

# Religious Autonomy and the Existential Process of Agency: A Comparative Analysis of the Foundations of Women's Moral Agency in Kant's Philosophy and Shi'i Islam

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## Article History:

Received: September 9, 2025

Revised: February 24, 2026

Accepted: February 25, 2026

Published: February 25, 2026

## Abstract

*This study conducts a comparative analysis of women's moral agency within two intellectual frameworks: Kant's practical philosophy and Shi'i Islam. The central research question is: How is the structure of women's moral agency formulated in these systems, and how does each address the gap between inner subjectivity and the external actualization of agency? In the Kantian section, employing conceptual analysis, the contradiction between the transcendental autonomous subject and the empirical subject of woman characterized by deficient rationality is analyzed as the primary obstacle to the objective realization of women's agency. In the Shi'i Islamic section, drawing on Quranic foundations such as *fiṭrah* (primordial nature) and *khilāfah* (vicegerency), and mediated by the views of Mullā Ṣadrā on substantial motion, *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* on credal perceptions, and *Muṭahharī* on psycho-emotional differences, a model of "situated agency" is presented. In this model, women's psycho-physical differences are regarded not as deficiencies, but as existential gradations and a basis for the wise distribution of responsibilities. The legal institutions of Shi'i Islam, including *mahr*, *nafaqah*, and independent property rights, function as structural supports for agency, facilitating the transition from*



*inner subjectivity to external actualization. The novelty of this research lies in its formulation of “religious autonomy” in contrast to Kantian autonomy.*

**Keywords:** *Kant's Philosophy; Moral Agency; Religious Autonomy; Shi'i Islam; Substantial Motion; Women's Rights; Women's Moral Agency*

## INTRODUCTION

The question of women's moral agency and how it is realized in individual and social life ranks among the fundamental issues in contemporary moral philosophy. A comparative study of Kant's philosophy as the most significant ethical system of modernity and Shi'i Islam as a living tradition with comprehensive moral claims opens new horizons for understanding this question. An examination of the existing scholarship reveals that previous studies have either confined themselves to one-sided analysis, reduced Islam to juridical rulings, or arrived at unbalanced analyses through merely defensive postures or uncritical acceptance of feminist presuppositions. What has been neglected is the question of the structure of women's moral agency and how the transition from inner subjectivity to its external actualization is addressed in these two intellectual systems.

This study, moving beyond the philosopher-versus-religion dichotomy, formulates the problem at the level of comparison between two systems of moral anthropology: Kant's practical philosophy grounded in self-grounding reason, and Shi'i Islam as an integrative model of reason, primordial nature (*fiṭrah*), and revelation, with simultaneous attention to foundations and mechanisms of actualization (Jouili, 2011; Mahmood, 2006; Sehlikoglu, 2018). The central question is how the structure of women's moral agency is formulated in these two systems and how each addresses the problem of the gap between inner subjectivity and the external actualization of agency (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025; Crossouard et al., 2020; Guspita et al., 2025; Kayalı, 2025; Vidūnaitė, 2023).

Moral agency is understood as the capacity for choice, subjectivity, and responsibility based on ethical criteria, encompassing ontological, epistemological, psychological, institutional, and teleological dimensions. The novelty of this research lies in five aspects: the transition from the static concept of dignity to the dynamic concept of agency; the formulation of religious autonomy in contrast to Kantian autonomy; the employment of Mullā Ṣadrā's theory of substantial motion to explain women's differences as existential gradations rather than deficiencies; the application of 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī's theory of "credital" perceptions (*i'tibāriyyāt*) to the analysis of women's situated agency; and the redefinition of Islamic legal institutions (mahr, nafaqah, financial independence) as structural supports for agency (Khawar, 2023; Mahmood, 2009; Rakhmat, 2023; Ridwan & Ismail, 2025; Sahar, 2025).

The current research is organized according to a five-part structure: the theoretical framework of moral agency; an analysis of the structure of women's agency in Kant's philosophy and its internal contradiction between the autonomous transcendental subject and the empirical subject of woman characterized by deficient rationality; the formulation of the Shi'i model of women's agency drawing on the Qur'an and the views of Mullā Ṣadrā, Ṭabāṭabā'ī, and Muṭahharī; an analysis of Islamic legal institutions as structural supports for agency in comparison with the absence of institutional mechanisms in Kant's philosophy; and finally, a comparative analysis formulating religious autonomy in contrast to Kantian autonomy.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF MORAL AGENCY**

### **The Concept of Moral Agency and Its Distinction from Dignity**

Moral agency is one of the fundamental concepts in contemporary moral philosophy and philosophical anthropology, referring to the human capacity for recognition, judgment, choice, and

action based on ethical criteria (Bacin, 2022; Ferdynus, 2024; Mattingly & Throop, 2018). Unlike dignity, which concerns the inherent worth and value of the human being, this concept emphasizes the process of subjectivity, the capacity for choice, and responsibility. Dignity responds to the question of what constitutes human value, whereas agency is concerned with the question of how the human being acts ethically (Fasihi & Fazeli, 2024; Nurdiyanto et al., 2025; Tanjung et al., 2025; Wahyuningsih et al., 2026).

In the tradition of moral philosophy, this distinction is rooted in discussions raised by philosophers such as Kant, who distinguished between the absolute value of the human being as an end in itself and the capacity to posit moral law. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant explicitly considers the human being to possess dignity due to autonomy, distinguishing this dignity from any relative value (Kant, 1996b, p. 434). In Islamic philosophy, traces of this distinction can be observed in 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī's theory of credital perceptions, wherein a distinction is made between credital values posited on the basis of real needs and the foundational principles of *fiṭrah* rooted in the common human nature (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2010, pp. 98–102).

The distinction between dignity and agency is important because a human being may possess inherent dignity but, due to various obstacles, be unable to actualize their moral agency. This potential gap between dignity and agency formulates the central problem of the present research: how can one move from inner subjectivity to the external actualization of agency? In Kant's philosophy, this problem emerges in the form of the contradiction between the transcendental subject endowed with autonomy, on the one hand, and the empirical subject of woman characterized in Kant's anthropology by deficient rationality, on the other (Kant, 1997, pp. 303–308). In Shi'i Islam, this problem can be pursued in the relation between *fiṭrah* as the common

human foundation and the psycho-physical differences that manifest in existential gradations ([Şadrā, 1981](#), pp. 345–347).

### **The Four Dimensions of Moral Agency**

For a systematic analysis of women's moral agency in the two intellectual traditions of Kant and Shi'i Islam, five distinct but interconnected dimensions can be identified, each opening specific questions and providing a coherent framework for comparative study ([Anderson, 2003](#); [Caniago et al., 2024](#); [Izza et al., 2025](#); [Topkara, 2025](#)).

