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Class and Gender

The Perspectivity of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's Ethics in *The Nasirean Ethics*

Abstract

Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's (d. 1274) *Akhlāq-e Nāṣerī* is, above all, a Persian translation of Miskawayh's (d. 1030) *Tahdīb al-akhlāq*, originally composed in Arabic. Since the latter contained no chapters on economics or politics, Ṭūsī supplemented his translation with two additional chapters. For these, he drew on Fārābī's *Mabādī' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila* and Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-siyāsa*, incorporating selected passages that he regarded as particularly valuable and worthy of being made accessible to a Persian-speaking readership.

A significant portion of the chapter on economics in *Akhlāq-e Nāṣerī* focuses on women, their nature, and how they should be treated by men. Although these discussions are drawn from various sources, Ṭūsī organizes them in a way he deems appropriate.

In this article, I will focus on these additional two chapters of *Akhlāq-e Nāṣerī* with special attention to Ṭūsī's ideas on womanhood. I will also examine his views on slavery and the status of slaves in his envisioned city. I argue that slaves occupy a comparatively better position in Ṭūsī's ideal city than women, enjoying a degree of social mobility that allows them to rise within the social hierarchy. In contrast, women are confined to the domestic sphere and subjected to strict control. They are often associated with matter, which must be governed by form, and are therefore portrayed as the source of chaos. If left unchecked, this chaos is seen as a threat to both the moral order and the broader social structure.

Keywords: class; gender; women; slavery; perspectivity

Introduction

Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's *Akhlāq-e Nāserī* is, to a great extent, a Persian translation of Miskawayh's *Tahdīb al-akhlāq wa taṭhīr al-a'rāq*, originally written in Arabic (Ṭūsī, 2011, 25; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 35).¹ However, since the latter lacks chapters on economics and politics, Ṭūsī added two chapters to the Persian translation. In doing so, he also incorporated translated sections from Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-siyāsa* and Fārābī's *Mabādī' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila* (Ṭūsī, 2011, 155, 187; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 208, 248). Throughout this process, Ṭūsī carefully selects and adapts ideas from these sources, making them accessible to a Persian-speaking readership. While the concepts explored in these chapters stem from the aforementioned works, they are systematically compiled and organized by Ṭūsī.²

In this paper, I primarily focus on the chapter on managing the household in *Akhlāq-e Nāserī*, aiming to outline the constitutive elements of Ṭūsī's category of woman (Ṭūsī, 2011, 151–184; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 205–244). In the first section, I provide a general reflection on the perspectivity of Ṭūsī's ethics, highlighting how his class and gender significantly shape the standpoint from which his ethics is constructed. Furthermore, I argue that Ṭūsī's normative approach to epistemology allows for only a single perspective in ethics, namely that of the “elite male of high intelligence,” as Zahra Ayubi aptly puts it (Ayubi, 2019).³ In the second section, I briefly trace Ṭūsī's understanding of woman as confined to the material and physical aspects of reality and consciousness back to its Aristotelian roots, highlighting some of the implications of equating woman with matter. One such implication is that woman represents the principle of disorder, destruction, and chaos, necessitating constant control. In the third section, I examine this idea further by analyzing Ṭūsī's relevant statements, demonstrating how this leads to an understanding of the heterosexual relationship between man and woman as one fundamentally rooted in fear, threat, and distrust. The fourth section is dedicated to Ṭūsī's reflections on the relationship between the master and the male slave. Through a comparative analysis of the categories of slave and woman, I argue that Ṭūsī's imaginative horizon of the slave's possible forms of agency is significantly broader than that of the woman, granting him a considerably more favorable position in Ṭūsī's ethical system. A central point in my analysis of Ṭūsī's category of woman is that it inherently implies a spatial dimension. While the man's development as a moral subject and his attainment of happiness (*sa'adat*) can only occur in the city, the woman is confined to the home and kept outside the space of moral and intellectual fulfillment. In line with this, woman is discussed exclusively in his chapter on the household, with no reference to her behavior or any form of activity in the city. Consistently, the entire chapter “On Politics,” which addresses the structure of the city (Ṭūsī, 2011, 253–258; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 334–341) makes no mention of women.

Before turning to the main subject of this paper, I will first provide an overview of the chapter that constitutes its central focus. The subject of the relevant chapter in *Akhlāq-e Nāserī*, as mentioned, is

¹ In this paper, references in parentheses consistently first cite the English translation of the book, followed by the corresponding passages in the original Persian version of Ṭūsī's work.

² For more on the book, see also G. M. Wickens' introduction to the English translation (Ṭūsī, 2011, 9–20).

³ See, for instance, the “Introduction.” This is one of the central ideas around which Ayubi structures her analysis throughout the book *Gendered Morality*, and it is therefore frequently reiterated. The chapter examined in my paper is also analyzed by Ayubi, particularly in the chapter titled “Ethics of Marriage and the Domestic Economy” (2019, 115–175). At this point, I should note that Ayubi's close study of the text has been helpful in articulating some of my ideas in this paper. However, the reader will recognize that my interpretation of the chapter is guided by different questions, concepts, and purposes.

