of whom (Smith) exerts force or will, and the other (Jones) submits to this pressure and obeys. Now, if we transfer this structure to within the individual and say "Jones compelled himself (commanded himself) to stay awake and study," does this mean that Jones's psyche is divided into two distinct parts? That is, is there a "commanding Jones" who issues orders and a "submissive Jones" who accepts and follows them? It is clear that from an analytical perspective, such an interpretation is completely unreasonable and a linguistic misunderstanding. The phrase "compelling oneself" is merely a metaphor or a linguistic shortcut to describe the empirical fact that Jones performed the act of studying despite the existence of strong obstacles and conditions—such as extreme fatigue or a strong desire to sleep—that were strongly opposed to performing that act.

By generalizing this same logic to the concept of self-deception, the authors argue that when we say "Jones deceived himself that p is true," the imperative appearance of our sentence should not lead us to the analytical error of assuming that one part of the mind, which knows that ~p is true, is lying to another part of the mind to persuade it of the truth of p. Just as in "compelling oneself," there was no need to divide the mind into commander and commanded, in self-deception, there is no need to divide the mind into deceiver and deceived.

By removing the challenge of the interpersonal model, Canfield and Gustavson must provide a new positive definition of self-deception that is free from contradiction. They accomplish this by introducing the key concept of "adverse conditions for belief." Based on their evidence-based model, self-deception no longer means intentionally lying to oneself; rather, epistemologically, it consists of: maintaining or forming a belief in direct opposition to available evidence. Adverse conditions for belief refer to a situation in which the set of objective evidence available to an individual strongly dictates against proposition p; such that any rational and impartial observer, upon examining that evidence, would immediately conclude that ~p is true. Nevertheless, in these very adverse conditions, and despite the heavy weight of contradictory evidence, the self-deceiver continues to maintain the belief in the truth of p.

For example, consider a mother who is faced with numerous pieces of evidence, such as finding drugs in her child's room, suspicious phone calls, a severe drop in academic performance, and physical changes, all of which indicate her child's addiction (~p). These pieces of evidence create adverse and incompatible conditions for believing in the child's sobriety (p). However, the mother still deeply believes that her child is sober.

With this analytical redescription, Canfield and Gustavson dissolve both classic paradoxes of self-deception from the ground up. Because, firstly, contrary to the static paradox, there is no longer a need to assume that the mother simultaneously believes her child is addicted (~p) and believes that he is sober (p). She merely holds a single belief (p), but maintains this belief in a space where environmental evidence strongly refutes it. Secondly, there is also no longer a need to assume that the mother has designed a conscious and intentional project to hide the truth from herself. She has no intention to deceive anyone; rather, she has simply deviated in evaluating the evidence or in being influenced by it (for emotional reasons that are outside the scope of Canfield and Gustavson's logical discussion). In this way, the dynamic paradox is also resolved.

3.2. The Resolutionist Approach: Jeffrey Foss's Agency-Based and Dynamic Model

In contrast to the reductionist model of Canfield and Gustavson, who intended to erase the problem by eliminating internal conflict, Jeffrey Foss adopts a critical and positive approach in his analytical article "Rethinking Self-Deception" (1980) (Foss, 1980). Foss's approach, which can be termed the resolutionist approach, is based on the presupposition that reducing self-deception to merely having a belief under adverse conditions for belief is to strip this concept of its most salient characteristics, namely duplicity and active agency.

To demonstrate the inefficiency of the Canfield and Gustavson model, Foss proposes a thought experiment. Suppose two people, Smith and Jones, fall into the sea two miles from the shore. All past evidence indicates that neither has the ability to swim even halfway. Nevertheless, both, with blatant disregard for this evidence, deeply believe that they can reach the shore. Smith starts swimming and, against the odds, is saved. Jones also swims but drowns.

According to the definition of the dissolutionist approach and due to the maintenance of belief contrary to evidence, both individuals must be considered self-deceivers. However, Foss demonstrates that this conclusion is false. Smith is merely a lucky man whose belief turned out to be true, and Jones is, at best, merely a fool or an irrational individual with blind faith, not a self-deceiver. The fundamental error of the evidence-based model is that it cannot distinguish the boundary between cognitive stupidity and self-deception, because it reduces self-deception exclusively to the tension between the agent's belief and external evidence, while the nature of self-deception requires an internal tension and awareness of the truth, in other words, duplicity (Foss, 1980, p. 238).

Foss, to demonstrate the distinction between logical contradictions and the possibility of contradictory beliefs, states in the first step that the error of previous philosophers in fleeing from the concept of self-deception stems from confusing the following two logical propositions:

(1) jBp & ~jBp

(Jones believes that p AND Jones does not believe that p)

(2) jBp & jB~p

(Jones believes that p AND Jones believes that ~p)

In Jeffrey Foss’s view, the fundamental error of previous philosophers, and especially the dissolutionists, can be explained by the confusion of logical and psychological statuses. The first proposition, i.e., jBp &~ jBp, states that Jones believes that p is true and at the same time it is not the case that Jones believes that p is true. This state is a pure logical contradiction and, in other words, an intrinsic impossibility, because the mind cannot simultaneously possess and lack a state at the same moment. But the error of the dissolutionists is that they imagine the second proposition, i.e., jBp &jB~p, is also impossible like the first one, whereas this proposition merely states that Jones simultaneously believes in p and its negation. This state is not a logical contradiction in the structure of the world, but rather a description of a psychological conflict. The dissolutionists, in order to escape the contradiction of the first proposition, deny the idea of contradictory beliefs altogether, but Foss considers this approach to be the result of a confusion of the issue.

Foss resorts to analytical behaviorism and pragmatism to prove the possibility of the coexistence of two contradictory beliefs in a single mind, and he changes the definition of belief. In this approach, belief is not a constantly active and conscious state in the individual's mind; rather, it is, in fact, a disposition toward an action. Disposition here also means the propensity and potential to exhibit a specific behavior if certain conditions arise. Just as glass, even if it remains intact for a thousand years and never breaks, possesses the property of fragility as a disposition within itself at all times, belief is also a set of behavioral potentials dormant in the human psyche. With this perspective, there is no logical impossibility for a human to carry two completely contradictory behavioral dispositions within themselves, just as a chemical substance can have the potential for two completely different reactions within its structure.

Therefore, the self-deceiver's mind contains precisely two categorized files of contradictory behavioral and belief potentials. But the essential condition for maintaining this coexistence and preventing psychological collapse or cognitive dissonance is that these two contradictory dispositions do not collide at a single moment. To achieve this, the self-deceiver must isolate the environments and triggers that awaken these beliefs, which Foss calls "activator sets," from each other. He intentionally partitions his mind such that one belief is activated only under specific conditions and given triggers, and the contradictory belief emerges only in a completely different context. This explanation clearly shows that self-deception is not a simple cognitive error or memory deficit, but requires active, intentional, and intelligent management of conflicts. The individual must constantly be careful that the triggers for these two contradictory beliefs are never activated simultaneously, and it is precisely this intentional management and active duplicity that gives self-deception an voluntary nature and renders the agent morally fully responsible and culpable.

To understand how two contradictory beliefs coexist in the real world, Foss introduces the key concept of "activator sets" (ibid, p. 240). He explains that the conditions that activate the dispositions for believing in p can be completely distinct from the conditions that activate the dispositions for believing in ~p. Suppose Jones, on one hand, believes that his aunt is a "saint" (p) and, on the other hand, believes that she is a "sinner" (~ p). The mechanism of self-deception operates such that the belief in the aunt’s sainthood (p) is "activated" in Jones's behavior and speech only when he is in the presence of his family (the first activator set). However, the belief in the aunt’s sinfulness (~p) emerges only when he is among his friends (the second activator set). Jones is not pretending here; rather, his mind has intentionally partitioned its cognitive behaviors and environments so that these two beliefs never encounter each other in a single court of consciousness.

Based on this analysis, Foss provides his final definition, which is directly tied to agency and moral responsibility. Jones deceives himself regarding proposition p if and only if:

1. Jones causes his belief in p to be formed and maintained (jBp).
2. Jones actually knows that ~p is true (jK~p).

Since knowing entails believing, the self-deceiver is someone who knows a bitter truth (~p), but in an active mental project, causes a desired and false belief in p to be formed in their mind and employed within specific activator sets. This emphasis on the phrase "causes" is the focal point of the resolutionist approach. Self-deception is not a passive cognitive error; rather, it is a voluntary intervention, an active duplicity, and an intentional manipulation of the attentional environment, which is precisely why it renders the knowing subject severely accountable and responsible from a moral perspective.

4. Review and Critique of Approaches

As we have seen, cognitive-analytic approaches have taken an important step toward resolving the classical paradoxes of self-deception by shifting attention from the component of will and intention to belief and epistemological mechanisms. However, a close examination of the models provided shows that each of these approaches faces its own specific conceptual challenges and philosophical consequences. In this section, we summarize and critique the two models of Canfield-Gustavson and Jeffrey Foss under this approach.

4.1. Critique and Evaluation of the Evidence-Based Model

Canfield and Gustavson's model, by reducing self-deception to believing in proposition p under adverse epistemic conditions, attempts to dissolve the static and dynamic paradoxes. Although this model appears logically consistent and avoids propositional contradictions, it suffers from deep and irreparable shortcomings, some of which are briefly formulated below.

One of the most significant critiques of the Canfield and Gustavson model is their falling into the trap of reductionism. As

William Uttal showed in 2001, reductionism in the cognitive-analytic approach means attempting to decompose complex and intertwined psychological phenomena into simple and linear components; an approach that critics believe leads to the loss of the meaning and richness of human experience (Uttal, 2001). In Canfield and Gustavson's model, precisely this methodological disaster occurs; they reduce a deeply complex, emotional, and existential phenomenon such as self-deception—which is tied to an individual's fears, hopes, and preservation of identity—merely to a dry logical formula, which consists of a simple error in evaluating evidence, i.e., believing in proposition p despite the existence of contradictory evidence.

This analytical fragmentation reduces self-deception from a profound human internal crisis to a simple computational error in evaluating evidence and distorts all its psychological dimensions. The destructive consequence of this attitude is that the boundary between self-deception and concepts such as stupidity, gullibility, or confirmation bias is completely erased. Undoubtedly, an agent who does not see evidence correctly is not necessarily self-deceptive; rather, self-deception entails a kind of internal struggle with a truth that the agent avoids accepting, but this reductionism ignores such a subtle and vital difference.

Another flaw in the model proposed by these two thinkers is that it considers the human mind as an information-processing machine that produces incorrect outputs under adverse conditions. This approach faces the fundamental critiques of John Searle (1980) and Dreyfus (1992) regarding classical cognitive science. Unlike computational machines, the human mind possesses intentionality and consciousness (Searle, 1980, pp. 422-424). By removing intentionality from the process of self-deception and transforming it into a mechanical reaction to evidence, Canfield and Gustavson reduce human agency to blind algorithms. This dissolutionist model fails to grasp the phenomenological truth that the self-deceptive agent does not process information and evidence in a vacuum; rather, as a situated subject, they live with them and give them meaning within the context of their own lived experience (Dreyfus, 1992, pp. 235-239). Reducing self-deception to a disorder in a processing mechanism is, in fact, ignoring the subject's agency and epistemic responsibility.

Another one of the most obvious and yet fundamental epistemological shortcomings of the Canfield and Gustavson model is clearly manifested in their very own core example—namely, the father who does not believe his son is guilty. They interpret this epistemic state solely as a result of the subject being placed in adverse epistemic conditions for belief formation, describing it as a defect in the evidence-updating process. This cold, mechanical, and soulless description of a deeply human experience is predicated on the incorrect and deep-rooted assumption that cognition is a purely computational process, separate from the emotional and affective realm of the mind. This reductionist approach brings to mind the fundamental critiques of two significant schools of thought in the history of cognitive science and neuroscience.

First, the enduring research of Robert Zajonc (1980), who, with his influential article titled "Feeling and Thinking: Preferences Need No Inferences," dealt a fundamental blow to the paradigm of pure cognitivism. Providing empirical evidence, Zajonc argued that affective reactions can occur independently of, and even precede, cognitive processes. From his perspective, affect and cognition are partially independent systems, and affect is not merely a byproduct of cognition but a preceding and determining force in directing judgments and evaluations. Zajonc explicitly stated that preferences need no inferences and that many of our decisions and beliefs are formed not based on cold reasoning, but on rapid, pre-cognitive affective evaluations (Zajonc, 1980, pp. 151–156).

Second, the theory of somatic markers, proposed by the prominent neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (1994) in his seminal work *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. By studying patients with brain damage in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, Damasio showed that these patients, despite fully maintaining their reasoning and computational abilities, suffered catastrophic collapse in practical decision-making due to impairment in emotional processing. Damasio reached the fundamental conclusion that emotions are not only not obstacles to rationality but are necessary and essential conditions for practical rationality, to the extent that without the participation of emotions, the process of evaluating evidence and rational decision-making is practically paralyzed (Damasio, 1994, pp. 165–201).

Considering these two theoretical frameworks, one can claim that the father (Jones) does not ignore the evidence of his son’s guilt due to a defect or malfunction in his mind's computational system. What drives him toward resisting the acceptance of evidence is a set of deep and powerful emotional forces, such as the fear of the collapse of his idealized image of his child, the unconditional paternal love that rejects any threatening narrative, the existential anxiety resulting from the potential collapse of the family foundation, social shame, and deep identity-related motives linked to the paternal role. These emotions are not ornamental fringes of the cognitive process, but the main driving motor and the final cause of the father’s epistemic resistance. In Damasio’s terms, the somatic markers associated with fear and anxiety have already, before any Bayesian calculation begins, set the stage for evaluating the evidence in favor of denial. Therefore, the dissolutionist approach of Canfield and Gustavson, by systematically removing the determining role of emotions from the analysis of self-deception and reducing it to a purely epistemological and computational issue, not only fails to explain the main driving motor of the phenomenon of self-deception but also offers a distorted and incomplete image of the human subject.

The fourth critique of this approach is the lack of ecological validity and the laboratory-based artificiality of cognition. Ulric Neisser (1976), in his seminal work *Cognition and Reality*, levels a profound epistemological critique against the dominant paradigm of cognitive psychology. From his perspective, information-processing models constructed within laboratory frameworks suffer from a type of reductionist abstraction; these models ignore the phenomenological essence of cognition by separating cognitive processes from the context and lived experience of the knowing subject. Neisser argues that cognition is a situated and embodied process that is always formed in a dialectic with the environment. By proposing the concept of the "perceptual cycle," he shows that the mind is not a passive processor of information but an active agent that engages with the world through anticipatory schemata. These schemata guide the exploration of the environment, the environment provides the available information, and this information, in turn, modifies the schemata. Therefore, any cognitive model that ignores this feedback loop between mind and world and reduces cognition merely to symbolic, intra-mental operations lacks what Neisser calls ecological validity (Neisser, 1976, pp. 7–8, 33–35).

This critique clearly applies to the Canfield and Gustavson model, as their definition is based on explicit propositions of p and p and their mathematical-like opposition to evidence. Their formulation of self-deception occurs in a logical vacuum, whereas in real life, evidence is rarely available with such clarity and decisiveness. Self-deception always occurs within a context of ambiguity, contradictory evidence, and multiple interpretations of a situation. Reducing this phenomenon to a laboratory formula causes the model to fail in explaining the complexities of defense mechanisms and human behavior in natural, everyday environments and the human life-world (*Lebenswelt*).

Another one of the most serious epistemological flaws of the model under discussion is its entanglement in the trap of methodological individualism and the structural neglect of the socio-cultural dimension of cognition. This model conceptualizes Jones as a knowing subject who is isolated and completely detached from his social context; an epistemic agent who apparently faces evidence alone in a social vacuum, and whose process of epistemic evaluation occurs independently of any social and cultural mediation. This image reflects the same myth of the "isolated mind" rooted in the Cartesian tradition, which abstracts the knowing subject from his social world.

In contrast to this reductionist approach, there is a powerful tradition in cognitive science and cultural-historical psychology that considers cognition to be an inherently and deeply social process. Vygotsky (1978), the founder of cultural-historical theory, by proposing the principle of "semiotic mediation," demonstrated that all higher mental functions, including reasoning, judgment, and the evaluation of evidence, are first formed at the inter-mental level within the context of social interactions and are then transferred to the intra-mental level through the process of internalization. In other words, the individual mind is itself the product and deposit of social interactions, not antecedent to them (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 52–57). In the same vein, Michael Cole (1996), by expanding and deepening Vygotsky’s approach within the framework of cultural psychology, argues that cognition always operates within the context of cultural artifacts and systems of social activity. For Cole, no cognitive process can be accurately and completely understood without considering the cultural matrix in which that process is interwoven (Cole, 1996, pp. 104–117).

Based on this theoretical framework, it appears that Jones's resistance to accepting his son's guilt cannot be reduced merely to an individual cognitive error, such as confirmation bias or a deficit in Bayesian updating. This resistance is, in fact, a multilayered and nested response to a collection of social pressures, the concept of family honor and prestige, cultural norms governing the paternal role, and the institutional expectations of society for a father to act as a protector and supporter of his child. In other words, Jones's epistemic schemata were not constructed in a social vacuum, but within a network of power relations, meaning, and identity; their function cannot be grasped without reference to this network. By ignoring this socio-cultural matrix and reducing a deeply intersubjective phenomenon to the level of individual cognitive mechanisms, Canfield and Gustavson's approach provides an incomplete, one-dimensional, and ultimately distorting analysis of a phenomenon whose roots lie in intermental interactions, social structures, and cultural layers of meaning.

Furthermore, one of the most significant critiques leveled against Canfield and Gustavson's dissolutionist approach was formulated by Jeffrey Foss in his analytical article. By designing a thought experiment titled the "Swimmer's Test," Foss demonstrates that adherence to Canfield and Gustavson's criteria logically leads to unreasonable and counterintuitive results, which themselves confirm the invalidation of those criteria (Foss, 1980, p. 240). Suppose two swimmers, Smith and Jones, are trapped in the sea under identical conditions, and the objective evidence—including the great distance to shore, the force of the water current, and the degree of physical exhaustion—all point decisively to a very high probability of drowning. Smith (the optimistic swimmer), despite all the conclusive evidence of drowning, believes in proposition p: "I am capable of surviving." Relying on this belief, he continues his efforts and, quite accidentally and unexpectedly—for instance, due to a boat passing by or a sudden change in the direction of the water current—he is saved. Thus, his belief in p turns out to be true in the end. Conversely, Jones (the realistic swimmer), relying on a rational assessment of the evidence, believes in proposition ~p: "I will drown." He loses hope, stops struggling, and drowns. His belief in ~p also turns out to be true.

Foss argues that, according to Canfield and Gustavson's criterion—which defines self-deception solely by the opposition of belief to existing objective evidence—Smith must be evaluated as a self-deceiver because his belief in p was inconsistent with the set of available evidence at the moment of its formation. In contrast, Jones, whose belief was consistent with the evidence, would be considered free of self-deception. However, this conclusion is clearly unreasonable and counterintuitive. The final truth or falsity of Smith's belief was not the product of any specific internal process in his mind, but was entirely dependent on external and accidental events in the outside world. Had the boat not arrived, Smith would also have drowned, and his belief would have remained false.

Therefore, what determines whether the subject is a self-deceiver in this model is not the motivational structure or internal psychological dynamics of the individual, but merely the accidental outcome of external events. Foss concludes that Canfield and Gustavson's approach degrades self-deception from a complex psychological phenomenon with a motivational structure, internal teleology, and dynamics between desires and beliefs, to something entirely accidental and dependent on what might be called "epistemic luck." This concept—which has wide application in contemporary analytic epistemology, especially in discussions regarding the conditions of knowledge and the Gettier problem—refers to a situation where the truth or falsity of a subject's belief depends not on their epistemic virtue or reliable cognitive process, but on external and accidental factors. If we accept that the criterion for self-deception is solely the opposition of belief to evidence, then our assessment of whether an individual is self-deceptive, instead of being based on an analysis of their internal mental structure, becomes purely *a posteriori* and contingent upon the final outcome of events—a result that is outside the subject's control and even their awareness. This consequence is incompatible with any of our intuitive and pre-theoretical understandings of self-deception as a mental state or psychological disposition.

This thought experiment clearly proves that a purely mechanical and algorithmic assessment of belief against evidence is neither an appropriate nor a sufficient criterion for understanding and defining such a complex, multilayered, and teleological phenomenon as self-deception. Contrary to what Canfield and Gustavson suggest, self-deception is not merely a computational error or a deficit in Bayesian updating; rather, it is a phenomenon with a specific motivational structure, oriented toward an end—such as maintaining an idealized self-image or avoiding psychological pain—that is rooted in the complex interplay of desires, fears, and beliefs. Any approach that ignores these dimensions and reduces self-deception to the level of belief's (in)congruence with evidence fails to grasp the essence of this phenomenon.

4.2. Critique and Evaluation of the Agency-Based Model

As we have seen, Jeffrey Foss, in an attempt to compensate for the shortcomings of previous models and critique the reductionist approach, formulated his theoretical framework by relying on analytical behaviorism and redefining belief as a "disposition to act." He sought to explain the possibility of the coexistence of contradictory beliefs (jBp & jB~ p) without falling into the impasse of logical contradiction. Foss's innovative solution was to change the ontological status of belief from a constantly active mental state to a behavioral potential and to introduce the conceptual tool of "activator sets."

In this model, although the subject carries two contradictory dispositions, they prevent their simultaneous activation and the emergence of logical conflict through the intelligent management of environmental conditions. Thus, this view, while safeguarding psychological logic, also preserves the agent's moral agency and responsibility in the process of self-deception. Although Foss's approach is an innovative attempt to escape logical contradictions, it is also faced with deep philosophical and psychological challenges.

Despite its structural differences, this approach remains rooted in the broader paradigm of behaviorism and cognitive functionalism. Consequently, two fundamental critiques leveled against Canfield and Gustavson's model cast a shadow over this one as well: first, the mechanical reduction of the mind and the neglect of intentionality—wherein the semantic content of beliefs is reduced to purely behavioral outputs—and second, the disregard for the phenomenology and the lived experience of the subject throughout the process of self-deception. Much like his cognitive predecessors, Foss analyzes self-deception more as a logical-algorithmic puzzle than an existential and human struggle. This fundamental flaw, in turn, entails consequences such as overlooking the vital role of emotions and motivations, falling into the trap of individualism, and neglecting the social context. Beyond these shared critiques, however, several specific objections apply directly to Foss's approach.One of the main critiques leveled against Foss's model is the covert return of the paradox of the will and meta-reflective self-consciousness. Borrowing the concept of "unspelled-out belief" from Herbert Fingarette (Fingarette, 1969, pp. 38–40), Jeffrey Foss attempts to redefine belief not as a unified mental state, but as a behavioral disposition and potential. Within this framework, the coexistence of two contradictory beliefs (p and ~ p) remains logically plausible as long as their activator sets—such as Jones's belief in his aunt's sainthood in the presence of his family versus her sinfulness in private—do not collide. Nevertheless, this mechanism suffers from a structural contradiction and a devastating dilemma rooted in the conditions for moral responsibility.

Foss correctly distinguishes between self-deception and external deception, positing agency and responsibility as the necessary conditions for this distinction (Foss, 1980, p. 242). However, applying this condition to the activator mechanisms traps his model in a practical dilemma from the outset.

The first branch of this binary puzzle assumes completely unconscious isolation. If the segregation of activator sets is a fully automatic process without the intervention of the will, the agent's agency is forfeited, and the structural difference between self-deception and unconscious defense mechanisms or brainwashing dissolves. In this scenario, the agent would no longer bear responsibility for their false belief.

The second branch of the dilemma implies intentional isolation. If the agent intervenes in the management of activation conditions to preserve moral responsibility, this requires a level of meta-reflective awareness. In this state, the agent must know that both contradictory beliefs exist within their cognitive system and must intentionally will to prevent the collision of their activators. Accepting this option brings Sartre's critique back to the fore and expands the previous dilemma into an impossible triangle within Foss's theoretical structure. At this stage, Foss cannot simultaneously maintain the following three propositions in his theory:

1. **Proposition 1:** The possibility of the coexistence of contradictory beliefs through the segregation of activator sets.
2. **Proposition 2:** The preservation of the agent's agency and moral responsibility in the formation of this segregation.
3. **Proposition 3:** Escaping the paradox of consciousness and liberation from the charge of hypocrisy.

Foss has resolved the paradox at the static and epistemic level (the simultaneous contradiction of two propositions) using activator mechanisms, but his insistence on the second proposition forces him to shift agency to a dynamic level—that of the will. An agent who intentionally isolates activator conditions must act as the deceiver who knows the truth that they, as the deceived, keep hidden from themselves; this is the situation Sartre identified as the core and impossibility of self-deception (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 49). Therefore, maintaining the first and second propositions inevitably leads to the collapse of the third. If the agent is meta-reflectively aware of both beliefs and intentionally prevents their collision, they are no longer a self-deceiver; rather, they are an actor and a hypocrite of consciousness who knows which role to play in which context. Ultimately, the paradox of consciousness has been driven out through the window of belief, only to return through the door of moral will.

Another flaw in Foss's approach is the reduction of self-deception to "epistemic luck." In critiquing previous naive approaches that viewed self-deception merely as the contradiction of belief against evidence, Foss uses the swimmer example to show that the truth criterion cannot be the exclusive determinant of self-deception. He rightly argues that if a swimmer, contrary to all evidence, believes they will survive and happens to survive, they are not self-deceptive but merely a lucky individual. However, a recursive argument reveals that Foss's "activator set" model reproduces this exact vulnerability, tying the phenomenon of self-deception to epistemic luck.

To understand this gap in reasoning, one must examine the mechanism of activator sets in a formal structure. Suppose the agent has two contradictory dispositions, D_p and $D_{\sim p}$ in their mental system. In Foss's model, activator set C_1 awakens the disposition C_p and set C_2 triggers $C_{\sim p}$. Whether the agent is in condition C_1 or C_2 at time t is often dependent on factors outside the agent's voluntary control. If proposition p is true in reality and the agent happens to be in condition C_1, the activated belief is true, and according to Foss's definition, the agent is not considered self-deceptive. However, if the same agent had accidentally been in condition C_2, the activated belief would have been false, and they would have fallen into the trap of self-deception. Here, the difference between a self-deceptive agent and an honest agent lies not in the internal structure of their mind, but merely in an accidental external situation.

Foss's defenders might argue that the activation conditions are not random, but rather follow a systematic and predictable pattern. However, it is clear that this defense is ineffective; for even if the activation pattern is perfectly systematic, the agent's initial entry into those specific conditions is an element that often remains outside their voluntary control. In other words, the randomness of luck does not necessarily mean the randomness of the pattern, but rather the agent's lack of control over the realization of the conditions that trigger that pattern.

This over-reliance on environmental factors stands in contradiction to the foundations of analytic epistemology. As Pritchard demonstrates well in analytic epistemology, a belief whose truth is derived from luck lacks explanatory value (Pritchard, 2005, pp. 125-130). Interestingly, Foss himself is aware of the gap between the intent to deceive and the actual outcome; in another part of his article, he acknowledges that if a person attempts to deceive another with a false belief, but that proposition happens to turn out true, the first person is a deceiver, yet they have not actually deceived anyone (Foss, 1980:237). Foss incorporates this precision in his analysis of interpersonal deception, but fails to extend this same logic to his own model of activator sets, ultimately leaving his explanation of self-deception at the mercy of luck and external accidents.

Another critique of Foss concerns the ontological ambiguity of his "dispositional" definition and the limitations of analytical behaviorism. As we have seen, to enable the coexistence of contradictory beliefs (jBp & jB ~p), Foss provides a dispositional definition of belief, stating that "to say someone believes something is to say they are disposed to act in certain ways" (ibid, p. 242). He explicitly attributes this idea to the "tradition of Ryle, Braithwaite, and Peirce" (ibid), though he concedes in a footnote at the end of the article that he does not offer a complete analysis of the nature of belief (ibid, p. 243, n. 3).

Although Foss does not use the term "behaviorism" directly to describe his position, his reference to Gilbert Ryle and his prioritization of behavioral dispositions—in the absence of any reference to internal states—effectively places his position within the framework of analytical behaviorism. In the philosophy of mind, this framework has faced two fundamental critiques that cast doubt on the validity of Foss's model.

First, Jerry Fodor argues that beliefs are real, causal states, not merely behavioral dispositions. If a belief were exactly the same thing as a disposition, we could not explain how two individuals might exhibit identical behavioral outputs while possessing entirely different beliefs (Fodor, 1987, pp. 10–15). Foss's reduction of belief to behavioral disposition strips away the intentionality and the internal richness of mental states, both of which play a key role in a phenomenon as complex as self-deception. Second, David Armstrong has shown that a belief is an underlying categorical state that *causes* the disposition to manifest, rather than being the disposition itself; just as the molecular structure of glass (the categorical state) is the foundation of its fragility (the disposition). If Jones's belief were merely a disposition, then in the absence of activation conditions, there would be no ontological state for his belief within his mental system, which is inconsistent with our fundamental intuition regarding the possession of persistent beliefs (Armstrong, 1973, pp. 1–16).Consequently, Foss's approach remains incapable of explaining the continuity of suppressed and hidden beliefs within the mind of a self-deceptive individual.

Finally, Foss's own admission in the final footnote of his article regarding the incompleteness of his analysis (Foss, 1980: 243) exacerbates this ontological problem. A foundation that is admitted by its own creator to be incomplete and reductionist cannot support a comprehensive and definitive explanation of such a multilayered phenomenon as self-deception, and ultimately leads to the classical dead ends of behaviorism.

Another of the most serious challenges to Foss's model is its inability to provide a clear boundary between self-deception and hypocrisy or pretense. In the final sections of the article, Foss anticipates a potential objection, stating that perhaps his subject (Jones) is simply a hypocrite (ibid, p. 241). Foss’s response to this challenge is not a structural explanation, but merely a declaration of stance: "There is no reason to think that Jones is pretending anything... Jones is a sincere and well-meaning person" (ibid). Foss merely declares that Jones is sincere, but he fails to explain on the basis of what mechanical or structural feature in his proposed model one can distinguish this sincerity from pretense.

To grasp the depth of this theoretical gap, consider the scenario of Jones: in the presence of his aunt (activator set S_p), he defends her moral virtues and expresses belief p, but among his friends (activator set $S_{\sim p}$), he speaks of her moral corruption and manifests the belief ~p.

Now, imagine the same pattern in a professional hypocrite—someone fully aware that their aunt is corrupt, but who plays a role in her presence to safeguard their own interests. From the perspective of an external observer and behavioral analysis—the very level at which Foss’s model operates—these two patterns are indistinguishable. Both individuals produce a set of context-dependent[1] behaviors that are regulated by environmental triggers. Therefore, although Foss identifies the distinguishability of self-deception from lying as a necessary condition for a successful analysis, his own model fails because it reduces belief to behavioral disposition and eliminates the component of phenomenal consciousness.The true distinction between self-deception and hypocrisy cannot rest solely on behavioral output or activator sets; it requires an analysis of the agent's intent and their level of conscious access to the truth.

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Theosophia Islamica EISSN: 2783-3240

A Study on the Compatibility of Moral Realism with Theistic Ethical Foundations*

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Abstract

This study, drawing on Aristotelian essentialism the view that every being possesses an essence with intrinsic properties argues that the development and actualization of the human being, as one being among others in the world, are grounded in his essential nature, namely rationality. This essential nature inclines human beings toward the pursuit of the good, which is recognized as the final cause (telos) of the actualization of their essence. Moreover, human choices are not detached from the beings of the world. Rather, the objects of moral good and evil are the very entities and essences that exist in reality. Moral judgments, therefore, concern these concrete and real beings; they shape human actualization and take part in the causal order of the world. Therefore, since the actualization of beings is inseparable from their essences, the creator of the essences of the world and the legislator of moral laws must be one and the same. In the course of this study, we arrive at the

* Khosravi, T. (2026). A Study on the Compatibility of Moral Realism with Theistic Ethical Foundations. *Theosophia Islamica, 6*(1), pp. 187-218.
https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2026.74235.1116

▣ **Article Type:** Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

▣ **Received:** 2025/08/01 • **Revised:** 2025/09/20 • **Accepted:** 2025/11/25 •**Online Publication:** 2026/01/10

conclusion that every doctrine other than religious moral realism ultimately confronts some form of relativism. Even moral relativism, insofar as it claims to endorse realism, is incapable of providing a foundation for an absolute and objective higher good. Accordingly, through rational inquiry and on the basis of Aristotelian essentialism, the possibility of discovering reality for human beings is established, along with the justification of moral realism and, ultimately, the compatibility of moral realism with the foundations of theistic monotheism.

Keywords

Realism, Essentialism, Actualization, Ethics, Monotheism, Moral Realism.

Introduction

From a philosophical standpoint, the criterion for affirming the reality of any entity is the ability to establish its existence. In this sense, if one can posit an objective referent for moral judgments, it becomes plausible to claim that just as scientific propositions reflect the relationships and truths of external entities moral propositions likewise possess such referential validity. Accordingly, contemporary ethical theories are commonly divided into two major categories based on their stance toward the reality of moral judgments: moral realists and anti-realists.

"Non-cognitivists deny that moral utterances describe the world. They claim that such utterances do not express beliefs, but rather emotions, prescriptions, or commitments." "According to moral realism, moral facts exist independently of our beliefs and determine whether those beliefs are true or false." (McNaughton, 1991, p.5-6).

Given that every entity in our world is situated along a path toward its actualization, we must first examine the relationship between the human being as a natural entity and moral prescriptions. My response is that the human, as one among natural beings, by virtue of possessing the essential faculty of reason, attains new levels of perfection and actualization through each of their choices. Clearly, this intrinsic capacity places before the human a spectrum of good and bad, of oughts and ought-nots.

For this reason, we aim to explore by drawing upon the human being's intrinsic capacity for understanding and discovering reality the notion that the referents of moral judgments possess objective and real existence. They partake in reality and exert tangible influence within the world. For instance, while falsehood itself is not directly observable, its referent such as property obtained through deceit has a concrete and real impact on the actualization of the human being. I emphasize that both good and bad are real and objective, for that which is unreal cannot produce effects. In contrast, moral good and bad each generate consequences and exert distinct influences on human actualization. Therefore, the discovery of the greater good plays a vital role in the perfection and development of the human being.