#### *The Ontological Dimension of Agency*

The ontological dimension of agency concerns the existential place and origin of moral subjectivity. The central question in this dimension is: in which layer of human existence is moral agency rooted, and what relation does it establish with human truth? Is agency something accidental and acquired, or is it essential and structural? In Kant's philosophy, the autonomy of practical reason constitutes the ontological foundation of agency. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant introduces autonomy as the fundamental characteristic of the will of every rational being, maintaining that an autonomous will is one whose law is determined by the will itself, independently of any properties of its objects ([Ghalib et al., 2022](#); [Kant, 1996a](#), p. 432; [Reath, 2006](#); [Seer et al., 2024](#)).

This autonomy is not an acquired characteristic but an essential characteristic of every rational being that makes them possible as a moral agent. In Shi'i Islam, *fiṭrah* as the common human nature is considered the ontological source of agency. *Fiṭrah* refers to the common existential structure in which all human beings, both men and women, participate, and which forms the foundation of their cognitive, emotional, and practical capacities ([Tabāṭabā'ī, 1984](#), p. 169). Mullā Şadrā's theory of substantial motion also formulates agency not as something static and completed, but as a dynamic and fluid

process. According to this theory, the human soul in its path of substantial motion traverses existential stages, and each stage provides specific capacities for agency (Ṣadrā, 1981, pp. 112–115). This view makes possible the explanation of differences in agency while maintaining the unity of human truth.

### *The Epistemological Dimension of Agency*

A systematic comparison of women's moral agency in Kant and Shi'i Islam can be organized through five dimensions: ontological, epistemological, psychological, institutional, and teleological. Across the literature, this framework is plausible because the corpus repeatedly distinguishes moral worth from moral action, abstract principle from situated judgment, and inner subjectivity from its social realization (Bremner, 2023; Brown, 2022; Cekić, 2025; Ezedike, 2020; Ghosh, 2025; Korsgaard, 1986; Olamaiekopaie & Arzroomchilar, 2022; Taheri, 2019).

The epistemological dimension of agency concerns the epistemic sources that guide ethical choice and action. The central question is: by what means does the moral agent recognize good and evil, and from where do the criteria of moral judgment originate? In Kant's philosophy, pure practical reason is the sole source of moral knowledge, excluding any intervention of emotion, inclination, or sensory experience from the realm of ethics. In the Critique of Practical Reason, Kant maintains that the moral law must be discovered a priori and independently of any empirical matter, and that only practical reason is capable of this discovery (Kant, 2006, pp. 19–30). Although this approach supports the objectivity and universality of the moral law, it faces challenges in explaining how these abstract laws are to be applied in concrete and specific situations.

In Shi'i Islam, reason, fiṭrah, and revelation are recognized as epistemic sources of agency. 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'i's theory of credital perceptions demonstrates that human beings posit ethical and legal

credital perceptions on the basis of their real needs, and this process of positing is itself rooted in fiṭrah (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2010, pp. 105–110). In *The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī divides credital perceptions into two categories – pre-social and post-social – and explains the fixed roots of human practical credital perceptions in the domain of individual and social action (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2010, pp. 112–118). This theory provides significant capacity for analyzing women's situated agency, as it shows how a moral agent can, on the basis of their real needs and relying on foundational principles of fiṭrah, posit credital perceptions that are effective in various circumstances.

### *The Psychological Dimension of Agency*

The psychological dimension of agency concerns the role of emotions, affections, and personality characteristics in the process of ethical choice and action. The central question is: what place do human emotions occupy in moral agency, and what relation do they establish with practical rationality? Do emotions stand alongside rationality and obstruct it, or are they along its continuum and complementary to it? Kant's philosophy, with its emphasis on abstract formalism, excludes emotions from the realm of ethics and makes the moral worth of action depend solely on the motive of duty (Kant, 1996b, pp. 393–399).

This approach has been seriously criticized by feminist philosophers. Martha Nussbaum and other feminist critics maintain that the neglect of emotions is the main weakness of the Kantian system in explaining women's moral experiences, because women's moral experiences are often intertwined with care, empathy, and emotional relationships, and a system that ignores these dimensions is incapable of fully explaining women's agency (Nussbaum, 1993).

In Shi'i Islam, concepts such as *mawaddah*, *raḥmah*, and *'ishrah bi-al-ma'rūf* indicate that emotions are not in opposition to rationality,

but rather along its continuum and defined as a level of existential perception. In his commentary on verse 21 of Surah al-Rum, 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī draws a precise semantic distinction between *mawaddah* and *raḥmah*, showing that these emotions are not merely fleeting feelings but existential realities that make possible the marital bond (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1984, pp. 169–171). Murtaḍā Muṭahhari, in *The System of Women's Rights in Islam*, distinguishing between equality of rights and similarity of rights, analyzes women's psycho-emotional differences not as a deficiency in agency, but as the foundation for the wise distribution of responsibilities (Muṭahhari, 2017, pp. 112–115).

### *The Institutional Dimension of Agency*

The institutional dimension of agency concerns the social and legal mechanisms that support the objective realization of agency and provide the groundwork for the transition from inner subjectivity to external action. The central question is: is the mere establishment of the theoretical foundations of agency sufficient for its realization, or are structural supports needed that protect agency in conditions where inner motivations are deficient? Kant's philosophy, with its emphasis on inner motivation and respect for moral law, fails to provide an institutional mechanism for the transition from inner subjectivity to the external realization of agency. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant makes the moral worth of action depend solely on the agent's motive and considers actions performed out of fear of the law or hope for reward to lack moral worth (Kant, 1996b, p. 400). The kingdom of ends, as an abstract ideal of the ethical community, lacks executive guarantee and objective mechanisms for the practical realization of ethical principles (Kant, 1996b, p. 433).

In Shi'i Islam, legal institutions such as *mahr*, *nafaqah*, and independent property rights function as structural supports for agency. These institutions are not substitutes for moral motivation but rather support it in vulnerable situations. *Mahr*, as a financial right

that the man pays to the woman, guarantees the woman's economic independence and bargaining power, placing her in a position of subjectivity and choice (Mutahhari, 2017, pp. 201–205). Nafaqah, as the man's financial duty to provide for the woman's basic needs, is a structural support against potential vulnerabilities (Mutahhari, 2017, pp. 215–220). Women's independent property rights also enable them to act as independent agents in economic and social spheres without dependence on others (Mutahhari, 2017, p. 148). These institutions, within the framework of Sharia, make possible the synergy of inner motivation and external structure.