the science of managing the household (*tadbīr manzil*), as it is referred to in the original Persian (Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 203), or economics, as it is translated into English (Ṭūsī, 2011, 151). A brief description of the division of the chapter and its sections will be helpful to understand its structure and to discern the perspective from which Ṭūsī develops his ethics. At the outset of this chapter, Ṭūsī explains the necessity of building houses. He briefly states that “mankind” (*nu‘e insānī*), unlike most animals, needs to store food for times when it is not available (Ṭūsī, 2011, 153; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 205). However, since “mankind must occupy itself with [...] the acquisition of food,” it cannot simultaneously manage the safekeeping of the food already stored (Ṭūsī, 2011, 153; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 206). Therefore, it requires helpers “who would reside in the house, as deputies, for most of the time,” taking over the task of safeguarding the stored food (Ṭūsī, 2011, 153; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 206). Furthermore, to ensure the preservation of the species, “there is also need for a mate, [...]”. Accordingly,” Ṭūsī continues, “Divine Wisdom has required that every man (*mard*) should take a mate, one who will both attend to the custody of the house and its contents, and also by means of whom the work of procreation is fulfilled.” (Ṭūsī, 2011, 153; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 206) The narrative presented thus far is clearly that of a man who must ensure his survival both on an individual level and for the continuity of the species. Therefore, when Ṭūsī refers to “mankind,” he does not include women. Rather, he speaks exclusively of the man, the builder of the household, around whose needs everything is arranged. It is the man who introduces the woman into the narrative, assigning her the dual task of remaining at home to safeguard his property and assisting him in preserving his species. After the woman, children enter the scene, followed by “auxiliaries and servants,” whose role is to help sustain the man’s household (Ṭūsī, 2011, 154; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 206). Accordingly, the chapter “On Economics” aims to instruct the man, as the owner and regulator of the household, on how to manage his property (first section (Ṭūsī, 2011, 157–161; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 210–215)) and govern his wife (second section (Ṭūsī, 2011, 161–166; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 215–222)), children (third section (Ṭūsī, 2011, 166–178; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 222–236)), and servants (fifth section (Ṭūsī, 2011, 181–184; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 240–244)). The fourth section, which discusses the rights of parents, was appended to the book about thirty years after its completion, following a recommendation by a certain Persian prince, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Nīshāpūrī (Ṭūsī, 2011, 178; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 236 and 387)). This addition is significant, as it reveals that in the original version of the book, the rights of parents had no place. Rather, Ṭūsī coherently develops his ethics from the perspective of a husband, a father of sons, and a free man who, guided by his needs and desires, categorizes other groups of human beings and defines their nature and hence their place in a way that best serves his desired order.

As a final introductory note, I should mention that the reference text for the quotations in this paper is the English translation by G. M. Wickens, titled *The Nasirean Ethics*, first published in 1964, and the Persian edition of the work by Mojtabā Mīnavī and ‘Alīreḏā Heydarī, first published in 1356 Sh (1977). In cases where I found Wickens’ translation to be inaccurate, I have made slight revisions based on the mentioned Persian edition. Any such revisions are noted in the references accompanying the relevant quotations.

1 Harmony, Hierarchy and Perspectivity: Whose Ethic?

The analogy of a living organism has long been employed in philosophy to conceptualize political unity as a collective whole with a shared purpose, in relation to which the status of each individual

is to be determined. This analogy introduces a specific set of terms, such as health and disease, healing, amputation and the like, whose application to political individuals and identities has far-reaching consequences. Moreover, it centers on the idea of strict harmony, envisioning a well-functioning organism in which the well-being of the whole defines the purpose and happiness of each member.⁴ This analogy and its associated terminology are extensively applied by Ṭūsī in the chapters "On Economics" and "On Politics." In keeping with this analogy, Ṭūsī frequently compares the ruler of the household and the city to a physician who possesses knowledge of the body's members, their functions, their ailments, and the appropriate means of healing them:

The regulator of the household (who may be likened to the physician from one point of view, and to one member – the noblest of members – in another regard) must be aware of the nature, property and act of each individual among the inhabitants of the household, as also of the equilibrium resulting from the combination of those acts. (Ṭūsī, 2011, 156; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 209)

"The equilibrium" (i'tidāl) is the crucial factor to maintain, both in the household and in the city.

[I]n regulating the state of each separate individual he [the regulator of the household] should imitate the treatment accorded by the physician to each separate member." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 156; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 209) However, "if the welfare of all members lies in the amputation and cauterization of that one, he abandons all idea of mending it, thinking nothing of cutting it off or moving it. (Ṭūsī, 2011, 155; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 208)

The analogy through which the political order is conceptualized here is, in many respects, problematic. The emphasis on equilibrium and the harmonious functioning of political unity at the expense of individual members is clearly at odds with modern ideals of individual freedom. In this respect, it can broadly be stated that reading Ṭūsī's analysis through the lens of modern values would be an anachronistic approach, offering little insight into the text itself. That being said, what remains striking in Ṭūsī's descriptions is how equilibrium is explicitly defined in favor of the ruling class, transforming harmony into an order that serves its will and desires. The final phrase quoted above, namely: "if the welfare of all members lies in the amputation and cauterization of that one, he abandons all idea of mending it, thinking nothing of cutting it off or removing it," can be formulated with such certainty only by someone who does not see himself at risk of being 'cut off' or 'amputated.' Rather, he obviously belongs to those who have always been in the position of deciding who gets 'cut off,' conceptualizing and legitimizing the ability of 'cutting off' as a *virtue* of their own. As I elaborate in what follows, Ṭūsī unmistakably identifies himself with the ruling and noble member of the body, with the physician and the soul that governs from outside the body, and the shepherd, tasked with leading the flock to "suitable pastures and watering-places." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 154; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 207) The point I wish to underline here is how the security of the author's elevated position manifests in his strong emphasis on a hierarchical understanding of the body and, by extension, political unity – thus relegating harmony to being a secondary factor and defining it in a way that reinforces hierarchy, ultimately serving the interests of the specific class to which the author himself belongs. This becomes particularly evident in a passage where Ṭūsī states:

If a disorder arises in a certain member, by treating that one he [the regulator of the household] safeguards the best interests of all members; *in particular*, he safeguards by primary intention the

⁴ For further discussion of this analogy in Greek philosophy, see Williams (2006); for its application in modern philosophy, see McCloskey (1963).

interest of the principal member adjacent to it, and then by secondary intention the interest of that member itself. (Ṭūsī, 2011, 155; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 208; emphasis mine.)