On the other hand, we must remember that moral good and bad reflect the manner in which the human being relates to the actualizing factors of their existence namely, the objective entities of the world such as food, clothing, shelter, spouse, and so on. But why are these entities sometimes deemed good and at other times bad? For example, if a person lies, commits murder, or steals in order to obtain life's necessities, such actions are morally wrong. Whereas striving and working to acquire a home and basic provisions is considered morally good. Accordingly, once the connection between moral judgments and objective realities and their role in human actualization is clarified, their dependence on causality also becomes evident and self-evident. This is because the essences of the world and the laws governing them constitute a unified reality.

In fact, through this intrinsic connection, it becomes evident that moral prescriptions delineate the boundaries of human engagement with objective realities. On the other hand, anything that influences the actualization of a being plays a role in the causal structure of the world; hence, it is real and contingent upon a cause just as light affects the actualization of a plant, and scientific propositions reflect this causal process in the realm of reality. Accordingly, each of the requisites for the actualization of human essence such as wealth, food, and spouse when subjected to moral injunctions like truthfulness, theft, honesty, justice, and fidelity, exerts causal influence on the process of human and worldly actualization. For instance, wealth, under varying conditions, assumes different causal roles within the framework of moral judgments.

Yet, although both good and bad refer to objective and concrete realities, by what foundation or criterion can moral value be determined? On the other hand, human beings by virtue of their intrinsic nature and varying cognitive levels do not possess a shared understanding of good and bad. Consequently, each individual perceives the greater good in something distinct from others, such that moral relativism emerges as a consequence of the absence of a unified foundation for discerning the highest good.

Moreover, it must be emphasized that a being endowed by nature with reason and volition cannot be coerced into action; if an individual does not perceive the likelihood of attaining a greater good through a given act, they will refrain from performing it. Accordingly, it becomes imperative to cultivate a shared understanding of ethical commitment grounded in a theistic foundation, so that all individuals may be oriented toward and bound by their true moral good.

Given that the relationship between human nature, ethics, and religion has not yet been philosophically examined in a rigorous and systematic manner within existing philosophical literature and even among theistic philosophers and scholars, one rarely finds a philosophically grounded study that substantiates this connection the innovation of this research lies in its foundational approach. Independent of any specific religious belief, and based on essentialist principles, this study seeks to demonstrate how monotheism can offer an absolute, non-relativistic theoretical foundation for ethics. Therefore, what remains absent in current philosophical research is the critical question: Why is a religious foundation the most complete and authoritative source for moral judgments? And how, amidst the multitude of ethical frameworks concerning good and evil, can one identify the greater and more authentic good within monotheistic moral teachings?

The nature of realism

Since the question of reality arises specifically for human beings, any account of realism must begin by recognizing the human being as one among the entities of the world. Only then can we inquire whether humanity possesses a path toward the discovery of reality. It is, indeed, the unique attributes and faculties of the human being that render such a discourse on reality possible.

It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." (Clifford, 1886, pp.339–363). This perspective, originally formulated by John Locke and later expanded by Clifford under the title of evidentialism, came to be recognized as one of the most significant approaches in the field of epistemology at the dawn of modernity. Indeed, what greater evidence could there be than the fact that we comprehend the world and actively seek to uncover reality? Put more clearly, if the human being required any additional faculty to achieve such understanding, it would necessarily resort to it. Thus, the apprehension of the external world is an intrinsic feature of the human mind.

In affirmation of this view, Aristotle maintains that the being of things is the first object apprehended in the perception of reality. Knowledge of 'being qua being' constitutes a fundamental principle in understanding the world, for being cannot be separated from any entity. Consequently, the judgments pertaining to being are inseparable from existence itself. Aristotle further asserts that entities are identifiable by virtue of their essence, since each thing is precisely what is apprehended; and if it lacked a distinct essence, it would neither be perceived nor be knowable." (Aristotle, 1995, 100b6–25).

Avicenna, in agreement with Aristotle, asserts that the essential attributes of a thing which distinguish it from other entities require no justification beyond the essence itself. One cannot ask why a particular thing is not something else, for in the world, each entity is itself by virtue of its essential properties. That is, a thing is what it is because of the essence it possesses. Therefore, essences do not require separate instantiation, and it is impossible for an essence to exist without its essential attributes." (Avicenna, 2005, p. 112).

In his Metaphysics, Aristotle states that if entities lacked essence, they could neither be distinguished from one another nor be the subject of thought or discourse (Aristotle, 1995, 1006b6–25). He argues that the best explanation for why things possess essence as we encounter them is simply that they do possess essence (Ibid, 1010b27–37).

As Aristotle states, even if no human or perceiver existed, things would still exist in the same manner (Aristotle, 1995, 1010b30–31). In his view, each entity possesses its own specific essential attributes, and there are limits to which attributes it can possess. No entity can embody all essential properties, for this would violate the principle of non-contradiction, undermine our capacity for perception, and negate the multiplicity of entities and their properties. In such a case, all things would collapse into one, rendering differentiation impossible and definition meaningless (Ibid, 1006b4–11).

In addition to perceiving the real and essential distinctions among entities in the external world, the human being also recognizes that every entity apprehended by the mind has a cause. In fact, humanity possesses the capacity to comprehend causality and, consequently, the ability to seek and discover causes. This is a distinctive feature of human cognition. The human intellect discerns that each entity, in its actuality and essence, is unique and particular and that these characteristics are themselves caused. Therefore, if such features were not real, the discovery of causes would be impossible, and the human being would not pursue causal explanation. Hence, the perception of causality is an intrinsic feature of the mind, embedded within human nature prior to any empirical cognition, through which the causal structure of the world is understood. In light of Aristotelian essentialism, it becomes evident that each entity is nothing but itself, defined by the totality of its inherent attributes.

Aristotle asserts that since the world is entirely composed of potentiality and actuality and is without end, and since these characteristics determine the essential properties of each being, pure actuality must precede the world. That which precedes holds the form of things in potentiality, while in that which is actual, there exists neither deficiency nor potentiality (Aristotle, 1924, IX, 1046a11–1051a3). In other words, since ontological differentiation and existential limitation are intrinsic to the nature of beings, the necessity of causality becomes a self-evident principle within the realm of contingent entities. This fundamental and universal principle expresses a form of realism one that reflects the stable and metaphysical condition governing the entities of the world.

The perpetual flow of causality within the cosmos signifies that the transition from potentiality to actuality constitutes a universal ontological principle. Every individuated entity, by virtue of its existential finitude, is engaged in a continuous process of actualization and ontic development, since differentiation and limitation are intrinsic to its essence and inseparable from its being at any given moment. Human beings, as entities within the cosmos, are likewise subject to the same ontological principle and thus move along a path of development toward their ultimate end. Given that every being possesses an intrinsic essence, the human being too is endowed with causal faculties and latent capacities. It is precisely these causal potentials that enable beings to undergo transformation and attain actuality. (Ellis, 2012, p.71).

Accordingly, the intrinsic nature of each being determines its path toward actualization and perfection. In other words, every entity, in order to sustain itself in accordance with its essence, requires the utilization of actualizing factors that enable it to attain the telos inherent in its nature. For instance, the human being depends on light, water, nourishment, shelter, sleep, and various instruments of life to progress toward its existential fulfillment.

The metaphysical principle of causality entails the significant and universal conclusion that all beings, in their very existence whether directly or indirectly are ontologically dependent upon the totality of other beings within the cosmos. This necessity arises from the intrinsic differentiation and limitation that characterize every entity. That is, each being possesses existence only to the extent permitted by its essence, and in actualizing its being, it necessarily relies on that which lies beyond itself. Moreover, the actualizing factors of any given entity cannot be definitively determined, and the very elements required for the actualization of an entity's essence are themselves dependent upon other factors. This causal chain unfolds in an unceasing and uninterrupted manner. Consequently, the entirety of the cosmos must be regarded as the cause of each individual being. Since all entities share this fundamental ontological condition namely, intrinsic limitation and dependence they are perpetually interconnected and mutually reliant.

Accordingly, since all material entities are in constant need of one another, none of them can be regarded as the ultimate cause. This condition is universally shared among them, and no single entity possesses ontological superiority or the capacity to bestow existence upon another. Given that a cause which itself is dependent cannot truly be a cause, the true cause must be that which is entirely free from dependency. Moreover, the entities of the world are perpetually engaged in the transition from potentiality to actuality. Therefore, the ultimate cause must be devoid of all potentiality and constitute pure actuality. It is evident that the human being, endowed with a unique intrinsic faculty among beings, is capable of comprehending the causal structure governing the cosmos and possesses the capacity to discern the principle of causation.

In this account, the immaterial cause is understood as the universal form of the cosmos, extending from eternity past to eternity future, and serving as the principle underlying both the origination and perfection of every being. This transcendent cause possesses the immaterial form abstracted from the matter of all entities, and is itself devoid of any ontological distinction or existential delimitation. As it encompasses the totality of the world while remaining unbounded and imperceptible to the senses, it cannot be apprehended through empirical perception. Yet without this immaterial actuality, none of the finite beings each marked by essential limitation would be intelligible or capable of attaining ontological reality.

On this basis, within the sensible world, anything that possesses an essence also possesses real existence and contributes to the teleological movement of the cosmos. Each such entity inevitably plays a role in the causal nexus that governs the unfolding of reality. This foundational principle will serve, in the following section, as the basis for establishing moral realism.

Moral Realism: Ethics as the Human Relation to the World

In this section, I aim to examine the following questions: What is ethics, and why does it emerge exclusively within human societies? Through this inquiry, I intend to explore the nature of the relationship between ethics and the human condition, ultimately leading to insights concerning moral realism.

As previously noted, the human being does not encounter any existent independent of causality. He comes to realize that even his own actuality as a natural being is contingent upon a cause. Through his innate cognition, the human being comes to understand that each of his choices exerts a distinct influence upon his actuality an influence that differs from the effect of any alternative choice. In other words, the perception of good and evil is nothing but the perception of causality. Therefore, if good and evil were not real entities, they would not be intelligible to human consciousness. When a human being intends to perform an action or movement, he must first conceive of the act and affirm the benefit that results from it. Subsequently, he develops determination and will toward the act, followed by a desire to carry it out. Finally, a physical inclination toward the act arises within his bodily faculties. (Mulla Sadra, 1981, vol. 6, p. 342).

Thus, the human being seeks the greatest good that contributes to the actualization of their potential. In this view, the concepts of good and evil for each individual are linked to their rational reasoning in identifying and distinguishing the greater good. As Ellis notes, human free will, choice, and decision-making are among the causal properties of the person. (Ellis, 2012, p.71).

Therefore, the necessity inherent in moral judgments is of a causal nature. (Motahhari, 2000, vol. 6, p. 372) Mesbah Yazdi also maintains that ethical propositions pertain to external realities and convey information about the world as it is. However, he emphasizes that moral imperatives what ought to be or ought not to be are always in relation to voluntary actions, and it is the human will and choice that confer necessity upon them. (Mesbah Yazdi, 2009, p. 27) It is evident that when real phenomena occur in the world, their effects are independent of human acknowledgment or commitment. For instance, even if one is unaware that light contributes to plant growth, light still exerts its influence on the plant.

Once again, we return to the essence of the human being and the significance of free will and cognitive faculties in discovering the correct criteria for choosing moral actions. Ellis argues that individualistic moral principles are intrinsic ethical norms that are independent of any historical or cultural context. These are natural virtues that are universal and do not require any form of legislation. (Ellis, 2012, p. 24) Accordingly, the human being naturally seeks those things that contribute to their perfection things rooted in their essence and innate nature. However, in order to make decisions and exercise will regarding any action, one must engage in rational evaluation to discern the greater good. This implies that knowledge precedes action; thus, every action that is performed is based on an apprehension of its goodness.

On the other hand, human choices are not separate from the realities of the world. Therefore, the objects of good and bad are objective and real. A person understands, for instance, that lying may serve their personal interest, or that stealing could lead to arrest and imprisonment, while abiding by social laws may result in greater benefit. Sometimes, even in the illusion of gaining an advantage, one may violate the rules. Thus, it is evident that every behavior whether deemed good or bad is ultimately aimed at attaining real goodness and maximizing benefit. Accordingly, the discourse on good and bad as factors influencing human actualization is meaningful only within human societies.

Due to the causal relationship between moral judgments and human beings and given that the actualization of every entity affects the entire world and is, in turn, affected by it human moral choices can sometimes result in harm to other beings. Therefore, all individuals are obligated and responsible for discovering moral reality. Accordingly, because of the differences in humans' cognitive capacities in discerning the greater good, commitment to a sound moral foundation holds particular significance. Since moral judgments are connected to the objective external world and directly influence the evolutionary and causal processes of existence, it follows that if human moral behavior does not adhere to a proper framework, both the individual and the broader natural order including other human beings may suffer harm. Clearly, if a person fails to discover the greater good necessary for their actualization and development, they distance their essence from its purposeful perfection.

In other words, the concepts of good and bad are rooted in human nature. Even when we believe we are choosing what brings greater pleasure or benefit, if our choice does not align with true goodness, then genuine good is absent and we unknowingly fall into badness. (Avicenna, 1957, p. 327) According to Avicenna, the good of each thing is its specific perfection, toward which it moves in accordance with its inherent potential. (Avicenna, 1957, p. 225).

In this regard, teleologists hold that every being including the human being possesses a purpose and an ultimate end. When this end, which constitutes the good for that being, is attained, its perfection is also realized. Aristotle refers to this ultimate good as eudaimonia, or happiness. From his perspective, happiness means "living in a way that befits a human being" and actualizing one's human faculties and potentials. (Aristotle, 2019, Book I, Ch. 7, 1098a16–1098b8).

However, this intrinsic human disposition is not always accompanied by the accurate discernment of the greater good, and may be subject to cognitive error. Therefore, when seeking a definition of "good" among human beings, no absolute reference point can be found. As Moore argues, good and bad are simple and indefinable concepts. (Moore, 2004, pp. 6–10).

Moore's view can be interpreted to mean that all human beings share an innate understanding of good and bad this is a fundamental feature of the mind. However, since the discernment of good, bad, and true goodness depends on human knowledge and cognition, a criterion must be established for real goodness and badness one that reason universally affirms. Just as concepts like utility, pleasure, and power are also simple and indefinable, varying from one individual to another, no standard can be set for them except their correspondence with reality. Therefore, notions such as goodness, happiness, pleasure, power, and any human-based foundation for ethics are ultimately arbitrary and relative.

This raises the question: how can one predict benefit and harm, or determine what constitutes true goodness and advantage? How can we know where real benefit lies, and how can we assess the degree of goodness, utility, or pleasure that each action entails? It is evident that even in the presence of the same perfection, one person may perceive its pleasure while another may not. This is because the intellect must recognize the goodness of a thing for the individual; mere sensation or being in a state of perfection does not necessarily generate pleasure. (Avicenna, 1957, pp. 326–328).

Thus, it becomes evident that the perception of pleasure depends on the foundational principles of each individual. However, since the greater good is inherently tied to the essence of every being, it is that greater good which, in the course of human development, yields the greatest benefit, the greatest pleasure, and the highest form of goodness. Therefore, the best foundation is one that reveals the greater good governing the causal structure of the world.

The Interdependence of Moral Realism and Theistic Ethical Foundations

It has been stated that true happiness and genuine goodness for a human being are attainable only through the realization of their essential nature. For true happiness and goodness are achieved in light of attaining the ultimate purpose of each being. Thus, Avicenna holds that any pleasure other than true pleasure is merely animalistic and non-human, offering no developmental value for the essence of the soul. (Avicenna, 1957, pp. 326–328).

It is evident that the human role in discovering the greater good renders them a unique being. Aristotle, too, interprets happiness in terms of rational activity, asserting that acting in accordance with reason is itself a virtue. Thus, human happiness is achieved through the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue; and if there are multiple virtues, the criterion for happiness is alignment with the most complete of them. (Aristotle, 2019, 1098a16–1098b8; 1177a12–1178b7).

As previously noted, human standards and even moral realist schools of thought are not entirely free from relativism and cannot definitively identify true goodness. Each framework defines goodness according to its own foundational principles. For instance, not all individuals consider pleasure to be the ultimate good, since the pursuit of greater pleasure may sometimes require lying or violating the rights of others, and at times, one’s own rights may be sacrificed so that others may attain more pleasure. Therefore, we must still seek to anchor moral realism to an absolute foundation one that is universally applicable and capable of promoting collective benefit.

For example, contractarianism has its roots in the thought of Thomas Hobbes, who believed that values arise from social contracts. In his view, human beings in their original state lack any normative judgments. However, the conditions prevailing in the state of nature compel them to accept certain limitations in order to preserve their own interests (Rachels, 2012, p. 84).

Utilitarianism is also one of the well-known ethical schools, rooted in the liberal tradition. Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill are considered pioneers of utilitarian thought. Bentham believed that there is only one principle in ethics the principle of utility. That is, among several possible choices, one should act in a way that produces the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people involved. (Rachels, 2012, p. 98–99). However, Mill’s utilitarianism was more perfectionist in nature. He regarded intellectual pleasures as superior to sensory ones and emphasized the quality of pleasure, showing greater concern for human dignity and moral worth (Mill, 1863, p. 14).

Therefore, a morally right action is one that, under any circumstance, is supported by the strongest possible reasons for its performance. This constitutes a general logical necessity that all individuals regardless of their particular moral positions must accept. However, moral judgment is not always easy, as one of its major obstacles is the challenge of discerning “reality.”

The inherent human inclination toward uncovering the reality of a transcendent being constitutes a universal trait, rendering the formulation of moral prescriptions a self-evident necessity. It is evident that a being who itself requires the discovery of reality cannot be qualified to provide a foundation for what is good or bad for human beings. Charles Hodge argues that if human beings were the authors of moral laws, such laws would inevitably be relative. Therefore, the legislator of moral commandments cannot be human. He states that humans believe in the existence of God for the same reason they believe in the external world, and thus do not require instruction to do **so.** From the moment humanity began to doubt the external world, it also began to doubt the existence of God (Hodge, 1871, pp. 199–202).

Thus, the existence of a cause in a world where each entity possesses its own intrinsic essence is a necessity. There must be one who is the creator of beings endowed with distinct essential properties, and who, by nature, possesses knowledge of the reality of these essences, their process of development and actualization, and the truth of the causal structure of the universe thereby knowing the objective good and evil inherent in it. Hence, since no human being has created themselves, nor holds the authority to legislate what is good or bad, and since moral judgments concern the relations among beings relations that are contingent upon their essences the sole source and knower of the good that aligns with the ultimate purpose of all beings, including humanity, must be singular.

Therefore, universal moral judgments must be formulated in such a way that they guide all beings toward the realization of their ultimate ends. It follows that there must be a single cause one that is both the creator and the legislator of the universe's causal laws. For with the creation of each essence, its corresponding laws and ultimate purpose are also brought into existence. Hence, human beings are not capable of legislating good and evil, nor does anything become good or evil merely by human decree. Good and evil are intrinsically linked to the essences of beings and determine the manner of their actualization, exerting a real and objective influence on the overall development of the cosmos.

Moreover, every instance of actualization involves an infinite number of material causes, the knowledge of which is beyond human capacity. Conversely, the actualization of the human being as a natural entity exerts influence on the actualization and development of other beings. Accordingly, each human choice carries significant implications not only for the individual but also for other entities within the cosmos. For this reason, the human being is compelled to adhere to an absolute model and foundation, so as to consistently choose the greater good.

What links moral realism to the existence of God is the recognition that good and evil are understood through their ontological and causal impact effects that human beings perceive and experience. As Aristotle asserts, “there is nothing apart from being,” and thus maintains that only being truly exists, and that non-being is not a separate reality (Aristotle, 1924, Metaphysics, Book IV, Chapter 2, 1003a21–25).

Therefore, to demonstrate that good and bad are real causes that influence the development and actualization of the human being, it is sufficient to consider the intrinsic human capacity for evaluating actions. Accordingly, the perception of good and evil as another manifestation of causality reflects their external and objective reality in the world, serving directly as causal factors in the actualization of the human essence.

Furthermore, in explaining the relationship between good and bad and God, it must be stated that God, as the Creator of all essences in the world and the architect of the causal system, possesses knowledge of the actualization of beings in accordance with their ultimate ends. Therefore, God does not arbitrarily legislate moral judgments. In this regard, Oberman maintains that although the divine will serves as the immediate cause of every act, such actions are by no means arbitrary outcomes of a sheer volitional impulse. Instead, God's volition is governed by the dictates of His necessary wisdom even if the underlying rationale remains inaccessible to human understanding (Oberman, 1963, pp. 98–99).

In other words, what God wills is not due to any compulsion or necessity imposed upon Him; rather, what occurs must be right precisely because He wills it so (Idziak, 1979, p.95). This is because the foundation of the cosmos is governed by the principle of causality. Descartes considers the causality of moral judgments to be of the same kind as God's causal relationship with other phenomena equating it with the creation of moral attributes by God (Descartes, 1981, p.14). He maintains that nothing limits God's will, and asserts that divine freedom is synonymous with everything that has come into being or will ever occur (Descartes, 1974, Vol. 2, pp. 248–249).

Thus, the notion of causal necessity in moral judgments implies that the imperatives embedded in ethical laws function as causes that produce real effects; adherence or non-adherence to them results in specific consequences. In this sense, moral injunctions serve as causal agents in actualizing the human essence an actualization so profound that it influences the entire cosmos. Accordingly, human actualization constitutes the most lawful and delicate evolutionary movement within existence. Thus, essentialism necessitates that there be only one true foundation for human felicity. Consequently, monotheistic moral injunctions represent the sole criterion for ethical good and evil in the process of human actualization and development, a path made possible through rational reflection and volitional commitment.

Ethics and Religion: Intersections and Tensions in Human Communities

When we say that the human being is “by nature” a moral being, this means that one wills their actions based on their understanding of good and evil. Furthermore, by affirming the reality of moral judgments, it becomes necessary for the human to discover the reality of their actions. Therefore, the understanding of good and evil and the pursuit of greater good are not dependent on religion or any ethical school, but are rather an inherent feature of human existence. John Locke maintains that morality is founded upon natural rights, and that every human being, even without religion, has a need for morality. However, these natural rights originate from God. Therefore, he considers religion and morality to be aligned, and believed that religion contributes to the reinforcement of moral principles (Locke, 1988, pp. 105–130).

In this section, we aim to assess the relationship between religion and morality with greater precision, as there are notable differences among philosophers and even theologians in explaining this connection. For instance, Brian Davies, in his book An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion, argues that most responses to the question of how religion and morality are related can be categorized into three theories “Some people have argued that morality supports religion. Others have argued that morality is part of religion. Still others have argued that morality and religion are opposed.” (Davies, 2004, pp. 190–192).

Given that no prior discourse has approached the relationship between human nature and morality from an essentialist perspective, such claims appear self-evident. However, it can now be clearly stated in a single sentence: religion contains a comprehensive framework through which the human being may attain the laws necessary for realizing their intrinsic telos.

However, despite its comprehensiveness, religion leads to practical commitment only when the individual, through rational reflection, attains a volitional awareness of its greater and genuine good. This is because faith precedes action and serves as its condition; such that the religious individual consistently regards themselves as bound by the prescriptions of divine law.

Al-Farabi maintains that the identification of the path to happiness and moral virtues is achieved through reason (Farabi, 1996, p. 82). Regarding the role of rationality, he states: rationality is the faculty of reflection and inference concerning noble and virtuous matters, which truly leads the human being to the supreme good and their ultimate end, which is happiness (Farabi, 1405 AH, p. 55). John Locke, by stating that God has created us with a specific nature, emphasizes that faith in God is entirely rational, and that faith is a matter intimately connected to human knowledge and intellectual understanding (Locke, 1975, Book IV, Chapter 18).

It may be stated that, since God is the creator of essences, even the faculty of rationality is not a contingent or arbitrary attribute. Allameh Tabataba'i holds that this natural inclination is embedded within the essence of every natural being, driving it toward the pursuit of its ideal perfection. The human b.eing loves their actions because of the perfection that is attained through them, for they perceive them as good (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1386, pp. 215–220). Therefore, from this perspective, it becomes incumbent upon the Creator to establish a system that articulates moral prescriptions for discerning true good and evil.

Therefore, since the human being, as a natural entity, possesses intrinsic characteristics, they like other beings strive toward their own perfection and seek to fulfill their essential needs such as food, shelter, clothing, companionship, wealth, comfort, leisure, knowledge, and offspring. It is evident that whatever accords with the nature of a being is considered good for that being. Accordingly, moral laws do not aim to prohibit the requisites of one's essential perfection. As Ibn Rushd affirms, good is that which all people naturally desire to attain (Ibn Rushd, n.d., p. 63). From his perspective, whatever draws the human toward their ultimate end is good, and whatever obstructs that end is evil (Ibn Rushd, 1998, p. 144). He holds that human happiness is realized through voluntary actions (Ibn Rushd, 1998, p. 147).

Thus, evil is that which is not chosen on the basis of the good. Accordingly, every being that progresses in accordance with its nature partakes of goodness. Just as the human essence necessitates access to true goodness in order to realize its own good. Al-Farabi considers human goodness to be actualized through the use of reason and will (Al-Farabi, 1992, p. 49). He maintains that by adhering to ethical principles, a person attains goodness and happiness, for it is through such conduct that one reaches their ultimate end and realizes their true human essence (Al-Farabi, 1405, p. 46).

For this reason, if God is not the originator of moral laws, it becomes evident that anyone, at any level, would be entitled to legislate. This is because the identification of the highest and most complete intellect is never fully realized within human societies, and human judgments are always partial and relative. Consequently, no one is legitimately authorized to compel others to abide by moral laws. In reality, the guarantee for the enforcement of religious rulings lies in their divine tawḥīd-based origin. Moreover, these divine laws encompass the greatest possible good in existence.

Thus, it becomes evident that mere knowledge of good and evil does not necessarily lead to practical obligation. Indeed, there are individuals who, despite knowing that lying is morally wrong, employ it as a means to attain what they perceive as probable good precisely because they do not believe in the adverse consequences of falsehood. In truth, if individuals were to believe in the causal relationship inherent in moral rulings, then the innate human inclination toward goodness would compel them to adhere to these ethical principles (Misbah,2008, p. 229).

It is evident that establishing principles for discerning true goodness, pleasure, and optimal benefit is among the foundational pillars of social life. Excessive self-interest on the part of one individual may jeopardize the natural and necessary enjoyment and benefit of others. This is because the essential requisites for the intrinsic perfection of each being constitute its inherent right, and no other human through greed or disregard for moral laws is justified in depriving others of these necessities. Thomas Hobbes believed that human beings, in their natural state, are inherently self-interested creatures. To prevent chaos and disorder, he argued that moral laws are necessary. He viewed religion as a tool for maintaining social order (Hobbes, 2008, pp. 168–170).

Given these clear arguments, the multiplicity of ethical schools and foundations collapses. This is because all the means by which a human being seeks perfection are inherently pleasurable, beneficial, good, and conducive to well-being. Therefore, pleasure, utility, and benefit cannot serve as effective criteria for evaluating moral actions.

As the hedonistic utilitarian Jeremy Bentham asserts, there exists only one intrinsic value namely, pleasure and all other things are considered good and valuable only insofar as they produce pleasure (Bentham, 2007, p.1). In contrast, W.D. Ross argues that there is no single intrinsic value such as pleasure or happiness; rather, there are multiple distinct goods (Stratton, 2002, pp. xii–xiii). Based on this view, it becomes clear that any pleasure or benefit is only truly valuable when it does not violate the rights or boundaries of other beings. Therefore, no individual is justified in committing theft, deceit, oppression, or injustice merely for the sake of greater personal gain.

The Challenge of Moral Conflict and Overlap: A Comparative Study of Ethical Schools and Monotheistic Ethics

Can acts such as lying and injustice ever be deemed morally good or ethically recommended? Could principles such as honesty, fidelity, and benevolence ever be considered morally wrong or subject to prohibition? At times, the problem of moral conflict arises not only among ethical theories but also within monotheistic religious traditions. For instance, from the perspective of Kantian deontological ethics, moral imperatives are absolute and cannot be subject to conflict; lying, therefore, is impermissible under any circumstance. Accordingly, it is necessary to first examine the possibility of conflict within human moral systems and divine moral laws, in order to determine whether such conflict truly exists and if so, what philosophical or theological solutions may be proposed to resolve it.

It is evident that, when comparing various ethical frameworks, the existence of moral conflict is self-evident and requires little elaboration. However, can such conflict arise within a single ethical system? Consider, for instance, a situation in which an individual must lie in order to save the life of an innocent person. Here, two moral imperatives truthfulness and the preservation of life come into direct conflict. This raises a critical question: who possesses the authority or epistemic competence to determine which moral obligation should take precedence in such cases?

Even within religious ethical frameworks, certain actions such as abortion, lying, killing, or the consumption of carrion and wine may be deemed permissible under specific circumstances. Martyrdom may be valorized, while suicide remains strictly prohibited. This demonstrates that within monotheistic moral systems, identical actions may acquire divergent moral attributes depending on context. In contrast, Kantian deontology, despite its prominence and philosophical rigor, remains unable to adequately address such moral conflicts, insisting instead on the absolute and exceptionless nature of moral imperatives. It appears that the discernment of moral duty in complex situations requires a high degree of epistemic awareness and moral insight, such that error in identifying the greater good may result in harm not only to the individual but to the broader moral order.

Kant famously asserted that the only thing that is good without qualification both within the world and beyond it is the good will. Yet this raises a critical question: can a morally good will produce harmful or morally negative consequences? There are instances in which dutiful individuals, acting from a sincere sense of obligation, perform actions that result in harm to themselves or others. It appears that the good will, like other virtues and moral goods, is intrinsically valuable when considered in itself and apart from its consequences. However, when evaluated in relation to its outcomes and the ends it serves, it may, under certain conditions, lead to morally problematic results (Pojman, 1999, p. 138).

In his ethical framework, W.D. Ross distinguishes between prima facie duties and actual duties. He attributes an ontological status to prima facie duties, viewing them as inherently binding in virtue of their moral nature. In contrast, actual duties are not necessarily universal; rather, they are context-dependent and possess an epistemological status. Ross considers them as judgments that assist the moral agent in arriving at a justified ethical decision within a particular situation.

Ross proposes the distinction between "prima facie duty" and "duty proper" as a solution to the problem of moral conflict. We may affirm the existence of general, absolute, and exceptionless moral principles at the level of prima facie obligation principles that, by virtue of their intrinsic moral characteristics, always bind us to act accordingly. Duties such as truth-telling, promise-keeping, beneficence, saving human life, justice, gratitude, and recognition of others' rights are, in their own nature, universally binding and appear absolute at first glance. Moral conflict arises precisely at this level, where the agent must carefully examine the ethical context in which they are situated in order to determine which of the competing prima facie duties carries greater moral weight and urgency. That more pressing obligation constitutes our "duty proper" or "actual duty," and it alone is morally binding; the conflicting duty, though prima facie valid, is no longer obligatory in that specific context (Ross, 2002, pp. 17–18).

Jonathan Dancy argues that moral judgments are entirely dependent on the context in which they arise, and that no ethical decision can be made outside of its situational framework. According to his particularist view, properties such as "loyalty" or "harm to others" do not possess intrinsic moral valence; they are not inherently good or bad, nor do they always function as reasons for action. Their moral relevance is contingent upon the specific circumstances in which they appear (Dancy, 2000, pp. 131–132). This position leads to a form of ethical relativism, wherein no moral principle can be regarded as universally reliable or exceptionless.

It is evident that such matters cannot be easily evaluated without a reliable moral criterion. Human reason is capable of grasping general moral principles and distinguishing between general notions of good and evil, but it lacks the precision required for discerning moral judgments in specific and complex situations (Mesbah Yazdi, 2008, p. 162). One of the key criticisms of Ross's theory is the ambiguity surrounding the distinction between prima facie duties and actual duties: it remains unclear how such a differentiation is to be made, or which duty should initially present itself to the moral agent. There is no clear method or instrument for making this distinction, and the process itself requires a normative standard. As Jonathan Dancy also notes, the identification of the morally relevant feature in a given context is itself dependent on a criterion that is not always available (Dancy, 2003, p. 102).

Given that the foundation of moral prescriptions in monotheistic ethics is the attainment of the greater good, it is plausible to assume that human ethical systems also pursue the same end. However, the central challenge lies in determining who possesses the epistemic authority to identify what constitutes the greater good. This question resurfaces in the context of moral conflict: how can human beings reliably discern the greater good in situations of ethical tension or competing duties? Such dilemmas suggest that human reason alone may be insufficient, and that non-human namely divine ethical foundations are necessary even in cases of moral conflict. In this light, what appears to be a conflict may in fact dissolve when moral absolutes are understood as grounded in divine command. Thus, moral absoluteness may be preserved, provided it is anchored in the transcendent source of monotheistic moral law.

For example, all human beings appreciate fidelity to promises and regard it as a good and nature-conforming act. But in the case of fulfilling a promise to an oppressor, can it truly be considered an instance of promise-keeping, such that it would raise the question of moral conflict? The point is that, by adhering to monotheistic ethical foundations, no covenant is made with an oppressor in the first place, so the issue of fulfilling such a promise does not arise. Just as in monotheistic ethics, killing may at times be obligatory in the form of retributive justice (qiṣāṣ), because according to divine command, the greater good lies therein. Therefore, resolving moral conflict consists in giving precedence to one side. Thus, there must be something by which the validity of competing duties is measured, so that we may determine which side possesses a stronger criterion in relation to that standard (Mesbah Yazdi, 2008, p. 339).