## RESULTS

### **The Structure of Women's Moral Agency in Kant's Philosophy**

#### *The Foundations of Kantian Autonomy and Its Relation to Moral Agency*

Kant's moral philosophy is founded on the principle that ethical obligations are based on a standard of rationality that he refers to as the “categorical imperative.” From Kant's perspective, immorality signifies a violation of the categorical imperative and consequently a failure to be rational (Kant, 1996a, p. 440). What distinguishes Kant's moral philosophy from preceding traditions is the fundamental doctrine that the rational will must be regarded as autonomous; that is, it is itself the author of the law to which it submits. Accordingly, the fundamental principle of morality, namely the categorical imperative, is nothing other than the law of this autonomous will itself (Kant, 1996a, p. 440).

At the heart of Kant's moral philosophy lies a particular conception of reason whose scope in the practical realm extends beyond the Humean view of reason as the “slave of the passions.” Moreover, it is the presence of this self-legislating reason in every

person that, in Kant's view, provides decisive grounds for regarding every human being as possessing equal worth and deserving of equal respect (Kant, 1996a, p. 434). For the analysis of moral agency in Kant's philosophy, a distinction must be made between two distinct domains. On the one hand, there is the "transcendental subject," which is the main subject of discussion in Kant's foundational works on moral philosophy; a subject that possesses autonomy and inherent dignity and is considered the author of moral law.

This subject lacks any empirical determination, including gender, race, or social position, and functions as a formal and universal structure (Mosser, 1999). Autonomy in this domain signifies the will's capacity for legislation independent of any characteristics of the objects of the will (Kant, 1996a, p. 432). On the other hand, there is the "empirical subject," discussed in works such as the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, which is a human being with objective characteristics, gender differences, and specific social positions. This duality between the transcendental subject and the empirical subject forms the foundation of the problem that subsequently emerges concerning women's agency.

### ***Kant's Gendered Anthropology and the Description of Feminine Rationality***

In his anthropological works, particularly in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* and the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, Kant describes feminine and masculine characteristics. These descriptions stand in stark contradiction to the universal principles of his moral philosophy. From Kant's perspective, women belong to the domain of the "beautiful" while men belong to the domain of the "sublime." Women lack the necessary capacity for abstract thinking and philosophizing and are confined to the realm of aesthetics, emotions, and practical matters such as housekeeping and child-rearing (Baron, 1997).

In the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant describes women as beings lacking the rational independence necessary for active citizenship and confines them to traditional roles of domesticity and passivity (Kant, 2006, p. 310). He maintains that nature has created feminine weakness for the preservation of the human species and the possibility of enduring bonds between man and woman. This natural weakness renders women in need of male protection and guidance (Kant, 2006, pp. 303–308). However, recent research has shown that Kant distinguishes between two meanings of “nature” and that his descriptions of feminine and masculine characteristics should be regarded as social categories influenced by culture and education. In a brief note, Kant raises the question of whether femininity is merely a product of education or something natural (Pape, 2023). This indicates that Kant was aware of the influence of socio-cultural factors on the formation of gender identity.

### ***The Gap Between the Transcendental Subject and the Empirical Subject of Woman***

The manifest contradiction between the universal principles of Kant's moral philosophy and his gendered anthropology raises fundamental questions concerning the internal coherence of his philosophical project. Does this duality merely stem from the cultural prejudices of the Enlightenment era that can be separated from Kant's transcendental philosophy, or is it rooted in the structure of his philosophical system?

Mari Mikkola, distinguishing between “situational deficiency” and “inherent deficiency” in her analysis, argues that many of the limitations Kant attributes to women are not inherent, biological incapacities but rather products of the cultural structures and historical conditions of his era. Citing Kant's *Anthropology*, in which women are described as “rational beings,” and referring to the existence of “heroic women,” Mikkola shows that Kant does not deny

women's moral agency in his theoretical principles (Mikkola, 2011, pp. 92–98). Nevertheless, she acknowledges that Kant was unable in practice to translate this theoretical agency into objective rights and an appropriate social position for women.

Kurt Mosser adopts a different defensive strategy by distinguishing between the “transcendental subject” and the “empirical subject” in Kant's philosophy. He argues that the “transcendental unity of apperception,” manifested in the “I think,” is not an empirical individual possessing specific characteristics such as gender, race, or class, but rather a formal and universal structure that constitutes the condition of possibility for all cognition and experience (Mosser, 1999). In Mosser's view, this reading can provide a foundation for gender equality: if moral agency depends solely on the capacity to employ the “I think” and this capacity is potentially accessible to all human beings irrespective of gender, then women must also be regarded as “complete moral subjects” (Mosser, 1999). Mosser specifies that Kant's gendered views are not logical conclusions derived from his transcendental principles but rather reflections of the cultural presuppositions of his era.

Helga Varden offers another approach by emphasizing the necessity of distinguishing two levels in Kant's philosophy, namely the “moral ideal of freedom” and “moral anthropology.” In Varden's view, Kant's anthropological works were written not as determinations of moral duty but as descriptions of the socio-historical norms of his time. Drawing on Kant's systematic ethical texts, particularly the Doctrine of Right, she shows that Kant in these works defines all human beings, including women, as autonomous persons who have the right to strive for active citizenship (Varden, 2017, p. 26). Consequently, Kant's gendered views are not essential but rather products of social structures and are subject to change through the expansion of freedom (Varden, 2017, pp. 29–30).

In contrast, Robin Schott and other feminist critics regard this contradiction not as peripheral but as fundamental and deeply rooted in the structure of Kant's philosophy. Schott argues that gender in Kant's philosophy is not a subsidiary or marginal matter but is intertwined with the core of concepts such as rationality, autonomy, subjectivity, beauty, and community (Schott, 1997, pp. 14–18). From this perspective, the definition of pure reason and practical reason in Kant's philosophy is tied to characteristics that were regarded as “masculine” in the culture of his time, from which women were deemed excluded.

### *Feminist Critique and the Problem of Neglecting Emotions*

Martha Nussbaum, adopting an external perspective and employing the criteria of Aristotelian virtue ethics, critiques the formal and abstract structure of Kantian morality. From Nussbaum's standpoint, Kant's emphasis on moral formalism and universal abstraction, while securing objectivity, proves incapable of explaining the “content” of the good life, the characteristics of concrete experience, and values such as care and empathy that are of particular significance to women (Nussbaum, 1993). Nussbaum regards social and institutional reforms as the cornerstone for the flourishing of agency and the realization of justice for women, maintaining that exclusive reliance on formal principles in this domain is insufficient (Nussbaum, 1993).

This critique is particularly important because women's moral experiences are often intertwined with care, empathy, and emotional relationships. Kant's philosophy, by excluding emotions from the realm of ethics and restricting the moral worth of action to the motive of duty, is incapable of explaining this dimension of women's moral life. Moreover, the description of women in Kant's anthropology as beings dependent on emotions and lacking independent rationality itself constitutes an obstacle to the realization of their agency. This

internal contradiction within the Kantian system seriously challenges the question of the possibility of the objective realization of women's agency within the framework of this philosophy.