The interest of all members is to be defined first and foremost through the interest of the adjacent principal member (‘uḍwī ra’īs), which in turn is secondary to the interest of an even more noble member adjacent to it, until it reaches the most noble member, whose interest represents the interest of all members.

Another key point to emphasize is that the interest of each member – or the specific perfection that is ontologically possible for them to attain – cannot and need not be defined or even grasped by the member themselves. Instead, only the physician, the ruling man of the household, or the rulers of the city are to possess knowledge of “the nature, property, and act of each individual.” To harmoniously organize political unity and ensure that each member performs the function expected of them and attains their specific perfection, the ruler does not even need to convince the members of what is good and just for them. Instead, Ṭūsī states, he employs various methods that are not rational in nature, but emotional, such as “encouragement and intimidation, promises, prevention and imposition, courtesy and rigor (munāqishat), and kindness and severity.” (Ṭūsī, 2011, 154; translation slightly revised by me. Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 207) This observation enables us to grasp the underlying cognitive presumption behind the dualities that Ṭūsī enthusiastically constructs throughout the work under discussion, such as “the ruled and the ruler,” “the noble and the base,” “the free and the slave,” “the man and the woman,” and “the shepherd and the flock.” In what follows, I elaborate on what I mean by this.

When discussing various types of crafts, Ṭūsī categorizes them primarily in normative terms as “noble, base, and intermediate.” He further states that “[n]oble crafts are those coming within the range of the soul, not that of the body.” (Ṭūsī, 2011, 158; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 211) These crafts, in turn, fall into three categories, with the most noble being “that which is dependent on the substance of the intelligence, such as sound opinion, apposite counsel, and good management” (Ṭūsī, 2011, 158; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 211). In this way, the ability for intellectual thought and the production of sound ideas and opinions is explicitly reserved for a certain class within the political unity, representing the most noble part of the body. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that even when the interests of an individual member are considered in the treatment of its disorder or disease, those interests are ultimately to be defined by the physician or the noble member. Not only because this way “the equilibrium” can be preserved, rather because only the noble member possesses the intellectual faculty and is capable of forming “sound opinion.”

By depriving the ruled class of intellectual capacity, Ṭūsī finds no common logic or language shared between the ruled and the rulers. It is for this reason that he advises the ruler to manage “the circumstances of the community by encouragement and intimidation, promises, prevention and imposition, courtesy and rigor, and kindness and severity,” that is by creating, manipulating, and controlling the emotions of the ruled (Ṭūsī, 2011, 154; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 207).

By asserting that “the noble crafts” fall „within the range of the soul, not that of the body,” Ṭūsī first excludes various classes of men from participating in the governance of the city (Ṭūsī, 2011, 158; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 211). This includes craftsmen engaged in activities that provide the city’s ‘material’ conditions, such as “the abject but necessary craft of street-sweeping” and “the intermediate crafts of agriculture and blacksmithing.” (Ṭūsī, 2011, 158; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 212) Furthermore, the entire class of women is denied this capability, as one of their defining characteristics is being intrin-

sically linked to matter, physical reality, and the body. I expand on this further in sections two and three.

Ṭūsī's observations about the most noble craft reveal another key insight, clearly exposing the perspectivity of the ethics he develops in *The Nasirean Ethics*. The most noble craft, that is the craft "dependent on the substance of the intelligence," is, interestingly, not the domain of intellectuals or scholars, who instead fall into the second rank of noble crafts (Ṭūsī, 2011, 158; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 211). Surprisingly, it is not even the craft of the king. Rather, "it is the craft of ministers" (Ṭūsī, 2011, 158; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 211): a position Ṭūsī himself would later assume for several years after the Mongol ruler Hulagu (1217–1265) conquered and ruled Iran. By doing so, Ṭūsī places the craft he aspires to at the time of writing this work at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, entirely disregarding the craft of kingship. Therefore, the hierarchy he describes starts interestingly with the minister. Having secured his role as the ruling soul over the entire body, he extends his gaze across all political spaces, from the household to the city, seeking to recognize and epistemologically underpin the hierarchy at every level.

The male and elitist perspective of Ṭūsī's ethics become explicitly evident in certain passages. For instance, a particularly illuminating passage appears in the section on "The Manners of Speech," (Ṭūsī, 2011, 173–174; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 230–233) where he outlines the relevant etiquette a father should instill in his son: "Let him be, as far as possible, cautious in addressing common people, children, women, madmen and drunken persons." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 174; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 231) Hence, it is not the mentioned groups, all of whom lack intellect, that are the focus of Ṭūsī's ethical investigation, rather it is the mature man of a distinguished class within the political order. Furthermore, one can infer the economic and material status of the class to which Ṭūsī's ideal ethical subject belongs when he briefly describes the construction of the house that serves this subject: "Its foundations should be solid, its ceilings inclined to loftiness, and its doorways wide, [...]. The dwelling of the men should be separated from those of the women; the place of residence for each term and season should be adapted to the time in question [...]; and in all the abundance of amenities and spaces, one should preserve the conditions of the compatibility of situations." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 156; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 209) This is obviously not the house of a "street-sweeper"; rather, it is the residence of a man of considerable material wealth. The section titled "Concerning the Government and Regulation of Property and Provisions" (Ṭūsī, 2011, 157–161; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 210–215) contains further implicit and explicit references to the material conditions of the subject with whom Ṭūsī is concerned in his exploration of happiness and its attainment.

From all this, it can be concluded that, the ethics described in *The Nasirean Ethics* is characterized by its unspoken yet ever-present perspectivism. Using the analogy of the living body, it is the ethics of the brain and intellect, thinking in isolation from the tasks that the other parts of the body must perform to provide the material conditions necessary for sustaining and keeping the brain alive. Moreover, Ṭūsī does not merely describe the ethics he knows from his own lived experiences within the particular class to which he belongs; after all, the future minister is also a philosopher. Hence, not only is he able to describe and articulate the ethical norms and values of that class as good and just, but he also establishes an epistemological foundation that presents the perspective of that class as the sole valid one from which ethical good and evil can be discovered and defined. This is achieved by assigning to his class alone the capacity for intellectual thought and the ability to form "sound opinion."