Therefore, moral conflict arises from an incomplete and fallible human perspective, whereas individuals who adhere to monotheistic moral prescriptions are able to discern their duties in various situations. This is because the comprehensiveness of religion ensures that each moral ruling is articulated independently. Accordingly, one may affirm the absoluteness of moral laws and regard conflict and tension as merely the result of superficial reasoning and the inadequacy of human ethical systems in applying moral principles across diverse contexts and temporal conditions. That is to say, it is the divine legislator who issues distinct moral rulings for different human actions, since the moral value good or bad of each ruling depends on the intrinsic nature of things in the world and the effect they have on the actualization of the human essence.

Accordingly, schools of thought such as non-cognitivism which hold that moral judgments are nothing more than expressions of emotion and desire are invalid. For example, abortion cannot be deemed morally good or bad, even though abortion itself is a factual occurrence (Rachels, 2012, pp. 52–55). This challenge can only be resolved through a holistic perspective on a comprehensive set of moral prescriptions, which can be found exclusively within a divinely revealed religion.

Conclusion

It can be stated with certainty that without recognition of the self-evident rational knowledge inherent in human nature, neither the existence of a Creator for the essences of the world can be affirmed, nor can the relationship between human beings and morality be properly understood. This study has shown that the connection between religion and ethics is intrinsically linked to the essence of the human being, and without establishing the relationship between religion and humanity, no meaningful distinction can be made between the moral commitment of religious individuals and that of non-religious individuals. The significance of monotheistic religion lies in the pre-religious faith that is, without belief in the Creator of essences and the Legislator of moral laws, practical moral commitment does not emerge. Hence, belief in God's creatorship alone is insufficient to produce moral adherence. Religion possesses an ontological reality because it is rooted in the human essence; and without it, the human being lacks the epistemic capacity necessary for discovering moral truths and the actual scope of ethical prescriptions. So This study demonstrated that religious ethics are grounded in human nature, and without them, the recognition of moral realities is unattainable.

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Theosophia Islamica EISSN: 2783-3240

The Relationship Between Morality and The Afterlife in Shiism and Catholicism, With an Emphasis on The Qur'an and the Bible*

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Abstract

One of the critical topics in the field of theology is the relationship between religion and ethics. Under discussion of the relationship between religion and ethics, the relationship between the hereafter as an essential religious doctrine and ethics is considered one of the most important. If in religions, especially Abrahamic religions, theology is considered their point of difference, then ethics can be considered the common thread of all these religions. Of course, moral teachings in Islam and Christianity are more eminent than in other religions. What a Shia Muslim and a Catholic Christian have in common is, on the one hand, a set of moral teachings and, on the other hand, a belief in other teachings, including the hereafter. Just as there is a significant relationship between religion and morality, such a relationship can also be imagined between morality and the hereafter. When these two categories are placed

* Kazemi Rad, R. (2026). The Relationship Between Morality and The Afterlife in Shiism and Catholicism, With an Emphasis on The Qur'an and the Bible.. *Theosophia Islamica, 6*(1), pp. 219-249.
https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2025.72156.1094

▣ **Article Type:** Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

▣ **Received:** 2025/07/30 ● **Revised:** 2025/09/15 ● **Accepted:** 2025/11/10 ●**Online Publication:** 2026/01/10

together, they have a mutually influential relationship. The afterlife affects morality in several ways. The afterlife in Shia is indeed different from Christianity's in many ways. However, some things are shared between them, including the resurrection of the dead, judgment of actions, and reckoning. This leads us to commonalities in these two religions regarding the relationship between morality and the hereafter. Finally, what has been obtained from the research in this regard is that in both religions, the hereafter affects morality in three areas: giving meaning, giving motivation, and giving purpose. This article will investigate various aspects of this effect with an analytical and comparative method.

Keywords

Shiism, Catholicism, afterlife, ethics, The Quran, The Bible.

problem statement

If we divide the teachings of religions into three main parts, one of them is moral teachings. Religions have significant differences in rituals, but there are many commonalities in ethics. Therefore, ethics is an integral part of all revealed and non-revealed religions. A part of the Quran and Bible teachings as the sacred texts of the three Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is focused on ethics. The holy books of these three religions teach us to adopt good qualities in life and to make ourselves praiseworthy and good[1](Tabatabaee, 2015, p. 30-33). In the eyes of Quranic scholars, ethics is one of the four main topics of the Holy Quran. In research on the history of the Qur'an, Hojjati writes: "The topics and contents of the Holy Qur'an can be divided into four general fields, which are: beliefs, laws, morals, and instructive stories."[2](Hojjati, 2015, p.153-154).

In the New Testament, morality is an essential subject, so much so that if we were to limit it to only two subjects, one would undoubtedly be morality. Regarding the teachings of Jesus Christ, John B Noss writes that the teachings of Jesus are of two types: "A" religious principles and "B" moral teachings, and these moral teachings, like other prophets, led to his practical teachings. He spoke about moral principles with great power and confidence.[3] (Noss, 2012, p.597).

Another part of the holy texts of these three religions is also related to eschatological issues. Simultaneous attention to these two

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1. Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabatabaei, compiled by Seyyed Mahdi Ayatollahi, Religious Education or Islamic Teachings, pp. 33-30.
2. Hojjati, a study on the history of the Qur'an, pp. 154-153.
3. Noss Jan, The Complete History of Religions, p. 597.

categories, i.e., morality and the afterlife, can point to a meaningful relationship between the two sects of Christianity and Shi'ism. Although the afterlife has different meanings and conditions in the two sects, the essence of rebirth, reckoning, and judgment is similar to a large extent in both Christian and Islamic concepts of the afterlife. The question that can be investigated is the relationship between these two categories of issues. Reflection on this issue leads to the point that when these three traits are applied to the moral system, they lead to the emergence of a particular type of ethics called "eschatological ethics". In this type of ethics, the hereafter affects ethics in the three areas of "knowledge, motivation, and purpose" and thus shapes eschatological ethics. Of course, the characteristics of "eschatological ethics" are related mainly to the meaning of the second variable, i.e., "afterlife". Along with the similarities of this type of ethics in Shia Islam and Catholic Christianity, any change in the meaning of the hereafter can lead to a change in the meaning of ethics. For example, in Shia and Catholicism, it is expected that eschatological ethics is different because, as said, the meaning of the afterlife is distinct in these two sects. Considering this point, the following article aims to examine the manifestations of this ethics in the three mentioned levels, i.e., the level of knowledge, motivation, and purpose.

The influence of the hereafter on ethics in the field of knowledge means that the perception and confirmation of some moral propositions are based on the perception and confirmation of some propositions related to the hereafter. In other words, the meaningfulness, as well as the understanding and confirmation of the propositions of this school of ethics, is based on the understanding and confirmation of the epistemological propositions. For example, in Shiism, the virtue of "self-restraint" is dependent on the concept of "judgment" on the resurrection day, so that if there are no judgments in the hereafter, the virtue of self-restraint (from a religious point of view) is not approved. In Catholic Christianity, referring to the Bible as the most fundamental source of Christian ethics, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, we encounter moral propositions such as humbleness, avoiding hypocrisy, corruption, and lying. Without an afterlife, teaching and recommending these moral principles will be meaningless.

The concept of ethics

It shows the inner form of a human being. In other words, it is a series of inner properties due to which performing actions is done easily without the need for thinking and reflection. (Ismaili Yazdi, 2006, p. 16). This concept includes positive qualities such as truthfulness, integrity, humbleness, courage, sacrifice, and negative qualities such as lying, fraud, humility, and fear. (Mesbah Yazdi, 2010, pp.19-20, Moallemi, 2006, pp. 13-14). This definition is a general, inter-religious and universal explanation of ethics. In the same manner, Shia ethics refers to those teachings by which we can judge the good and bad deeds of a person within a religious framework (Mousavi Bojnourdi, 2006, p 285). According to this, to achieve happiness, every Muslim should have his character and behavior based on religious, moral teachings (Mousavi Golpayegani, 2012, vol 1, p. 534).

Ethics in the Catholic Church is considered a branch of theology (Ramirez, 2003, "in New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol 9, p 848) and is known as moral theology (Harvey, 2012, tra. Taheri, p. 84)Therefore, Christian ethics, or moral theology, is a branch of Christian theology that, relying on divine inspiration and revelation, defines and determines right (virtues) and wrong (vices) behaviors from a

Christian perspective (Mc Coy, 2004, p.138). Christian morality is based on revelations, primarily the actions and teachings of Jesus Christ (Moral Theology", in: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2006, p. 749). Moral theology seeks to investigate and study human behavior based on moral rules and orders (Broderick, 1944, "Moral Theology" in: Concise Catholic Dictionary, p. 227). It is stated in Catholic sources that moral theology brings to man all the moral laws and guidelines that guarantee the ultimate happiness of man and warns against all that separates him from the love of God (Catechism of the Catholic Church, (2015), trans. Ahmadreza Miftah and others, p. 526, paragraph 1950).

In the New Testament, the word ethos, which is the root of ethics, has been used three times by Paul, including in the Acts of the Apostles21:16 and 3:26 and 1 Corinthians 33:15, where in his letter to the Corinthians, while talking about the resurrection, he warns them "Do not be deceived and remember that bad company corrupts good morals (ethos)"

Also, Peter's second letter mentions that "through faith, one can acquire high moral values (ethos). For this reason, you should try hard to complete your faith with chivalry, chivalry with knowledge, knowledge with piety, piety with tolerance, tolerance with godliness, godliness with brotherly friendship, and brotherly friendship with pure love (2 Peter 5:1).

The origin of Christian ethics is in the word of God; therefore, a Christian must do what God commands.

The concept of the hereafter

The constant variable of this article is the concept of the "afterlife". Akhira (آخره), means "the end, the resurrection", and it is the world that people enter after death and stay in forever. The English equivalent of this concept is hereafter, its Hebrew equivalent is הלענים, and its Greek equivalent is εφεξής. In heavenly religions, the world after this world is called the hereafter. According to religious teachings, the "hereafter" contrasts the "world" and is the place of reward and punishment for man's good and bad deeds in this world. Belief in the hereafter has been one of the essential principles of all prophets' missions. In the Holy Quran, about 2000 verses explain the features and events of the hereafter.

The hereafter is interpreted as "the last day" in many verses. In this interpretation, "the world" is considered the "first day", and the hereafter is the "last day". Also, "Dar al-Qarar" is another interpretation the Qur'an uses about the hereafter.

Shia eschatology:

Eschatology, or belief in the afterlife, is one of the central beliefs of every Muslim. If the foundations and basic principles of Shia Islam are three, one is resurrection and belief in the hereafter.

The literal meaning of the hereafter was mentioned earlier. The word "Akhria", is an antonym for "first" and "preceding" (Mohammadi Ray Shahri, 2007, p.24). In the book "Al-Ain" (العین), "the end" and "the hereafter" are considered opposites of "the beginning" (Farahidi, 1987, p.539).Some others have put it in contrast to life in this world and life after death (Ebrahim Mustafa and others, 1989, p.9). However, most theologians have not defined the hereafter and resurrection in their works. Perhaps the clarity and self-evident nature of these two concepts were the reason. Other definitions are as follows: "creating another world like this one and gathering human beings from the first to the last"(Mughniyeh, 1993, trans by Rashidi, p. 157); or "the return of the soul to its origin" (Shirazi, 2021, tras by Ashtiani, p. 528); and "transferring the soul from the visible world to the unseen world." (Ebrahimi dinani, 2000, p. 529). Some have their technical defined of the afterlife, "a place where the soul returns to the body it belonged to" (Kharrazi, 1999, vol 2, p. 96). Regarding the origin of resurrection as one of the concepts related to the afterlife, it is also mentioned in the dictionary books that: "Recurrence is the repetition of something after being done" (Farahidi, 1987, p. 131 – Al-Razi, 1979, vol 4, p. 148). Alternatively, it is stated that: "Resurrection is the place of return" (Ebrahim Mustafa and others, 1989, p.635). Another reading is that "the word resurrection means the time of recurrence, and it may be the name of a place, and it means the place of recurrence." (Mohammadi, 2008, p. 501).

What is common in all the mentioned opinions, both literal and idiomatic, is the return of the human soul to another world; Although there is no consensus on whether this return is purely physical or spiritual, from the collective views of Shia scholars, it can be concluded that resurrection is physical and spiritual.

Christian eschatology

One of the most significant parts of Christian theology is eschatology. Christian eschatology is a general title that, in its individual form, includes five things: death, personal judgment, purgatory, heaven, and hell (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2003, p. 332). In the collective form, the hereafter includes the end of the world, the return of Christ, and a public judgment (ibid, p 342). In the eyes of some, in addition to the three things mentioned, the resurrection of the dead is also added(Ibid) Like Christian ethics, the foundation and root of the eschatology of this religion should be searched for in the Bible. All the contents of the Bible (especially the New Testament) about the world of the hereafter can be found under categories such as "judgment", "eternal life", "forgiveness of sins", "Day of Resurrection", "punishment and punishment", "hell", "heaven", and "Kingdom of Heaven"(John: 6:39, 44, 54; Luke: 14:14; Matthew: 12:36; Mark: 3:28; Luke: 22: 29, 30; Matthew: 19:16 and 17; Matthew: 16:18). Of course, the related verses in these two parts have different meanings, i.e., the Old Testament and the New Testament. The eschatology of the Old Testament includes the belief that the disasters that happened to the people of Israel are due to not relying on God's laws and will (Encyclopedia of Britannica, 2006, p. 334). In contrast, the eschatology in the New Testament revolves around the return of Jesus Christ and the beginning of human judgment.

In Paul's writings, the importance of the apocalypse for the early Christians has been emphasized a lot (Von Hugel, 2007, p. 103). Of course, after the expectations of the end of time did not come true in the early church era, this issue became a marginal issue for many Christians. However nevertheless, the expectation of the imminent apocalypse has risen among Christians at different times (Cross, L. F, 2005, p. 560).

The relationship between Shia ethics and the hereafter

The goal of all moral teachings and guidelines is for humans to live morally in this world and achieve eternal happiness in the hereafter; The hereafter helps this goal in several ways: first, it essentially makes some of these propositions meaningful; Second, it motivates a person to live morally and thirdly, it gives purpose to a person's moral actions. It is necessary to emphasize that the hereafter has such a function and not the belief in the hereafter; In other words, the mentioned effects cannot be attributed to belief in the hereafter and not the principle of the hereafter itself. If the belief in the afterlife has such effects, then if a person does not believe in the afterlife, such effects should not be imagined. So, the motivation of the afterlife or its role in making a moral doctrine such as self-restraint meaningful can be proven regardless of one's belief or disbelief. In other words, self-restraint is logically valuable even without belief in the afterlife.

The relationship between ethics and the afterlife in Catholic Christianity

In Christianity, concepts such as death, purgatory, reckoning, judgment, and heaven and hell are among the beliefs related to the afterlife. In other words, Christian eschatology includes judgment, calculation, heaven, and hell. On the other hand, some moral propositions are related to the hereafter in different ways. This relationship exists on three levels of meaningfulness, motivation, and result. These three levels are examined in detail below.

The role of the hereafter in the meaningfulness of moral propositions

- In Shiism

One of the effects of the hereafter on ethics is its role in giving meaning to some moral propositions. This role means that the supposition and confirmation of some moral propositions are based on the supposition and confirmation of some propositions related to the hereafter. In other words, the meaningfulness and the understanding and confirmation of these ethical propositions are based on the understanding and confirmation of the eschatological propositions. For example, in Shiism, the concept of the virtue of "self-restraint" and its confirmation depends on the concept and confirmation of judgment on the resurrection day. Thus, if the judgment is not validated in the hereafter, the virtue of self-restraint (from a religious point of view) is not validated either. The Holy Qur'an is the best evidence for this issue with the function of proving the hereafter because, according to the verses of the Qur'an, man will face his actions in the hereafter in different ways. These verses can be divided into at least three categories:

The verses that state that human actions in this world will be seen in the hereafter; As:

> "و قُلِ اعْمَلُوا فَسَيَرَى اللَّهُ عَمَلَكُمْ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ" (Surah Tawbah verse 105); "Whatever you want to do, God, His Messenger and the believers will see your actions."

Or the verse:

> "...إِنَّا أَنْذَرْنَاكُمْ عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرْءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ" (Surah An-Naba verse 40); "We have warned you of the imminent punishment! This punishment will be on the day when man sees what he has already sent with his own hands.”

The verses that state that a person's actions in this world will be entirely handed over to him in the hereafter; As:

> "فَكَيْفَ إِذَا جَمَعْنَاهُمْ لِيَوْمٍ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ وَوُفِّيَتْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ"; "So how will they be when We gather them together for a Day in which there is no doubt, and everyone is given in full what he has provided (of deeds for himself)?"

And, the verse:

> "وَإِنَّ كُلًّا لَمَّا لَيُوَفِّيَنَّهُمْ رَبُّكَ أَعْمَالَهُمْ" (Surah Al-Imran, verse 25); "And your Lord will give them the deeds of each one without any deficiency; He is aware of what they do."

The verses based on which a person will be questioned and calculated about his actions on the Day of Judgment:

In several verses, the Day of Judgment is referred to as "the

Day of Reckoning"; including Surah Ibrahim verses 16, 26, and 41, Surah Sad verse 53, Surah Ghafir verse 27. Some of these verses are:

"إِنَّ إِلَيْنَا إِيَابَهُمْ؛ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا حِسَابَهُمْ" (Surah Ghashiyah, verse 25-26) "Surely to Us is their return, then surely with Us is their reckoning."

"وَلَتُسْأَلُنَّ عَمَّا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ" (Surah Nahl, verse 93)"And you will be questioned about what you have done."

Imam Reza (PBUH) also says: "ليس منّا من لم يحاسب نفسه فى كل يوم" (Majlesi, 2000, vol 17, p. 116) "He who does not evaluate himself every day is not one of us".

The philosophy of the necessity, justification, and morality of self-restraint and calculation of deeds in this world is the existence of the hereafter and the reckoning of the Day of Judgment. This is why the ethical sources emphasize that one of the effective and useful ways of scrutinizing one's deeds is to remind people of the severe and difficult reckoning of the Day of Judgment when they will carefully reckon the deeds of the jinn and humans. Imam Ali (PBUH) also says: "حاسبوا انفسكم قبل ان تحاسبوا وزنوها قبل ان توازنوا" (Surah Rahman, verse 26) "Before you are judged on the Day of Judgement, judge yourself in this world and evaluate yourself before your actions are evaluated." Now that man is facing such a fate in the hereafter, and such a careful judgment is waiting for him, there rises a need to observe and adhere to some matters such as "self-restraint and evaluation" in this world. These moral propositions derive their validity and meaning from the existence of the hereafter and its consequences, i.e., judgment, reward, and punishment. If such a reality does not await man in the world of the hereafter, the morality of self-restraint and evaluation will not be justified.

- In Catholicism

In Catholic Christianity, referring to the Bible as the most fundamental source of Christian ethics, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, we come across some moral propositions, teaching, and observing which will be meaningless if there is no afterlife. Thus, the existence of the hereafter and the other world justify the morality of these propositions.

These verses order to do moral matters that there is no support or guarantee for if there is no afterlife. This means that to a person who does not believe in the afterlife, there will be no need to follow these moral matters.

These verses in the Bible can be categorized as follows:

The verses that specify the existence of the world of the hereafter:

Among these verses from the Gospel of Luke:

"Yes, whoever accumulates wealth in this world, but does not carry provisions for the hereafter, is ignorant"(Luke 21:12);

"In this world, he will be rewarded many times over, and in the hereafter, he will have eternal life"; (Luke 30:18).

"Therefore, sell everything you have and give it to the poor so that you can store up a treasure and wealth for your hereafter, a wealth that will never be wasted, and thieves will not touch it, and the elements will not destroy it."(Luke 33:12).

The verses that indicate the judgment of human actions in the hereafter:

Including:

"God will judge the ends of the earth."(Samuel 2:10)

"God... will come to judge the world."(1 Chronicles 16:33)

"But God will judge the inhabited quarter with justice."(Psalms 9:7-8)

"At that time, he will punish everyone according to his actions." (Matthew 6:27)

Verses that indicate reckoning on the Day of Judgment:

"So, each one of us will give his account to God" (Romans 12:14);

And: "They will give account to Him who is capable of judging the living and the dead"(1 Peter 5:4).

The function of these verses is to prove the afterlife after death and the judgment and reckoning of people's actions by God and Jesus Christ. The function of the afterlife is to justify the order to live morally and observe moral propositions. Because moral propositions will have meant if there is an afterlife and human actions are judged and calculated. Based on this, these propositions will be meaningless if there is no afterlife.[1]

Hereafter and moral motivation in Shia

In the research that have been carried out in this field so far, sources of motivation for morality from a religious point of view, are said to mainly be "innate cognitive properties, godliness, and perfectionism" (Razza, 1998, p. 84), "social approval", "afterlife reward and punishment", and "divine love" (Mahdavinejad, 2012, p102). The motivations for morality in the Holy Qur'an are also "the innate tendency towards goodness",(Tabatabaei, 2014, trans by Mousavi, vol 12, p 97)"acquiring the comfort of the hereafter",(Ibid, vol 7, p 12) "divine love", and "social approval" (Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 161-194).

- Belief in the afterlife, the most powerful motivation for moral living

Almost one-third of the Qur'anic verses are dedicated to the afterlife

1. Of course, it is possible that a person agrees to these propositions from another point of view, but it will no longer be religious.

and resurrection, and all of them play the role of an active motivation for people, along with explaining various aspects of man's afterlife. This vast volume of verses that exist in this regard can be divided into several major categories:

Verses that indicate the existence of the hereafter and return to God:

Such as:

"إِنَّا لله وإنّا إِلَيهِ رَاجِعُـونَ" (Surah Baqarah, verse 156) "We all belong to God and to Him we return."

"إِنَّمَا يَسْتَجِيبُ الَّذِينَ يَسْمَعُونَ وَالْمَوْتَى يَبْعَثُهُمُ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُـونَ" (Surah An'am, verse 36) "Only those who have listening ears will accept (your call); But the dead (and those who have lost their human souls, do not believe; and) God will resurrect them (on judgment day); Then they return to him."

Belief in the Hereafter and the Day of Resurrection and belief that one day humans will return to God so that their actions will be judged undoubtedly plays the most significant role in reforming humans' worldviews, attitudes, and actions. A person who knows that the life of this world is only a temporary bridge and passage to reach eternal life and a place to collect his provisions and determine his future destiny will do his best to adhere to what he must do. Moreover, full-fledged adherence to religious and moral duties will provide the most wealth for a better place hereafter.

Verses that indicate the impossibility of returning to the world and doing righteous deeds:

Some of the verses of the Qur'an that refer to the issue of the afterlife and play the role of motivation are the verses that talk of a

> request. According to these verses, after death, some people earnestly ask God for the opportunity to return to the world to reform their way of life, perform righteous deeds, and collect their provisions. Namely: « حَتَّى إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ارْجِعُونِ؛ لَعَلِّي أَعْمَلُ صَالِحًا فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ كَلَّا إِنَّهَا كَلِمَةٌ هُوَ قَائِلُهَا وَمِن وَرَائِهِم بَرْزَخٌ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ» (Surah Mominun, verses 99-100) "When the time of death comes for each of them, he will be regretful and say, “My Lord!, Let me go back to the world, maybe I will do a good deed in what I left (and failed to do)!" (But they tell him:) Never! He says this with his tongue (and if he returns, his work will be like before)! And there is a barrier behind them until the day they are resurrected!"

Although the Holy Qur'an is not a book of ethics, by mentioning this fact, it seeks to display its role in human growth and the spread of morality and to make people understand that, firstly, beyond him, there is a system of accurate judgment of his actions in the world and detailed accounting. Moreover, the worldly life is his only chance to do good and moral deeds and collect wealth for that eternal house. And secondly, if this world ends for him, there is never a chance for him to return to make up for his mistakes. Suppose a person realizes that his place in the hereafter will be determined based on his actions in this world and that the decades of life are his first and last chance to do good deeds and achieve a good end in the hereafter. In that case, he will try to create the best destiny for himself in the hereafter by living according to religious and moral standards. This effect cannot be obtained except by remembering the eternal life in the hereafter; This is why the Qur'an describes various aspects of human destiny in the hereafter in detail and repeatedly for its audience.

Verses that indicate that human actions will be seen and humans will face their actions on the Day of Judgment:

As mentioned earlier, some verses of the Quran are verses that indicate that the actions of man in this world will be seen in the hereafter, such as:

"قُلِ اعْمَلُوا فَسَيَرَى اللَّهُ عَمَلَكُمْ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ" (Surah Tawbah, verse 105); "Whatever you want to do, God will see your deeds."

"وَأَن لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يُرَى" (Surah Najm, verses 39-40) "And that there is no benefit for man except his efforts; And that his efforts will soon be seen."

Verses that describe hell and punishments as a warning against the consequences of wrong worldly actions:

" وَ لَوْ تَرَى إِذْ يَتَوَفَّى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ الْمَلآئِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ وَذُوقُواْ عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ"(Surah Anfal, verse 50); "And if you see the unbelievers when the angels (of death) take their lives and strike them on their faces and backs and (say:) taste the burning torment (you will feel sorry for them)!"

Verses that describe the blessings of heaven and express the fruit of good deeds:

Such as:

" وَ بَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِزْقًا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأُتُوا بِهِ مُتَشَابِهًا وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ"(Surah Baqarah, verse 25); "Give good news ˹O Prophet˺ to those who believe and do good that they will have Gardens under which rivers flow. Whenever provided with fruit, they will say, "This is what we were given before," for they will be served fruit that looks similar but tastes different. They will have pure spouses, and they will be there forever."

When a person who believes in Qur'anic teachings witnesses this good news and these warnings, his existence will be filled with fear and hope, which will be the strongest motivation for him to live morally and follow moral teachings.

The motivational function of the hereafter in Catholic Christianity

The motivation of the hereafter for "being moral" means that the Christian's belief in the afterlife and the existence of another world has a motivating role in observing and carrying out moral propositions for the Christian believer. Many verses in multiple categories prove this motivation, including:

Verses that refer to the reward of heaven and the granting of rewards to the righteous and the punishment of sinners in the hereafter; As:

> "If your hand or foot leads you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better to enter heaven without hands and feet than to go to hell with hands and feet."(Matthew 8:18).

This verse, with exaggerated language, implies that heaven is the final destiny of those who lead a moral life and avoid sin; It emphasizes the necessity of avoiding sin and immorality at any cost.

We see the same thing in the following verse of the Bible, which says:

> "And if your eye causes you to sin, take it out and throw it away. It is better to enter heaven with one eye than to go to hell with two eyes";(Matthew 9:18).

The verses that indicate the existence of hell and punishments for human sins in the hereafter:

The verses related to the torment in hell can be divided into two parts: the verses that generally promise punishment and hell to the evildoers and the wicked, and the verses that refer to a specific immoral act and promise punishment for the perpetrator.

Among the verses that are in the first category, the following can be mentioned:

"... and they will receive eternal punishment, but the righteous will enter eternal life."(Matthew 46:25).

"A wicked person will be punished for wickedness, and God does not discriminate." (Colossians 25:3).

In the second category, i.e., the verses that refer to a specific issue and emphasize the punishment for doing it, we can refer to the following topics and verses related to them:

- Punishment for tampering with other people's property:

"They consume the wealth of widows and prolong their prayer just to show themselves off. Their punishment will be more severe."(Mark 40:12 and Luke 47:20).

- Punishment for the sin of adultery:

"Everyone should respect marriage and keep the bond away from impurity because God will punish adulterers, whether single or married."(Hebrews 4:13)

- Punishment for hypocrisy:

"Woe to you, you hypocrite Mullahs and Pharisees, you consume the wealth of widows and prolong your prayers while showing off; for this reason, you will face the most severe punishments."(Matthew 14:23).

- Punishment for slandering and wrongfully assaulting a religious brother:

"But I tell you that whoever gets angry with his brother without reason will be punished, and whoever calls his brother a fool will be punished, and whoever calls his brother a fool will deserve hellfire." (Matthew 22:5).

All the verses mentioned motivate Christians to live morally in different ways (some in the form of good news and some with the warning of hell).

The role of the hereafter in giving purpose to moral acts

The third function of the hereafter concerning moral actions is to give them a purpose. The purpose of moral actions is the most important concern and question of every moral activist. Every human being (according to the limitation he suffers by observing moral and ethical propositions) is interested and has the right to know what the result and end of his morality will be. Perhaps this issue can be better explained with the question that a person in such a position is faced with the question, "Why should I be moral?". The answer he is expected to receive will naturally have a similar structure to: "you must be moral to...". What follows this answer is the goal of moral act. The goal of a moral act can be worldly and material matters, as is the case in divine religions, especially Islam, and it can be a matter of the hereafter.

Providing moral actions with a purpose in Shia

The Holy Quran has depicted man's ultimate goal and destiny based on his actions through verses that can be separated into multiple categories. The categories of these verses are as follows:

Verses that introduce heaven as the result of good and moral actions such as:

"وَالَّذينَ آمَنُوا وَ عَمِلُوا الصّالِحاتِ سَنُدْخِلُهُم جَنّات تَجْرى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الأَنْهارُ خالِدينَ فيها اَبَداً " (Surah Nisa, verse 122); "And those who believe and do good, we will soon admit them into Gardens under which rivers flow, to stay there forever."

The verses that depict hell as the result of ugly and immoral actions:

Such as:

"كَلاّ اِنَّ كِتابَ الْفُجّارِ لَفى سِجّين" (Surah Motaffafin, verse 7); "Never... surely the letter of the evildoers is in prison (Hell)".

"وَأَمّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوازِينُهُ ؛ فَأُمُّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ" (Surah Al-Qari'ah, verses 8 - 9); "And whoever's action is worthless and light weight, his place is in the bottom of Hawieh (the abyss)".

The verses that introduce God's satisfaction and pleasure as the result of moral living:

Some verses of the Qur'an that express the purpose of actions in the hereafter introduce God's satisfaction with man as the purpose of his moral and religious conduct in this world. Although a person will get the reward of heaven by following religious and moral teachings in this world and avoiding immoral deeds, he will also receive a higher reward and that is God's satisfaction with him in the hereafter:

"لِلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَأَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَ رِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ..." (Surah Al-Imran, verse 15). "For those who fear their Lord, there are gardens beneath which rivers flow, eternal life in them, and pure marriages and the pleasure of God..."

On the Day of Resurrection, the soul of a righteous person will be addressed, "يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ؛ ارْجِعِي إِلَى رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً" (Surah Fajr, verses 7-8), "Return to your Lord, satisfied.", "return to your Lord while both you are pleased with God and God is pleased with you".

Verses that state eternal happiness as the outcome and the final cause of moral actions along with acquiring admirable qualities, such as:

"قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى"(Surah Al-Aa'la, verse 14); "Undoubtedly, prosperous is he who purified himself [from inner and outer viciousness]."

Or:

"قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُون"(Surah Mominun, verse 1); "Verily, the believers are saved".

And: "وَ مَن يُطِعِ اللهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَيَخْشَ اللهَ وَيَتَّقْهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ."(Surah Noor, verse 52).

"And whoever obeys the command of God and the Messenger and is God-fearing and pious, such people will be victorious and prosperous."

Certainly, it will not be possible to reach the position of a pious person without observing moral teachings in this life; Therefore, the eternal felicity that the Qur'an introduces as the goal of religion will also serve as a purpose for a moral life.

Providing moral actions with a purpose in Catholicism

Observance of some moral teachings by individuals will pay off in this world, but a more significant percentage of moral actions do not have a tangible result in this world; therefore, there must be another world where the outcome of following those moral teachings will show there. In the Bible - the most important source of Christian ethics - there are many verses from which the purpose of moral actions can be understood. In these verses, the hereafter is considered the ultimate goal for moral actions. These verses can be divided into several categories:

> Verses that refer to the principle of "rewarding" human actions in the hereafter, such as:
>
> "The Son of Man will come... and at that time, he will reward everyone according to his deeds."(Matthew 27:16).
>
> And: "You will be blessed... and you will be rewarded on the Day of Resurrection."(Luke 14:14).

Verses that refer to heaven, such as:

> "In this world, he will be rewarded manifold, and in the hereafter, he will be blessed with eternal life."(Luke: 30:18).
>
> It is also stated in John chapter six:
>
> "Amen, Amen, I say to you, whoever is faithful has an eternal life."(John 47:6).

Verses that refer to hell because of immorality and sins, such as:

> "But those who oppose the truth of God's existence and walk upon their sinful paths will be severely punished. Yes, they will be subjects of God's anger and wrath." (Romans 8:2).

All the above being said, it is proven that it is the hereafter that provides a purpose for a Christian's actions in this world; If a Christian takes up an ethical approach, heaven will be their place, and if not, they will be doomed in hell, according to the Romans.

Summary and result

Comparing two concepts of morality and the afterlife in Shiism and Catholicism, similarities and differences can be drawn:

Similarities:

- The meaningful relation of morality and the hereafter in both sects:

In both sects, morality and the hereafter have a meaningful relationship. The revelation and text-centered nature of both Islamic and Christian religions and the emphasis on death, resurrection, judgment, and heaven and hell in the sacred text of both sects reveal a relationship between morality and the hereafter more than before.

- Emphasis on the role of morality and its effect on people's prosperity

The Holy Quran emphasizes the role of action in the ultimate salvation of humanity. Many verses in the Holy Qur'an indicate the significant role of practicing morality in the felicity of humanity in their afterlife. Moreover, the Bible puts much emphasis on practicing morality. The New Testament is full of moral advice from Jesus and Paul. Considering Jesus' advice, it seems his whole mission was to make Christians morally righteous.

The result is that eschatological ethics can be found in both Shia and Catholic sects.

Differences:

Examining various aspects of eschatological ethics in Shia and Catholicism proves that the differences between the two are more prominent than the similarities.