### ***The Absence of an Institutional Mechanism for the Transition from Inner Agency to External Actualization***

One of the most important critiques leveled against Kant's moral philosophy is the absence of an institutional mechanism for the transition from inner subjectivity to the external actualization of agency. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant makes the moral worth of action depend solely on the agent's motive and considers actions performed out of fear of the law or hope for reward to lack moral worth (Kant, 1996b, p. 400). The "kingdom of ends," as the ideal of the ethical community, lacks executive guarantee and objective mechanisms for the practical realization of ethical principles (Kant, 1996b, p. 443). This problem assumes more serious dimensions with respect to women's agency. Since Kant provides no specific institutional mechanism for the objective guarantee of women's dignity and agency, and on the other hand describes women in his anthropology as lacking the rational independence necessary for full participation in social life, women's moral agency remains effectively confined to the realm of theory and abstract ideal, with no path opened for its objective realization in social and legal structures.

Andrews Reath, in his analysis of the concept of autonomy and universal law in Kant's philosophy, emphasizes that although Kant's ethical principles are theoretically universal and comprehensive, they require for their practical realization social and institutional contexts that Kant himself did not address (Reath, 2006). This theoretical lacuna, particularly in the domain of women's issues, emerges as a vulnerable point in Kant's philosophical system. An examination of the foundations of women's moral agency in Kant's philosophy reveals that this philosophical system confronts an unresolved

duality. On the one hand, Kant's universal ethical principles such as autonomy, the human being as an end in itself, and inherent dignity provide a potential capacity for explaining women's agency. On the other hand, his gendered anthropology, which attributes deficient rationality to women and confines them to the realm of emotions and aesthetics, creates a serious obstacle to the realization of this agency.

Furthermore, the absence of an institutional mechanism for the transition from inner subjectivity to the external actualization of agency deepens the gap between theory and practice in Kant's philosophy. Even if it is accepted that Kant's theoretical principles are compatible with women's agency, the lack of executive guarantees and supportive structures for the objective realization of this agency in social life casts doubt on the efficacy of his ethical system in the domain of women's issues. This theoretical-practical gap raises the question of the possibility of an alternative that could, through the integration of theoretical foundations and practical mechanisms, provide a more coherent response to the problem of women's moral agency.

## **Foundations of Women's Moral Agency in Shi'i Islam**

### *Qur'anic Foundations of Agency*

#### *Fitrah as the Simultaneous Source of Rationality and Emotions*

The concept of fitrah in the Holy Qur'an, as the common human nature, constitutes the most fundamental existential layer that makes possible the moral agency of both women and men. The verse “therefore set your face to the religion purely, the upright creation upon which he originated people. there is no changing of the creation of Allah. this is the valuable religion, although most people do not know?” (Qur'an, 30:30) indicates that all human beings, regardless of gender, are created upon a common fitrah that directs them toward truth and goodness. In his commentary on this verse, 'Allamah

Ṭabāṭabā'ī interprets fiṭrah as the common existential structure in which all human beings participate and which forms the foundation of their cognitive, emotional, and practical capacities (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1984, p. 169).

From the perspective of the present research, the significance of this verse lies in its introduction of fiṭrah not merely as a source of pure rationality, but as the simultaneous source of rationality and emotions. This view stands in contrast to Kant's philosophy, which excludes emotions from the realm of ethics. In the Qur'anic view, human emotions such as affection (mawaddah) and mercy (raḥmah), which will be discussed in subsequent verses, are not opposed to rationality but rather extend along its continuum as a level of existential perception. This foundational perspective makes possible the formulation of an agency that is both rational and emotional, and that is more compatible with women's lived experience.

### *The Divine Infusion of Spirit and Vicegerency as the Foundation of Supra-Gendered Agency*

The verses concerning the divine infusion of spirit into the human being provide another foundation for supra-gendered agency. God states in Surah al-Ḥijr: “ when i have shaped him and ran my created soul in him fall down prostrating towards him” (Qur'an, 15:29). In his commentary on this verse, 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī emphasizes that the attribution of the spirit to God indicates the inherent honor and dignity of the human being, and that this honor is not exclusive to men but is shared by all human beings, both women and men (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1984, p. 136). The important point is that in this verse and similar verses, gender plays no role in the reception of the divine spirit, indicating the supra-gendered agency of women and men. Furthermore, the verse of vicegerency, “ when your lord said to the angels: `i am placing on the earth a caliph “ (Qur'an, 2:30), indicates that the human being, as God's representative on earth, possesses

responsibilities and prerogatives that constitute them as a moral agent. In his commentary on this verse, Javadi Amoli maintains that vicegerency is not exclusive to men and that women share equally in this exalted station with men (Amoli, 2007, p. 75).

### *Substantial Motion and the Gradedness of Existence*

#### *Explanation of Psycho-Physical Differences as Existential Gradations*

The theory of substantial motion, one of Mullā Ṣadrā's fundamental innovations in Islamic philosophy, opens a new horizon for understanding the psycho-physical differences between women and men. According to this theory, the human soul at its inception is a corporeal entity that, through substantial motion and existential intensification, traverses the vegetative, animal, and rational stages until it attains intellectual abstraction (Ṣadrā, 1981, pp. 345–350). From this perspective, the psycho-physical differences between women and men are not signs of existential deficiency but rather represent different gradations of the manifestation of existence and distinct capacities for the disclosure of divine names. In *al-Asfār al-arbaʿah*, Mullā Ṣadrā, based on the principiality of existence and the gradedness of existence, interprets the “single soul” not as a historical individual but as a single, fluid reality of which all human individuals—both male and female—are but gradations. He emphasizes that gender pertains to the accidental properties of the lower levels of existence and that, at the level of intellectual abstraction, sexual distinction has no meaning (Ṣadrā, 1981, pp. 345–347). This view makes possible the explanation of differences in agency while maintaining the unity of human truth.

#### *The Negation of Women's Existential Deficiency While Recognizing Differences*

In *al-Ḥikmat al-ʿarshiyyah*, Mullā Ṣadrā maintains that human dignity is not contingent upon material accidents but is rather

dependent on the immateriality of the soul and proximity to God. From this perspective, men and women are entirely equal with respect to the ultimate purpose of creation, and gender differences at this existential level confer no ontological privilege whatsoever (Şadrā, 1983, pp. 218–220). This claim finds its philosophical formulation in Mullā Şadrā's theory of “bodily origination and spiritual subsistence”: the human soul, through its substantial motion, traverses the vegetative and animal stages and ultimately attains intellectual abstraction—a stage at which gender, as a material accident, ceases to be relevant (Şadrā, 1981, pp. 112–115). From the perspective of the present research, Mullā Şadrā's theory of substantial motion possesses significant capacity for responding to the critiques leveled against Kant's philosophy. Whereas in Kant's philosophy the duality between the transcendental subject and the empirical subject of woman leads to an unresolved gap, in Mullā Şadrā's philosophy this duality is resolved through the theory of the gradedness of existence and substantial motion. Women's psycho-physical differences in this view are regarded not as obstacles to agency but as existential gradations and distinct capacities for the manifestation of human perfections.