The class-dependence of Ṭūsī's ethics defines one aspect of its perspectivity. As I discuss in the following sections, its gender-restricted approach constitutes the second key aspect.

2 "The very Beginning:" The Mother's Assigned Place

It is a widely discussed topic in feminist philosophy that, within the hylomorphic framework of Aristotelian thought, women have often been regarded as matter. According to Aristotle, it is the father who, in the process of reproduction, transmits the form of a human being to the embryo, whereas the mother provides only the matter required for the reproduction (see, for instance, Aristotle, 1991, 731b24–732a11). He further elaborates on this, explaining why an embryo sometimes develops into a male and sometimes into a female, despite the father always transmitting the same human form. In this context, he explains that warmth is the generative and sustaining cause of natural living beings. In reproduction, the father provides the warmth, while the matter supplied by the mother represents coldness, which must be warmed and thus given life by the father. However, if the warmth provided by the father is insufficient, unable to warm or properly form the matter, the result is a female (see, for instance, Aristotle, 1991, 766b8–766b26). Hence, the birth of a female represents a failure in the natural process of reproduction and being a woman is to be considered as a form of deficiency and disability, both physically and cognitively. Had the process gone ideally, the result would have been a male.

The Aristotelian equation of woman with matter, passivity, and cognitive disability has been echoed throughout Islamic philosophy, shaping one of the most unquestioned assumptions collectively upheld by philosophers of this tradition, hence never requiring argument or justification.⁵ The striking fact in this regard is not merely this equation itself, but rather that by equating woman with matter, everything sayable about her is presumed to have already been stated, rendering any further inquiry redundant. This, however, is internally consistent, as matter, by its very nature, is fundamentally unknowable, meaning that nothing can truly be said about it.

In this regard, Ibn Sīnā's mention of women in his *Treatise on Love* is particularly revealing. Given the subject of the treatise, one might expect some discussion of women. Yet, throughout the essay, there is no mention of love for women. In one passage, Ibn Sīnā asserts that love permeates all corners of the cosmos, even the matter, which, according to him, embodies an inherent love and passion for the form. To illustrate this, he analogizes the matter to a "low-born and blameworthy woman" who refuses to reveal her face, instead covering it with a new form each time the previous one disappears (Ibn Sīnā, 1945, 215). This analogy is, in many respects, telling. It not only reflects the thorough ontological dependence of woman on man but also implies a one-sided love of the woman toward the man. The woman, from an ontological perspective, occupies a low position in the hierarchy of being. Love and passion are according to Ibn Sīnā the driving forces behind the perfection of everything including the human being, to be materialized through imitating the higher principles of being. The form or man cannot elevate himself toward existential perfection while being interested in or having a loving attitude toward something lower in this hierarchy. In other words, it is neither 'natural' nor 'good' for a man to love a woman; rather, it signifies a

⁵ See, in this regard, for instance, Ġazālī, 1380 Sh, 316; see also Mullā Hādī Sabzewārī's commentary on Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī's somewhat ambiguous statement regarding women (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 1981, 136). As I note in the conclusion of this paper, Fārābī is an exception within the context of Islamic philosophy.

downward and destructive movement in the existential process of perfection and is to be considered both morally evil and a source of further corruption. Accordingly, love between men can be seen as conducive to the path of perfection, whereas the love of men for women and, by extension, love between women represents merely a morally deviant form of passion, deserving of reproach.⁶

The category of woman constructed in *The Nasirean Ethics* aligns seamlessly with the outlined framework, and the conceptualization of woman in association with the idea of matter is explicitly expressed in various passages.⁷ In his discussion on parental rights, Ṭūsī allocates some space to the woman as the mother “at the beginning” of the child’s existence and cognitive development:

[T]he mother, at the beginning of the child’s existence, associates and participates with the father in causality, inasmuch as she is receptive (qābil) to the operation effected (aṭar) by the father. [...] she is an even closer cause, in supplying food to the child, that is the matter (māddeh) of its very life; and she is for a long time directly concerned with its physical nurture [...].⁸ (Ṭūsī, 2011, 179; translation slightly revised by me. Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 238)

However, the matter associated with the mother is entirely formless. The physical form that the child benefits from is instead transmitted through the father:

In the first place, the father is the first of the contingent causes bringing about the child’s existence. Next, he is the cause of the child’s being reared and brought to perfection. Thus, on the one hand, from the physical advantages attaching to the father he achieves physical perfection (such as growth and increase and nourishment, and so on) [...]; while, on the other hand, from the father’s psychical management (tadbīr-e nafsanī) he attains psychical perfections (such as manners, education, virtue, skills, sciences, and a way of earning his livelihood), which are the causes of the enduring and perfecting of the child’s soul. (Ṭūsī, 2011, 179; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 237)

The father, as the form, ensures the child’s persistence and perfection, whereas the mother, as the matter, represents mere receptivity and potentiality, requiring the form to impart any actuality.

This passage also reveals that the subject responsible for upholding parental rights, ‘the child’ to whom the section is addressed, is the son, not the daughter. It is obviously not the daughter who inherits the father’s physical form, which symbolizes physical perfection, nor his psychical perfections, such as “sciences and a way of earning the livelihood.” Ṭūsī indeed never addresses the concept of perfection in relation to female subjects. Rather, as I clarify in detail in the following

⁶ In this regard, see for instance Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 1981, 172.

⁷ In her monograph *Gendered Morality: Classical Islamic Ethics of the Self, Family, and Society* (2019), Zahra Ayubi emphasizes the *Islamic* character of the ethical systems she examines, including that of Ṭūsī. In my paper, I contend and attempt to demonstrate that Ṭūsī systematically and consistently constructs his category of woman on the basis of the Aristotelian equation of woman with matter. In this sense, I do not believe that Ṭūsī’s category of woman should necessarily be regarded as an integral part of a specifically *Islamic* ethics.