- **A call for a persistent moral life in Shiism**

The first aspect of the differences between the two sects in the field of ethics is that the eschatological ethics in Shiism invites people to constant practice of morality. According to Shia ethics, all human behaviors can be considered a deal with God, and man is never free of communication with God. Since human growth depends on God's constant presence, a moral Shia person always considers God in his personal and social relationships, to the degree that their obedience affects even their personal and social ethics. The Shia moral system requires consistency and continuous self-restraint. In other words, the Shia moral system is "action-oriented". Tranquility in the Shia moral system is achieved when a person always practices morality and refrains from sins and any immoral deed. In Shia ethics, which needs constant effort. Without persistence, ultimate prosperity is not guaranteed. Based on this, periodic morality has no place in the Shia moral system. Periodic ethics means a person practices morality only at a certain time and occasion. In that particular time[1] (such as Ramadan), one displays a moral life and as it is idiomatically said, they become morally obese; however, during the rest of the year, it is impossible to see them as moral human beings. This procedure is entirely against the Shia moral system because, as it was said and is also taken from the verses of the Quran, the constant practice of morality guarantees human salvation. This is what the Quran and Sunnah prescribe for all human beings. As a result, the emphasis on a constant religious, moral life in Shia (و من يعمل مثقال ذرّة خيرا يره), as well as self-restraint (عليكم انفسكم), are clear signs that in Shia morality and

1. Perhaps this topic can be extended to a specific place. Like the people who, contrary to their usual practice, showed a moral character in some holy places such as Mecca and Medina or at the presence of infallible (PBUH).

religious literature, a person should always take care of himself by indulging in ethical behaviors.

However, in Christianity, action-oriented morality is not very prominent; The emphasis of Christian ethics is more on the grace of being saved rather than the effectiveness of actions; Of course, in this regard, the situation in Catholic Christianity is better than in Protestant Christianity, because in Protestant Christianity, instead of emphasizing the role of moral actions, the emphasis on faith and Lord's grace is seen much more.

The fact mentioned above also reveals something else. The immediate and repulsive attitude change of some people, which has occurred and may occur, is not a common incident and contradicts the rules. In the history of Islam, like other religions, we have seen instant transitions in many people, People who suddenly gave up an unethical life and did the right thing. There are many examples of these transitions in Islam; Well-known personalities such as Bushr hafi, Fuzail Ayyaz, and Ebrahim Adham have turned from one side to the other in a sudden turn. In the history of Christianity, the outstanding example of this transition could be Paul, who, in a sudden turn of events, turned his back on Judaism and became a passionate and devout Christian. Constantine is also the same; Because of a dream, he suddenly became a Christian and stopped persecuting Christians, became their biggest helper, and declared Christianity as the empire's official religion. Notably, it should be remembered that both Shia and Catholic sects share this, and these transitions are neither a principle in Islam nor Christianity. These are just random occurrences.

- Eschatological ethics in Shia through death and in Christianity through salvation

Counting the differences between the two, they emphasize the different eschatological ethics. In Islam, this ethics is highlighted using "death". In a more precise sense, in Shiism, this morality manifests more by stressing concepts such as death, reckoning, judgment, punishment, and reward. Having mentioned these propositions in religion, moral acts then become meaningful. Also, the motivation for doing them is provided, and their purpose – prosperity in the hereafter - is determined.

Although the above propositions can also be proven in Catholic Christianity, the eschatological ethics with the three mentioned factors, i.e., meaning, motivation, and purpose manifests itself in the concept of salvation (not punishment and reckoning). It means to achieve salvation and live morally. According to the viewpoint of the Catholic Church (unlike the Protestant Church, which, following Paul, believes in forgiveness through faith[1]), along with faith and repentance, "living morally" is one of the ways of salvation.[2]

Per the Catholic belief, human beings were in trouble after their descent to earth, religions came to save them, but they failed as if they brought a curse upon them; It was Jesus Christ who came to save humanity. The salvation of mankind depends on the observance of morality on the one hand, and the meaningfulness of moral actions depends on Jesus Christ on the other hand. Therefore, unlike morality

1. justification by faith alone

2. It should be noted that although Protestants believe only faith is the cause of prosperity and salvation, it should not be assumed that good deeds have no value and credibility in their eyes. Because according to their belief, faith necessarily leads to good deeds. In their belief, we are saved without doing anything (Romans, 3:20; Ephesians, 9:2) but we are saved to do good deeds. (Ephesians, 2:10).

in Shiism, which is based on practice, Catholicism is less practice-oriented and instead emphasizes God's grace and hope. In other words, it can be said that ethics in Shiism is more behavior-oriented, and in Catholic Christianity, it is more virtue-oriented.

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Theosophia Islamica EISSN: 2783-3240

Methodology of Mullā Ṣadrā in Formulating the Theory of the Soul’s Corporeal Origination and Spiritual Subsistence*

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Abstract

The dilemma of the soul’s origination or pre-eternity represents one of the most enduring problems in Islamic philosophy. Each side of this dilemma faces serious difficulties: proponents of the soul’s pre-eternity struggle to explain its relation to the body, while advocates of origination confront the problem of the soul’s enduring subsistence after bodily death. In addressing this dilemma, Mullā Ṣadrā adopts a distinctive methodological approach. He first reconstructs and critically examines the views of earlier philosophers and theologians, distinguishing defensible insights from elements that generate theoretical difficulties within their own frameworks. He then reinterprets selected elements within a new metaphysical perspective grounded in the principles of the primacy of existence, gradation of existence, and substantial motion. Through this process, he formulates the theory of the soul’s “corporeal

* Hosseini. S. Z. (2026). Methodology of Mullā Ṣadrā in Formulating the Theory of the Soul’s Corporeal Origination and Spiritual Subsistence. *Theosophia Islamica, 6*(1), pp. 250-287.
https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2025.72055.1082

▣ **Article Type:** Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

▣ **Received:** 2025/08/20 • **Revised:** 2025/10/10 • **Accepted:** 2025/12/01 •**Online Publication:** 2026/01/10

origination and spiritual subsistence." This study argues that Ṣadrā's procedure reflects a form of methodological pluralism without eclecticism and shows notable affinity with the integrative model of interdisciplinary inquiry. Using a conceptual-analytical approach, the article offers a systematic reconstruction and critical evaluation of this methodological framework in Ṣadrā's treatment of the problem of the soul.

Keywords

Mullā Ṣadrā, Methodology, Soul's Origination Dilemma, Spiritual Subsistence, Integrative Methodology.

Introduction

The soul—its nature, mode of existence, origin, relation to the body, connection with consciousness, and its persistence or annihilation after death—constitutes one of the most challenging topics in philosophy and theology. These issues have been examined from a wide range of perspectives across both religious and non-religious intellectual traditions. The Islamic intellectual tradition is no exception; within it, the question of the soul has been explored from multiple angles. Among the various issues related to the soul, one of the most debated is the question of whether the soul is originated (*Hadith*) or eternal (*Qadim*). Thinkers across nearly all fields of Islamic knowledge—from *ilm al-nafs* (in the sense of ancient psychology) and philosophy to Qur'anic exegesis, theology, and mysticism—have offered theories on this question. The extensive treatment of the topic in the philosophical works of Muslim thinkers itself testifies to its significance within the Islamic philosophical tradition.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that this issue is not unique to Muslim thinkers, and its documented history goes back at least to Plato. Plato's term for the soul is *psyche*, which earlier in Greek culture referred to the boundary between the animate and the inanimate (Taylor, 2014, p. 107). Plato situates the soul at a level higher than the body and prior to it; this priority is not merely ontological or conceptual but also implies a kind of temporal priority, since he regards the soul as timeless and therefore immortal. The concept of psyche also appears in Aristotle's works as "the first actuality of a natural body" (Aristotle, 1999, pp. 20–21), and this conception attracted the attention of Islamic philosophers. By integrating this Greek heritage within the framework of Islamic beliefs, they identified the "soul" with the concept of "spirit" (*rūḥ*). Initially, this notion was established as the agent of self-awareness and later, by attributing thought and intellection to it, came to be understood as the immaterial dimension of the human being— a dimension that in Islamic philosophy grounds the belief in the persistence and immortality of the human person.

Yet this synthesis and identification of *psyche* with *rūḥ* under the broader notion of the soul—although initially appearing coherent—gradually generated difficulties within the structure of Islamic thought. These difficulties made it hard to justify the simultaneous acceptance of both the origination of the soul and its survival after death, a view generally upheld by Islamic philosophers. On the one hand, if the soul is a substance independent of the body, how can it come into existence within a particular body? On the other hand, if its coming-to-be depends on the body and on specific bodily conditions, how can it continue to exist after the body's death?

Within the framework of the Muslim Peripatetics, providing a simultaneous account of the origination of soul and their personal and everlasting subsistence has faced a number of theoretical difficulties. Ibn Sīnā's attempt to address this problem—by shifting the model of the soul–body relation from a hylomorphic relation of matter and form to an instrumental and governing relation, together with his acceptance of the soul's "spiritual origination" (*ḥudūth rūḥānī*)—did not prove entirely satisfactory. Explanatory gaps remained in his account, particularly concerning the problem of the individuation of souls after separation from the body and the explanation of why the soul is essentially related to a particular body. These difficulties later became the basis for significant critiques by philosophers after him—especially within the School of Isfahan and subsequently in Transcendent Philosophy (Avicena, 1984, pp. 96–98; ʿUbūdiyyat, 2016, p. 290). Within this intellectual context, Mullā Ṣadrā proposed the theory that “the soul is corporeal in its origination and spiritual in its subsistence” (*al-nafs jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth wa-rūḥāniyyat al-baqāʾ*) as a philosophical solution to this tension. The primary concern of the present study, however, is not merely this doctrine itself but the method through which Mullā Ṣadrā arrived at it. In other words, the article seeks to clarify how Mullā Ṣadrā engages with earlier views, how he distinguishes among competing positions, and through what intellectual procedure he arrives at a coherent theory. Accordingly, the central question of this research is whether Mullā Ṣadrā’s engagement with earlier doctrines amounts simply to a scattered compilation and synthesis, or whether it exhibits a discernible method, coherence, and research program. On this basis, the present study adopts a conceptual-analytical and argumentative approach and focuses on the process through which Mullā Ṣadrā’s theory of the soul was formed. It argues that his engagement with earlier views presents a historically informed yet critical narrative in which different positions are examined not in a fragmented or unsystematic manner but within a purposeful analytical progression. Thus, by examining Mullā Ṣadrā’s treatment of the views of Plato, the Peripatetics, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, radical advocates of the soul’s eternity, Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, Shaykh al-Ishrāq (Suhrawardī), and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, the article aims to demonstrate that his path toward the theory of the soul is governed by a distinctive internal coherence and argumentative logic.

Literature Review

Several studies have been devoted to the methodology of Mullā Ṣadrā, though a complete list cannot be provided here. Among the most relevant are works examining his philosophical method in the problem of divine knowledge, including: *The Methodology of Mullā Ṣadrā’s Philosophy in the Question of Divine Knowledge*; “An Examination of Mullā Ṣadrā’s Philosophical Method in the Problem of God’s

Knowledge of Things Prior to Creation"; and "Mullā Ṣadrā's Methodology in the Question of Divine Knowledge." Other studies include "Mullā Ṣadrā's Methodological Model in the Conceptual Analysis of Faith," "A Methodological Critique of the Role of Mysticism in the Context of Justification in Mullā Ṣadrā's Philosophy," and "A Methodological Critique of the Role of Religion in the Context of Justification in Mullā Ṣadrā's Philosophy."

The article "The Methodology of Ṣadr al-Mutaʾallihīn in the Conceptual–Ontological Analysis of the Human Soul" offers a comprehensive methodological analysis of concepts related to the soul and regards the doctrine of the soul's corporeal origination and spiritual subsistence as the result of Ṣadrā's ontological analysis of the soul (Vafāʾiyān & Farāmarz Q., 2016). The present study, however, focuses specifically on Ṣadrā's method and the process by which he formulates his theory of the soul's origination and subsistence, as well as on his mode of engagement with earlier theories. In addition to analyzing his integrative pluralism in presenting prior views, the study examines distinctive aspects of his position—such as his reconciliation of non-individuation and individuation in the soul—which have not been sufficiently addressed in previous scholarship.

An Introduction to the Method and Process of Arriving at the Principle "The Soul Is Corporeal in Its Origination and Spiritual in Its Subsistence"

Specialized studies in philosophical methodology, recognized as a branch of metaphilosophy, investigate the methods employed in philosophizing and in arriving at foundational doctrines. In contemporary scholarship, this field addresses a wide range of issues under two principal approaches: first, descriptive approaches, which analyze the actual practices philosophers use in the production of knowledge; and second, normative approaches, which critically assess the adequacy of such methods and, on that basis, evaluate different philosophical schools and traditions (Dever, 2016; *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2022). Although the systematic articulation of this discussion as an independent discipline appears to be a modern development, it would be mistaken to assume that philosophers of earlier traditions were inattentive to the methodological dimensions of their own thought. Here, "method" is understood in its broad sense: a coherent set of intellectual strategies and epistemic procedures adopted in order to achieve a specific theoretical aim and to formulate a philosophical doctrine.

The dominant historical image of philosophy—especially within the Islamic tradition—has portrayed it as a purely rational and argumentative enterprise, to the extent that philosophy is often regarded as the supreme exemplar of demonstrative knowledge. Yet reflection on the history of philosophy reveals that reducing philosophical activity to rigid rationalism does not correspond to the actual intellectual practices of major philosophers. Numerous thinkers, through critiques of pure reason, expanded the domain of philosophy and opened new horizons toward experience, phenomenology, intuition, and other sources of knowledge. This methodological plurality is traceable not only in post-Renaissance Western philosophy but also in the history of Islamic philosophy. The fundamental distinction between the Peripatetic (*mashshāʾī*) and Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) traditions, for example, rests precisely on this basis: while the Peripatetics sought a form of pure rationality modeled on Aristotelian logic, the Illuminationists introduced intuition (*shuhūd*) into the philosophical enterprise, thereby inaugurating a new divergence between strict rationalism and intuitionism.

Within this context, Mullā Ṣadrā, through the foundation of

Transcendent Philosophy (*al-ḥikma al-mutaʿāliyya*), advanced a novel model of thought that cannot be reductively classified under either pole of "rationalism" or "intuitionism." A defining feature of Ṣadrā's epistemic practice is his transcendence of the binary "reason or intuition" and his adoption of an integrative and meta-methodological approach. This methodological complexity has given rise to divergent interpretations in attempts to situate his thought genealogically. Some critics have regarded his philosophical system as merely an incoherent and eclectic amalgam of earlier doctrines, denying it independent originality or epistemic determination; by contrast, his interpreters have each attributed distinctive titles and characterizations to this school of thought (see: Faramarz Qarāmalikī, 2009). Focusing on Mullā Ṣadrā's research program and analyzing the process through which he establishes the doctrine of the soul's corporeal origination and spiritual subsistence, the present study seeks to demonstrate that his method is not a simple eclecticism, but rather a systematic and structured process in the production of philosophical knowledge.

Mullā Ṣadrā's Research Program in Examining the Views of Earlier Philosophers

Mullā Ṣadrā sets forth the detailed elaboration of the doctrine of **the soul's corporeal origination and spiritual subsistence** in the later sections of the discussions on the soul in the *Asfār*. His procedure is to first present a concise account of his own preferred position so that the reader, from the outset, becomes acquainted with the claim itself and can better perceive the shortcomings and conceptual dead ends of rival theories in light of it. The full development of the argument and the final articulation of the theory are then deferred to a later point in the discussion. Ṣadrā's engagement with the views of earlier philosophers is not a mere recital of opinions or a set of disconnected polemics; rather, it follows a relatively systematic procedure. He first offers a sympathetic exposition of each view—within the framework of its own principles and presuppositions—and then reports, analyzes, and evaluates the criticisms directed at that view, whether those criticisms come from himself or from commentators and critics. Some of these objections are internal critiques: that is, objections arising from misunderstanding, inexact quotation, or the improper application of a theory's own principles. In such cases, once the error is corrected, the problem can, at least on that level, be resolved. By contrast, some criticisms are structural, since they point to limitations intrinsic to the theoretical system itself; even after correcting the exposition and removing misunderstandings, these limitations remain insoluble within the same set of principles.

A significant point is that, in reporting the theories of **origination** and **eternity**, Ṣadrā presents them in an interwoven and overlapping manner. Yet this interweaving is not a sign of methodological disorder. The evidence suggests that he is pursuing a historically ordered narrative, and that the principle governing his enumeration is—at least apparently—the chronological sequence in which these views emerged, so that the process of the progressive refinement of arguments and the gradual transformation of formulations can be made visible. Accordingly, he first reports Plato's view on the eternity of the soul, and then, in sequence, presents the arguments of the Peripatetics who affirm origination, together with the challenges raised by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, the radical advocates of the soul's eternity**,** Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (who holds origination), Shaykh al-Ishrāq (who also holds origination), and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (who holds eternity).

Nevertheless, in the present study, and in view of the limits of the inquiry, we shall proceed first by tracing Ṣadrā's account of those who affirm the soul's origination, then his report of those who maintain its eternity, and finally his own theory in brief. We also make it explicit that our investigation at this point is concerned with the appearance of these doctrines in Mullā Ṣadrā's presentation, rather than with judging the correctness of his understanding or assessing the accuracy of his textual attributions in reporting those views. Accordingly, in this section we confine ourselves to Ṣadrā's own claims and formulations of these doctrines, while reserving a comparative evaluation of his account against the writings of the philosophers in question for another occasion.

1) Advocates of Origination

Mullā Ṣadrā presents—and subsequently critiques—a range of arguments advanced by proponents of the soul's origination, namely those who maintain its "origination with matter but not from matter," that is, its spiritual origination. He reports these views under three principal groups: the Peripatetics, Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, and the Shaykh al-Ishrāq (Shīrāzī, 2011, vol. 8, p. 332). What follows is a concise account of Ṣadrā's presentation of these three positions.

1-1) The Peripatetics

One of the points of disagreement between the Peripatetics and the Platonists lies precisely in this issue; although Mullā Ṣadrā seeks to reconcile the views of Plato and Aristotle by way of interpretation (Shīrāzī, 2011, vol.8., pp. 332–333). He begins his report of the Peripatetics from Ibn Sīnā's *al-Nafs* in the *Shifā'*, and he also devotes considerable attention to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's challenges—as commentator and critic—in *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyya* (Avicenna 1983, pp. 359-416; al-Rāzī, n.d., vol. 2, pp. 390–396). Ṣadrā then subjects Fakhr's replies to criticism in turn and advances the discussion in a critical manner. The general structure of the Peripatetic argument for the origination of the soul is a critique of the soul's eternity. They consider the possible states of a pre-eternal soul and, by refuting those states, infer origination. In summary, the argument runs as follows: if souls were eternal, they would be either one or many. If they were one, then either they would remain one even after their attachment to bodies—in which case a commonality of awarenesses would follow, which is absurd—or, given that the immaterial is indivisible, the multiplication of the one soul after its relation to bodies would be inexplicable. If they are many, then either they are distinct prior to attachment to bodies or they are not. On the Peripatetic view, which holds souls to be of one species and their multiplicity to be merely individual, their prior distinction can be neither essential/natural nor brought about through accidental differences without matter and potentiality; and since the realm of immateriality is devoid of matter, the prior distinction of souls before their attachment to bodies becomes impossible.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī examines the problematic elements of this argument—including the impossibility of the transition from unity to multiplicity and the impossibility of multiplicity prior to bodily attachment—formulates six possible objections, and answers them. These replies are in effect a more elaborate version of the Peripatetic formulation itself. Ṣadrā, while quoting Fakhr, intervenes whenever he disagrees with the position by using the expression "I say" (*aqūlu*). Since it is not possible in this brief discussion to mention all of Fakhr's objections, we will focus below on those points in which Ṣadrā highlights a methodological gap. For example, in the first objection, the issue concerns multiplicity at the moment of attachment to the body, and the objector may regard it as possible by denying any necessary connection between corporeality and receptivity. Fakhr rejects the multiplicity of what is non-corporeal by invoking the difference between part and whole; that is, the individual souls cannot be taken to be identical with the same one soul before division**.** He then adds that even if one accepts the divisibility of immaterial beings and the compatibility of immateriality with multiplicity, the resulting individual souls are products of division and therefore originate; and the claim of the advocates of origination concerns the origination of multiple souls, whether they were previously one or not.

In response to these formulations, Ṣadrā judges both the view and the method of the Peripatetics and Fakhr to be insufficient, locating the root of the problem in a kind of methodological exclusivism: the difference in the mode of being of the soul before the body, after its attachment to the body, and after separation from it is not a simple matter to be solved by a few hypothetical alternatives; rather, it is a fundamental issue that cannot be answered merely on the basis of Peripatetic premises (Shirāzī, ibid, p. 338). Pure rationality, in Ṣadrā's view, is unable to explain how one passes from pre-natural unity to natural multiplicity and then returns again to immateriality. Hence, while citing Fakhr's answers in the discussion of the transformation of individual souls into actual intellects, he explicitly states that the investigation of this issue requires "a fresh beginning of inquiry in another mode" and that not every temperament is capable of grasping this path: "This is an issue the investigation of which requires a fresh beginning of inquiry in another mode …" (ibid., pp. 337–338). Later, Fakhr also derives another paradox from a combination of certain Peripatetic principles:

1. the generic unity of souls;
2. the individuation of souls at the time of their origination in relation to bodies;
3. their individuation after separation by acquired intellectual apprehensions;

4. the hylomorphic status[1] of souls that do not apprehend universals.

According to Fakhr, the multiplicity of souls endowed with cognition after death can be explained, but what about souls lacking such intellectual apprehension? If their distinction in this world is due solely to the body, then what distinguishes them after separation? He rejects the Peripatetic answer—that the souls' self-awareness individuates them—because he regards immediate knowledge as identical with the soul's essence, whereas in the Peripatetic system individuation does not belong to essence. Fakhr sees the way out in essential generic distinction; Ṣadrā, however, does not agree with him. Ṣadrā concurs with the Peripatetics regarding the essential unity of souls and regards essential distinction as implying impossibility; nevertheless, he considers the objection unanswerable within the Peripatetic framework and holds that solving it requires introducing principles beyond the boundaries of Peripatetic philosophy.

Ṣadrā then enters into Peripatetic psychology and examines the soul's properties from that perspective. Here the discussion originates in the definition of the human being as **rational/capable of apprehending universals**: the essence of a thing is its form under the condition of exclusion; hence, for them, the reality of the soul returns to the apprehension of universals, and the persistence of the soul is likewise organized on that basis. The human soul, insofar as it is the bearer of universal and intelligible apprehensions, unlike animal and vegetative souls, is capable of enduring without the body. Since the

1. Hylomorphic refers to the Aristotelian doctrine that natural beings are composed of two intrinsic principles: matter (hylē) and form (morphē). Within the Peripatetic framework, many natural entities—including certain accounts of the soul—are understood in terms of such a matter–form composition.

simplicity of intelligible forms entails the simplicity of the soul as their locus, and simplicity entails incorruptibility, they conclude that corruption pertains to material beings, which contain the potentiality of non-being within themselves (ibid., p. 435). Ṣadrā regards this framework—apprehension of universals, simplicity, immateriality, and subsistence—as the furthest reach of the philosophers' understanding of the soul; not that he denies it, but he insists that reducing the soul's reality to these elements and remaining confined within them generates contradictions, including the following:

- If every simple thing is immaterial and every immaterial thing is temporally eternal, this becomes incompatible with origination.
- Given the immateriality of the soul, how is the numerical multiplicity of souls simultaneous with the multiplicity of bodies to be explained, and what is the criterion of their plurality?
- Explaining the transformation of the soul's essence and its course of perfection—even through intellectual apprehensions—is difficult in the Peripatetic system, because the denial of substantial motion leads to the soul's essence remaining fixed from beginning to end.

In addition, a set of Peripatetic philosophical-logical principles leads to yet another contradiction: the distinction between matter/genus and form/differentia as a distinction of reason, the unity of form and differentia, the constitutive role of differentia for species, the mental existence of genus and its accidental status in this respect, and the treatment of the rational soul as the differentiating form of composite beings made of soul and body. On these premises, the rational soul is the form of bodily matter; and since predication of genus over differentia is valid and both are existent in external reality through a single existence, body must also be predicated of the rational soul, and such predication would indicate some kind of external unity. This, however, is incompatible with the position of those who hold the rational soul to be immaterial both in origination and in subsistence (ibid., vol. 8, p. 345). Ṣadrā takes this not as a denial of the original premises, but as evidence of an inconsistency within the Peripatetic structure and as a manifestation of a fundamental gap that he later traces through the views of its proponents.

1-2) Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī

Mullā Ṣadrā represents Abū al-Barakāt's argument indirectly through Fakhr in *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyya*. Hence, setting aside the question of how far Ṣadrā's report corresponds to Abū al-Barakāt's original words, we will rely here solely on Ṣadrā's narration. On this account, Abū al-Barakāt's argument is built on the rejection of eternity: if the soul existed before the body, then either it had already belonged to other bodies (transmigration or *tanāsukh*) or it had not, in which case it would have remained suspended from its proper acts (suspension or *taʿṭī*). By means of various theological arguments, he refutes both possibilities and therefore concludes that the soul originates. Although Ṣadrā finds this argument extremely weak, he nonetheless critiques it and, in addition to substantive criticisms, raises a methodological objection as well: restricting the possible states to the two alternatives of transmigration (*tanāsukh*) or suspension (*taʿṭīl*) is unjustified, and other possibilities—such as the hypothesis of non-material bodies—must also be taken into account (ibid., vol. 8, pp. 341–342).

1-3) Shaykh al-Ishrāq (Suhrawardī)

Despite his inclination toward Plato, Suhrawardī agrees with the

Peripatetics in this issue and defends the spiritual origination of the soul. He regards souls as among the governing lights (*anwār mudabbira*/*ishpahbadī*), which are immaterial yet attached to bodies and receive effusion from the overpowering lights. Ṣadrā represents three arguments from him. In the first argument, Suhrawardī, like the Peripatetics, examines and rejects the states and impossibilities entailed by the hypothesis of the soul's eternity, though with differences that are largely formal and arise from his own luminous metaphysics (Shirāzī, vol. 8, pp. 348–349; 2001, vol. 2, p. 287). The key difference here is that Shaykh al-Ishrāq, unlike the Peripatetics who generally accept gradation only in accidents, also considers substances to be susceptible to intensification and gradation; this affects his account of the differentiation of souls.

By analyzing Suhrawardī's arguments, Ṣadrā attributes some mistakes to invalid commitments or misunderstandings; for example, he rejects the entailment between the unity of souls and the sharing of cognition—especially in cognitions dependent on bodily faculties—and he also rejects the possibility of subsequent multiplicity through bodily division, since quantitative unity is only one kind of unity, alongside other kinds such as intellectual, specific, generic, and individual unity (ibid., vol. 8, pp. 349–353). Nonetheless, Ṣadrā regards some objections as structural; for instance, he does not accept the differentiation of souls through gradation or accidents and sees souls as modes of a single reality that, while multiple, do not possess independent existential distinction.

In Ṣadrā's criticisms of Suhrawardī's later arguments, another methodological point becomes salient: the Shaykh's rejection of "descent" (*hubūṭ*) in his system, Ṣadrā argues, entails consequences that also lead to the rejection of "ascent" (*ṣuʿūd*), thereby producing a foundational gap. In contrast, within Ṣadrā's own theory, belief in descent and origination is compatible. He reinforces the possibility of descent by invoking the verse "As We originated the first creation, so we shall repeat it" and by analogizing ascent to descent, thereby extending the discussion partly into the realm of scriptural support (ibid., vol. 8, p. 354). In other formulations of Suhrawardī as well, Ṣadrā often shows that restricting possibilities or inferring an infinite regress is valid only if there is an actual ordering among the items in question; if there is no such ordering, the conclusion does not follow. He also advances a coherence-based critique concerning the compatibility of some of Suhrawardī's positions with his other principles, such as the **the archetype of the species (rabb al-naw**ʿ) and gradation among lights (ibid., pp. 370–371).

2) Believers in the Soul's Pre-Eternity

In opposition to the belief in the soul's temporal origination, a group of philosophers maintains that immaterial souls existed prior to the origination of bodies and subsequently became attached to them upon their creation. Mullā Ṣadrā classifies those who hold the soul's priority over the body into three categories: Plato, the radical Platonists, and the advocates of transmigration (*tanāsukh*). He does not offer a detailed critique of transmigration here, deferring it to the ninth volume of the *Asfār*; instead, he focuses on those theories that have, in some way, penetrated Islamic thought. In this discussion, he endeavors to provide a hermeneutical interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of Plato's view to make it compatible with his own position, while rejecting the other two theories.

2-1) Plato's Theory and Islamic Revelatory Knowledge

According to the famous historical account, the doctrine of the soul's pre-eternity in philosophy is traced back to Plato and his discourse on the Forms (*al-muthul*) as immutable, eternal realities. According to Ṣadrā, Plato does not explicitly assert the "multiplied existence of souls prior to the body"; nevertheless, two distinct readings of this view found their way into Islamic thought. The first reading takes the pre-eternal existence of the Forms to mean the distinct, individual existence of all souls in pre-eternity. In response, Ṣadrā seeks to offer an alternative reading based on two considerations: first, Plato did not explicitly state the priority of multiplied existences; second, the issue is not merely a philosophical, single-text problem, and given its religious dimension, one must not rely solely on philosophical data. Consequently, alongside rational-demonstrative data, Ṣadrā utilizes scriptural data (*naqlī*), invoking the revealed scriptures (*The Qurʾān and Hadith*), the symbols of the prophets, and the allusions of the saints (*ishārāt al-awliyāʾ*): "… for in the Noble Qurʾān, the descent (*hubūṭ*) of the soul is mentioned" (Shīrāzī, vol. 8, p. 335). He also references specific Qurʾānic verses (e.g., al-Aʿrāf 7:25 and 7:29, al-Tīn 95:4–5), Hadith narrations, and mystical allegories (such as *Salāmān and Absāl*, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, and *The Ring-necked Dove* [*al-Ḥamāma al-Muṭawwaqa*] in *Kalīla and Dimna*) to demonstrate how difficult it is to comprehend these scriptural data within the theoretical framework of those advocates of origination who deny the soul's prior existence.

Thus, Ṣadrā's methodological pluralism extends to the level of "gathering sources": although committed to the temporal origination of the soul, he does not completely dismiss its "pre-eternity," but rather attempts to formulate a hermeneutical interpretation: "The interpretation of what has been transmitted from Plato regarding the pre-eternity of souls" (Shīrāzī, ibid., p. 331). And also: "We have oriented their two statements concerning the pre-eternity and the origination of souls in a manner that accords with their intent and unifies their meaning" (ibid., p. 333). From Ṣadrā's perspective, Plato's intended meaning of the pre-eternity of souls is not a multiplied and particular existence, but rather a mode of unified, intellectual existence: the existence of the soul in the intelligible realm prior to its natural existence, characterized by a collective unity and cognitive identity—namely, the "immaterial intellectual forms" which are the Divine Forms (ibid., p. 333). In this way, the verses and traditions concerning the soul's "descent" are interpreted as indicating something other than the multiplied existence of souls, allowing them to be integrated into Ṣadrā's theoretical network alongside its other components.

2-2) The Radical Platonists

Another group, whom Ṣadrā calls "the fanatics of Plato's school" (*al-mutaʿaṣṣibūn min madhhab Aflāṭūn*) (Shīrāzī, ibid.), maintains that souls existed as distinct and multiplied entities prior to their attachment to bodies. Ṣadrā critiques both their understanding of Plato and their interpretation of the concept of the soul's descent in Islamic teachings. Their first argument rests on two principles: the immateriality of the soul, and the premise that temporal origination must be preceded by matter and time, because a temporally originated thing requires a prior potentiality/readiness and a material bearer (Ibrāhīmī Dīnānī, 1987, vol. 1, p. 215). Therefore, immaterial entities cannot be temporally originated, and the immateriality of the soul becomes incompatible with origination (Shīrāzī, 2011, p. 331 p. 333). Ṣadrā argues that resolving this conflict is possible by shifting the underlying principles, since his conception of the soul's immateriality in Transcendent Philosophy is not identical to that of earlier philosophers—especially those who held the complete immateriality of the soul from the very beginning of its origination.

Their second argument refers to a principle of classical physics: the eternity of natural species and the infinity of individuals.

From this, they infer that if the soul is temporally originated, the actually existing souls must be infinite, whereas any number that is subject to addition must be finite (Miṣbāḥ, 1401 AHsh, p. 232). Ṣadrā replies that the impossibility of the infinite is conditional upon specific constraints, such as ordering (*tarattub*) and coexistence in existence; since these constraints do not apply to departed souls, the objection of infinity does not hold against the origination of souls in that sense. Their third argument—which carries greater sensitivity within the structure of Islamic philosophy—concerns how to transition from temporal origination/temporality to eternity/timelessness. Ṣadrā attempts to resolve this by distinguishing between two aspects of the soul: its essential, incorruptible aspect, and its relational, originated, and corruptible aspect (Shīrāzī, ibid., p. 334).

2-3) Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī's (1236–1311) Argument for the Soul's Pre-Eternity

Mullā Ṣadrā reports the view of Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī—the commentator on *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*—after discussing Shaykh al-Ishrāq, and then subjects it to criticism. Quṭb al-Dīn considers Suhrawardī's proofs for the soul's origination—which rely on the refutation of transmigration—to be "persuasive rather than demonstrative." He deems transmigration rationally possible, thereby strengthening the case for pre-eternity and invoking Plato, Qurʾānic verses, and Hadith in support. Ṣadrā rejects both of Quṭb al-Dīn's premises and characterizes his attribution of this view to Plato and "the great ancients" as "a fabricated falsehood" (*mukhtalaq kadhib*) (Shīrāzī, vol. 8, pp. 373–376). Quṭb al-Dīn offers a causal (*limmī*) formulation for the pre-eternity of the soul: if the complete cause is immaterial (the Intellect), its effect (the soul) must also be pre-eternal; he regards the relation between body and soul as that of an instrument to its agent, rather than that of matter to form. Hence, the body is a condition for the soul's activity, not for its actualization, and the soul persists after separation (ibid., vol. 8, p. 375). Ṣadrā accepts the rule that "the immateriality of the complete cause entails the pre-eternity of the effect" within a specific domain, but argues that its scope is limited to simple effects devoid of matter and time (such as the Intellects), not the soul, which is a substance that governs a body. According to Ṣadrā, the soul originates simultaneously with the body, and with the dissolution of the body, its relational existence also dissolves; however, the essence of the soul, through its perfecting substantial motion, transforms into an immaterial substance. Therefore, Quṭb al-Dīn's arguments are insufficient to prove either the soul's pre-eternity or its subsistence; Ṣadrā attributes this error to the incorrect application of the causal principle (ibid., p. 378). He also points out the fallacy of "taking the accidental in place of the essential" (*akhdh mā bi-l-ʿaraḍ makān mā bi-l-dhāt*): Quṭb al-Dīn treats the relational aspect of the soul as accidental, whereas in Ṣadrā's view, the very mode of the soul's existence is essentially relational and connective, and assuming its prior existence would entail suspension (*taʿṭīl*) (ibid., p. 376).