### *The Theory of Credital Perceptions*

#### *Fiṭrah as the Source of Positing Ethical-Legal Credital Perceptions*

The theory of credital perceptions (al-idrakāt al-i'tibāriyyah) of 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī is one of the most important theories in Islamic philosophy for explaining the origin of ethical and legal credital perceptions. In *The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī distinguishes between two categories of perceptions: true perceptions, which disclose objective realities, and credital perceptions, which human beings posit on the basis of their real needs (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2010, pp. 98–102). In Ṭabāṭabā'ī's view, credital perceptions are rooted in fiṭrah and human real needs, and these needs

are not exclusive to men; rather, women also participate in the positing of these credital perceptions.

In his analysis, Ṭabāṭabā'ī divides credital perceptions into two categories – pre-social and post-social – and explains the fixed roots of human practical credital perceptions in the domain of individual and social action (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2010, pp. 112–118). From the perspective of the present research, this theory provides significant capacity for analyzing women's situated agency. According to this theory, women as moral agents can, on the basis of their real needs and relying on the foundational principles of fiṭrah, posit credital perceptions that are effective in various circumstances. This view distances itself from both cultural determinism and modern extreme individualism.

### *Women's Situated Agency in Light of Real Needs*

One of the most important applications of the theory of credital perceptions to the discussion of women's agency is the possibility of analyzing “situated agency.” Ṭabāṭabā'ī maintains that human beings, in confronting their real needs, engage in the positing of credital perceptions, and although these credital perceptions have no external correspondence, they possess external effects, and sometimes their effects are even greater than those of objective realities (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2010, pp. 105–110).

This analysis provides a philosophical foundation for the idea that women as moral agents can posit different credital perceptions in different circumstances, and this adaptation to the exigencies of time and place is not a deficiency of agency but rather an indication of its flexibility and dynamism. Javadi Amoli, in continuation of this discussion, emphasizes that the creational differences between women and men provide a basis for the wise distribution of responsibilities, and these differences should not lead to value discrimination (Amoli, 2007, p. 80). This view establishes a connection

between the theory of credital perceptions and the discussion of gender differences.

## **Analysis of Psycho-Emotional Differences**

### **The Distinction Between Equality of Rights and Similarity of Rights**

Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, in *The System of Women's Rights in Islam*, adopts a critical approach toward Western philosophies and analyzes the psycho-emotional differences between women and men. In Muṭahharī's view, the psycho-emotional differences between women and men do not signify women's deficiency but rather indicate a wise distribution of capacities commensurate with existential functions (Muṭahharī, 2017, pp. 112-115). By distinguishing between "equality of rights" and "similarity of rights," he argues that neglecting natural and psychological differences not only fails to achieve gender justice but results in compounded injustice. Muṭahharī explicitly states that instinctive differences between women and men form the basis for the distribution of responsibilities and rights (Muṭahharī, 2017, p. 148). This view, unlike Kant's philosophy which reduces gender differences to rational deficiency, regards differences as distinct and complementary capacities.

### **Women's Emotions as the Foundation of Agency, Not an Obstacle to It**

Muṭahharī raises the central question of why Western philosophy, despite its claims of freedom and equality, failed to provide a successful account of feminine emotions and their relationship to dignity. His answer points to the "forgetfulness of the human being" and the "internal contradiction" of the Enlightenment project (Muṭahharī, 2017, p. 163). In his thought, women's emotions are not obstacles to agency but rather constitute dignity itself and serve as the foundation for women's moral responsibility. From the perspective of the present research, this view is particularly significant because it demonstrates that in Shi'i Islam, unlike in Kant's

philosophy, emotions are not opposed to rationality but rather extend along its continuum as a level of existential perception. Thus, the critique leveled against Kant for neglecting affectivity finds its counterpoint in the Shi'i model, which not only recognizes emotions but imbues them with meaning within the framework of dignity and divine vicegerency.

### ***Islamic Feminism and the Rereading of Women's Agency***

After analyzing the foundations of women's moral agency in Shi'i Islam, it is necessary to address the question of whether there have also been critiques within the Islamic tradition of traditional interpretations of women's status. Islamic feminism, as an intellectual movement emerging from within the Islamic tradition, has engaged in a rereading of concepts such as *qiwāmah*, *mahr*, *nafaqah*, and women's agency, drawing on Qur'anic foundations while critiquing patriarchal interpretations. This section examines the views of three of the most prominent thinkers in this field.

Amina Wadud, an American Muslim scholar and philosopher, is one of the most influential figures in Islamic feminism. Her foundational work, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Wadud, 1999), represents a turning point in feminist hermeneutics of the Qur'an. Wadud, emphasizing the principle of *tawhīd* as the foundation of justice and equality, engages in a rereading of verses related to women and argues that the history of Qur'anic interpretation has been dominated by male exegetes, leading to the formation of readings that reflect male experience and worldview rather than necessarily divine intent (Wadud, 1999, p. 2). On issues such as divorce, polygyny, and child custody, she presents a reading of the Qur'an compatible with women's dignity and agency, demonstrating that women's limitations stem not from the Qur'anic text itself but from patriarchal interpretations (Wadud, 1999, pp. 82–90). From the perspective of the

present research, Wadud's critique of traditional interpretations of the Qur'an parallels Nussbaum's critique of Kant's abstract formalism; both emphasize that neglect of women's lived experience has led to an incomplete reading of the sacred text.

Asma Barlas, a Pakistani-American professor and researcher, argues in her influential work "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an (Barlas, 2002) that the Qur'an inherently possesses an anti-patriarchal message, but this message has been distorted throughout history by male-dominated interpretations (Barlas, 2002, p. 9). Relying on the principle of *tawhīd* and the negation of any similarity between God and creation, Barlas demonstrates that concepts such as male domination over women cannot be extracted from the Qur'an, as such concepts would require a kind of resemblance between God and men (Barlas, 2002, pp. 94–96). In her analysis of *qiwāmah*, she shows that this concept signifies economic and protective guardianship, not domination or existential superiority (Barlas, 2002, pp. 184–186). This reading aligns completely with the interpretation of *qiwāmah* by 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Javadi Amoli referenced in previous sections, indicating that Islamic feminist critiques extend along the continuum of philosophical-exegetical readings within the Shi'i tradition.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini, a distinguished Iranian social anthropologist and researcher, examines in her works, particularly in *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Mir-Hosseini, 2000), the controversies surrounding gender in the Qom seminary with an anthropological approach. Through in-depth interviews with traditional, neo-traditional, and modernist jurists, she demonstrates how juridical concepts related to women are undergoing reinterpretation and transformation (Mir-Hosseini, 2000, pp. 1–15). Mir-Hosseini identifies three main approaches to the question of gender in Shi'i jurisprudence: the traditional approach, emphasizing

inequality and complementarity between men and women; the neo-traditional approach, attempting to offer more moderate readings through concepts such as “equilibrium” rather than “equality”; and the modernist approach, believing in full gender equality and seeking a fundamental revision of juridical foundations (Mir-Hosseini, 2000, pp. 15–18). From the perspective of the present research, Mir-Hosseini's analysis of intra-seminary controversies concerning gender demonstrates that women's agency is not a static concept but a dynamic and evolving issue within the Shi'i juridical-theological tradition.