⁸ Wickens translates *māddeh* in the phrase “that is the matter of its very life” as “source,” rendering it as “she is the source of its very life.” However, the Persian formulation carries an inherent ambiguity, as it is unclear whether “that” refers to “the food” or “the mother.” The phrase could thus be interpreted in three ways: “the food is the matter of its very life,” “the mother is the matter of its very life,” or “who [the mother] is the matter of its very life.” In all three cases, however, the statement does not suggest that the mother is the source of life. This reading would also be inconsistent with other passages in the work, where “the matter,” “the physical,” and “the mother” are equated, while “the father” is associated with “the form,” as becomes apparent in the next passage cited. In this regard see also Ṭūsī, 2011, 202–203.

section, the nurturing of the woman is framed in negative terms, emphasizing her control and complete domination. The true pleasure, perfection, and happiness are concepts systematically linked to masculinity, irrelevant to and even in contrast with the female nature. This is explicitly articulated when Ṭūsī, in explaining the pleasure of happiness (*laḍḍat-e sa'ādat*), draws a revealing parallel between active and passive pleasure on one side and male and female pleasure on the other, stating that "[p]rima facie active pleasure may be compared to the pleasure of males in sexual intercourse, while the passive pleasure is like that of females." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 71; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 97) The defining feature of passive, female pleasure is that it "removes and alters at the onset of varying states" (Ṭūsī, 2011, 71; translation slightly revised by me. Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 98); in other words, it is accidental (Ṭūsī, 2011, 72; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 98). He further equates passive, female pleasure with sensory and even bestial (*bahīmī*) pleasure, explicitly opposing it to active, masculine pleasure, which he characterizes as intellectual and divine (Ṭūsī, 2011, 72; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 98). In a further step, he links the concept of active, masculine pleasure to perfection and happiness, asserting that only active pleasure brings "its possessor from deficiency to completeness, from sickness to health, and from vice to virtue." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 72; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 98) From this, it becomes "evident," at least for Ṭūsī, that "the pleasure of happiness (*laḍḍat-e sa'ādat*) is active," implying that women, due to the passive nature of their pleasure, have no share in it (Ṭūsī, 2011, 72; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 98). In this way, perfection and happiness are conceptualized as commodities exclusively owned by men and exchanged solely among them.

"The very beginning" assigned to the woman as mother is a static one, a beginning that is not meant to extend beyond that point. Consequently, the extensive pedagogical reflections in the longest section of the chapter on the household, titled "Regulation of Children," (Ṭūsī, 2011, 166–178) focus entirely on disciplining and educating the son, while the education of daughters is relegated to a single brief paragraph.

The rights of the father are more spiritual (*rowḥānī*), and for this reason children become aware of them only after intellectual consideration. The rights of the mother, on the other hand, tend rather to be physical (*jismānī*) and for this reason children understand them as soon as they begin perception (*'iḥsās*), showing a readier inclination towards their mothers. (Ṭūsī, 2011, 180; translation slightly revised by me. Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 239)

The mother, as the material principle, is solely the object of sense perception, meaning that the child is able to perceive her „as soon as he *begins* perception" and has not yet developed intellectual faculty. On the other hand, as the material principle, the mother is not regarded as capable of developing intellectual faculty or understanding spiritual matters at any stage of her life. Accordingly, even when the 'child,' i.e., the son, is advised to repay the parents' service and devotion, he must recognize that

[...] the claims of fathers are to be discharged rather by offering obedience, and by kindly mention, benediction and commendation (which are more spiritual concerns); and those of mothers by offering money and bestowing the means of livelihood, and by all the various sorts of kindness that tend to be more physical. (Ṭūsī, 2011, 180; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 239)

To define and assign a place, even an abject one, to woman within the ontological and epistemological order is, in itself, a positive theoretical endeavor and a step forward compared to ignoring her entirely. However, to systematically construct the category of woman in terms of matter and its implications amounts to defining woman solely through negation. This is because

the very concept of matter is one of negation—negation of activity, actuality, order, and form. Conceptualized in this way, woman represents the negation of man and of every *positive* quality attributed exclusively to him. In other words, Ṭūsī's conception of woman defines her as the negation of every position. But not only that, it goes much further by making it in principle impossible to think of woman in *positive* terms. Simply put, within this framework, nothing meaningful can be articulated about woman except through various forms of negation, merely stating what she *is not*.

Beyond establishing a rigid binary gender regime and defining woman as the radical other, this framework also renders the category of woman strictly static, denying it any possibility of transformation or mobility. Woman is neither supposed nor allowed to partake in any process; instead, she is entirely fixed in the place assigned to her by the philosopher. I elaborate on this further in the following section.

3 Woman as the Source of Disorder and Destruction

There are certain motifs in Ṭūsī's considerations on womanhood that recur, suggesting a reading centered around a limited set of concepts and ideas. One prominent motif is the presumed deficiency of women's intellect. Ṭūsī repeatedly asserts this assumption in his instructions on how to treat women, presenting it as an obvious fact that requires neither explanation nor justification (Ṭūsī, 2011, 162, 163, 164, 174 and 234; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 216, 218, 219, 231 and 310). Yet an even more telling motif that recurs throughout the section and resonates with readers is the portrayal of the woman as a source of chaos, disorder, and destruction. Ṭūsī's repeated characterization of woman in these terms is so striking that it almost reads as a dire warning to his readers against something literally lethal. For instance, he concludes the section on women as wives by stating:

Whoever is incapable of fulfilling the condition for the chastisement (*siyāsat*) of wives should rather remain a bachelor [...]; for the mischief (*fasād*) of associating with women, quite apart from its disorder, can only result in an infinite number of calamities (*āfāt*): one of these may be the wife's intention to bring about the man's annihilation (*halāk*). (Ṭūsī, 2011, 166; Translation slightly revised by me. Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 222)