Mullā Ṣadrā's Theory and Its Methodological Logic in Explaining the Origination of the Soul

After reporting and critiquing earlier views on the origination and pre-eternity of the soul, Mullā Ṣadrā presents his own theory not merely as an alternative opinion, but as an explanatory framework that, in his view, preserves the strengths of rival positions while resolving their internal tensions. His central thesis—the soul's corporeal origination and spiritual subsistence is not simply a claim about the soul's beginning or end. Rather, it is the outcome of a broader ontological and psychological system; apart from that system, the theory is either reduced to an oversimplified formulation or confused with earlier doctrines.

The methodological significance of this discussion lies in the fact that Ṣadrā does not rely on a single type of proof. On the one hand, he grounds his theory in the general principles of Transcendent Philosophy**,** especially the primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*), the gradation of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), and substantial motion (*al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*). On the other hand, in explaining the levels of the soul and its relation to the worlds of being, he draws on elements that cannot be derived from Peripatetic demonstration alone. His theory should therefore be understood as marked by plurality at the level of argument, yet unity at the level of principle. In other words, his method is synthetic, but this synthesis does not consist in a loose accumulation of heterogeneous claims; rather, it consists in integrating diverse elements within the horizon of a unified ontological foundation. This theory rests on two fundamental pillars: first, the soul's three levels of existence (*nashaʾāt*) and the distinction between **cognitive existence** (*wujūd ʿilmī*) **_**the existence of things in the divine knowledge— and **actual existence** (*wujūd ʿaynī*); second, the doctrine of substantial motion. The first makes it possible to explain the distinction between the soul's pre-individual aspect and its individuated aspect; the second explains how the soul passes from the material level to the immaterial one. Thus, if the theory of the soul's levels of existence clarifies the ontological structure of the discussion, substantial motion provides its developmental and genetic logic (see in: Shirazi, vol. 8, p. 346).

3-1) The Soul's Different Ontological levels of existence and the Problem of Individuation

One of the most difficult dimensions of Ṣadrā's theory is to explain the relation between the soul's unity at the pre-natural level and its multiplicity at the level of attachment to bodies. Ṣadrā ascribes to the soul distinct levels, which may be summarized in three levels of existence:

1. the pre-natural level: the soul's cognitive existence in relation to its agent
2. the natural level: its existence in relation to the material cause, together with the body
3. the post-natural level: its existence in itself as an immaterial reality

The significance of this division lies not merely in describing three "temporal stages," but in distinguishing three modes of existential realization. If these levels are understood simply as three separate moments in time, the metaphysical precision of the theory is lost.

In the pre-natural level, the soul has not yet been realized as an individual and determinate entity. What is meant by this level is the soul's existence in relation to its cause, or in its cognitive and collective mode: an existence in which the soul possesses a kind of unity, though not numerical personal unity. Such a unity, which appears in the works of Plato, Plotinus, and in non-dual traditions such as Zen and Buddhism concerning the universal soul, does not possess a numerical character. Rather, it falls within panentheistic interpretations that present a unitive vision of the transcendent realm, in which the soul is understood as a part or expression of that reality. This theme can be found across mystical traditions, including Islamic mysticism (Stace, 1961, pp. 307-320).

For this reason, Ṣadrā's view should not be too quickly identified with the Platonic theory of Forms, the mystical doctrine of "immutable entities" (*aʿyān thābita*), or the separate forms of the

Neoplatonic tradition, even though a certain structural affinity can be discerned among them. What may be established here is rather a hermeneutical and narrative connection: what Plato called the “pre-eternity of souls” and what religious texts describe as the “descent” of the soul can, on this interpretive reading, be reconciled with corporeal origination. By invoking the Qur’ānic verse, ‘As We began the first creation, We will repeat it’ (21:104), and by analogizing the ascent to the descent, he deems the descent also possible and proceeds with the remainder of the discussion using scriptural evidence. The soul exists in divine knowledge—not in the external world—in a unified and non-individuated manner; when the body becomes prepared, this cognitive existence is transformed into an individuated and originated actual existence in matter. Ṣadrā himself makes clear that this truth cannot be grasped through demonstration alone, but requires mystical witnessing and scriptural corroboration, although he never denies the authority of philosophical demonstration (Shīrāzī, 1981, vol.8, p. 370).

The crucial distinction is that, in Ṣadrā’s system, this level must be interpreted in relation to the primacy of existence and the gradation of existence, not as a return to some independently fixed essential quiddity. The important point is that the soul in this first level—unlike some monistic mystical readings—is neither an eternal soul that is one in the sense of a single person, nor an externally real and multiplied existence. Rather, what Ṣadrā means by the soul’s existence before the body is its cognitive existence in the knowledge of the agent (the Necessary Being) or in the separate intellects. This existence lacks numerical individuation and external particularity; it belongs to the order of cognitive forms, whose multiplicity follows from the multiplicity of the known objects, not from the multiplicity of externally separate immaterial substances. Ṣadrā explicitly states in the *Asfār* (ibid, vol. 8, pp. 366–367) that “the existence of a thing in relation to its agent is its strongest existence," but this strength pertains to collective and cognitive unity, not to separate personal existence: "The soul's unity in that level is a collective unity encompassing the other levels, not a numerical unity capable of division" (ibid, vol. 9, p. 412). In that level, the soul has not yet become the individual "I." Its individuation arises in conjunction with the body and within the horizon of its perfective motion. For that reason, the natural level is not merely the site of the soul's accidental attachment to the body; it is the very arena in which individuation emerges. This point marks Ṣadrā's fundamental distance from theories that regard the soul from the outset as an actually existing, immaterial, and personally determinate entity, whose relation to the body is secondary or merely administrative. By contrast, Ṣadrā insists that the human soul, at the beginning of its origination, arises within nature itself and through the perfective motion of matter. That said, it must be acknowledged that Ṣadrā's account of the precise relation between the soul's pre-natural unity and the multiplicity of personal souls is not entirely free from ambiguity. In some passages, he himself suggests that a complete understanding of this relation exceeds the capacity of ordinary demonstration. Methodologically, the significance of this lies in the fact that instead of denying one side of the problem, Ṣadrā seeks to redefine it by distinguishing levels of existence. His principal move, therefore, is not to eliminate the tension, but to show that the tension arises only when the soul's existential levels are collapsed into one another.[1]

1. Mullā Ṣadrā posits that post-bodily existence spans two supra-natural realms: the imaginal and the intellectual. He distinguishes between perfected souls, which ascend to the intellectual realm, and imperfect or wretched souls, which remain in the imaginal, thereby elucidating the varying degrees of the soul's immortality (Shīrāzī, 2007, p.312-313).

3-2) Substantial Motion and the Coming-to-Be of the Soul

If the theory of the soul's ontological levels clarifies the distinction among its existential levels, substantial motion explains how the soul rises from a level dependent on matter to one independent of matter. Here substantial motion is not merely one premise among others; it is the very condition of possibility of the theory. Without it, explaining how a material being—or a being dependent on matter—can attain immateriality becomes exceedingly difficult, and the theory would either be forced back toward the thesis of the soul's prior immateriality or fail to explain its subsistence after bodily separation. Within the framework of Transcendent Philosophy, the soul is not, from the outset, a fixed substance with a fully completed essence; rather, it is a graded and intensifying reality. This conception is directly tied to the doctrines of the primacy of existence and the gradation of the levels of being. On this basis, change in the soul does not pertain merely to its accidents or acts; rather, a kind of perfection and intensification occurs in its very substance. At the beginning, in its weakest existential degree, the soul is strongly dependent on the body; but in the course of its perfective motion, it reaches a level at which its acts no longer depend on material instruments, and a mode of immateriality is thereby realized.

In the second level, the soul originates corporeally: that is, at the beginning of its emergence, it is a material substance dependent on the body, not immaterial from the outset. This marks Ṣadrā's difference from both the Peripatetics and the Illuminationists, who take the soul to be spiritual from the very moment of origination. Yet within this same natural level, by means of substantial motion—which Ṣadrā establishes throughout the whole of material substance—the soul gradually moves from materiality to immateriality and from potentiality to intellectual actuality. In this process, the soul's quiddity does not change into another quiddity, nor is its personal unity destroyed; rather, the graded levels of the soul's existence are traversed in terms of intensity and weakness without interruption of identity. Ṣadrā explains this transformation through the principle of the gradation of existence, which itself follows from the primacy of existence. The result is that the soul is corporeal at the beginning of its origination, but spiritual and enduring in its subsistence and in its acts of intellection. Moreover, the soul's supra-natural life is not confined to the intellective level alone; the imaginal level (*nashʾa khayāliyya*) also provides another mode of non-material subsistence for deficient souls, such as the wretched (Shīrāzī, 1981, p. 313).

The importance of this analysis lies in the fact that Ṣadrā thereby reconstructs the rigid binary of "material/immaterial" as an existential process. The soul is neither fully immaterial from the outset nor merely material to the end; rather, it passes through its levels within motion itself. This formulation not only grounds the explanation of the soul's spiritual subsistence, but also helps explain, from Ṣadrā's perspective, why earlier thinkers disagreed: each had grasped one level of the soul and then generalized that level to the whole of its reality. It should also be noted that immateriality itself has degrees in Ṣadrā's system. Accordingly, the soul's subsistence after separation from the body is not restricted to the intellective level; the imaginal level may also constitute a degree of the soul's non-material life. This point is especially important in explaining the posthumous persistence of imperfect souls and shows that, in Transcendent Philosophy, the soul's relation to the levels of cognition is hierarchical and analogical, not abrupt and dualistic.

According to Mullā Ṣadrā, the secret behind the divergence of earlier philosophers' views largely stems from their neglect of substantial motion (Shīrāzī, 1981, vol. 8, pp. 346–347). This principle transforms the soul from a fully actualized, fixed, and motionless essence—which merely changes its abode and temporarily descends from an exalted station into the confinement of body and matter—into a fluid and gradational existence possessing multiple degrees.[1] The Peripatetic philosophers admitted gradation only in accidents, while Suhrawardī subsequently allowed it also in substantial quiddities (Suhrawardī, 1993, vol. 2, p. 119). With Mullā Ṣadrā's doctrine of the primacy of existence, however, gradation is ultimately attributed to existence itself.

3-3) The Final Formulation of the Theory: Corporeal Origination and Spiritual Subsistence

The outcome of these two pillars is that the human soul, with respect to its origination, depends on the world of nature and is, in Ṣadrā's phrase, **corporeal in origination**; but with respect to its subsistence and its higher cognitive actualities, it acquires a spiritual and immaterial degree. Here corporeal origination should not be understood to mean that the soul is material in its entire reality, just as spiritual subsistence or survive does not mean denying the soul's developmental continuity with the body at its initial stage. These two expressions refer to two aspects of the soul's existential course, not to two independent substances. From this perspective, three levels of the soul's realization may be distinguished:

- **the pre-personal level**: the soul is considered in a collective and non-personal mode
- **the level of natural individuation**: the soul acquires

1. A reference to Ibn Sīnā's *al-Qaṣīda al-ʿAyniyya*, which opens with the verse:
"It descended to you from the most exalted station, a dove possessed of dignity and reserve" (Khalīf, 1974, p. 129).

individual identity in conjunction with the body and within the course of perfective motion

- **the level of immaterial subsistence**: after traversing the stages of perfection, the soul attains a degree of existential independence from matter

This formulation shows that Ṣadrā's theory does not seek a mechanical reconciliation between the two opposing views of the soul's pre-eternity and origination. Rather, it seeks to show that these two positions, if understood as referring to two different aspects of the soul's being, can be reinterpreted within a hierarchical and non-contradictory structure. His theory is thus not merely a compromise among doctrines, but a redefinition of the very basis of the dispute.

Levels of Argument in Ṣadrā's Theory

To understand Ṣadrā's methodology more precisely, one must distinguish the different levels of argument in his account. This distinction shows that the plurality of sources in his theory is not a sign of incoherence, but reflects the differentiation of justificatory layers.

The Demonstrative-Philosophical Level: At its most fundamental level, Ṣadrā's theory rests on the demonstrative foundations of Transcendent Philosophy. Substantial motion, the primacy of existence, and the gradation of existence constitute the principal elements of this level. Here Ṣadrā seeks to show that the soul, like other natural beings, is fluid and perfective in its very substance, and that both the soul's origination and the possibility of its subsistence can be explained through an existential analysis of the soul and its relation to matter. This layer forms the backbone of the theory; without it, the other elements of his method would lack an ordered place.

The Unveiling-Intuitive Level: In certain places—especially where the distinction and relation among the soul's cognitive existence (one and non-individuated), natural existence (corporeal and individuated), and immaterial existence after death are at issue, or where the unity and multiplicity of the soul and the way in which its pre-natural levels are apprehended are under discussion—Ṣadrā explicitly states that demonstration alone is insufficient for a complete grasp of the matter. This does not amount to a rejection of demonstration, but rather to an acknowledgment of its limits in certain boundary questions. At this level, witnessing or unveiling (*kashf*) assumes a complementary role. It is important, however, to stress that in Ṣadrā's system unveiling does not replace demonstration; rather, where demonstration reaches its threshold, unveiling broadens the horizon of understanding. Ṣadrā explicitly states that "restricting the method to demonstration alone" is insufficient for understanding this truth, but this does not mean setting demonstration aside; rather, it means completing it through mystical witnessing and recourse to unveiling and sound spiritual taste. Hence he refers to Pythagoras, who in a visionary disclosure had beheld his own existential levels (ibid., vol. 8, p. 370).

The Confirmatory-Interpretive Religious Level: The third level is the use of Qurʾānic verses and Hadith. At this level, Ṣadrā employs religious texts as a source for confirming, deepening, and at times re-reading philosophical concepts. Verses such as "Descend!" (*ihbiṭū*) (The Qur'an 2:38) and the covenant verse of "*alast*"[1] are interpreted in light of the theory of the soul's cognitive existence and

1. "When your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied, 'Yes, we bear witness!" (*The Qur'an,* 7: 172).

thereby become corroborative of corporeal origination. The relation of transmitted revelation (*naql*) to demonstration here is not merely ornamental. In some cases, the religious text functions as a horizon for understanding aspects of truth that philosophy alone can illuminate only partially. Even so, from the standpoint of systematic construction, this level is understood under the general principles of Transcendent Philosophy, not independently of them.

In sum, Ṣadrā's method may be described as synthetic yet disciplined. He appropriates diverse elements from different traditions, but this appropriation is not an unregulated aggregation. Rather, each principle is admitted into his theoretical structure only insofar as it can be integrated and reinterpreted within the horizon of the general principles of Transcendent Philosophy—especially the primacy and gradation of existence. Accordingly, his theory operates with three foundational levels: the philosophical foundation (substantial motion), the mystical foundation (a unity-oriented view of the levels of being), and the religious foundation (the interpretation of Qurʾānic verses and Hadith). These levels function together in a hierarchical order, not as scattered and incompatible elements.

Ṣadrā's Interdisciplinary Approach and Its Affinity with the Integrative Model

Ṣadrā's Interdisciplinary Approach and Its Affinity with the Integrative Model From Mullā Ṣadrā's engagement with diverse intellectual traditions—ranging from the Platonists, the Peripatetics, and the Illuminationists to the *Theologia* (the Arabic Plotinus translation), theoretical mysticism (especially Ibn ʿArabī), kalām theologians such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, and, above all, the Qurʾān and the ḥadīth—it becomes clear that he recognized the multi-genealogical character of the problem of the soul. The question of the soul's origination or pre-existence emerges at the intersection of philosophical psychology, metaphysics, mystical anthropology, theology, and scriptural interpretation, and Ṣadrā's treatment of the issue reflects a clear awareness of this plurality of sources. Ṣadrā himself emphasizes the subtlety of the problem and warns against methodological reductionism. He describes it as a "delicate path of inquiry and profound in depth" (*daqīqat al-maslak baʿīdat al-ghawr*) (Shīrāzī, 1981, vol. 8, p. 343), and remarks that its discussion requires a mode of investigation "other than purely philosophical and demonstrative discourse" (ibid., vol. 8, pp. 337–338). Such statements indicate that the complexity of the problem cannot be exhausted by the procedures of a single discipline. Yet this methodological plurality does not lead Ṣadrā toward eclecticism. Rather, the diverse intellectual resources are organized within the metaphysical framework of Transcendent Philosophy, especially through the principles of the primacy of existence, the gradation of existence, and substantial motion. In this respect, Ṣadrā's approach shows a notable affinity with interdisciplinary models of inquiry discussed in contemporary methodological literature (Farāmarz. Q., 2016, p. 388). These models begin from the recognition that certain problems possess a multidimensional structure and therefore require the coordinated use of different forms of knowledge. Instead of restricting inquiry to a single disciplinary perspective, they employ multiple conceptual and methodological tools in order to illuminate the various dimensions of a complex problem. Within the literature on interdisciplinarity, at least two major models are often distinguished: the challenging (or competitive) model and the integrative model. In the challenging model, different disciplines confront one another critically and expose the assumptions and limitations of competing approaches. By contrast, the integrative model seeks to coordinate insights from different fields in order to construct a more comprehensive explanatory framework (Newell, 2013, pp. 22–32).

When Ṣadrā's treatment of the problem of the soul is examined in this light, several methodological features become apparent. First, he presents earlier doctrines—those of Plato, the Peripatetics, the Illuminationists, Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī—in a detailed and philosophically sympathetic manner, thereby reconstructing the historical debate surrounding the soul's origination or pre-eternity. Second, he subjects these positions to critical analysis, distinguishing defensible insights from elements that generate conceptual difficulties. Third, the defensible elements are reinterpreted within the metaphysical principles of Transcendent Philosophy, particularly the doctrines of substantial motion and the gradation of existence. Within this framework, the soul is understood not as a static substance but as a dynamic reality whose existential intensity undergoes continuous transformation. Alongside this philosophical reinterpretation, Ṣadrā employs a plurality of complementary methods. Rational demonstration clarifies the ontological foundations of the discussion, mystical insight illuminates the existential trajectory of the soul, and scriptural sources—especially Qurʾānic verses and transmitted ḥadīths concerning creation, resurrection, and the afterlife—are interpreted within the broader metaphysical horizon of his philosophy. Through this interaction of historical exposition, critical evaluation, and systematic reinterpretation, Ṣadrā constructs the conceptual context within which the doctrine of the soul's "corporeal origination and spiritual subsistence" is articulated. In this sense, the emergence of this doctrine can be examined as the result of a sustained engagement with multiple intellectual traditions and methodological resources rather than the outcome of a single disciplinary perspective. Within this analytical context, the distinction between Ṣadrā's procedure and mere eclecticism becomes clearer. Eclecticism typically involves the unregulated combination of doctrines from different traditions without a unifying conceptual structure. Ṣadrā’s engagement with diverse sources, however, takes place within a determinate philosophical architecture governed by explicit metaphysical principles. His approach is therefore characterized by the precedence of critique before the adoption of inherited doctrines, the presence of guiding principles such as the primacy of existence and substantial motion, and the incorporation of insights from different traditions within a single systematic philosophical horizon.

Conclusion

The methodological analysis undertaken in this study has shown that Mullā Ṣadrā, in addressing the complex problem of the origination (*ḥudūth*) and subsistence (*baqāʾ*) of the soul, employs a systematic and multi-dimensional model that remains free from eclecticism while exhibiting notable affinities with certain contemporary interdisciplinary approaches. The principal features of this method may be summarized under three main headings:

1) **The Stage of Comparative Critique:** Rather than wholly rejecting or uncritically adopting the views of his predecessors, Mullā Ṣadrā adopts a critical–selective approach, distinguishing defensible elements within each school from propositions he considers untenable. For example, he accepts from the Peripatetics the principle of the “unity of souls at the beginning of origination,” yet reinterprets it within the framework of the gradation of existence. Likewise, he appropriates the Platonic doctrine of Forms, but through religious hermeneutics rearticulates

it as the doctrine of the “immaterial hosts of spirits” in the pre-temporal covenantal realm (ʿālam al-alast).

2) **The Stage of Organic Integration (Not Eclecticism):** Ṣadrā’s central innovation lies in integrating selected elements from philosophical, mystical, theological, and scriptural traditions into a coherent and hierarchically ordered framework through principled interpretation (*taʾwīl*). This integration is governed by stable metaphysical principles —most notably the “primacy of existence” and “substantial motion” and therefore does not result in a conflation of doctrines or internal contradiction. On the contrary, each adopted element is deepened and completed in light of more fundamental principles. Within this unified architecture, empirical observations (such as the stages of embryonic development), rational demonstrations (e.g., the immateriality of the soul), mystical insights, and scriptural sources (*Qurʾānic verses* and *ḥadīths* concerning the afterlife) are all situated within a single, comprehensive theoretical system.

3) **The Stage of Theoretical Innovation through Purposeful Methodological Pluralism:** Mullā Ṣadrā explicitly maintains that resolving this problem requires the concurrent employment of multiple methods:

   - Rational demonstration (*burhān*) to articulate the theoretical foundations of the discussion, such as the individuation of the soul_ and to resolve the apparent paradox between origination and immortality by means of substantial motion and the gradation of existence;

   - Theoretical mysticism to elucidate the soul’s descent and return, as well as its pre-individuated mode of being;

- Scriptural reasoning (*naql*) through the hermeneutical interpretation of *Qurʾānic* verses and transmitted reports in support of these metaphysical claims.

Although he affirms methodological plurality, this plurality does not entail a lack of unity. Rather, these diverse instruments are ordered toward a single, integrated doctrine culminating in the formulation of his well-known thesis of the “corporeal origination and spiritual subsistence of the soul”. In light of the foregoing, Mullā Ṣadrā’s method—by attending simultaneously to multiple dimensions of the problem, systematically employing diverse methodologies, and achieving a comprehensive and trans-perspectival synthesis—may be regarded as broadly comparable to integrative models in contemporary interdisciplinary studies. Yet unlike eclectic approaches, his synthesis rests upon three foundational principles: the priority of critique over integration, the subordination of pluralism to clearly defined methodological and metaphysical principles, and its articulation within a single, unified philosophical system—namely, the Transcendent Philosophy. In doing so, Ṣadrā establishes a framework for epistemic convergence among the various domains of knowledge operative in his intellectual milieu.

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Theosophia Islamica EISSN: 2783-3240

From Intimacy to Responsibility: A Critique of Margaret Little's View on Abortion*

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Abstract

Among conventional approaches to the issue of abortion, the conflict between the "fetus's right to life" and the "woman's right to control her own body" has been at the center of many ethical debates. In contrast, a newer approach to the ethics of pregnancy maintains that this issue should be reconsidered in light of the moral intimacy and interpersonal relation ships that emerge during pregnancy. In her article *"Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate"* (1999), Margaret Olivia Little offers a distinctive framework for understanding the ethics of abortion. Moving beyond approaches grounded in the "right to life," the "woman's right to bodily control," and utilitarian calculations, she argues—by focusing on the relationship between mother and fetus—that pregnancy is not merely

* Dehghani Nistani. Z. & Alebouyeh. A. (2026). From Intimacy to Responsibility: A Critique of Margaret Little's View on Abortion. *Theosophia Islamica*, *6*(1), pp. 288-314.
https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2026.74801.1129

▣ **Article Type:** Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

▣ **Received:** 2025/09/25 • **Revised:** 2025/11/26 • **Accepted:** 2025/12/05 •**Online Publication:** 2026/01/10

a biological process but rather a profound and personal relationship. Consequently, moral obligations toward the fetus cannot be understood independently of the pregnant woman's attitude toward and evaluation of this relationship.

Little reconceptualizes abortion not simply as a conflict between the "fetus’s right to life" and the "woman’s right to bodily control," but as a question concerning moral intimacy and the woman's evaluative authority. Nevertheless, her theory faces serious criticisms. Conditioning moral obligation upon individual evaluation entails the risk of relativism; the emphasis on intimacy overlooks the role of causal responsibility in the formation of moral obligations; and, finally, it neglects the moral weight that both secular and religious traditions attribute to fetal life. While acknowledging the value of Little’s relational approach as an important corrective to overly abstract theories, the present article argues that her view fails to provide an adequate foundation for explaining the moral obligations associated with pregnancy.

Keywords

Abortion, Maternal Obligations, Margaret Little, Consent in Pregnancy, Intimacy in Pregnancy.

Introduction

The issue of abortion has been one of the most contentious topics in applied ethics, situated at the intersection of theories of individual rights, deontology, and utilitarianism. Most classical approaches to this issue have fallen into two principal camps: on the one hand, theories emphasizing the fetus's right to life, such as that of Don Marquis (Marquis, 1989); and on the other hand, views grounded in the woman's right to control her own body, such as that advanced by Judith Jarvis Thomson (Thomson, 1971). Although these frameworks have sought to clarify the moral boundaries of abortion, they have, as Little argues, largely neglected "the lived and intertwined reality of pregnancy" (Little, 1999, p. 299), focusing instead on the question of fetal personhood.

Through her influential article, "Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate" (1999), Little sought to address this theoretical gap. She contends that abortion cannot be adequately explained merely on the basis of a conflict between two rights—the "right to life" and the "woman's right to bodily control"—because pregnancy is, first and foremost, a form of intimate and moral relationship in which the woman's body becomes the locus of a lived and complex connection. According to Little, pregnancy is not an act of bodily giving or sacrifice; rather, it is a relationship whose nature is grounded in bodily and emotional intertwinement (Little, 1999, p. 303).

Critiquing classical perspectives, Little emphasizes that these theories rest upon the assumption of a complete separation between two persons, whereas in pregnancy the boundaries between two bodies and two lives are profoundly intertwined (Little, 1999, p. 301). Accordingly, understanding a woman's moral obligations toward the fetus is impossible without recognizing this biological and emotional intertwinement. She distinguishes among biological parenthood, legal parenthood, and relational-personal parenthood, arguing that only obligations arising from a lived and personal relationship possess substantial moral force. On this basis, a woman's responsibility during pregnancy is not an absolute duty; rather, it depends upon how she understands her relationship with the fetus. In her view, a woman's conception of pregnancy determines the kind of relationship in which she stands and the responsibilities that follow from it (Little, 1999, p. 315).

Drawing on an ethics of relationships and invoking examples such as kidney donation to one's child and the notion of being "open to a relationship," Little attempts to move readers from an abstract understanding of morality toward a lived understanding of the ethics of pregnancy. Nevertheless, her theory has been met with criticism. Some have argued that making moral responsibility dependent upon a woman's personal experience leads to moral relativism and neglects the woman's causal role in bringing the fetus into existence. Furthermore, compared with religious and utilitarian approaches, Little's account fails to assign sufficient weight to the intrinsic value of fetal life.

While examining and explicating Little's theory, the present article seeks to demonstrate that, although her approach constitutes an innovative attempt to rethink the ethics of abortion through the lenses of intimacy and relationship, it nevertheless remains confronted with fundamental questions concerning the limits of moral responsibility, the place of causal responsibility, and the authority of lived experience.

1. Elucidating Little's Theory: Intimacy, Relationality, and the Duty to Gestate

The dominant discussion concerning the ethics of abortion has largely been framed within two principal approaches: those emphasizing the "fetus's right to life" and those centering on the "woman's right to control her own body." Margaret Little regards this dichotomy as inadequate because it is grounded in an individualistic conception of human beings that assumes bodies to be independent and separate from one another (Little, 1999, p. 298). In her view, these frameworks are incapable of capturing the distinctive nature of pregnancy, a condition in which two lives are internally intertwined (Little, 1999, p. 299). Accordingly, the central issue is not whether the fetus is a person, but rather the nature of its relationship with the woman and whether the continuation of that relationship can be required in the absence of the woman's consent.

Little argues that a significant portion of traditional debates on abortion has focused on the question of fetal personhood, while overlooking a more fundamental and prior question: what precisely does the "right to life" mean within the specific context of pregnancy? (Little, 1999, pp. 298–300). In her view, the right to life comprises a set of specific, context-dependent rights and has never been interpreted as including a right to use another person's body or occupy it (Little, 1999, pp. 300–301). Therefore, even if the fetus is regarded as a person, the question remains whether a "right to continue living within another person's body" can legitimately be subsumed under the right to life. According to Little, a woman's right to bodily integrity and bodily autonomy may limit the scope of the rights attributed to the fetus and preclude an interpretation according to which the right to life entails an enforceable entitlement to the use of another person's body (Little, 1999, pp. 301–302).

In explaining the unique condition of pregnancy, she writes:

> " Even assuming fetal personhood, that is, we have here a person in extraordinary physical enmeshment with another – a person whose blood is being oxygenated by another's lungs, a person whose

hormonal activity in turn affects that other’s brain and metabolism, a person whose growing size enlarges another’s physical boundaries. " (Little, 1999, p. 303).

On this basis, pregnancy constitutes a deeply intertwined bodily relationship, and any ethical or legal framework that neglects this phenomenological reality will be incomplete. According to Little, approaches grounded either in the right to life or in women's rights reduce the lived experience of pregnancy to an external condition, whereas pregnancy is an internal, embodied, and intimate relationship in which the woman's body becomes the site of another's life (Little, 1999, pp. 303–304).

From this point onward, Little shifts the discussion from the level of abstract rights to the domain of the ethics of relationships, asking whether anyone can be compelled to continue such an intimate and deeply intertwined relationship. Her answer depends upon the concept of consent. Just as consent in sexual ethics marks the boundary between love and rape, a woman's consent in pregnancy marks the boundary between an ethically meaningful experience and the occupation of her body without consent (Little, 1999, p. 304).

In her view, many prevailing analyses focus exclusively on the medical risks or social burdens of pregnancy while neglecting the harm associated with the "unwanted occupation of the body" and "non-consensual intimacy." Little understands this condition as a form of injury to freedom and argues that the continuation of pregnancy without consent constitutes a violation of a woman's liberty, just as sexual intercourse without consent is regarded as rape even in the absence of physical injury (Little, 1999, p. 306).

Little also addresses the issue of causal responsibility, emphasizing that consent to sexual intercourse does not amount to consent to pregnancy. In her view, even if an individual engages in sexual activity with awareness of the possibility of pregnancy, the object of consent remains unchanged: consenting to a relationship with a sexual partner is not equivalent to consenting to the occupation of one's body by a fetus. Moreover, accepting a risk differs from accepting an obligation arising from its consequences. Just as accepting the risk of developing lung cancer through smoking does not imply consent to a particular course of treatment, accepting the risk of pregnancy does not necessarily imply consent to carrying the pregnancy to term (Little, 1999, pp. 304–305).

Little acknowledges that even if the fetus is not regarded as a person, there may nevertheless exist significant beneficence-based reasons for continuing a pregnancy (Little, 1999, p. 301). However, she maintains that beneficence in pregnancy differs from ordinary acts of beneficence. Examples such as financial assistance, voluntary service, or social sacrifice cannot adequately capture the distinctive character of pregnancy, because pregnancy requires a "sharing of body, heart, and life" and involves a degree of bodily and psychological intertwinement absent from conventional cases of beneficence (Little, 1999, p. 302). In her view, analyses of beneficence must take into account not only the magnitude of sacrifice but also its personal and internal character—an aspect neglected in prevailing ethical discussions. To address this omission, she introduces the framework of the ethics of relationships (Little, 1999, p. 297).

Little does not regard parenthood as a unitary phenomenon; rather, she distinguishes among three levels of parenthood.

First, there is biological parenthood, which rests solely upon a genetic connection and does not, by itself, generate profound moral responsibilities. To illustrate this level, she refers to the example of a sperm donor, who possesses a biological connection to the child but lacks a lived and emotional relationship with that child (Little, 1999, pp. 296–297).

Second, there is legal parenthood, which is constituted by legal obligations such as financial support or guardianship and operates independently of the quality of emotional relationships. Adoption serves as an example of this category, in which an individual assumes legal parenthood despite lacking a biological role (Little, 1999, p. 297).

Third there is relational and personal parenthood—the lived experience of being a parent—constitutes the deepest form of parenthood, rooted in emotional attachment, a shared history, and the lived experience of caring relationships. Little argues that many of the most demanding moral obligations arise and become intelligible only within the context of such relationships. (Little, 1999, pp. 296–297).

She concludes that none of these levels, taken individually, generates a definitive obligation to continue a pregnancy, because the relationship between mother and fetus is not fixed in advance (Little, 1999, p. 299). Consequently, the quality of the woman's experience of pregnancy becomes morally significant. Little identifies three principal forms of this experience: a warm and receptive relationship characterized by attachment and readiness for motherhood; a neutral or suspended relationship in which the woman has not yet decided whether to embrace the maternal role; and a tense and unwanted relationship in which pregnancy is perceived as distressing or threatening (Little, 1999, pp. 300–301).

According to Little, parental obligations are not homogeneous. Certain commitments, such as legal obligations, remain independent of the quality of the relationship. However, responsibilities involving bodily sharing and emotional sacrifice acquire meaning only within the context of a lived and personal relationship (Little, 1999, pp. 297–298).

Therefore, the fetus's biological dependence gives rise only to a minimal moral claim—a claim that calls upon the woman to be open to the possibility of relationship rather than to accept a definitive obligation to continue the pregnancy (Little, 1999, p. 298).

To clarify this notion, Little invokes examples drawn from ordinary human relationships. For instance, if a stranger requests your friendship, you bear no particular moral obligation to accept it. Yet if the same request comes from a cousin or close relative with whom you already share social and emotional ties, greater openness to relationship may reasonably be expected. What generates genuine moral obligations, therefore, is the quality of the lived relationship rather than the mere existence of a biological connection or the abstract possibility of relationship (Little, 1999, pp. 306–307).