What emerges from reviewing the views of these three thinkers is an emphasis on several central points directly connected to the problem of this research. First, the foundational texts of Islam possess significant capacity for explaining women's agency and dignity, but this capacity has been obscured throughout history by patriarchal readings. Second, their critique of institutions such as *qiwamah* is not a negation of these institutions but rather a negation of readings that infer male domination from them. Third, Islamic feminism emphasizes the necessity of reinterpreting religious texts with attention to women's lived experience and employing new interpretive methods.

### **Structural Supports of Agency in Shi'i Islam**

#### ***Mahr: Financial Independence and Bargaining Power***

Mahr in the legal system of Islam is a financial right that belongs to the woman at the time of marriage and is referred to in the Holy Qur'an as “*nuḥlah*” (a gracious gift). God states in Surah al-Nisā': “give women their dowries freely” (Qur'an, 4:4). The term “*nuḥlah*” in this verse indicates that mahr is not the price of a commodity but a gift that signifies the man's commitment and respect toward the woman. 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī in his commentary al-Mizān interprets “*ṣaduqāt*”

as the dowries given to women and explains “nuḥlah” as a gratuitous gift that is not exchanged for a price. He emphasizes that with the use of the pronoun “hunna” (them), the mahr belongs to the woman herself, not to her father or guardian (Tabāṭabā’ī, 1984, p. 243). From the perspective of the present research, the significance of mahr lies in its positioning of woman in a state of “subjectivity” and “capacity for choice.” This legal institution, unlike pre-Islamic traditions in which mahr was paid to the woman's guardian, is given directly to the woman herself, and she may dispose of it in any manner she wishes. As the Qur'an continues in the same verse: “give women their dowries freely, but if they are pleased to offer you any of it, consume it good and smooth.” (Qur'an, 4:4); meaning that if women willingly give up a portion of their mahr to you, consume it as lawful and wholesome. This verse demonstrates woman's complete independence in disposing of her mahr (Tabāṭabā’ī, 1984, p. 246).

Contemporary scholars maintain that mahr in the Islamic legal system guarantees woman's economic independence and bargaining power. This financial independence positions woman such that she can, in case of dissatisfaction with the continuation of married life, relying on her financial resources, decide to separate and remain safe from economic vulnerability. Murtaḍā Muṭahharī in his analysis of the philosophy of mahr introduces it as a “sign of woman's independence and personality” and maintains that mahr liberates woman from economic dependence (Muṭahharī, 2017, p. 205). Ayatollah Javadi Amoli in his commentary considers mahr as a manifestation of respect for woman and a sign of her financial independence (Amoli, 2007, p. 330). This analysis indicates that mahr is not merely a financial institution but a structural support for women's agency.

### ***Nafaqah: Structural Support Against Vulnerability***

Nafaqah means the provision of woman's basic necessities by the man, including food, clothing, housing, and medical expenses. This

religious duty is rooted in the Holy Qur'an: "let the rich spend according to his wealth " (Qur'an, 65:7). According to this verse, the man is obliged to provide nafaqah for the woman according to his capacity (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1984, p. 231). From the perspective of the present research, nafaqah functions as a "structural support" against woman's potential vulnerabilities.

In Shi'i commentaries, the obligation of nafaqah as an established right for woman is emphasized. 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, in his commentary on the relevant verses, considers nafaqah as one of woman's fixed rights that is placed upon the man (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1984, p. 343). Jurists maintain that nafaqah is a unilateral obligation upon the man, and the woman has no responsibility for providing living expenses, even if she herself possesses income and wealth (Damad, 2016, p. 317). This legal structure liberates woman from livelihood concerns and enables her to attend to her other roles in the family and society with greater peace of mind. Ayatollah Javadi Amoli in his commentary considers spending (infāq) as one of the distinguished characteristics of the pious and maintains that spending is not merely financial but a kind of purification of the soul and treatment of the disease of avarice that exists in human nature.

Citing the verse "say: `if you possessed the treasuries of my lord`s mercy, you would hold them back for fear of spending and mankind is ever grudging" (Qur'an, 17:100), he shows that human beings are naturally avaricious and withholding, and spending is the way to treat this internal disease (Amoli, 2007, p. 285). This analysis places nafaqah beyond a mere legal obligation and connects it with ethical and spiritual foundations.

The important point is that nafaqah is not merely a supportive institution but is connected with the foundations of agency in Shi'i Islam. Woman as a moral agent who takes steps on the path of substantial motion toward perfection requires the security and

tranquility that nafaqah provides for her. This security lays the groundwork for the transcendence and flourishing of her capacities. Furthermore, nafaqah is a guarantee for the preservation of woman's dignity in situations where the marital relationship faces tension, because even in case of dispute, the man is obliged to pay nafaqah until the end of the waiting period (Muṭahhari, 2017, p. 218).

### ***Independent Property***

One of the most important legal institutions in Islam that is directly connected with women's agency is woman's right to independent property. The Holy Qur'an emphasizes this right: "do not wish for the bounty which allah has preferred one of you above another. for men is a share of what they earn, and for women is a share of what they earn." (Qur'an, 4:32). This verse explicitly declares woman's economic independence and emphasizes that women, like men, have the right to benefit from the fruits of their labor. In Shi'i commentaries, it is emphasized that this verse negates any gender discrimination in the domain of property. 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'i in his commentary on this verse maintains that woman's ownership of her property is independent of man's will and disposal, and she may dispose of her property in any manner she wishes (Ṭabāṭabā'i, 1984, p. 343).

This economic independence provides the ground for the realization of woman's economic agency. Contemporary scholars maintain that woman's right to independent property in Islam introduces her as a full-fledged economic agent who can independently decide and act in various economic spheres, including production, distribution, and consumption (Muṭahhari, 2017, p. 148). This right liberates woman from economic dependence on others and increases her capacity for choice in various domains of life. Javadi Amoli also emphasizes that woman's economic independence is a

manifestation of her inherent dignity arising from the divine infusion of spirit (Amoli, 2007, p. 335).