It would be interesting to find out whether Ṭūsī's emphasis on women being so hazardous stems solely from the hylomorphic framework of his thought in this regard and his equation of women with matter, or whether his lived experiences in this matter influenced his attitude. While we know a considerable amount about Ṭūsī's political and scholarly life, little is known about his private life, aside from the fact that he had three sons who followed in his political and scholarly footsteps.⁹ In one passage, Ṭūsī emphasizes the need to conceal all signs of a wife's existence, stressing that "one should go to extreme lengths to keep her veiled and secluded from those having no right of entry to the female quarters, so contriving that no outsider ever learns of her signs (*āṭār*), appearance (*shamāyil*), and voice (*āwāz*).” (Ṭūsī, 2011, 163; translation slightly revised by me. Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 217) Clearly, Ṭūsī was consistent in following his own advice, ensuring that no trace of his wife or perhaps also his daughters was left in history.

⁹ For more on the life of Ṭūsī, see Lane (2018): <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/tusi-nasir-al-din-bio/> (accessed on March 28, 2025).

To conceptualize woman as the source of chaos and the opposite of all order is not only consistent with equating her with matter, but rather one of its inherent consequences. All order depends on form, and matter needs to be formed in order to embody a sort of structure and order. To be formed means, at the same time, to be brought under control. Ṭūsī's astonishingly strict regimen of control over women demonstrates that his equation of women with matter is not meant as a mere metaphor. Rather, his reflections on woman should be understood as the systematic articulation of this idea, consistently developing and clearly formulating its implications. This is also why his instructions on how to treat wives take on a thoroughly negative form, merely outlining what women should be prevented from doing.

Reiterating what was stated at the outset of the chapter, Ṭūsī asserts that the purposes of marrying a woman should be limited to "the preservation of property and the quest for progeny." In other words, a woman is primarily meant to safeguard the man's property within the home, thereby maximizing his freedom and mobility by relieving him of the need to stay at home. Freed from this task, men can spend more time outside, develop various skills, and gradually construct complex social structures such as cities and, ultimately, civilizations—structures that are, consequently, created by men for men. Secondly, her role is to help the man reproduce. Ṭūsī stresses that the instigation of desire (*shahwat*) should not be the purpose of marriage (see Ṭūsī, 2011, 161; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 215). Love is not mentioned in this passage, as marriage based on romantic feelings was not a recognized concept; moreover, women were not considered proper objects of love. Later, Ṭūsī cautions the reader about the destructive nature of love for women. I will return to this point further below.

Having outlined the eligible purposes of marriage, Ṭūsī goes on to specify a relatively long list of criteria that women deemed worthy of marriage must fulfill. He even defines the ideal measure of beauty a woman should possess, stating, "as regards beauty, one should confine oneself to symmetry of frame, and even in this respect, one should observe the exact requirement of moderation" (Ṭūsī, 2011, 162; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 216). However, he does not mention any criteria that men should meet to be considered appropriate for marriage.

Among other criteria, he states that a free woman is preferable to a slave. The reason for this preference is not because a free woman possesses positive qualities such as education or refinement, but mainly because, due to her connections, she is better able to secure support and assistance in everyday matters. Additionally, Ṭūsī asserts that "a virgin is preferable to one who is not, for she will be more likely to accept discipline (*adab*), and to assimilate (*mushākilat*) herself to the husband in disposition (*kholq*) and custom (*‘ādāt*), and to follow and obey him." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 162; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 216) In other words, a non-virgin has already been 'formed' by her former husband, making it difficult to re-form her. Marrying a wealthy woman is recommended, but the man should not marry her for her property, "for when women own property, it invites their domination and authority, a tendency to use others and assume superiority." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 162; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 216) This implies the reversal (*intikās*) of the natural order of roles, which inevitably leads to the corruption (*fasād*) of household affairs.

After selecting and marrying a wife, the man must then be instructed on how to rule over her. Ṭūsī first outlines three strategies in this regard, all of which are emotional in nature. The first is that the man should create a formidable image of himself in the eyes of the wife, so that she does not waver "in heeding his commands and prohibitions," instead following "her fancy and will." (Ṭūsī,

2011, 162; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 217) Otherwise, the wife will “bring the husband into subjection, making him the means of attaining her desires [...]. Thus, the one who should command is commanded, the one who should obey is obeyed, and the regulator is regulated.” (Ṭūsī, 2011, 162; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 217) It is both astonishing and perplexing how far Ṭūsī goes in describing the extent of destruction this state would lead to: “[T]he end of such a state is the realization of shame and disgrace, of reproach and destruction *to both*, for so many ignominies (*faḍāyih*) and villainies (*shanāyī*) result that it becomes inconceivable to make reparations and amends therefore” (Ṭūsī, 2011, 162; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 217). Reading this passage, one wonders: Is it not the man who fears the woman more and, therefore, tries to instill the same feeling in her? In any case, it is important to note that following her own desires is seen as harmful to the wife herself as well, and she is best controlled against the destructive forces within herself by accepting the governance of the man over her, who represents form, order and intellect. However, this is not something she needs to apprehend or be convinced of. It is enough for the husband to have attained this insight.

The second strategy to govern a wife successfully is “to show favor” to her. The goal of this strategy is to create “love (*muḥabbat*) and sympathy (*shafīqat*)” in the wife, though not for the sake of love itself. Rather, “one confers on the wife those things that call for love and sympathy, so that when she feels apprehensive as to the removal of that state, she solicitously undertakes the affairs of the household together with submission to her husband” (Ṭūsī, 2011, 163; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 217). To put it simply, love is to be created in order to threaten the wife with its loss, compelling her to fulfill her duties in the household.