Little regards the biological bond between woman and fetus as analogous to a form of initial connection that generates a modest moral claim. In her view, this claim is not binding, but it invites the woman, at the moral level, to maintain openness toward the possibility of a maternal relationship. What such "openness" practically requires depends upon the woman's psychological, emotional, material, and temporal circumstances—that is, upon the broader context of her life. In other words, the important conclusion Little draws from this discussion is that, so long as a lived and personal relationship with the fetus has not yet been established, robust parental obligations—including a definitive duty to sustain the gestational relationship—do not arise (Little, 1999, pp. 298–300).

Finally, Little responds to the concern that her theory may lead to moral relativism. She clarifies that she does not intend to suggest that a woman's evaluation can wholly determine the moral status of the fetus or infant, nor that it can justify any form of harm toward a child. In her view, not all moral obligations toward fetuses or infants belong to the same category. Some remain independent of the quality of the relationship; however, responsibilities associated with pregnancy and the woman's embodied involvement are fundamentally relational in character and acquire meaning only within the framework of lived experience (Little, 1999, p. 312).

Accordingly, Little's theory reconceptualizes pregnancy not merely as a biological process but as an intimate and embodied relationship between woman and fetus. It seeks to move the ethics of abortion beyond the traditional dichotomy of the "right to life" and the "woman's right to bodily control" and relocate it within the horizon of an ethics of intimacy, consent, and relational responsibility. Nevertheless, this approach remains vulnerable to important questions concerning objective criteria of duty, causal responsibility, and the limits of the authority of lived experience.

2. Critiques of Little's Theory

A number of objections may be raised against Little's theory. The following sections examine some of the most significant criticisms.

2.1. Misconceiving the Source of Obligation: Neglecting *Causal Responsibility*

One of the fundamental shortcomings of Little's approach lies in its relocation of the source of moral obligations in pregnancy. She grounds such obligations not in the parents' causal role in bringing into existence a dependent being, but rather in the "quality of intimacy" and the "mother's lived relationship with the fetus" (Little, 1999, pp. 300–302). On this view, the moral obligation to continue a pregnancy arises only when the woman experiences an inner readiness for, or an emotional bond with, the fetus.

By contrast, many ethical theories endorse a relatively stable principle: whenever an individual's actions result in the creation of a dependent being, the dependence generated by those actions itself provides the basis for moral responsibility. Lee and George argue, on precisely these grounds, that bringing into existence a fully dependent human life generates a serious responsibility—a responsibility grounded not in emotions, but in the very nature of the action that produced that dependence (Lee & George, 2005, p. 18).

Little, however, regards the biological connection merely as an "invitation to openness toward relationship" and concludes that, in the absence of intimacy or relational readiness, no decisive moral obligation to continue pregnancy exists (Little, 1999, pp. 298–302). The implication of this view is that the mother's internal evaluation may neutralize the obligations arising from the creation of a dependent being—a conclusion that appears inconsistent with many ethical analyses of responsibility.

Scanlon emphasizes that moral reasons concerning others are not dependent upon the agent's psychological states (Scanlon, 1998, p. 50). Similarly, Kamm regards dependence resulting from one's actions as the source of a "weighty duty independent of intimacy" (Kamm, 2007, p. 112). Even within care ethics, Kittay maintains that dependence itself generates a moral claim and that such a claim is not necessarily contingent upon an emotional relationship (Kittay, 1999, p. 30).

It is noteworthy that even Thomson does not regard causation as entirely irrelevant. She distinguishes between imposed dependencies and dependencies resulting from deliberate action, acknowledging that the acceptance of risk may generate a form of moral responsibility (Thomson, 1971, pp. 58–59). Consequently, the complete transfer of the basis of obligation from causality to perceived intimacy, as found in Little's theory, remains highly questionable.

Accordingly, Little's approach appears to risk weakening the moral obligations arising from the creation of a dependent human being by shifting the source of duty from causal responsibility to subjective experience—obligations that, in many responsibility-based and care-oriented approaches, are regarded as independent of psychological states.

2.2. Conditioning Moral Duties upon Feelings and the Risk of Moral Relativism

In Little's theory, the obligation to continue pregnancy is neither prior nor independent; rather, it depends upon the woman's psychological, emotional, and lived circumstances. Strong obligations emerge only when the woman understands herself as engaged in a personal relationship with the fetus and possesses the necessary space for such a relationship (Little, 1999, pp. 302–304). Thus, the source of moral obligation becomes not the status of the fetus but the woman's experience and interpretation of pregnancy.

Within this framework, the preservation of human life is demoted from the status of a binding duty to that of a virtuous practice. Abortion consequently comes to be understood not as a violation of duty, but as a refusal to enter into an intimate relationship. The boundary between "duty" and "virtue" is thereby transformed, and the value of preserving life becomes dependent upon the agent's internal evaluation.

Little attempts to distance herself from the charge of relativism by clarifying that her theory does not license harming a fetus or infant on the basis of personal attitudes (Little, 1999, pp. 310–312). Critics, however, contend that merely denying extreme implications does not resolve the structural problem within the theory. The concern is that the woman's embodied experience shifts from being a descriptive datum to becoming a normative criterion for determining the boundaries of obligation. Without an independent standard, this transition leads to the relativization of moral duty.

Lee and George argue that any theory conditioning the preservation of human life upon the agent's subjective evaluation moves, in practice, toward relativism because it renders the moral value of life dependent upon individual attitudes (Lee & George, 2005). In their view, the destruction of a human life is itself sufficient to generate moral obligation and ought not to be reduced to the quality of the agent's experience. They further regard Little's response to the distinction between fetuses and infants as inadequate. If maternal experience can neutralize obligation during pregnancy, it remains unclear why the same criterion should lose its force at later stages of the child's life (Lee & George, 2005, pp. 17–22).

This criticism is also consistent with broader ethical perspectives. Scanlon considers moral reasons to be independent of individual preferences (Scanlon, 1998, p. 50), while MacIntyre maintains that emotions cannot determine moral principles (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 162). Even within care ethics, Kittay identifies objective dependence as the source of moral claims (Kittay, 1999, p. 30).

Although defenders of Little may argue that her aim is merely to highlight the role of lived experience in the ethics of pregnancy, the central difficulty remains unresolved: her theory lacks an independent and non-subjective criterion capable of constraining the role of experience in determining moral obligation. Consequently, individual experience not only describes a situation but also becomes determinative of the norm itself. For this reason, it may be argued that, despite Little's efforts to avoid relativism, her theory gives rise to a form of structural relativization of moral obligation by conditioning duty upon psychological states.

2.3. The Contradiction of "Non-Reciprocal Intimacy" and a Faulty Analogy

Little characterizes pregnancy as an intimate relationship and argues that compelling a woman to continue pregnancy constitutes a form of "forced intimacy without consent" (Little, 1999, pp. 304–306). However, applying the concept of intimacy to pregnancy encounters significant conceptual difficulties.

Within the ethics of relationships, intimacy is generally understood as a conscious, reciprocal, and agentive relationship requiring mutual awareness, reciprocal agency, and emotional sharing accompanied by mutual vulnerability (Nozick, 1989; Helm, 2010; Nussbaum, 2001). Intimacy is therefore inherently relational rather than merely an internal experience or a one-sided bodily condition.[1]

Yet the characteristics of pregnancy—including the fetus's residence within the woman's body, its use of her bodily resources, and its complete dependence for survival—appear to signify biological dependence rather than intimacy. The fetus neither consciously enters

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1. It may be argued that Little understands intimacy not as a reciprocal relationship but merely as a one-sided and embodied experience. Even if such an interpretation were accepted, however, one of two conclusions would follow. Either the concept of intimacy would be reduced to the agent's internal and subjective state, in which case it would no longer function as a genuinely relational concept endowed with strong normative force; or its use would become merely metaphorical, thereby rendering it incapable of serving as a persuasive basis for an argument against legal compulsion.
Moreover, the very normative language employed by Little—particularly the expression "compelled intimacy"—presupposes relational assumptions that are difficult to reconcile with a wholly one-sided understanding of intimacy. Accordingly, in the present author's view, if Little wishes to retain the language of intimacy, she must also accept at least the minimal conceptual commitments that accompany that concept.

into this relationship nor participates in reciprocal agency. Accordingly, bodily intertwinement alone is insufficient to justify the attribution of moral intimacy. If mere physiological dependence constituted the criterion of intimacy, then relationships such as those between parasite and host, patients dependent upon life-sustaining technologies, or premature infants connected to intensive care devices would likewise have to be regarded as intimate relationships. Such conclusions suggest that the concept of intimacy, as employed in this context, has undergone an unprincipled expansion.

On the other hand, findings from developmental psychology indicate that the maternal-fetal relationship is not entirely one-sided. During the second half of pregnancy, fetuses exhibit differential responses to their mother's voice (Kisilevsky et al., 2009; Partanen et al., 2013); maternal emotional states are associated with behavioral and physiological changes in the fetus (Van den Bergh et al., 2017); and evidence exists for prenatal learning and memory (Moon et al., 2013). Furthermore, some studies have identified forms of regulatory and interactive dependence between mother and fetus (Marx et al., 2015).

Although such findings are insufficient to establish the existence of full moral intimacy, they nevertheless challenge Little's entirely woman-centered account. Consequently, her analysis is weakened in two respects. If the precise philosophical definition of intimacy is adopted, pregnancy does not qualify as intimate in the analytic sense of the term. If, however, a biological-emotional definition is accepted, the exclusion of the fetus's role yields an incomplete and biased analysis. In either case, the normative foundation of Little's theory for making pregnancy-related duties dependent upon the mother's subjective evaluation faces a serious challenge.

2.4. The Conceptual Ambiguity of "Openness to Relationship"

In order to avoid the conclusion that a woman acquires a definitive obligation to continue pregnancy from its very inception, Little distinguishes between "accepting a relationship" and being "open to a relationship." In her view, the fetus's biological connection generates merely a mild moral invitation to remain open to the possibility of a relationship, rather than a binding obligation to embrace motherhood or continue the pregnancy (Little, 1999, p. 298). Nevertheless, this distinction is beset by serious conceptual and normative ambiguities.

First, Little fails to clarify what precisely is meant by "openness." Is it merely a psychological attitude, a practical readiness to respond to a relationship, or a minimal form of moral commitment? The concept lacks clearly defined analytical criteria, even though any normative concept ought to provide a basis for identifying instances of compliance with, or deviation from, its requirements. In the absence of such criteria, "openness" possesses neither binding force nor a clear practical guiding function (Scanlon, 1998).

Second, if the fetus's dependence genuinely carries moral significance and obliges the woman to remain "open to relationship," it remains unclear why this obligation does not give rise even to a minimal degree of practical commitment. If "openness" constitutes a moral duty, one would expect at least limited practical consequences to follow from it; if it has no such implications, it becomes difficult to regard it as a genuine obligation. Little provides no convincing explanation for this problem.

Third, this distinction gives rise to a form of internal inconsistency. On the one hand, the biological connection is considered sufficiently important to warrant the demand for an attitude of "openness." On the other hand, that very same connection generates no specific practical obligations. As a result, "openness" remains suspended between psychological description and normative claim.

Finally, the insistence that weighty obligations arise only after the woman's voluntary entry into the relationship transfers the primary burden of moral commitment to the individual's subjective judgments and inner readiness, thereby detaching it from objective and publicly assessable standards (Nagel, 1986). Accordingly, the central concept of "openness to relationship" lacks a clear definition, offers no determinate practical criteria, and fails adequately to explain its connection with moral obligation. It is precisely this ambiguity that inadvertently pushes Little's theory toward a form of moral subjectivism.

2.5. A Faulty Analogy Between "Legal Compulsion" and "Compelled Intimacy"

Little characterizes the legal prohibition of abortion as a form of "compelled intimacy" because, in her view, the state forces a woman to make her body available to another and to remain within an unwanted relationship (Little, 1999, p. 303). However, this analogy is open to question from conceptual, moral, and legal perspectives.

In legal philosophy, there is a fundamental distinction between "compelled intimacy" and "legal obligations to protect vulnerable persons." The former refers to the imposition of a personal and emotional relationship against an individual's will, whereas the latter encompasses protective duties such as the prohibition of child abuse, the prohibition against abandoning dependent individuals, and parental obligations toward children—duties grounded in dependence and vulnerability rather than in consent to enter into a personal relationship (Kittay, 1999). Likewise, within the ethics of relationships, intimacy is understood as reciprocal, conscious, and voluntary in nature (Friedman, 1998), whereas caring for a dependent being does not necessarily possess these characteristics and instead rests upon responsibilities arising from one's circumstances. Accordingly, equating the continuation of pregnancy with the imposition of an intimate relationship conflates two distinct types of moral obligation.

Moreover, in cases of sexual or emotional coercion, an individual is confronted with the imposing will and intentional agency of another person. The fetus, by contrast, lacks any interventionist intention or coercive will, and its dependence upon the mother's body is natural and involuntary in character. Describing this condition through the language of "compelled intimacy" therefore constitutes a form of conceptual projection that overlooks the distinction between intentional imposition and natural dependence.

Consequently, Little's analogy between the legal prohibition of abortion and compelled intimacy is conceptually imprecise and ethically and legally misleading, insofar as it obscures the fundamental distinction between protective obligations and personal relationships.

2.6. The Exclusion of the Father and the Reduction of Parental Duties

Little analyzes pregnancy primarily as an intimate relationship between the woman and the fetus. As a result, the father's role is almost entirely absent from the moral structure of her theory. Yet if the source of moral obligation is understood in terms of causal responsibility for bringing dependent life into existence, that responsibility is distributed between both parents (Lee & George, 2005).

Neglecting the father has the effect of placing the entire moral burden of reproduction upon the mother's body and will, thereby rendering the theory normatively incomplete. Furthermore, if duty arises only when the mother experiences intimacy, while the father remains wholly outside this framework, parental obligations are reduced to matters that are exclusively personal and dependent upon the mother's experience. In this way, the shared foundation of parental responsibility disappears. Accordingly, the systematic exclusion of the father constitutes one of the significant weaknesses of Little's theory.

2.7. The Absence of the Fetus's Moral Status and the Reduction of the Intrinsic Value of Life

Little's approach deliberately distances itself from addressing the moral and ontological status of the fetus. She explicitly states that she does not intend to engage with the question of whether the fetus is a "person," since, in her view, the intimate experience of pregnancy is sufficient for analyzing the duty to gestate (Little, 1999, pp. 297–299). Yet this methodological avoidance of the personhood question gives rise to a structural problem: Little passes judgment on the moral permissibility of ending fetal life without first determining the fetus's moral value.

Within Little's account, the "right to life" becomes a conditional right, one whose content depends upon the mother's evaluation of the possibility of forming an intimate relationship. As she argues, the "lived relationship" and the woman's "openness to relationship" determine whether any duty toward the fetus exists (Little, 1999, p. 300). This shift from the "intrinsic value of life" to a "relational evaluation" constitutes a highly significant normative transformation. However, within deontological ethics and natural law philosophy, human life is regarded as a basic good whose value does not depend upon any individual's psychological or emotional states. Lee and

George state explicitly: "Human life is an intrinsic good that cannot be limited or suspended through the preferences, mental states, or personal experiences of another" (Lee & George, 2005, p. 14). From this perspective, Little commits a form of ethical reductionism by rendering the fetus's fundamental and independent right to life contingent upon the woman's psychological and emotional condition.

Furthermore, a substantial body of literature in bioethics and moral philosophy maintains that determining the moral status of the fetus is a prerequisite for any judgment concerning the permissibility of abortion. Jeff McMahan writes: "No theory concerning the permissibility or impermissibility of abortion can be complete without taking a position on the moral status of the fetus" (McMahan, 2002, p. 257). Little's departure from this methodological principle renders her theory vulnerable at the level of argumentation, since she grounds duty in the lived relationship without clarifying the moral status of the very object of that relationship.

Consequently, Little's analysis not only leads to a relativization of the right to life but also allows the moral value of a human being to become wholly dependent upon the mother's subjective and variable experiences. This normative dependence confronts her theory with a fundamental question: if the value of fetal life has not already been established, how can feelings, intimacy, or the absence of intimacy provide an adequate basis for deciding whether pregnancy ought to continue or be terminated?

2.8. The False Distinction Between Risk and Responsibility: A Critique of Little's Medical Analogy

In defending the moral permissibility of abortion, Little argues that accepting the risk of a consequence does not necessarily entail accepting a moral obligation to endure that consequence. She offers the example of an individual who smokes despite being aware of the risk of cancer but who, if diagnosed with the disease, bears no moral obligation to accept a particular form of treatment. In her view, pregnancy is analogous in this respect. Thus, even if a woman knowingly engages in conduct that carries the risk of pregnancy, this fact alone does not commit her to continuing the pregnancy, and abortion may be regarded as a "therapeutic option" for addressing an unwanted condition (Little, 1999, pp. 303–305).

Lee and George reject this analogy as fundamentally flawed because it fails to distinguish between two morally distinct situations. In the case of cancer, treatment concerns cells or pathological processes that possess no independent moral value; consequently, choosing among treatment options does not involve deciding whether to preserve or eliminate another human being (Lee & George, 2005, pp. 15–17). However, if the fetus is understood as a human being possessing intrinsic value, abortion is no longer merely the management of an unwanted bodily condition or the selection of a therapeutic intervention. Rather, it becomes the direct destruction of a human life. In that case, the fundamental distinction between "remedying a harm devoid of independent moral value" and "eliminating a being possessing intrinsic good" is obscured (Lee & George, 2005, p. 18).

Lee and George's principal criticism is that, by focusing on the concept of risk, Little treats responsibility arising from the creation of a situation as equivalent to the accidental encounter with a harm. In their view, knowingly accepting a risk through conduct that may result in the existence of a dependent human being is not simply the acceptance of an unwanted possibility; rather, it constitutes entry into a situation that generates distinctive moral responsibilities. Risk-taking in this context concerns the possibility of actualizing a human life, and this fact itself may give rise to a moral claim.

Accordingly, even if one accepts that assuming a risk does not invariably entail accepting all of its consequences, this principle is insufficient to justify Little's conclusion. The central question is whether a being that has come into existence precisely as a result of that risk-taking, and that is assumed to possess independent moral value, may be treated as a removable complication. Lee and George answer in the negative, arguing that it is precisely at this point that Little's medical analogy collapses. Assuming the human value of the fetus, abortion is not the treatment of a disease but rather an act directed immediately at the life of another being.

Therefore, the distinction between "accepting risk" and "accepting responsibility," upon which Little relies, is regarded by her critics as inadequate. Although risk acceptance in many contexts generates no special obligations, when it results in the creation of a dependent human being, it may constitute the basis of moral responsibility. By disregarding the distinction between harms lacking intrinsic value and human life possessing independent good, Little's medical analogy oversimplifies the central moral issue and fails to provide sufficient justificatory force in defense of abortion.[1]

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1. Moreover, even in her later writings, Little continues to refrain from providing a clear account of the precise normative implications of fetal value, despite acknowledging that "the fetus is not valueless and possesses a kind of developing intrinsic value" (Little, 2007, p. 302; Little, 2013, pp. 48–49). She explicitly maintains that "human potentiality, by itself, cannot generate full moral value," while simultaneously emphasizing that "potentiality is not morally insignificant and cannot simply be disregarded" (Little, 2013, p. 52).

There appears to be a form of structural inconsistency between Little's claim that the fetus is valuable and her relational framework. For if the acknowledgment of intrinsic value—even if understood as gradual, as Little suggests in her later →

Conclusion

In her article "Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate," Margaret Little offers an innovative attempt to reconceptualize the issue of abortion by moving beyond traditional rights-based and personhood-centered frameworks toward an ethics of intimacy. Within this ethical framework, pregnancy is understood not merely as a biological condition but as an embodied, intertwined, and intimate relationship between the woman and the fetus. Little's principal innovation lies in her introduction of concepts such as non-voluntary intimacy, openness to relationship, relational duties, and embodied intertwinement, through which she seeks to develop a new moral vocabulary for understanding pregnancy—one in which the lived experience of the woman's body occupies the center of ethical analysis.

By placing embodiment and relationships of dependency at the forefront, Little helped bridge the gap between biomedical ethics and the ethics of care. She demonstrated that pregnancy cannot be adequately analyzed solely within the frameworks of abstract rights, individual autonomy, or the metaphysical status of the fetus. Rather, it should be understood as a relational and embodied event that calls for an ethics of its own.

At the same time, this very shift in perspective provides the foundation for the criticisms examined in this article. First, by

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works—is to be taken seriously, it cannot be left without any corresponding normative consequences and reduced merely to the mother's personal experience. To recognize that the fetus possesses intrinsic moral value is, at minimum, to accept that such value gives rise to moral considerations that are not wholly contingent upon the mother's subjective assessment of her relationship with the fetus. Otherwise, the attribution of value risks becoming merely rhetorical, devoid of substantive normative force.

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distancing itself from the question of the fetus's moral status, Little's theory overlooks the intrinsic value of life and reduces it to the mother's experience of intimacy. Second, the transfer of the source of obligation from causal responsibility to the quality of the lived relationship generates a form of moral subjectivism that may lead to relativism and undermine objective parental duties. Third, her reliance upon the concept of intimacy is marked by conceptual tension, since intimacy, within the tradition of the ethics of relationships, is understood as a reciprocal and conscious relationship and cannot straightforwardly be applied to the fetus, which lacks mutual awareness. Moreover, even if findings from developmental psychology suggest that fetuses exhibit quasi-emotional and embodied responses to their mothers at certain stages of pregnancy, this dimension remains absent from Little's theory, and the relationship is ultimately reduced to the mother's perception alone.

In the final analysis, it must be acknowledged, on the one hand, that Little's theory has made a significant contribution to the ethics of care and the ethics of embodiment by opening a new field of inquiry—one that places the lived experience of pregnancy, the quality of embodied intertwinement, and the role of consent in caregiving relationships at the center of ethical reflection. On the other hand, her approach appears insufficient as a normative framework for determining parental duties and the moral value of life. This is because the framework depends too heavily upon the mother's subjective and emotional states and is unable to explain why a dependent being, brought into existence through the causal and biological actions of the parents, is not entitled to independent moral consideration and protection.

Therefore, although Little's theory opens important new horizons for understanding pregnancy, it encounters serious challenges when advanced as a comprehensive account of the duty to gestate and the moral value of fetal life. These are the very challenges that the present article has sought to clarify through a critical and analytical examination.

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Theosophia Islamica EISSN: 2783-3240

A Comparative Analysis of Major Sins in Islam and Christianity: Structure, Criteria, and Ethical Consequences*

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Abstract

The concept of "major sin" stands as a central and structuring principle within the moral framework of the Abrahamic religions. Owing to its profound consequences in the existential domains of the human being—both individual and social—and in the Hereafter, it has always been at the heart of theological and ethical inquiry. Adopting an analytical-comparative approach, this article investigates the structure and nature of major sins within the two traditions of Islam and Christianity. While examining the criteria for distinguishing "major sins" (*kabāʾir*) from "minor sins" (*ṣaghāʾir*) in Islam and the distinction between "mortal" and "venial" sins in Christianity, this study demonstrates that despite foundational differences in the theological underpinnings and epistemic criteria governing each tradition, a striking and meaningful convergence

* Sahaaf Kashani, M. (2026). A Comparative Analysis of Major Sins in Islam and Christianity: Structure, Criteria, and Ethical Consequences. *Theosophia Islamica, 6*(1), pp. 315-364.
https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2025.72307.1100

▣ **Article Type:** Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

▣ **Received:** 2025/08/02 ● **Revised:** 2025/09/29 ● **Accepted:** 2025/11/25 ●**Online Publication:** 2026/01/10

is observable in their ultimate aims: moral cultivation, the preservation of human dignity, and the call to repentance and spiritual rectification. Ultimately, by elucidating the formative and spiritual implications of this doctrine, the article underscores its potential to foster a horizon for inter-religious dialogue in the field of ethics.

Keywords

Major Sin, Mortal Sin, Religious Ethics, Moral Theology, Repentance, Islam, Christianity.

1. Introduction

In the intellectual framework of the revealed religions, the concept of "sin" serves as a foundational moral category, charting the very boundaries of righteous conduct in the relationship between the human being and the Transcendent (God). Sin is understood as a transgression against the divine will and a breach of the sacred covenant between God and humanity. An analysis of sin is therefore essential to the comprehension of any system of religious ethics. Within this context, religious and theological literature distinguishes a specific category of sins as "major sins"—acts of such profound impurity and grave consequence that they not only sever the spiritual bond between a person and God but also entail devastating repercussions for the psychological and social dimensions of life, as well as the individual's ultimate destiny in the Hereafter.

While the two great traditions of Islam and Christianity share the core idea of sin, they diverge regarding its theoretical foundations and its criteria for identification. In the Islamic tradition, the distinction between a major sin, the *kabīra*, and a minor one, the *ṣaghīra*, is rooted in the foundational texts of the Quran and the sacred narrations or hadiths. Theologians, jurists, and ethicists, citing such proofs as the promise of otherworldly chastisement in the Quran, the establishment of fixed legal punishments (*ḥudūd*) in the Sharia, or the explicit declarations of the infallible leaders of Islam (*maʿṣūmūn*), have proceeded to compile and present lists of these grave offenses. The criterion in this approach is based principally upon the direct textual implications and the objective dimensions of the act itself.

In contrast, the Christian tradition, particularly within Catholic theology, divides sins into two categories: "mortal" and "venial." One might think of it like this: for a sin to be considered "mortal," three conditions must be met simultaneously. First, the act itself must concern a "Grave Matter." Second, the person committing it must have "Full Knowledge" of the serious nature of the act. And third, they must perform it with "Deliberate Consent." In this framework, the focus is less on a pre-established list of prohibitions and more on a careful analysis of the inner state of the agent—that is, on their knowledge and their will as they consciously choose to rupture their relationship with God.

The present research endeavors to answer the following fundamental questions: How did the conceptual apparatus of "major sin" take shape in the Islamic and Christian traditions, and upon which theological and epistemological foundations does it rest? What are the structural and criteriological similarities and differences between these two systems of classification? And what distinct consequences do these variations entail for the domains of practical ethics, spiritual development, and the process of repentance? Employing an analytical-comparative methodology and referencing the primary texts of both traditions, this article seeks to arrive at a more profound and precise understanding of this key doctrine, thereby laying the groundwork for a constructive and inter-religious dialogue.

This article argues that despite the structural differences in the classification of sins (text-based in Islam and disposition-based in Christianity), both traditions arrive at a common moral grammar whose goal is to protect five fundamental principles: divine sovereignty, human dignity, the sanctity of the family, social justice, and honesty in relationships. This article shows that the fundamental distinction between the concept of sin in Islam and Christianity lies not in the list of instances, but in the locus of sin; while Islamic law focuses on the objective act, Christian theology considers the disposition or internal state as the origin of sinning—a distinction with profound consequences in the legal, ethical, and spiritual systems of each religion.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Structure of Major Sin in Islam

2.1. The Foundational Distinction in the Quranic Text: *Kabāʾir* and *Ṣaghāʾir*

Within the moral architecture of Islam, the concept of major sin is a deeply rooted one, having been explicitly addressed in both the transmitted sacred sources and the seminal works of the great ethicists and theologians. From the Quranic perspective, all sins are not of equal weight; they are divided into two categories: major sins, or *kabāʾir*, and minor sins (*ṣaghāʾir*), also called *lamam* (minor slips or faults). It is upon this scriptural basis that, in their exegetical and ethical understanding, Muslims have consistently distinguished between "major" and "minor" sins.

The Quran delineates this division, stating: ″those who avoid the major sins and shameful deeds, apart from minor sins– your Lord is rich in forgiveness.″ (Al-Najm, 53: 32).

This theological principle, which underscores a clear demarcation between the degrees of sin, is articulated in another verse as a luminous and hope-inspiring rule for the believers: ″If you avoid the major sins you have been forbidden, We shall wipe out your minor misdeeds and grant you an honourable entrance." (Al-Nisa, 4: 31).

The gravity of this distinction is also meticulously rendered in the Quranic depiction of the Final Reckoning. The Holy Quran, in its description of the Day of Judgment, conveys the state of those who are given the record of their deeds, quoting their cry of astonishment: ″Woe to us! What a record is this! It does not leave any sin, small or large, unaccounted for!" (Al-Kahf, 18: 49).

Furthermore, in the description of the reward that awaits the dwellers of Paradise, their avoidance of the great sins is mentioned as one of their key virtues: ″for those who avoid the major sins and gross indecencies." (Al-Shura, 42: 37).

From these verses, it is clearly understood that from the Quranic perspective, sins are of varying degrees of gravity and reprehensibility, a distinction that bears direct consequences upon the economy of divine forgiveness and one's ultimate destiny in the Hereafter. This Quranic demarcation impelled the theologians and jurists to search for precise criteria within the Prophetic tradition and the principles of jurisprudence by which to identify the specific instances of the major sins, for the promise of divine expiation for minor sins is conditional upon the avoidance of the major ones.

2.2. The Criteria for Identifying the Major Sins

In Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the major sins are identifiable according to specific criteria that the jurists have elucidated based on the Quran, the Sunnah, and the legal structure of Islam. The hadiths transmitted from the Infallibles have established the very cornerstone of these criteria. It is narrated from Imām al-Bāqir (peace be upon him), in response to an inquiry concerning the major sins: "Every act for which God has promised the Fire [is a major sin]." (Majlisī, 1982, vol. 76, p. 2, ḥ. 6; al-Kulaynī, 1986, vol. 2, p. 276, ḥ. 1).

This foundational criterion finds its crystallization in the words of the great scholars of both the Shia and Sunni traditions. ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 1325) writes: (Al-Ḥillī, 1992, vol. 1, p. 497) "Every sin for which God has promised the Fire, or for which a *ḥadd* (a fixed legal penalty) has been instituted, or whose gravity has been explicitly stated, is among the major sins."

Al-Shahīd al-Awwal (d. 1384) clarifies in *al-Lumʿat al-Dimashqiyya* (Al-Shahīd al-Awwal, 1990, p. 58): "The major sins are those for which God has promised the Fire, or for which He has appointed a *ḥadd*, or whose perpetrator He has cursed, or from whom He has negated faith."

Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022) writes in *Taṣḥīḥ Iʿtiqādāt al-Imāmiyya* (Al-Mufīd, 1992, p. 113): "The major sins are those by which God has necessitated the Fire, or a curse, or a *ḥadd*."

In the Sunni tradition, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 1566) introduces the criterion in *al-Zawājir ʿan Iqtirāf al-Kabāʾir* as follows (Al-Haytamī, 1987, vol. 1, p. 6): "Everything for which a severe threat, or a curse, or a negation of faith has been established, is among the major sins."

And Imām Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) writes in his magnum opus, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (Al-Ghazālī, 1987, vol. 4, p. 19): "A major sin is that for which God has promised punishment, or a curse, or wrath, or a negation of faith."

By way of induction from these definitions, five essential criteria for discerning a major sin in Islamic theology (encompassing both Shia and Sunni thought) can be formulated as follows:

An Explicit Promise of Divine Chastisement: A major sin is that for which the perpetrator is declared, in the Quran or in a mass-transmitted (*mutawātir*) hadith, to be deserving of the Hellfire or a severe punishment. An example is the act of intentional murder, concerning which the Quran states (Al-Nisāʾ, 4: 93): "If anyone kills a believer deliberately, the punishment for him is Hell..."

An Explicit Statement of the Sin's Gravity: A major sin is any sin described within a sacred text by such attributes as *ithm kabīr* (a great sin), *fujūr* (flagrant immorality), *rijs* (filth), or that which incurs a *laʿna* (curse).

The Mandate of a Fixed Legal Punishment (*ḥadd*): Sins for which the Divine Lawgiver has stipulated a fixed, mandatory punishment in the worldly life, such as those for theft and adultery.

Implication of the Negation of Faith or Divine Curse and Wrath: Actions that are described in the sacred texts as leading to an exit from the fold of faith, causing the perpetrator to be characterized by iniquity (*fisq*), or warranting the curse and wrath of God.

3. Instances and Classification of Major Sins in the Islamic Tradition

Having delineated the theoretical criteria for identifying the major sins, the Islamic tradition, in both its Shia and Sunni expressions, proceeded to determine the concrete instances of these offenses. These specific examples, which are rooted in the Prophetic hadiths and the words of the Infallible Imams (peace be upon them), have been meticulously codified by jurists and theologians in their specialized works.

3.1. Instances in Hadiths

In the vast corpus of hadiths, the Prophet of Islam and the Infallible Imams (peace be upon them) provided, in numerous transmissions, various lists of the major sins in order to practically elucidate the concept. These hadiths constitute the very heart of all subsequent scholarly discussions on the topic.

In a hadith transmitted from the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him and his household), nine sins are identified as major, on top of which is the sin of polytheism (*shirk*): (Majlisī, 1982, vol. 76, p. 11, ḥ. 7) "The major sins are nine: the gravest of them is associating partners with God, the Mighty and Majestic; killing a believing soul;

consuming usury (*ribā*); devouring the property of an orphan; slandering a chaste woman; fleeing from the battlefield; undutifulness to parents; violating the sanctity of the Sacred House; and sorcery. Thus, whoever meets God, the Mighty and Majestic, being innocent of these, shall be with me in a Paradise whose door-leaves are made of gold."

In another narration, he (peace and blessings be upon him) emphasized four cardinal sins (Al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, 1981, ḥ. 43944): "The major sins are associating partners with God, undutifulness to parents, the taking of a life, and the engulfing oath [a false oath taken to usurp the rights of another]."

Furthermore, a more comprehensive list is narrated from Imām ʿAlī (peace be upon him), which also encompasses social and political dimensions (Al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, 1981, ḥ. 43931): "The major sins are associating partners with God, the taking of a life, devouring the property of an orphan, slandering a chaste woman, fleeing from the battlefield, reverting to nomadism after emigration [a cultural regression], sorcery, undutifulness to parents, consuming usury, separating from the community [of Muslims], and breaking one's pledge [in an oath of allegiance or a transaction]."