### *The Relation of Legal Institutions to the Foundations of Agency*

#### *Institutions as the Concrete Embodiment of Metaphysical Foundations*

One of the most important distinguishing features of Shi'i Islam from Kant's philosophy in the domain of women's agency is the manner of connection between metaphysical foundations and legal institutions. In Shi'i Islam, institutions such as mahr, nafaqah, and independent property are not merely conventional laws but the "concrete embodiment" of the very metaphysical foundations that were discussed in previous sections.

The metaphysical foundations of agency in Shi'i Islam, such as fiṭrah as the simultaneous source of rationality and emotions, the divine infusion of spirit and vicegerency as the foundation of supra-gendered agency, and substantial motion and the gradedness of existence as the explanation of psycho-physical differences, are all concretely embodied in the aforementioned legal institutions. For example, woman's financial independence in the form of independent property and mahr is the concrete embodiment of woman's supra-gendered dignity arising from the divine infusion of spirit. Similarly, the man's obligation to pay nafaqah is the concrete embodiment of the responsibility placed upon him based on creational differences.

Javadi Amoli, in explaining this connection, maintains that religious laws regulate the "reciprocal rights" of family members based on the "system of creation," and these rights are not merely social contracts but are rooted in the existential structure of the human being (Amoli, 2007, p. 326). This view indicates that in Shi'i Islam, there is an unbreakable connection between "what is" and "what ought to be."

### *The Synergy of Inner Motivation and External Structure*

In Kant's philosophy, the moral worth of action depends solely on the agent's inner motive, and external structures play no role in the realization of ethics (Kant, 1996b, p. 400). This view leads to a deep gap between inner subjectivity and the external realization of agency. In Shi'i Islam, however, legal institutions are designed in such a way that they make possible the synergy of inner motivation and external structure. On the one hand, Shi'i Islam emphasizes inner motivation and individual responsibility. Believers are obliged, out of faith and piety, to observe the rights of others and fulfill their duties. On the other hand, legal institutions function as structural support that protect individuals' rights in conditions where inner motivations are deficient. These two levels are not in opposition to each other but are in interaction and synergy. Muṭahharī in his analysis emphasizes that Islam simultaneously attends to “purification of the soul” and “reform of structures” and considers both necessary alongside each other (Muṭahharī, 2017, p. 163). In his view, faith and piety provide the inner motivation for fulfilling the rights of others, but legal structures also, as support, protect individuals' rights in times of weak inner motivation.

### *Comparative Analysis with the Kantian System*

#### *The Absence of an Institutional Mechanism in Kant's Philosophy*

In Kant's philosophy, ethical principles such as autonomy, the human being as an end in itself, and inherent dignity all remain in the realm of theory and abstract ideal, and no specific institutional mechanism is provided for their objective realization. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant makes the moral worth of action depend solely on the agent's motive and considers actions performed out of fear of the law or hope for reward to lack moral worth (Kant, 1996b, p. 400). This approach marginalizes any

role for social and legal institutions in the realization of ethics. Andrews Reath and other Kantian interpreters maintain that although Kant's ethical principles are theoretically universal and comprehensive, they require for their practical realization social and institutional contexts that Kant himself did not address (Herman, 1997). This theoretical lacuna, particularly in the domain of women's issues, emerges as a vulnerable point in Kant's philosophical system. Since Kant provides no specific institutional mechanism for the objective guarantee of women's dignity and agency, and on the other hand describes women in his anthropology as lacking the rational independence necessary for full participation in social life, women's moral agency remains effectively confined to the realm of theory and abstract ideal.

***The Kingdom of Ends as an Abstract Ideal Lacking Executive Guarantee***

The “Kingdom of Ends” in Kant's philosophy is introduced as the ideal of the ethical community – a community in which all human beings act as ends in themselves and no one treats another merely as a means (Kant, 1996b, p. 433). However, this concept also remains in the realm of abstract ideals and lacks executive guarantee and objective mechanisms for practical realization. Some Kantian interpreters, including Reath, maintain that although the Kingdom of Ends is a guiding idea for moral action, it cannot by itself provide the social and institutional structures necessary for the realization of justice and human dignity (Reath, 2006). This view faces serious challenges, especially in the domain of women's issues, because the realization of women's agency is not possible merely through changing individual motivations but requires transformation in social and legal structures.

In contrast, Shi'i Islam, by providing specific legal institutions such as mahr, nafaqah, and independent property, has taken a step beyond the abstract ideal and provided objective mechanisms for the

realization of women's agency. These institutions guarantee that even in conditions where individuals' moral motivations are weak, women's rights remain protected and their agency remains unharmed.

An examination of the legal institutions of Shi'i Islam as structural supports of agency reveals that these institutions are not merely financial protections but are rooted in metaphysical foundations and function as the concrete embodiment of those foundations. Mahr, nafaqah, and independent property each in their own way position woman in a state of "subjectivity" and "capacity for choice" and reduce her vulnerability in various circumstances. This model stands in contrast to Kant's philosophy, which lacks such institutional mechanisms. Kant's Kingdom of Ends, although depicting a lofty ideal, opens no path for its objective realization in social and legal structures. In contrast, Shi'i Islam, by designing legal institutions that make possible the synergy of inner motivation and external structure, provides a practical response to the problem of the gap between inner subjectivity and the external realization of women's agency.

## **DISCUSSION**

The comparative analysis of women's moral agency in Kant's philosophy and Shi'i Islam opens new horizons for understanding the relationship between theoretical foundations and practical mechanisms in two intellectual traditions. What becomes evident in this comparative examination is not merely a difference in answers, but a difference in the level of questions and the structure of problematization. Kant's philosophy grounds moral agency in the autonomy of pure reason and introduces the transcendental subject as the author of the moral law. Although this subject theoretically lacks any gender determination, in Kant's anthropology we encounter descriptions that attribute deficient rationality to women and confine

them to the realm of aesthetics and emotions. This duality between the transcendental subject and the empirical subject of woman creates a fundamental gap in the Kantian system that prevents the objective realization of women's agency.

In contrast to this unresolved duality, Shi'i Islam, drawing on Mullā Ṣadrā's theory of substantial motion and the gradedness of existence, regards women's psycho-physical differences not as existential deficiencies but as different gradations of the manifestation of existence and distinct capacities for the disclosure of divine names. In *al-Asfār al-arba'ah*, Mullā Ṣadrā, based on the principiality of existence and the gradedness of existence, interprets the "single soul" not as a historical individual but as a single, fluid reality of which all human individuals—both male and female—are but gradations. He emphasizes that gender pertains to the accidental properties of the lower levels of existence and that, at the level of intellectual abstraction, sexual distinction has no meaning (Ṣadrā, 1981, pp. 345–347). This view recognizes differences but does not reduce them to existential deficiency.