The third and final main strategy in managing the wife is “to occupy her mind” with various household chores, ensuring that she does not have any free time. Otherwise,

[...] she will busy herself with excursions, with decking herself out for excursions, with going to see the sights, and with looking at strange men, [...] so that in the long run, in addition to disorganization of daily life and loss of manhood (*muruwwat*) and the acquisition of disgrace (*faḍīḥat*), annihilation (*halāk*) and misery (*shiqāwat*) supervene in both this world and the next. (Ṭūsī, 2011, 163–164; translation slightly revised by me. Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 218)

As reflected in this passage, keeping the wife within the spatial frame allocated to her, i.e. the home, is of central importance. The moment she steps beyond the confines of the home, the entire order of not only this world but also the next is threatened with destruction and misery. In other words, not only the order of this world but also that of the next depends on keeping the wife in the home. Therefore, the home is not only the space assigned to the woman as her natural place but also the only space that morality designates for her. In the home, she is properly controlled and prevented from disrupting the order of both this world and the next. Accordingly, her attempt to break the spatial confines imposed on her, leave the home, and experience more than what is permitted by the ruling husband is, in principle, condemned as an act of extreme moral evil.

In addition to these three strategies, Ṭūsī outlines a list of things the husband should avoid doing to his wife. First and foremost, he warns against “excessive love of the wife,” as this would lead to her dominance and result in her desires taking precedence over his own. However, if the husband feels love for his wife, he “should keep it concealed from her and so contrive that she never becomes aware thereof.” (Ṭūsī, 2011, 164; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 219) He should regard this state as a malady, strive to cure it, and under no circumstances remain in it. Otherwise “such a calamity (*āfat*) inevitably produces the aforementioned corruptions (*fasād*).” (Ṭūsī, 2011, 164; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh,

219) Furthermore, the husband should not consult his wife on general matters or confide in her about his secrets. He must also keep the extent of his wealth hidden from her, lest numerous calamities (āfāt) ensue.

So far, Ṭūsī's list of prohibitions in treating wives has focused on restricting her mobility within the limits of the home and concealing aspects of reality from her, since such knowledge could grant her a certain degree of power. However, he takes this even further by providing instructions on how to strictly regulate what the wife is able to perceive through both her insight and hearing. Returning to his instruction to occupy the wife's mind in order to prevent her from leaving the home, the primary stated reason for this was to keep her from seeing things she is not supposed to see, most importantly, strange men. As a sort of justification for this Ṭūsī writes: "[W]hen she sees other men, she despises him [her husband] and holds him of little account" (Ṭūsī, 2011, 164; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 218).

Ṭūsī leaves the reader baffled, offering no explanation as to why the wife, upon seeing other men, would lose her esteem for her own husband. Perhaps this is better understood as an expression of the ruling husband's extreme anxiety about losing his status and position in the household, as well as his awareness of the fragility of the carefully constructed categories and relationships. In any case, Ṭūsī's instruction in this regard goes further, urging that the husband should prevent the wife

[...] from looking at strangers, and from listening to tales about men from women characterized by acts of this kind. Certainly he must never give her any easy way thereto, for such notions inevitably bring grave corruptions (fasādhā-ye 'azīm). The most destructive (tabāh) (activity of all in this respect) is the frequentation of old women who have been admitted to male gatherings and retail stories from these (experiences). (Ṭūsī, 2011, 164; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 219)

This regime of control is completed when we look a few pages further, where Ṭūsī, after devoting several pages to the education of sons, dedicates only one paragraph to the 'education' of daughters, stating that: "They should be brought up to keep close to the house and live in seclusion (hijāb), cultivating gravity, [...] and the other qualities we have enumerated in the chapter on "Wives". They should be prevented from learning to read or write." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 173; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 229)

The feminine body, even as a child, is politically and morally restricted to the spatial confines of the home. The category of woman is primarily constructed by limiting the spatial dimension of her existence. Other prohibitions, limitations, and negations follow this fundamental spatial restriction. The daughter is to be prevented from learning to read and write. Later, the husband decides what is safe for the wife to know, see, and hear.

The restrictions imposed on the wife regarding her knowledge of the husband's love for her, his secrets, and his wealth serve to deprive her of any power to rule. The denial of her education in reading and writing, along with preventing her from seeing or hearing, aims at achieving the complete segregation of the genders. Earlier in this section, I quoted a passage where Ṭūsī urges that "no outsider (bīgāneh)" is to be allowed to learn of the wife's "signs (āṭār), appearance (shamāyil), and voice (āwāz)." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 163; translation slightly revised by me. Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 217) To achieve this, even within the house, the men's living quarters must be separated from those of the women (see Ṭūsī, 2011, 156; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 209). So, in Ṭūsī's ideal order of the household, neither the outsider men are allowed to experience any aspect of the wife's existence,

nor is the wife permitted to experience anything about the outsider men. To attain this aim, even the old women, who may have been permitted in men's gatherings, are to be prevented from communicating with the wife, as they might tell her stories about outsider men.

It would be interesting to explore what exactly is gained or lost with a woman's aging that allows her to transcend the restrictions imposed by her assigned category as a woman. Why is she allowed to step beyond the space designated for her and even participate in men's gatherings? Is it because she is no longer of sexual interest to men and incapable of reproduction? Or has she perhaps lost her ruler, her husband, who would have prevented her from entering men's gatherings? In any case, it is important to note that no one is allowed to bridge the segregation between the genders. Even the old woman, upon being accepted into men's gatherings, must relinquish her involvement with other women. Furthermore, even in old age, the woman remains a threat to the desired order established by the ruler of the household.

From the points discussed above, it is clear that the segregation of the two recognized genders is primarily realized through the division of space. The first, the home, is a place where everything is meant to remain unchanged, with no development or transformation desired. In contrast, the significantly larger part, the city, is precisely where change, perfection, and ultimately happiness are expected to unfold. In the following section, I argue that the male slave, unlike the daughter, wife, or mother, can partake in perfection precisely because, by virtue of his gender, he is allowed to share in the space of the city.