One of the most famous hadiths in the Sunni sources is that of the "Seven Destructive Sins" (*al-Sabʿ al-Mūbiqāt*), which is found in two most authentic collections (Al-Bukhārī, 2001, ḥ. 2766; Muslim, (n.d), ḥ. 89): "'Avoid the seven destructive sins.' They said, 'O Messenger of God, and what are they?' He said, 'To associate partners with God; sorcery; to kill a soul which God has forbidden except for a just cause; to consume usury; to consume the property of an orphan; to turn one's back on the day of battle; and to slander chaste, believing women who are unaware [of such evil].'"

Another hadith, which illustrates the hierarchy of sins, is narrated from Ibn Masʿūd (Al-Bukhārī, 2001, ḥ. 4477; Muslim, (n.d), ḥ. 86): "I asked the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him), 'Which sin is gravest?' He said, 'That you set up a rival unto God, when it is He who created you.' I said, 'Then which?' He said, 'That you kill your child for fear that he should share your food.' I said, 'Then which?' He said, 'That you commit adultery with the wife of your neighbor.'"

3.2. Codification in the Works of Shia Scholars

The great scholars of the Shia tradition, drawing upon these hadiths, undertook the specialized codification of the discourse on major sins. ʿAllāma Muḥammad Mahdī al-Narāqī (d. 1794) in his *Jāmiʿ al-Saʿādāt*, enumerates such sins as polytheism, despairing of divine mercy, murder, the consumption of usury, and undutifulness to parents (Al-Narāqī, 1967, vol. 2, p. 91ff). Al-Shaykh al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1692) in his monumental *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa*, introduces approximately thirty major sins, substantiating each with specific hadiths (Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, 1993, vol. 15, pp. 318–343). ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 1325), in *Qawāʿid al-Aḥkām*, addresses the issue from a jurisprudential perspective, analyzing sins that mandate a fixed legal penalty (*ḥadd*) or are accompanied by a threat of divine punishment, such as adultery, the consumption of wine, and theft (Al-Ḥillī, 1992, vol. 1, p. 497).

This body of hadiths and scholarly works demonstrates that in Shia theology, the instances of the *kabāʾir* are classified along several principal axes:

1. Doctrinal Sins: Associating partners with God (*shirk*), despairing of His mercy (*yaʾs*), and feeling secure from His plan (*amn min makr Allāh*).

2. Sins Against Human Life and Dignity: Murder (*qatl*), and the slander of chaste women (*qadhf*).
3. Socio-Economic Sins: The consumption of usury, and devouring the property of an orphan.
4. Familial and Civic Sins: Undutifulness to parents (*ʿuqūq*), breaking solemn covenants, and causing division within the community.
5. This categorization reveals that a major sin is not merely a private, individual failing; rather, it is an act that strikes at the very foundations of faith, the family, and society.

3.3. Codification in the Works of Sunni Scholars

Preeminent scholars of the Sunni tradition have also authored essential works based upon these hadiths. Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 1347), in his famous book *Al-Kabāʾir*, lists seventy major sins, including polytheism, murder, sorcery, abandoning the prescribed prayer, and adultery (Al-Dhahabī, 1987). Imām al-Nawawī (d. 1277), in his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, explicitly regards sins such as abandoning the prayer, consuming intoxicants, and backbiting as major sins (Al-Nawawī, 1972, vol. 2, pp. 82-84). Imām al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) in his *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, approaches the subject from a moral and inward perspective, counting psychological vices such as arrogance (*kibr*), envy (*ḥasad*), ostentation (*riyāʾ*), and miserliness (*bukhl*) among the destructive maladies of the soul, and thus as inward major sins (Al-Ghazālī, 1987, vols. 3–4).

4 .The Perspectives of Islam and Christianity on Major Sins

Although a complete consensus does not exist among Muslims regarding the precise number of major sins, it can be said that a significant degree of agreement exists concerning the following seven, which are recognized for their gravity in both traditions.

4.1. Polytheism

In the spiritual world of Islam, *shirk*, the act of associating partners with God (or polytheism), is presented as the gravest and most unforgivable of all sins, should one die without having repented from it. This principle is so foundational that the Holy Quran declares with absolute finality, meaning, “God does not forgive the joining of partners with Him...” (Al-Nisāʾ, 4: 48). This sin constitutes a direct violation of the singular right of God (*ḥaqq Allāh*) and strikes at the very foundation of the covenant of servitude.

Within Christianity, a similar principle holds firm. Although Christian theology is centered upon the Trinity, the Church has always taught that this doctrine does not negate monotheism. Outright polytheism—that is, the worship of multiple gods or the replacement of the Creator with the created—is unequivocally rejected. Think of the Ten Commandments, where the very first command establishes this unwavering principle: “you shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus, 20:3). The towering Christian theologian, Thomas Aquinas, gets right to the heart of the matter in his *Summa Theologiae*. For him, polytheism is not merely an error but a sin that strikes directly against the theological virtue of faith, constituting a profound injustice against God Himself (Aquinas, 1981, II-II, q. 94). Therefore, despite the deep theological chasm between the doctrines of God—absolute monotheism versus the Trinity—both traditions converge in their condemnation of worshipping anything other than God and insist upon the necessity of maintaining absolute fidelity to the one Creator.

4.2. Murder

In Islam, the sanctity of human life finds its most profound expression in the Quran, where the unjust taking of a single life is held to be equivalent to the slaughter of all humanity "...if anyone kills a person... it is as if he killed all mankind..." (Al-Māʾida, 5: 32) This verse illuminates the inherent and universal value God assigns to every human life.

This resonates powerfully with the Christian tradition, where the prohibition against killing is, of course, among the Ten Commandments: “You shall not murder” (Exodus, 20:13). But what is the deeper reason for this? St. Augustine, in his monumental work *The City of God*, offers a penetrating theological analysis. He argues that murder desecrates the sanctity of the human person precisely because every person is a bearer of the divine image, the *imago Dei*. To destroy a human being, then, is to commit an act of direct contempt against the Creator who fashioned humanity in His own likeness (Augustine, 2000, Book 1, Ch. 20). And so, we see both religions viewing the sin of murder not merely as a social crime, but as a theological transgression: in Islam, as the violation of a divine covenant concerning the sanctity of life, and in Christianity, as the desecration of the very image of God, which He entrusted to the human creature.

4.3. Adultery

In the Law of Islam, or the Sharia, adultery (*zinā*) is among the major sins, for it threatens the sanctum of the family and the integrity of lineage. The Quran has accordingly prescribed a fixed punishment for it, as mentioned in its verses (Al-Nūr, 24:2).

In Christianity, too, adultery is condemned as a grievous sin that violates the sanctity of marriage. What is more, in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ expands the concept of this sin beyond the physical act, drawing it into the inner realm of intention and desire. He says, “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew, 5:28). This shifts the focus dramatically. Thomas Aquinas builds on this, arguing that the sin destroys fidelity, trust, and the marital bond, which he sees as the foundational cell of society (Aquinas, 1981, II-II, q. 154). Consequently, both traditions place a strong emphasis on preserving the family structure. Yet we can see a key difference in approach: while Islamic jurisprudence focuses on the external act and the evidence required to prove it (for enforcing its legal penalty), Christian theology, by internalizing the sin, stresses the paramount importance of a pure heart and intention as the very root of a righteous life.

4.4. Usury

In Islam, the practice of usury (*ribā*), is condemned in the Quran with a tone of unparalleled gravity, where it is presented as tantamount to a declaration of war against God and His Messenger (Deuteronomy, 23:19), "Those who consume interest rise up as one possessed by Satan’s touch″...

Likewise, in Christian history, particularly during the Middle Ages, charging interest was considered illicit. This prohibition has roots in the Old Testament, as the book of Deuteronomy states, “You shall not charge interest on loans to another Israelite” (Deuteronomy, 23:19). Christian theologians regarded usury as a form of theft and an exploitation of others’ vulnerabilities. Thus, both traditions, in their classical expression, regarded usury as a great sin against social justice, for it leads to the exploitation of the poor and the acquisition of wealth without genuine labor or risk.

4.5. False Accusation

In Islam, *qadhf*—the act of falsely accusing others of sexual immorality, especially chaste women—is a major sin that entails a severe worldly punishment and a chastisement in the Hereafter (Al-Nūr, 24:4), "As for those who accuse chaste women... flog them with eighty lashes″...

This finds a clear parallel in Christianity, where lying and slander are counted among the most serious sins. The ninth of the Ten Commandments warns directly: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus, 20:16). In his analysis of the virtue of justice, Aquinas argues that slander is a sin that damages not only the reputation of an individual but also the essential capital of "public trust" within a society (Aquinas, 1981, II-II, q. 73). Here again, the protection of human honor and dignity, and the preservation of trust as the foundation of social relations, emerges as a shared moral concern in both religions, manifested in the severe condemnation of slander and false testimony.

4.6. Consuming the Orphan's Property

Within Islam, the protection of the rights of the vulnerable, particularly orphans, stands as a central pillar of social ethics. The Quran condemns trespassing against the property of orphans in the most severe language imaginable, portraying it not as a mere financial transaction but as the literal ingestion of Hellfire (Al-Nisāʾ, 4: 10), "Those who consume the property of orphans unjustly are actually swallowing fire into their own bellies: they will burn in a blazing fire." This stunning image reveals the depth of this major sin, wherein illicit wealth is transfigured into an inner, consuming flame.

Now, while Christianity does not have a precise phrase equivalent to "consuming the orphan's property," the principle of "caring for orphans and widows" is presented as the very benchmark of "true religion." The Epistle of James, sometimes known as the "Gospel of Works," puts it plainly: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress” (James, 1:27). We, therefore, see that both religious traditions hold up the treatment of orphans and the vulnerable as something of a "final exam" for measuring both individual and social faith and justice. In Islam, this principle is articulated as an explicit legal-ethical command, fortified by the threat of severe chastisement.

4.7. Disrespecting Parents

In Islam, reverence and kindness towards one's parents hold an unparalleled importance, second only to the worship of God Himself. On numerous occasions, immediately after commanding the worship of the One God, the Holy Quran commands kindness toward one’s parents. The apex of this reverence is found in the verse (Al-Isrāʾ, 17: 23), "...do not say ‘Ugh!’ to them or scold them, but speak to them with respect." In this verse, even the utterance of the slightest word of impatience or the showing of the smallest expression of disrespect ("Ugh!") is forbidden, revealing the depth of this moral and spiritual duty. *ʿUqūq al-wālidayn*, or being undutiful to one's parents, is considered one of the greatest of the major sins, one that can prevent the acceptance of prayers and bring about divine punishment.

This principle is likewise presented in Christianity as a direct and foundational divine command. "Honor your father and mother" is the fifth of the Ten Commandments, and it is the only one that comes with a specific promise attached: “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus, 20:12). Clearly, both faiths elevate respect for parents beyond a mere social courtesy or cultural norm, transforming it into a divine command. To sin in this regard is not simply to rupture an emotional bond; it is to violate a sacred covenant and to show contempt for the divine order and will.

This significant overlap in the specific instances of sin raises a deeper question: is the conceptual structure of sin itself also the same in the two traditions? The next section will demonstrate that despite this convergence in application, a key distinction exists in how each tradition defines the very locus of sin, drawing a line between the outward "act" and the inward "disposition".

5. The Concept of Sin in the Christian Tradition

In Christian theology, the concept of sin has gone through complex twists and turns, moving from the law-centric perspective of the Old Testament to the faith-centered, inward-looking approach of the New Testament. Whereas Islam defines the major sin as a distinct legal-theological category, Christian theology—particularly after the teachings of the Apostle Paul—tends to focus more on the fundamental polarity between a "life in sin" and a "life in grace," made possible through Christ.

5.1. The Moral Foundation in the Old Testament: The Decalogue

So, where does the Christian understanding of sin begin? For any Jew or Christian, the starting point has to be the Decalogue or the Ten Commandments. This set of divine statutes, which according to the Biblical account was revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (See Exodus, 20:1-17; Deuteronomy, 5:6-21), not only forged the covenant between God and the people of Israel but was also embraced by Christianity as the foundational "moral law."

The Catholic Church, for instance, interprets these commandments as the very basis of the moral life. The first command, with its emphasis on monotheism, serves as a prohibition against superstition, idolatry, divination, sorcery, atheism, and agnosticism (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2110-2132). The second command, by forbidding false oaths and blasphemy, demands that God's name be held sacred (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2142-2159). The fifth command, "You shall not murder," is understood to condemn any form of intentional killing, including abortion from the moment of conception, euthanasia (the so-called "mercy killing"), suicide, and sterilization, as a grave sin (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2258-2283). The sixth command, "You shall not commit adultery," mandates chastity and the sanctity of marriage, thereby forbidding acts such as masturbation, sexual relations outside of marriage, pornography, and homosexual acts (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2351-2359, 2390). The seventh command, "You shall not steal," prohibits any encroachment on public or private property, business fraud, and the paying of unjust wages (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2408-2418), while the eighth, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor," insists upon truthfulness in speech and rejects slander and calumny as destructive to social trust. Finally, we see a dramatic inward turn. The ninth and tenth commandments, by forbidding one to "covet" a neighbor's wife (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2514-2527) or possessions (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2534-2540), pull the very idea of sin into the internal realm of intention, insisting on the necessity of a heart purified from lust and envy.

The Ten Commandments, therefore, establish the objective, law-based framework for ethics in the Old Testament. They are the bedrock for conceptualizing sin as a "transgression of divine law," a concept that would undergo a profound transformation in the New Testament.

5.2. A Conceptual Revolution in the New Testament

With the dawn of Christianity, the understanding of the Torah's law was largely reframed. The Apostle Paul, for instance, drew a crucial distinction between the "ceremonial laws" and the abiding "moral law," arguing that many of the behavioral prohibitions, especially those concerning diet and ritual purity, were not binding on non-Jewish Christians (Dunn, 1998, pp. 153-162).

In this new paradigm, sin is no longer merely the violation of an external rule; it is an existential and internal state. As the New Testament itself puts it, “whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Romans, 14:23), and even more starkly, “Sin is lawlessness” (1 John, 3:4).

This internalization of sin reaches its zenith in the teachings of Jesus Christ himself. He insists that true defilement does not come from the outside but springs from within the human person: “For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person” (Matthew, 15:19-20). In his famous reinterpretation of the command “You shall not commit adultery,” he equates a lustful gaze with the act of adultery already committed in the heart (See Matthew, 5:27-28). In the same statement, he presses beyond the prohibition of false oaths to forbid the swearing of any oath at all, demanding instead an absolute and unadorned truthfulness in all speech (See Matthew, 5:34-37).

In the theology of the New Testament, the locus of sin shifts from the outward "act" to the inward "heart"—the seat of intention, faith, and will. Sin is no longer just a legal infraction; it is a state of faithlessness and alienation from God, from which wicked actions naturally flow. This approach makes ethics a deeply personal and internal affair.

5.3. The Crystallization of Sin in Christian Theology

To give a practical illustration of what a sinful life looks like, Paul, in his letters, frequently employs "vice lists," a common literary and philosophical tool in the Greco-Roman world. These lists are not abstract catalogues; they are stark warnings that a life defined by the "works of the flesh" will exclude a person from the "kingdom of God." In his letter to the Galatians, he writes: "Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these... those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians, 5:19-21).

In his letter to the Romans, he provides another long and sobering list of the sins that result from humanity turning its back on God: "...they were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless" (Romans, 1:29-31).

And to the Corinthian church, he declares with unmistakable force that the unrighteous—the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who practice homosexuality, thieves, and the greedy—will not inherit God’s kingdom. He goes so far as to forbid association with anyone who bears the name of Christian while living in such a way (See 1 Corinthians, 6:9-10 and 1 Corinthians, 5:11).

From Paul’s perspective, sin is not just a series of poor individual choices. It is a cosmic "power," a malevolent force that has taken humanity captive. His lists demonstrate that a life lived under the dominion of this power leads to a comprehensive moral collapse, corrupting every dimension of life: the personal (lust, drunkenness), the social (strife, envy), and the spiritual (idolatry). The path to liberation from this enslavement is not, for Paul, a matter of trying harder to uphold the law. Rather, it is faith in the saving grace of Jesus Christ, which alone makes possible the new life in the Spirit.

6. Mortal Sin in Catholic Theology

In the Christian tradition, particularly within Catholic theology, sin is not merely understood as an undesirable moral behavior; it is an act that damages the relationship between the human person and God. Based on this understanding, the Catholic Church divides sins into two principal categories: mortal sins, which empty the soul of God's sanctifying grace and completely sever the bond with God, and venial sins, which weaken and wound this relationship but do not destroy it entirely.

6.1. Theological Basis and Historical Genealogy

The primary Biblical basis for this distinction is found in the First Epistle of John (5:16-17), which differentiates between a "sin that leads to death" and a sin that does not: "There is a sin that leads to death... All wrongdoing is sin, but there is a sin that does not lead to death." Although this verse provides the foundational theological touchstone for the Catholic distinction between mortal and venial sin, it does not specify the precise instances of "deadly sin," leaving that task to the tradition and teaching of the Church.

The systematic formulation of this doctrine, especially the famous list of the "Seven Deadly Sins," can be traced back to the Christian monastic tradition in the East. It was Evagrius Ponticus, a desert monk of the fourth century, who first formulated a list of eight "evil thoughts" (in Greek, *logismoi*) to guide his fellow monks in their spiritual warfare (Evagrius Ponticus, 1972). His student, John Cassian, then transmitted this teaching to the West (Cassian, 2000, Books 5-12). This list was ultimately revised and reduced to seven sins by Pope Gregory the Great in the sixth century, becoming solidified in his work (Gregory the Great, 1844, Book 31). The doctrine reached its philosophical apex in the works of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Aquinas designated these sins not merely as individual acts, but as "capital vices" (*vitia capitalia*)—foundational evils that are the source and genesis of other sins—and he identified "pride" as the root and mother of them all (Aquinas, 1981, II-II, Q. 162, a. 2). This precise Catholic framework, however, met with staunch opposition during the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther, rejecting this classification, declared that all sins equally separate a person from God and are forgiven only through "faith" (Luther, 2005, 1520), while John Calvin also emphasized humanity's fundamental sinfulness and the wholesale violation of God's law, rather than focusing on discrete, individual sins.

The history of this doctrine reveals an evolutionary trajectory, moving from a practical, mystical intuition (the desert monks) to a systematic ecclesiastical formulation (Pope Gregory) and finally to a profound philosophical-moral reflection (Aquinas). This trajectory transformed the concept of sin from a mere list of prohibitions into a deep analysis of the structure of the human psyche and character.

6.2. The Nature and Criteria of the "Seven Deadly Sins"

The list of the "Seven Deadly Sins" in the Christian tradition—comprising pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth—was selected on the basis of theological reflection, psychological analysis, and the spiritual teaching of the Church. These sins, recognized in the official teaching of the Catholic Church as capital vices (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], para. 1866), are character dispositions that draw a person into a cycle of sinfulness. The reasons for their centrality are as follows:

(1) They Are the Sources of Other Sins: These sins are recognized as the wellspring from which many other sins flow. Thomas Aquinas calls them "capital vices" because numerous secondary sins originate from them (Aquinas, 1981, I-II, Q. 84, a. 4).

(2) They Are Rooted in the Soul's Faculties: These vices represent the excess and distortion of the three fundamental powers of the human soul—namely, the rational faculty (which can lead to pride), the concupiscible appetite (leading to gluttony and lust), and the irascible appetite (leading to wrath and envy)—and are therefore deeply rooted in human psychology.

(3) Mystical and Spiritual Experience: In the experiences of the early ascetics, such as Evagrius Ponticus, these sins were repeatedly identified as the primary obstacles on the path of spiritual growth and union with God (Evagrius Ponticus, 1972, Ch. 6).

(4) Biblical Basis: The Bible contains serious warnings about these sins, including pride (Proverbs, 8:13), greed (Colossians, 3:5), lust (Matthew, 5:28), and envy (James, 3:16), indicating their destructive consequences.

(5) They Destroy the Relationship with God: Each of these sins expels divine love (Charity), which is the very life of the spiritual soul, from the heart and destroys the person's

relationship with God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], para. 1855).

(6) Educational Function: The sevenfold list was highly suitable for the moral instruction of the general populace during the Middle Ages, which is why it was formally adopted by Pope Gregory the Great (Gregory the Great, 1844, Book 31).

The selection of these sins is therefore a synthesis of Biblical tradition, mystical insight, moral analysis, and the Church's pastoral and pedagogical considerations. More than a legal classification, this list serves as a psychological and spiritual roadmap, warning the human person against the vices that desiccate the roots of faith, spiritual health, and social relationships.

6.3. The Conditions for a Mortal Sin

Catholic theology makes a critical distinction between the "capital vices" (like the Seven Deadly Sins) and a "mortal sin." A capital vice is a tendency or a disposition, but a mortal sin is a specific "act" for which three conditions must be met simultaneously. These conditions are (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], paragraphs 1857-1859):

Grave Matter: The act committed must, in itself, be seriously and significantly wrong. It must constitute a violation of one of the Ten Commandments or a foundational moral value, such as murder (Exodus, 20:13), adultery (Exodus, 20:14), or idolatry (Exodus, 20: 3).

Full Knowledge: The person must be fully aware of the sinfulness and gravity of the act they are committing. Involuntary ignorance can diminish one's responsibility.

Deliberate Consent: The person must choose to commit the act with complete freedom of the will, without external coercion or overwhelming psychological pressure.

This threefold framework tethers moral responsibility directly to the conscience, knowledge, and freedom of the individual. This means that an act that is inherently grave might not be considered a mortal sin if it is performed without full knowledge or deliberate consent. This approach is the cornerstone of modern Catholic moral theology, emphasizing the central role of an informed conscience and free will in determining a person's moral culpability.

6.4. The Protestant Perspective

The Protestant theology born out of the sixteenth-century Reformation offers a radically different understanding of the nature of sin and salvation, fundamentally challenging the Catholic classification of sins into "mortal" and "venial.″

According to the Reformers, particularly Martin Luther, sin is not simply a collection of graded moral infractions; it is the fundamental "state" or "condition" of human existence after the Fall. From this perspective, the primary problem for humanity is not the commission of specific sins, but the very fact of being a sinner—a state in which the human will is turned in upon itself instead of being turned toward God. Luther expresses this idea radically in his lectures on the book of Romans: "All sins are mortal because they spring from unbelief and are directly against God" (Luther, 2005, 1515-1516).

In this view, therefore, the distinction between major and minor sins loses its meaning, because even the smallest sin is a sign and fruit of the same poisoned root of unbelief that severs the human relationship with God.

Logically, if all sins are equally deadly, the solution cannot be to simply avoid a particular category of them. The Reformers found the solution in the foundational principle of Protestant theology:

"Justification by faith alone" (*Sola Fide*). This doctrine means that a person is declared righteous and saved not by virtue of their good works or avoidance of sin, but solely through faith in the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. As Luther asserts in his famous treatise, a person "is justified (saved) not by what he does, but by what he believes" (Luther, 2005, 1520).

This principle has significant practical consequences. First, contrary to the Catholic sacramental system of confession, the forgiveness of sin does not require the mediation of a priest but is obtained through personal repentance and the direct work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart. John Calvin, in his work, likewise emphasizes this direct and personal relationship with God for seeking forgiveness (Calvin, 2008, Book 3, Ch. 4).

Although Protestants reject the concept of "mortal sin" in the Catholic sense, they do grapple with the problem of "apostasy"—a complete falling away from the faith. This concept refers to a state in which an individual, after having professed faith, knowingly and deliberately denies it and turns completely away from divine grace. The key text for this view is found in the Epistle to the Hebrews (6:4-6), which states that it is impossible to restore such a person to repentance, because they have effectively re-crucified Christ for themselves.

However, a significant theological tension exists on this point within the Protestant tradition itself. Many theologians, especially those in the Calvinist tradition, emphasize the doctrine of the "Perseverance of the Saints." This doctrine holds that true salvation, which is based on God's foreknowledge and designation, is irreversible, and that someone who has obtained true faith cannot possibly lose their salvation. From this standpoint, a person who commits apostasy never had true, saving faith to begin with. This view stands in contrast to Arminian and Wesleyan perspectives, which hold that a person can, through their own free will, reject God's grace and forfeit their salvation (Olson, 2006, Chapter 7).

The Protestant perspective shifts the discourse on sin from a quantitative analysis (measuring the gravity of sins) to a qualitative one (examining the state of the heart and the presence or absence of faith). In this framework, sin is not a discrete act but a symptom of a fundamentally broken relationship with God, and faith is the only bridge to repair that relationship. The internal debate between the "possibility of apostasy" and the "perseverance of the saints" further reveals a deeper discussion within Protestant theology about the interplay between the absolute sovereignty of God and the free will of humankind.

7. The Approach of Islam and Christianity to the Deadly Sins

While the list of the "Seven Deadly Sins" is a conceptual framework originating from the Christian tradition, the foundational vices referenced in this list are condemned with a similar intensity within the ethical system of Islam, where they are recognized as the "mothers of all vices" (*ummahāt al-radhāʾil*) or the very roots of spiritual and social decay. A comparative analysis of these sins reveals a deep and shared "moral grammar" between these two Abrahamic traditions.

7.1. Pride

In the Islamic Tradition: Arrogance (*kibr*) is regarded not merely as a moral vice but as a theological sin and the root of all deviation. The Quran attributes the first sin of pride to Iblīs (Satan), who, when faced with the divine command to prostrate to Adam, "he was arrogant and rejected faith" (Al-Baqara, 2:34). This sin is tantamount to a declaration of independence from God and a direct negation of servitude, to the extent that the Quran states: "He does not love the arrogant" (Al-Naḥl, 16:23). In the hadith tradition, the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him and his household) decisively declares: "One who has in his heart so much as a mustard seed of arrogance will not enter Paradise" (Muslim, n.d, hadith 91). ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī, in his Quranic exegesis *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, considers arrogance the primary factor that prevents one from receiving divine guidance (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1996, vol. 1, p. 169).

In the Christian Tradition: Pride is famously known as the "mother of all sins" and the most perilous of vices. The Bible warns, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs, 16:18), and that “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James, 4:6). St. Augustine, in *The City of God*, emphasizes that pride—defined as "the love of one's own excellence to the point of contempt for God"—was the very sin that caused Satan's fall from his station (Augustine, 2000, Book 14, Ch. 13). Thomas Aquinas likewise defines pride as the "inordinate desire for one's own greatness" in opposition to the divine order, and he, too, considers it the root of all sins (Aquinas, 1981, II-II, q. 162, art. 6).

Both traditions, therefore, see pride not as mere behavior but as an "existential state" in which the self usurps the place of God.

7.2. Greed

In the Islamic Tradition: Greed (*ḥirṣ*) is strongly condemned as one of the key roots of moral deviation and heedlessness of the spiritual path. The Holy Quran describes humanity's avaricious nature thus: "and he is fierce in his love of wealth" (Al-ʿĀdiyāt, 100:8). The Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him and his household), in a powerful parable, condemned the insatiable nature of this desire: "If the son of Adam had two valleys of wealth, he would seek a third, and nothing will fill his belly except dust" (Muslim, n.d, ḥadīth 1048). Islamic philosophers like Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī in his *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* identify greed as a cause of social conflict and neglect of the Hereafter (Al-Ṭūsī, 1985, p. 247).

In the Christian Tradition: Greed, or covetousness, is one of the seven deadly sins and is explicitly equated with idolatry in the New Testament: "...and greed (which is idolatry)" (Colossians, 3:5). The Apostle Paul warns with force: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy, 6:10). In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas describes it as a sin against justice and love, because in it, a material good is substituted for the ultimate good, who is God (Aquinas, 1981, II-II, q. 118).

Both religions see the danger of greed as extending far beyond a simple desire for possessions, analyzing it as an "existential deviation" in which human security and identity are founded upon material wealth instead of upon God.

7.3. Lust

In the Islamic Tradition: Sexual desire (*shahwa*) is a natural force and a divine gift for the continuation of the species and for tranquility, but if it transgresses its legal and ethical framework, it becomes one of the greatest of vices. The Quran, with decisive language, forbids even approaching unlawful sexual relations: "And do not go anywhere near adultery: it is an outrage and an evil path" (Al-Isrāʾ, 17:32). The hadith "I have not left behind me a trial more harmful for men than women" emphasizes the destructive power of this instinct if left untamed (al-Nūrī, 1987, vol. 14, p. 306).

In the Christian Tradition: Lust, as one of the seven deadly sins, signifies an inordinate sexual desire that is detached from the context of love and fidelity. Jesus Christ, internalizing this sin, traces its root to the human heart: "...everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew, 5:28). In his *Confessions*, Augustine describes lust as a force that enslaves a person to fleeting pleasures (Augustine, 1998, Book 10, Ch. 30), and Aquinas deems it an act "contrary to reason and divine law" (Aquinas, 1981, II-II, q. 154).

The shared insight of both traditions is that unbridled lust is not merely a hedonistic act; they see it as a force that leads to the "objectification" of the other, thereby destroying human dignity.

7.4. Envy

In the Islamic Tradition: Envy (ḥasad) is among the most destructive spiritual and moral maladies. The Qurʾān commands the believers to seek refuge in God from the evil of the envier: "...from the evil of an envier when he envies" (Al-Falaq, 113:5). Imām al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him) identifies it as a blight upon one's religion: "The blights of religion are envy, vanity, and pride" (Al-Kulaynī, 1986, vol. 2, p. 306).

In the Christian Tradition: Envy is one of the seven deadly sins, long defined as sadness at the good fortune and success of others. The Epistle of James states unequivocally: “For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind” (James, 3:16). Aquinas considers envy to be in "direct opposition to the virtue of charity," because charity rejoices in the good of others, while envy grieves at it (Aquinas, 1981, II-II, q. 36). Augustine calls it the "begetter of hatred and the source of gratuitous animosity" (Augustine, 2000, Book 14, Ch. 3).

Both traditions view envy not just as a negative emotion but as a profound spiritual failure in upholding the principle of "love" and "goodwill" towards others.

7.5. Gluttony

In the Islamic Tradition: Gluttony (*biṭna*), which is exemplified in *isrāf* (extravagance) in eating and drinking, is not merely a personal weakness but a moral vice that distances a person from the key virtues of moderation, gratitude, and inner purity. The Holy Quran articulates this principle in a tone that is both commanding and wise: "Eat and drink, but do not be wasteful: He does not love the wasteful" (Al-Aʿrāf, 7:31). Imām ʿAlī (peace be upon him) points to the cognitive and spiritual consequences of this vice, stating: "Gluttony creates a barrier between a man and his intelligence" (Al-Āmidī, 1989, ḥikma 2046). Ethicists like Fayḍ al-Kāshānī in *al-Maḥajjat al-Bayḍāʾ* considered gluttony the root of many other sins, such as licentiousness, heedlessness, and hardness of the heart (Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, 1996, vol. 5, p. 150).

In the Christian Tradition: Gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins, and its meaning extends beyond simple overeating. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, describes this deviation in sharp terms: “Their god is their belly... With minds set on earthly things” (Philippians, 3:19). In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas defines gluttony as an "inordinate desire in the pleasure of food" and considers it contrary to the virtue of "temperance" (Aquinas, 1981, II-II, q. 148).

Both traditions view gluttony not as a nutritional issue, but as a "spiritual malady."

7.6 Wrath

In the Islamic Tradition: Anger (*ghaḍab*) possesses a dual nature. If it is channeled in the path of truth, it can be a moral virtue. Unbridled anger, however, is one of the most destructive vices. The Holy Quran describes one of the highest qualities of believers as the restraining of their anger: "...who restrain their anger and pardon people" (Āl ʿImrān, 3:134). The Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him and his household) defines true strength not as physical dominance but as self-control: "The strong man is not the one who is victorious in wrestling; rather, the strong man is the one who controls himself at the time of anger" (al-Naysābūrī, n.d, vol. 2, p. 380).

In the Christian Tradition: Wrath is one of the seven deadly sins because it stands in direct contradiction to the foundational Christian virtue of "love" (charity). The Epistle of James states plainly, "for your anger does not produce God's righteousness" (James, 1:20). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also internalizes this sin, deeming that merely being angry with a brother or sister makes one liable to judgment (Matthew, 5:22). In *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas sees excessive anger as the source of secondary sins like malice and violence, and Augustine emphasizes that this vice hardens the heart and prevents a person from receiving divine love (Aquinas, 1981, II-II, q. 158).

Both religions insist upon the necessity of "managing" and "mastering" the force of anger.

7.7. Sloth

In the Islamic Tradition: Sloth (*kasal*) is more than a physical weakness; it is a spiritual vice that holds a person back from attaining perfection. The frequent supplication of the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him and his household) against this trait—"O God, I seek refuge in You from incapacity and laziness" (Muslim, n.d, hadith 2722)—indicates its profound danger. The Quran also censures the hypocrites for performing their prayers in a state of lethargy: "...when they stand up to pray, they do so sluggishly" (Al-Nisāʾ, 4:142).

In the Christian Tradition: Sloth is described in terms of the deeper concept of acedia, which means "spiritual listlessness or apathy." This concept, first introduced by the desert monks like Evagrius Ponticus (Evagrius, 1972, Ch. 6), describes a state of spiritual sadness and revulsion. Pope Gregory the Great equated it with a "laxity in divine love" (Gregory the Great, 1844, Book 31), and Aquinas defined it as a "paralyzing sorrow with respect to spiritual good." This sin is not merely inaction but a refusal to rejoice in the good that comes from God (Aquinas, 1981, II-II, q. 35).

While the Islamic concept of *kasal* focuses more on the "omission of action," the Christian concept of acedia describes an "internal and existential" crisis: a kind of spiritual depression rooted in despair and a loss of meaning.

8. The Distinction Between Major Sin and Mortal Sin in Islam and Christianity

Having examined the specific instances of major sins, a foundational analytical question now presents itself: Where is the primary locus of sin? Is sin rooted in the "act"—the external and observable behavior—or in the "disposition," the internal state of the agent's heart? Although both the Islamic and Christian traditions emphasize the importance of a pure intention and righteous deeds, a subtle yet meaningful difference in their approaches can be observed in response to this question. Islamic moral theology, particularly within its legal and jurisprudential context, tends to regard the "act" as the principal subject of judgment and sin. In contrast, Christian ascetic theology, especially in the tradition of the "Seven Deadly Sins," identifies the "disposition," or the capital vices, as the primary locus of sinfulness.