'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī's theory of credital perceptions also makes possible the analysis of women's situated agency. According to this theory, human beings posit ethical and legal credital perceptions on the basis of their real needs, and although these credital perceptions have no external correspondence, they possess external effects, and sometimes their effects are even greater than those of objective realities (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2010, pp. 105–110). This analysis provides a philosophical foundation for the idea that women as moral agents can posit different credital perceptions in different circumstances, and this adaptation to the exigencies of time and place is not a deficiency of agency but rather an indication of its flexibility and dynamism.

Furthermore, Murtaḍā Muṭahharī's analysis of psycho-emotional differences between women and men opens a new horizon

in confronting the common reason/emotion dichotomy. Distinguishing between equality of rights and similarity of rights, Muṭahharī maintains that neglecting natural and psychological differences not only fails to achieve gender justice but results in compounded injustice. In his view, women's emotions are not obstacles to agency but rather constitute dignity itself and serve as the foundation for women's moral responsibility (Muṭahharī, 2017, p. 148). This view demonstrates that women's affective lifeworld in Shi'i Islam is not opposed to rationality but rather extends along its continuum as a level of existential perception.

The legal institutions of Shi'i Islam, such as mahr, nafaqah, and independent property, acquire new meaning within this framework. These institutions are not merely financial protections but “structural supports of agency” that position woman in a state of “subjectivity” and “capacity for choice.” Mahr, as a financial right belonging directly to the woman, guarantees her economic independence and bargaining power (Muṭahharī, 2017, p. 205). Nafaqah, as the man's financial obligation, functions as a structural support against woman's potential vulnerabilities (Amoli, 2007, p. 285). Women's independent property rights introduce her as a full-fledged economic agent who can independently decide and act in various economic spheres (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1984, p. 343).

What is particularly significant here is the unbreakable connection between these institutions and the metaphysical foundations of agency in Shi'i Islam. In explaining this connection, Javadi Amoli maintains that religious laws regulate the “reciprocal rights” of family members based on the “system of creation,” and these rights are not merely social contracts but are rooted in the existential structure of the human being (Amoli, 2007, p. 326). This view indicates that in Shi'i Islam, there is an unbreakable connection

between “what is” and “what ought to be,” and legal institutions function as the concrete embodiment of metaphysical foundations.

In contrast to this integrative model, Kant's philosophy lacks such institutional mechanisms. The “Kingdom of Ends,” as the ideal of the ethical community, although depicting a lofty vision of collective life based on human dignity, lacks executive guarantee and objective mechanisms for practical realization. Kantian interpreters maintain that his ethical principles require for their practical realization social and institutional contexts that Kant himself did not address (Herman, 1997). This theoretical lacuna, particularly in the domain of women's issues, emerges as a vulnerable point in Kant's philosophical system.

The concept of “religious autonomy” formulated in this research can open a new horizon for reconciling rationality and religious commitment in women's moral agency. In this concept, submission to divine law is not a negation of autonomy but rather the realization of authentic autonomy, because divine laws are harmonious with human *fiṭrah*, and obedience to them is obedience to the deepest layers of one's own existence. In explaining this relationship, 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī maintains that although religious laws are posited by God, they are in complete harmony with human *fiṭrah* and are, in truth, responses to humanity's real needs (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2010, pp. 105–110). This view fundamentally challenges the dichotomy between autonomy and heteronomy that has taken shape in Kant's philosophy.

Ultimately, this research does not claim the inherent “superiority” of either intellectual system. Rather, based on the criteria of “explanatory power” and “internal coherence,” it reveals the capacities of the Shi'i model in responding to the problem of the gap between inner subjectivity and the external realization of women's agency. The model of agency in Shi'i Islam, by integrating ontological, epistemological, psychological, institutional, and teleological

dimensions, and by designing legal institutions as structural supports, possesses higher explanatory power in this domain. These findings can lay the groundwork for an equal and constructive dialogue between Western philosophy and the Islamic tradition in the field of applied ethics and women's studies, opening new horizons for future research in this area.

## CONCLUSION

This research, through a comparative analysis of women's moral agency in the two traditions of Kant's philosophy and Shi'i Islam, has revealed a fundamental gap within the Kantian system: the unresolved dualism between the transcendental subject endowed with autonomy and the empirical subject of woman characterized in Kant's anthropology by deficient rationality, together with the absence of an institutional mechanism for the transition from inner subjectivity to external actualization, has created a structural obstacle to the objective realization of women's agency. In contrast to this one-dimensional model, Shi'i Islam, drawing on Mullā Ṣadrā's theory of substantial motion and the gradedness of existence, explains women's psycho-physical differences not as existential deficiencies but as existential gradations and distinct capacities for the manifestation of human perfections.

'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī's theory of credital perceptions, analyzing women's situated agency based on real needs and the foundations of *fiṭrah*, together with Murtaḍā Muṭahhari's analysis of women's emotions as the foundation of agency rather than an obstacle to it, formulate a three-dimensional model of agency that integrates ontological, epistemological, psychological, institutional, and teleological dimensions. The legal institutions of Shi'i Islam, such as *mahr*, *nafaqah*, and independent property, function within this framework as "structural supports of agency," creating a synergy

between inner motivation and external structure that makes possible the transition from theoretical dignity to practical realization. The concept of “religious autonomy” formulated by this research, explaining the reconciliation of rationality and religious devotion based on the theory of *fiṭrah*, opens a new horizon for understanding women's agency in the Islamic tradition.

These findings not only reveal the capacities of the Shi'i paradigm in responding to the problem of the gap between inner subjectivity and the external realization of women's agency but also lay the groundwork for an equal and constructive dialogue between Western philosophy and the Islamic tradition in the field of applied ethics and women's studies.

### **Author Contributions**

Conceptualization: M.S.; Data curation: M.S.; Formal analysis: M.S.; Funding acquisition: M.S.; Investigation: M.S.; Methodology: M.S.; Project administration: M.S.; Resources: M.S.; Software: M.S.; Supervision: M.S.; Validation: M.S.; Visualization: M.S.; Writing – original draft: M.S.; Writing – review & editing: M.S. Author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

### **Funding**

This study received no direct funding from any institution.

### **Institutional Review Board Statement**

This study was approved by Department of Islamic Teachings, Faculty of Theology and Ahl Al Bayt, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran.

### **Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent was not required for this study.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

## Acknowledgments

The author thanks Department of Islamic Teachings, Faculty of Theology and Ahl Al Bayt, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran for administrative support for this study.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

## Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT and PaperPal to improve the clarity of the language and readability of the article. After using these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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