



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



Isa Mousazadeh¹

Vahid Raoof Moghaddam²

1. Official Researcher, Research Institute of Islamic Philosophy and Theology, Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy, Qom, Iran (**Corresponding Author**). mousazadeh@isca.ac.ir
2. PhD Student Moral Philosophy, Faculty of Theology, University of Qom, Qom, Iran. v.raoofmoghddam@stu.qom.ac.ir

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

© 2026

"authors retain the copyright and full publishing rights"



<http://jti.isca.ac.ir>

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.

References

- Avicenna (Ibn Sina). (1997). *Al-Ilahiyyat min Kitab al-Shifa* (Theology from the Book of Healing). Qom: Office of Islamic Propagation of Qom Seminary.
- Plato. (2001). *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (M. H. Lotfi, Trans.). Tehran: Kharazmi Publishing.
- The Holy Bible*. (2010). New Millennium Version. Ilam: Ilam Publications.
- Beiser, F. (2017). *Hegel* (S. M. Hosseini, Trans., 3rd ed.). Tehran: Ghoghnoos Publishing.
- Descartes, R. (2011a). *The Passions of the Soul* (M. Sanei, Trans., 2nd ed.). Tehran: Elmo-Hoda Publishing.
- Descartes, R. (2011b). *The Passions of the Soul* (M. Sanei, Trans., 2nd ed.). Tehran: Elmo-Hoda Publishing.
- Rezanejad, G. (2003). *Mashahid al-Uluhiyyah*. Qom: Ayat-e Eshragh Publishing.
- Suhrawardi, S. (1994). *Hikmat al-Ishraq* (Philosophy of Illumination). Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies.
- Seif, M. (2010). *The Role of Freedom in Kant's Moral Philosophy*. Metaphysics (no publisher listed).
- Shirazi, M. (Mulla Sadra). (1989). *Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-'Aqliyyat al-Arba'ah* (Vol. 1). Qom: Mostafavi Publishing.
- Shirazi, M. (1989). *Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-'Aqliyyat al-Arba'ah* (Vol. 6). Qom: Mostafavi Publishing.
- Shirazi, M. (1989). *Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-'Aqliyyat al-Arba'ah* (Vol. 8). Qom: Mostafavi Publishing.
- Shirazi, M. (1989). *Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-'Aqliyyat al-Arba'ah* (Vol. 9). Qom: Mostafavi Publishing.
- Cassirer, E. (2006). *The Myth of the State* (Y. Moghan, Trans.). Tehran: Kharazmi Publishing.

- Kant, I. (2013). *Critique of Judgment* (A. Rashidian, Trans., 7th ed.). Tehran: Ney Publishing.
- Kant, I. (2016). *Critique of Practical Reason* (I. Rahmati, Trans., 5th ed.). Tehran: Sophia Publishing.
- Kant, I. (2015a). *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (H. Enayat & A. Gheisari, Trans., 2nd ed.). Tehran: Kharazmi Publishing.
- Kant, I. (2015b). *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* (M. Sanei, Trans., 3rd ed.). Tehran: Naghsh-o-Negar Publishing.
- Aristotle. (1972). *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Sir David Ross, Trans., 9th ed.). London: Oxford University Press.
- Lloyd, G., ed. (2001). *Spinoza: Critical Assessments*. London and New York: Routledge.