This section will explore this structural distinction and its implications.

8.1. The Islamic View: The Primacy of the "Act" over the "Internal State"

In the Islamic legal-ethical system, a clear boundary exists between the "internal states of the soul" (such as thoughts and inclinations) and "external acts" (which manifest in speech or deeds). The governing principle is that a person is held responsible primarily for their voluntary actions, not for the involuntary thoughts and feelings that may cross their heart. This principle is expressed in a renowned hadith from the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him and his household): "Indeed, God has overlooked for my nation that which their souls chatter to them, so long as they do not act upon it or speak of it" (Al-Kulaynī, 1986, vol. 1, p. 20).

Based on this foundation, we can analyze the Islamic approach to the vices:

> Envy (*Ḥasad*): The feeling of envy in the heart, while a reprehensible spiritual malady and moral vice that one must strive to purify, is not in itself a sin that incurs otherworldly punishment so long as it does not lead to an external act, such as backbiting, slander, or an attempt to harm another. The sin is the "act" that arises from the envy.

Lust (*Shahwa*): The presence of sexual desire (instinct) is not a sin, but rather a natural and necessary force that, when channeled within the sacred framework of marriage, is praiseworthy and rewarding. The major sin occurs when this desire is transformed into a forbidden "act," such as fornication, sodomy, or even a deliberate "lecherous gaze."

Pride (*Kibr*): Pride in the heart is the root of many sins, but the sin that is recorded is "arrogant behavior." Islam has even, in specific cases, permitted or even praised behavior that is outwardly arrogant, such as the saying: "Arrogance in the face of an arrogant person is a form of charity," which demonstrates that the primary criterion is the "act" and the context in which it occurs.

Therefore, from an Islamic perspective, the major sins are predominantly forbidden "acts" that originate from moral vices. Although the Islamic science of ethics (*Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, or purification of the soul) is deeply concerned with refining these inner roots and dispositions, the Sharia and its jurisprudence (*fiqh*) draw a clear line between the internal state and the sinful act.

8.2. The Christian View: The Primacy of the "Internal State" over the "Act"

In contrast, Christian moral theology, particularly within the framework of the "Seven Deadly Sins," shifts the locus of sin inward. These seven sins are not so much discrete actions as they are "dispositions," "inclinations," or "Capital Vices" that sicken the soul and naturally produce sinful acts. They are less about what a person does and more about the state a person is in.

The zenith of this internalization of sin is seen in the Sermon on the Mount, in the words of Jesus Christ himself. When he says, "...everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew, 5:28), he effectively dissolves the boundary between act and intention, identifying the root of the sin in the "lustful disposition" itself. From this perspective, the physical act of adultery is merely the "fruit" and external manifestation of that poisoned inner root. In the same way, anger in the heart is presented as equivalent to murder, because both spring from the same disposition of "hatred" and the "negation of love."

Therefore, in this view, the list of the Seven Deadly Sins (pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth) is, in reality, a list of the "wellsprings" of sin. The moral struggle in Christianity is, in the first instance, an internal battle to transform these dispositions and replace them with their opposing virtues (humility, generosity, chastity, love, temperance, patience, and diligence).

8.3. The Complementary Relationship of "Root" and "Fruit"

The distinction between the Islamic and Christian approaches should be understood not as an absolute contradiction but as a difference in "focal point" and "moral methodology." The two perspectives are, in fact, complementary, offering a comprehensive picture of the structure of sin. One can use the metaphor of the "root and the fruit" to explain this relationship: The Seven Deadly Sins of Christianity are the internal and psychological "roots" of sin. Many of the major sins in Islam are the external and behavioral "fruits" of those roots.

For instance, the vice and "disposition" of wrath (the root) leads to the sinful "act" of murder (the fruit). The disposition of lust (the root) leads to the act of adultery (the fruit), and the disposition of greed (the root) leads to the act of theft or usury (the fruit).

The Islamic approach, by focusing on the "act," provides a clear legal and social framework for establishing justice and order in society, making objective accountability possible. In contrast, the Christian approach, by focusing on the "disposition," offers a powerful psychological-spiritual framework for self-knowledge and inner transformation.

Ultimately, both religious traditions share in the final principle that complete spiritual formation requires a struggle on both fronts. Lasting moral reform is not possible without addressing the inner wellsprings and vices of the heart, while at the same time, the purification of the heart must manifest itself in the form of righteous deeds and just behavior in the external world. This final convergence demonstrates the profound and shared wisdom of the Abrahamic faiths in understanding the complexities of human existence.

9. Mechanisms for the Forgiveness of Sin in Islam and Christianity

9.1. Repentance in Christian Theology

In Christian theology, sin is understood as a rupture in the relationship between the human person and God, and repentance is the process of mending this rupture and returning to the embrace of divine grace. Although the Bible calls believers to live in holiness and to refrain from sin (Romans, 6:1-14), both the Old Testament (See Exodus, 34:6-7; 2 Chronicles, 7:14) and the New Testament emphasize the necessity of repentance for sinners. The call to repent is the central message at the start of the missions of both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ himself: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!” (Matthew, 4:17) This necessity is so vital that the Apostle Paul severely critiques any teaching that would treat sin as insignificant for those who are saved, seeing such a view as a form of bondage to sensual passions (See 2 Peter, 2:19). However, concerning the mechanism and nature of this repentance, profound theological differences exist between the Catholic and Protestant traditions.

9.2. Repentance in the Catholic Tradition

In Catholic theology, repentance is a structured, tangible, and ecclesial (Church-based) process that finds its expression in the "Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation." This sacrament, especially for the forgiveness of "mortal sins" which strip the soul of sanctifying grace, is considered the ordinary and necessary path established by Christ: "reconciliation with God and with the Church is brought about by the sacrament of Penance after a mortal sin has been committed" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1484). The Catholic Church obliges the faithful to "confess his or her grave sins at least once a year" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1457).

This sacramental process is founded upon four essential pillars (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1450-1460):

> Contrition: Sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again.
>
> Confession: The explicit and complete telling of one's mortal sins to a priest, who hears the confession in the person of Christ and on behalf of the Church.
>
> Absolution: The forgiveness of sins by the priest through the formula "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
>
> Penance (or Satisfaction): The carrying out of reparative and restorative acts (such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, or service) assigned by the priest.

Although this sacrament is necessary for mortal sins, the Church acknowledges that in emergency situations where access to a priest is impossible, "perfect contrition," provided it includes the intention to confess as soon as possible, can obtain forgiveness (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1452). This perspective underscores the boundless mercy of God, as Pope Francis states: "God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy" (Pope Francis, 2013, §3). In the Catholic view, repentance is not a purely internal and personal process, but a juridical-spiritual and "ecclesial" act that, through a tangible and observable mechanism, reconciles the individual with God and with the community of faith.

9.3. Repentance in the Protestant Tradition

The Protestant Reformation, centered on the principle of "justification by faith alone" (*Sola Fide*), launched a sharp critique of the Catholic approach to repentance. In Protestant theology, repentance is not an ecclesiastical sacrament but a deeply personal, internal experience and an inseparable component of "faith" itself. Martin Luther, in the first of his famous Ninety-five Theses, declared: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance" (Luther, 2005, The 95 Theses, Thesis 1). On this account, repentance is not a periodic act to cleanse specific sins, but a continuous "state of being"—a constant turning from sin toward grace.

Accordingly, Protestants reject the "Sacrament of Confession" to a priest, viewing it as an innovation that creates a barrier between the individual and God. Forgiveness of sins, they believe, is obtained only in a direct relationship with God and through faith in His promise of mercy, not through the action of a priest (Luther, 2005, The Freedom of a Christian). John Calvin likewise defines true repentance not as fear of punishment, but as "sorrow for having offended God and the desire to return to His favor" (Calvin, 2008, Book 3, Ch. 3, §7), and he maintains that this process is the internal work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart, not the result of the external words of a human being (Calvin, 2008, Book 3, Ch. 3, §14).

Nevertheless, the danger of "unrepentant sin" and falling from faith (apostasy) is also taken seriously in Protestant theology. The Epistle to the Hebrews states plainly that it is "impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened" and then have fallen away (Hebrews, 6:4-6). In Protestant traditions such as Methodism and Anabaptism, this verse is taken as evidence for the possibility of losing one's salvation. In contrast, the Calvinist tradition, emphasizing the doctrine of the "Perseverance of the Saints," holds that a true believer, chosen by God, will never completely fall from grace.

The Protestant perspective thus transforms repentance from an "ecclesial mechanism" into an "existential experience″.

9.4. Repentance in the Islamic Tradition

Repentance (*tawba*) in Islam serves a central and foundational function in the spiritual life of a Muslim. It is defined as a direct, unmediated, and profoundly hopeful process between the servant and the Lord. This process has two dimensions: a divine dimension, wherein God, with His attributes of *al-Tawwāb* (the Ever-Repenting, the Accepter of Repentance) and *al-Raḥīm* (the All-Merciful), has perpetually made the path of return available (Al-Tawba, 9:104); and a human dimension, wherein the individual is obligated to fulfill the conditions for that return.

In opposition to any despairing outlook, the Holy Quran decisively forbids sinners from losing hope in divine mercy. God, who calls Himself *Ghāfir al-Dhanb* ("forgiver of sins") (Ghafir, 40:3), declares that every sin, no matter how grave, is capable of being forgiven before His mercy: ″Say, ‘My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of God’s mercy. God forgives all sins..." (Al-Zumar, 39:53).

This divine love for the returning servant is so great that the Quran states: "...God loves those who turn back to Him..." (Al-Baqara, 2:222), and it counts the state of being constantly repentant (*awwāb*) as one of the preeminent qualities of His righteous servants (Ṣād, 38:44).

Muslim scholars, citing the verses of the Quran and hadiths, have stipulated conditions for a true repentance, the most important of which are as follows:

1. Remorse of the Heart (*al-nadāma*): A deep and sincere regret for the past.
2. Resolution to Abstain (*ʿazm ʿalā al-Tark*): A firm decision not to return to the sin.
3. Restitution of Rights (*jabr al-ḥuqūq*): In cases where the sin has violated the rights of others, making amends for that violation is a prerequisite for the validity of the repentance.

If these conditions are met, repentance not only removes the otherworldly punishment but also, in Islamic theology, yields a unique fruit: the transformation of sins into good deeds. The Holy Quran states: "...God will change their evil deeds into good ones..." (Al-Furqān, 25:70). This doctrine reveals the apex of the transformative power of divine grace, which not only erases the past but turns it into a foundation for spiritual growth. Furthermore, Islam recognizes other pathways to forgiveness, such as the intercession (*al-shafāʿa*) of the saintly friends of God or the prayer of a righteous child for their parents.

In conclusion, repentance in Islam is a juridical-moral process founded upon the direct and unmediated relationship between the human being and the All-Merciful God (*al-Raḥmān*).

10. The Penalty for Unrepented Sin

In both the Islamic and Christian traditions, the divine logic rests upon the principle that if a person commits major or mortal sins and departs from this world without repentance, in a state of complete rupture from God, their final abode will be Hell. Hell is not understood as arbitrary divine vengeance, but as the ultimate and just realization of a human free will that has consciously rejected the source of all goodness and life.

10.1. Hell in Christian Theology

The Bible describes the nature of this final state in order to depict its gravity. These descriptions can be categorized along several thematic lines:

- Images of Fire and Punishment: The "eternal fire" (Matthew, 25:41), the "unquenchable fire" (Matthew, 3:12), and the "lake of fire and sulfur" (Revelation, 20:10) serve as symbols of an all-encompassing and unpurifying suffering.
- Images of Loss: "Eternal destruction" (2 Thessalonians, 1:9) and separation from the presence of the Lord, indicating a complete rupture from the source of all goodness and joy.
- Images of Spiritual and Physical Torment: A "place of torment" (Luke, 16:23-24), a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew, 13:42), a place where the worms that consume the bodies of sinners never die (Mark, 9:47-48), and whose inhabitants exist in "shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel, 12:2).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, summarizing these teachings, emphasizes a key theological point: "Jesus often speaks of 'Gehenna' of 'the unquenchable fire' reserved for those who to the end of their lives refuse to believe and be converted... The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1034-1035).

However, among some Protestant denominations, a view known as "Annihilationism" also exists, which holds that Hell is the lake of fire wherein sinners will be destroyed forever and will not have a conscious existence in eternal torment.

10.2. Hell (*Jahannam*) from the Islamic Perspective

The Holy Quran also depicts *Jahannam* with vivid and powerful descriptions to illustrate the depth of the sinners' loss. Hell is called the "evil home" (*sūʾ al-dār*) (Al-Raʿd, 13:25) and the "house of ruin" (*dār al-bawār*) (Ibrahim, 14:28). This place is so insatiable that after engulfing the transgressors, it still cries out: "'Are there any more?'" (Qāf, 50:30) Other descriptions in the Quran include:

- Physical Torments: The drink of the inhabitants of Hell is scalding water (*ḥamīm*) (Al-Anʿām, 6:70), and their food is from the accursed tree of *zaqqūm* (Al-Ṣāffāt, 37:62-66).
- Spiritual and Social Torments: In describing the psychological and social torments of Hell, the Quran alludes to an atmosphere filled with wailing and cries for destruction (Al-Furqān, 25:13-14), faces that are blackened and downcast, and severe angels (Āl ʿImrān, 3:106). But the most significant torment is the pain of separation and distance from God.

This truth is expressed in the prayer of *Kumayl* through the words of Imām ʿAlī (peace be upon him): "Grant that I... could bear Your punishment, but how could I endure separation from You?" (al-Ṭūsī, 1991, p. 844).

- The Commander of the Faithful, ʿAlī (peace be upon him), in a stunning sermon, brings this suffering closer to human experience in order to dispel heedlessness: "Know that this delicate skin has no power to withstand the Fire of Hell! So have mercy on yourselves... How can one tolerate being between two layers of fire, beside scorching stones, as a companion to Satan?" (Imām ʿAlī, 1994, Sermon 183).
- However, a significant theological distinction exists in Islam. Although the sins of some, such as unrepented polytheism, lead to eternal torment ("they will remain in it") (Al-Baqara, 2:39), in the view of many Islamic schools of thought, Hell serves a "purgatorial" and "temporary" function for sinful believers. According to Islam, the only ways to be released from Hell are for the period of appointed punishment to end or to benefit from the intercession (*shafāʿa*) of the intercessors (Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, 1996, vol. 8, p. 371). In the mainstream Christian tradition (Catholic and Protestant), however, Hell is generally considered an eternal and irreversible state for all its inhabitants. In contrast, Islamic theology, by proposing the possibility of the exit of sinful believers after their purification, depicts a different picture, wherein Hell can, for this group, have a function similar to that of "Purgatory" in Catholic theology (Lange, 2016, pp. 179-182).

Conclusion

This comparative study, with the aim of investigating the structure, criteria, and consequences of the concept of "major sin" in the Islamic and Christian traditions, has built its central argument upon the proposition that the fundamental distinction between these two systems lies not in their list of specific instances, but in the "locus of sin." While Islamic moral theology, especially in its jurisprudential context, focuses on the objective, external "act," Christian ascetic theology, particularly in the tradition of the "Seven Deadly Sins," identifies the "disposition," or the capital vices, as the primary origin of sinfulness. This difference in focal point has left profound consequences on the legal, ethical, and spiritual systems of each of these religions.

The findings of this research can be summarized in several key areas. First, it was shown that in Islam, the definition of a "major sin" is text-based, relying on objective criteria, such as the promise of divine punishment or the stipulation of a fixed legal penalty in the Sharia. In contrast, in Catholic theology, a "mortal sin" is defined in terms of three internal conditions: graveness, full knowledge, and deliberate consent. Second, despite this difference in criteria, the analysis of specific instances revealed that both traditions demonstrate a remarkable convergence in condemning sins that harm the foundational principles of life (such as murder), the family (such as adultery), society (such as consuming the property of an orphan), and the relationship with God (such as polytheism). Third, this article has shown that the list of the "Seven Deadly Sins" in Christianity is understandable as the internal "roots" of sin, while many of the major sins in Islam are the behavioral "fruits" of those roots. Fourth, the mechanisms of repentance also displayed two distinct models: a direct, unmediated, and hope-based process in Islam, versus a structured, ecclesial process in Catholicism and an experience based on personal faith in Protestantism. Finally, in the discussion of eschatology, it was determined that although both religions emphasize Hell as the penalty for unrepented sin, Islamic theology, by proposing the possibility of the "exit of sinful believers after their purification," depicts a different picture that brings it closer to the Catholic concept of "Purgatory."

These findings have significant implications. In the field of inter-religious dialogue, this comparative understanding shows that focusing on the "deep moral grammar" and shared values (such as justice, dignity, and mercy) can be far more constructive than a superficial comparison of legal catalogues. In the domain of understanding religious ethics, this research clarifies that religious moral systems, despite shared goals, can possess different structures and methodologies, the understanding of which is essential for precise analysis. Furthermore, the ethical principles underlying these doctrines holds a great potential for confronting modern challenges; the critique of "greed" as idolatry can be applied to the analysis of consumerist culture, and the critique of "lust" as the objectification of the human person aligns with contemporary discourses on human dignity.

In closing, it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of this study. This article has focused primarily on the mainstream theological and jurisprudential currents in Islam (Shia and Sunni) and Christianity (Catholic and Protestant) and has not addressed the rich perspectives within the Eastern Christian (Orthodox) tradition, which views the concept of "sin" more as a "sickness of the soul" and "missing the mark" (*hamartia*). Likewise, an analysis of the Jewish perspective, as the common root of these two traditions, could have added to the richness of the discussion. Therefore, future research could fill these lacunae. A study that undertakes a tripartite comparison of the concept of sin in the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant traditions, or a study that places the Islamic view alongside Jewish theology, would open new horizons in this field. Furthermore, an empirical study on how these theological concepts are understood and experienced by ordinary religious adherents in contemporary societies could be a valuable complement to textual and theoretical research.

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Theosophia Islamica EISSN: 2783-3240

Water and Its Protection in Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Theological and Practical Study*

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Abstract

Water, a critical resource for human survival, holds profound theological significance in Islam and Christianity, symbolizing purification, divine grace, and communal responsibility. This comparative study examines the teachings of the Qur'an, Hadith (including Shiite traditions), and the Bible on water, analyzing their implications for conservation and sustainable management across theological, historical,and contemporary dimensions. Through textual analysis, historical review, and case studies from water-scarce regions like the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, the study highlights shared values of stewardship and equity, alongside divergent legal and sacramental approaches. Drawing on peer-reviewed literature and Shiite sources, it explores how these faiths inform modern

* Pourqorbani, A. (2026). Water and Its Protection in Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Theological and Practical Study. *Theosophia Islamica, 6*(1), pp. 365-379.
https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2025.72128.1085

▣ **Article Type:** Research; **Publisher:** Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy
▣ **Received:** 2025/08/03 • **Revised:** 2025/09/20 • **Accepted:** 2025/11/22 •**Online Publication:** 2026/01/10

water conservation strategies, addressing global scarcity challenges. The findings emphasize the potential of faith-based frameworks to complement Sustainable Development Goal, offering actionable insights for policymakers, religious leaders, and communities.

Keywords

Islam, Christianity, Water.

1. Introduction

Water is the cornerstone of life, yet its scarcity threatens global sustainability, with projections indicating a 40% shortfall in freshwater supply by 2030 (UNESCO, 2015, p. 12). Climate change, population growth, and unsustainable consumption exacerbate this crisis, particularly in regions like the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa (IPCC, 2022, p. 245). In Islam and Christianity, water transcends its physical utility, embodying profound spiri- tual and ethical significance. The Qur'an describes water as the source of all life (Surah Al-Anbiya 21:30), while the Bible portrays it as a symbol of purification and divine grace (John 4:14). These theological perspectives frame water as a divine gift, necessitating responsible stewardship and equitable management.

This comparative study explores the theological, historical, and practical dimensions of water in Islam (including Shiite perspectives) and Christianity, focusing on their teachings about conservation and sustainability. The research question is: How do Islamic and Christian teachings on water inform sustainable practices, and what are their shared and divergent approaches to its protection? By analyzing sacred texts, historical water management systems, and contemporary faith-based initiatives, the study draws on peer-reviewed literature and Shiite sources to highlight the role of religion in addressing environmental challenges. Specific attention is given to water-scarce regions, where faith communities play a pivotal role in fostering conservation. Aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (Clean Water and Sanitation), this research underscores the potential of religious frameworks to complement global sustainability efforts, offering insights for policymakers, religious leaders, and communities (United Nations, 2015, p. 6).

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach to investigate water's significance in Islam and Christianity, focusing on theological, historical, and contemporary dimensions. The methodology comprises three primary components:

- Textual Analysis: Sacred texts, including the Qur'an, Hadith (with Shiite collections like Wasa'il al-Shi'a), and the Bible, were analyzed to identify teachings on water's theological and ethical roles. Key passages were selected based on their relevance to themes of purification, stewardship, communal responsibility, and conservation, using established hermeneutical methods (Nasr, 2010, p .10; Ferguson, 1996, p. 45).
- Historical Review: Historical water management practices in Islamic (including Shiite) and Christian contexts were examined using peer-reviewed studies from Scopus and Web of Science databases. Sources were selected for their methodological rigor and focus on water governance in religious societies, covering periods from the Umayyad Caliphate to medieval Christian communities (Glick, 1996, p. 33, Wilkinson, 1977, p. 67).
- Contemporary Case Studies: Faith-based water conservation initiatives in waterscarce regions, such as the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, were investigated. Case studies were drawn from peer-reviewed literature, Shiite sources, and reports by international organizations ((e.g., FAO, 2016, Section 3), focusing on the practical application of religious teachings in modern contexts.

A comprehensive literature review of peer-reviewed articles, books from reputable publishers (e.g., Routledge, Harvard University Press), and Shiite texts (e.g., Tafsir Namuneh) complements these approaches. Sources were evaluated for their academic rigor, relevance to environmental theology and water governance, and alignment with the research question. This multi-faceted methodology ensures a robust analysis of water's role in both faiths, bridging theological insights with practical applications.

3. Water in Islamic Teachings

3.1 Theological Significance

In Islam, water is a divine gift, central to physical and spiritual life. The Qur'an emphasizes its sanctity, stating, "And We made from water every living thing" (Surah Al-Anbiya 21:30), underscoring its role as the source of life (Faruqui, Biswas, & Bino, 2001, p. 23). Shiite exegesis, such as Tafsir Namuneh, interprets this verse as highlighting water's divine origin and humanity's responsibility to protect it as a sacred trust (Makarem Shirazi, 1995, vol. 21, p. 156). Another verse, "And We sent down from the sky water in measure" (Surah Al-Mu'minun 23:18), reflects the principle of moderation in resource use ((Nasr, 2010, p. 78). The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) instructed, "Do not waste water, even if performing ablution on the banks of a flowing river" (Al-Damkhi, 2008, p. 461). Shiite traditions further reinforce this ethos. Imam Ali (AS) stated, "Water is a blessing from Allah; preserve it for the benefit of all" (Wasa'il al-Shi'a, n.d., vol. 17, p. 123), emphasizing equitable distribution. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (AS) advised, "Protect water as you protect your soul, for it sustains both body and spirit" (Bihar al-Anwar, n.d., vol. 76, p. 89), linking conservation to spiritual duty. These teachings, rooted in Shiite hadith, align with the broader Islamic principle of justice (adl) and moderation (i'tidal), positioning water as a communal resource requiring responsible stewardship (Tabataba'i, 1983, vol. 26, p. 234).

3.2 Historical Water Management

Islamic societies, including Shiite communities, developed advanced water management systems reflecting theological principles. The qanat systems in Persia facilitated agriculture in arid regions, with Shiite scholars in the Safavid era (1501–1736) overseeing their maintenance through waqf endowments (Wilkinson, 1977, p. 33; Lambton, 1989, p. 89). In Yemen, the Haq al-Shirb system ensured equitable distribution, a practice echoed in Shiite regions of Iraq, where local clerics mediated water allocation disputes (Glick, 1996, p. 112). During the Qajar dynasty in Iran, Shiite ulama established waqf-based water funds, supporting public fountains and irrigation channels in cities like Yazd and Isfahan (Sadr, 2006, p. 350). These systems balanced spiritual obligations with practical needs, demonstrating the influence of Shiite ethics on resource management ((Faruqui et al., 2001, p. 45).

3.3 Contemporary Applications

Water scarcity is acute in Islamic regions, particularly in the Middle East, where only 0.5% of global freshwater is available, and per capita water availability has declined by 20% since 2000 (FAO, 2016, 9; IPCC, 2022, Section 2.1). In Shiite-majority areas, such as Iran and Iraq, this crisis threatens spiritual practices like ablution and socioeconomic stability, with 60% of the region's population facing water stress (World Bank, 2020, p. 15). Shiite teachings provide a framework for addressing these challenges through community-driven and innovative solutions (Faruqui et al., 2001, p. 67). Shiite religious leaders have been instrumental in promoting conservation. In Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has issued fatwas supporting wastewater treatment, enabling its use in agriculture while adhering to purity standards (Al-Ansari, 2018, p. 770). In Iran, waqf-based initiatives in Yazd have revived traditional qanats, providing water to 15,000 households and reducing groundwater depletion by 25% (Keshavarz & Morid, 2020, p. 573). In Jordan, Shiite communities have adopted water-efficient ablution systems, saving up to 40 liters per person daily, inspired by Imam Ali's teachings on moderation (Atallah & Moustafa, 2019, p. 795). In Indonesia, Shiite organizations collaborate with Sunni counterparts in mosque-led campaigns, promoting conservation through sermons (Saniotis, 2012, p. 160). These efforts, grounded in Shiite principles of justice and stewardship, highlight the relevance of Islamic teachings in addressing modern water challenges.

4. Water in Christian Teachings

4.1 Theological Significance

In Christianity, water is a powerful symbol of purification, renewal, and divine grace. Baptism, a central sacrament, signifies spiritual rebirth and the washing away of sins (Ferguson, 1996, p. 34). The Bible references water 442 times in the New International Version, underscoring its theological importance (White, 2014, p. 125). Passages like John 4:14, where Jesus offers "living water," portray water as a source of eternal life and spiritual nourishment. Similarly, Psalm 23:2 describes God leading believers "beside still waters," symbolizing peace and divine provision, while Isaiah 44:3 promises, "I will pour water on the thirsty land," linking water to divine blessing and renewal (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 89). These texts frame water as a sacred element, connecting humanity to God's grace and creation.

4.2 Biblical Narratives

Water plays a pivotal role in biblical narratives, reflecting divine authority and salvation. The flood in Noah's Ark (Genesis 7) symbolizes God's judgment and renewal, preserving humanity through water (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 123). Jesus walking on water (Matthew 14:22–33) demonstrates divine power over nature, reinforcing water's role as a medium of divine intervention. The parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14) further illustrates water as a tool of liberation and divine providence. These narratives emphasize water's sacredness and humanity's responsibility to steward it as part of God's creation (Tucker, 2006, p. 45).

4.3 Historical Water Management

Christian communities historically integrated water management with spiritual values. In medieval Europe, monasteries developed sophisticated irrigation and water storage systems, such as cisterns and aqueducts, to support agriculture and communal life (Hoffmann, 2014, p. 156). These systems reflected the Christian ethic of caring for creation, as outlined in Genesis 2:15. For example, Benedictine monasteries in France and Italy maintained wells and channels to ensure equitable water access for surrounding communities, aligning with the principle of stewardship ((Stoddart, 2011 , p. 78). Such practices demonstrate how Christian teachings translated into practical resource management.

4.4 Contemporary Applications

Water scarcity affects Christian communities in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, where access to clean water is critical for health and agriculture (IPCC, 2022, p. 256). The World Council of Churches has advocated for water as a human right, urging conservation and equitable access (World Council of Churches, 2012, p. 5). In Kenya, Anglican churches have implemented rainwater harvesting systems, providing clean water to rural communities while promoting environmental stewardship (Stoddart, 2011 , p. 90). In Brazil, Catholic initiatives have supported watershed restoration projects, drawing on Pope Francis's encyclical Laudato Si', which calls for integral ecology and care for creation (Francis, 2015, p. 12). These efforts illustrate how Christian teachings inspire modern conservation practices.

5. Comparative Analysis

5.1 Shared Values

Both Islam and Christianity view water as a divine gift requiring stewardship. In Islam, the Qur'an's emphasis on equitable distribution (e.g., Surah Al-Anbiya 21:30) and Shiite hadiths, such as Imam Ali's call to preserve water for all, reflect the principle of justice (adl) (Faruqui et al., 2001, p. 23; Wasa'il al-Shi'a, n.d.). In Christianity, biblical calls to care for creation (The Holy Bible Genesis 2:15) underscore stewardship as a moral duty (Stoddart, 2011 , p. 78). These shared values align with Sustainable Development Goal 6, which seeks to ensure clean water and sanitation for all (United Nations, 2015, p. 6). Both faiths emphasize water's communal nature, promoting collective responsibility to prevent wastage and ensure access for all.

5.2 Divergent Approaches

Islam's approach, particularly in Shiite contexts, is rooted in legal and ethical frameworks, such as Sharia-based water allocation and fatwas from figures like Ayatollah Sistani, which prioritize equitable access (Gilli, 2008, p. 12; Al-Ansari, 2018, p. 70). Christianity focuses on sacramental uses, such as baptism, symbolizing spiritual purification (Ferguson, 1996, p. 34). While Shiite Islam emphasizes justice through communal governance, Christianity integrates water into liturgical practices, though both foster community engagement through councils

(Islam) and churches (Christianity) to promote conservation (Tucker, 2006, p. 45).

5.3 Role of Religious Leadership

Religious leaders amplify conservation efforts. Shiite scholars, like Ayatollah Sistani, leverage hadiths to advocate sustainable practices, issuing fatwas to support wastewater treatment (Al-Ansari, 2018, p. 770). Sunni scholars similarly promote conservation, creating a unified Islamic approach (Nasr, 2010, p. 45). Christian leaders draw on biblical mandates, such as Pope Francis's Laudato Si', to promote environmental stewardship (Francis, 2015, p. 12). In Sub- Saharan Africa, Anglican and Catholic leaders have mobilized communities for rainwater harvesting projects (Stoddart, 2011, p. 90). This leadership enhances the impact of religious teachings on conservation.

5.4 Technological Integration

Modern technologies enhance faith-based conservation when culturally adapted. In Shiite contexts, water-efficient ablution systems respect ritual purity while reducing consumption, inspired by Imam Ali's teachings ((Atallah & Moustafa, 2019, p. 795). In Saudi Arabia, solar-powered desalination aligns with Islamic values of innovation (Al-Zubari, 2017, p. 385). In Christian communities, church-led initiatives, such as rainwater harvesting in Kenya, integrate technology with stewardship principles (Stoddart, 2011 , p. 90). These examples illustrate how technology bridges traditional values with modern needs.

5.5 Interfaith Collaboration

Interfaith initiatives offer significant potential for addressing water scarcity. In Ethiopia, Muslim and Christian communities have collaborated on watershed restoration projects, combining Islamic principles of equity with Christian stewardship ethics (Jenkins, 2009, p. 290). In Iraq, Shiite and Christian leaders have promoted joint water conservation campaigns, leveraging shared theological values (Al-Ansari, 2018, p. 775). These collaborations demonstrate how shared beliefs can foster unified action, enhancing the impact of faith-based conservation efforts.

6. Contemporary Issues and Responses

Water scarcity, driven by climate change, population growth, and unsustainable practices, poses a significant global challenge, with a projected 40% shortfall in freshwater supply by 2030 (UNESCO, 2015; IPCC, 2022, p. 12). In Islamic regions like the Middle East, where only 0.5% of water is potable, scarcity threatens spiritual practices like ablution and physical well-being (FAO, 2016; Faruqui et al., 2001, Section 2.1). In Christian communities, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, water shortages exacerbate health and agricultural challenges, contributing to socioeconomic disparities (Stoddart, 2011 , p. 78).

Faith-based responses have proven effective in addressing these issues. In Shiite contexts, fatwas from figures like Ayatollah Sistani have facilitated wastewater treatment, enabling its use in agriculture (Al-Ansari, 2018, p. 770). In Jordan, religious endorsements have supported treated wastewater for agriculture (Atallah & Moustafa, 2019, p. 795). In Saudi Arabia, solar-powered desalination projects reflect Islamic values of innovation (Al-Zubari, 2017, p. 385). Community-based initiatives, such as Morocco's water councils, draw on Islamic principles of equity (Doukkali, 2005, p. 75). In Christian contexts, churches have led conservation efforts. In Kenya, Anglican communities have implemented rainwater harvesting systems (Stoddart, 2011 , p. 90). In Brazil, Catholic initiatives inspired by Laudato Si' have supported watershed restoration (Francis, 2015, p. 12). These efforts align with Sustainable Development Goal 6, demonstrating the potential of faith-based frameworks to address global water challenges (United Nations, 2015, p. 6).

7. Conclusion

Islamic and Christian teachings underscore water's sanctity and the ethical imperative to conserve it. Islam's focus on communal equity, reinforced by Shiite hadiths from Imam Ali and Imam Sadiq, and Christianity's emphasis on stewardship provide robust frameworks for addressing water scarcity (Faruqui et al., 2001, p. 8.). Practical initiatives, such as wastewater reuse in Shiite regions and rainwater harvesting in Christian communities, demonstrate the applicability of these teachings (Al-Ansari, 2018, 19.). By aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 6, both faiths contribute to global sustainability efforts (United Nations, 2015, p. 6). Religious leaders can amplify these efforts through education, advocacy, and interfaith collaboration, as seen in joint projects in Ethiopia and Iraq (Jenkins, 2009, 17; Al-Ansari, 2018, p. 290). Future research should explore how interfaith partnerships can enhance water conservation, fostering innovative solutions that bridge theological and environmental objectives.

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