4 Better to Be a Slave Than a Woman

The brief section on how to govern slaves (approximately four pages) outlines solely how a master should treat a slave, with no mention of a corresponding ethical framework for the slave. Hence, the ethics articulated by Ṭūsī in this section is explicitly that of the master. The perspective of the slave, much like the perspective of the woman in his ethics, is entirely absent. The overall tone of this section, unlike the one on wives, is notably positive, and there is no dire warning of destruction or misery through failing to rule the slaves properly.

Ṭūsī begins the section by stressing the crucial role of the class (*tāyefeh*) of slaves in ensuring the comfort and ease of another, i.e. the free class and proceeds by advising the master to be grateful to God for their existence and to employ them with "all manner of benevolence (*rafaq*), affability (*mudārāt*), gentleness (*luṭf*) and encouragement (*muwāsāt*)" (Ṭūsī, 2011, 181; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 241). Ṭūsī explicitly defines the relationship between the slave and the master as being based on love: "The basic principle governing the service of servants is that what impels them thereto should be love, rather than necessity or hope or fear" (Ṭūsī, 2011, 183; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 242). Having been treated with kindness, they serve the master as "good counsellors." For this purpose, it is important to take care of their needs and well-being. Ṭūsī even advises: "Let times of rest and ease be appointed for them, it being thus contrived that the tasks entrusted to them are undertaken cheerfully and diligently, not in an attitude of languor and sloth." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 183; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 243) Whereas granting free time to the wife is perceived as a dire threat to the order of both this world and the next, as elaborated in the previous section, the slave's free time is regarded as productive, actively contributing to the preservation of order.

As in the section on "Regulation of Wives" Ṭūsī first outlines certain criteria for selecting a slave. The first criterion is a well-proportioned body. Failure to meet this standard immediately results in exclusion from entering the carefully arranged world of the free man. A well-proportioned body is to be understood primarily in aesthetic terms. This means that "persons of irregular form and incongruous proportion" should not be obtained as slaves because, as Ṭūsī stresses, a person's ethical disposition (*kholq*) follows their physical constitution. (Ṭūsī, 2011, 182; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 241) While drawing a connection between the body and acquired ethical disposition is an interesting insight, as it suggests thinking of the ethical subject as an embodied one, Ṭūsī's straightforward and simplistic formulation reflects only the perspective of the master. By offering this argument, he in fact attempts to ethically legitimize the master's preference for the acquisition of aesthetically pleasing objects. The second implication of a well-proportioned body is physical health and ability. Hence disabled bodies, "such as the one-eyed and the crippled and the leprous," are not allowed to enter into Ṭūsī's household (Ṭūsī, 2011, 182; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 241).

Ṭūsī then specifies certain cognitive and emotional traits that a slave must possess to seamlessly integrate into the power hierarchy, which he regards as good and beyond question. Firstly, one should consider that a "slave is better fitted for service than a free man, for a slave is more inclined to accept obedience to the master and training in accordance with his disposition and manners." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 183; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 243) This is the same reasoning Ṭūsī employed to justify the preference for a virgin woman over a non-virgin, as discussed in the previous section. Furthermore, those with "small intelligence" are preferred over "the quick and ingenious person" because, as Ṭūsī argues, "deception, guile, and trickery are allied with these two qualities." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 182; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 241) The "small intelligence" of the slave enables the master to maintain control over him within the desired order. This also implies that those with great intelligence among slaves, that is the lowest class in the city, should be excluded from entering the order, as they pose a threat to the interests of the master. One should recall Ṭūsī's view, elaborated in the first section of this chapter, on the noblest of noble crafts, which, he asserts, depends on "substance of the intelligence" (Ṭūsī, 2011, 158; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 211). In this context, one might conclude that while intelligence is regarded as a thoroughly positive trait for the ruling class and expected of its members, only a moderate level of it is tolerated among the members of the lowest ruled class, i.e. the slaves.

At this juncture, it is important to note that while slaves constitute the lowest ruled class, this does not imply that women hold a higher position in the hierarchy of Ṭūsī's city. As detailed in the previous section, the space allocated to women, and which they are strictly confined to, is the home. In this sense, no place is designated for women in the social hierarchy. In other words, women do not constitute a social class, as they have no place in the city. The society Ṭūsī constructs is obviously a homosocial one, a city built exclusively by men, for men.

Ṭūsī's discussion of the category of slave implies a striking contrast to the way he addresses the category of women. In his instructions on how to govern wives, Ṭūsī views women as a homogeneous group, assigning them the one and the same tasks. No distinctions are made based on potential talents or specific dispositions that certain women may possess. All daughters and wives are to be governed in the same manner, as they seem to lack any characteristics that could grant them even the slightest sense of individuality. However, when it comes to slaves, Ṭūsī takes a different approach. The slave is not merely a slave; he possesses subtle signs of individuality that

Ṭūsī is clearly willing to recognize. In educating a slave in a craft or assigning him to a specific task, the master is to employ the slave in the craft for which he is designated as fitted (Ṭūsī, 2011, 182; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 242). The master is to consider the slave's natural inclinations before entrusting him with a task, "for every nature has a particularity for a particular craft." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 182; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 242)

When choosing slaves, one should take for one's personal service the more intelligent, the wiser, the more eloquent, and those with a greater share of modesty and piety. For commercial enterprises, one needs those who are more continent, more capable and more acquisitive. The cultivation of estates calls for those with a tendency to strength, toughness and the capacity for hard work; while the grazing of flocks is best carried on by those with stout hearts and loud voices and no great inclination to sleep. (Ṭūsī, 2011, 183; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 243)

In this regard, Ṭūsī goes further and explicitly distinguishes three groups (*aṣnāf*) within the category of slaves "according to their nature," namely "the freeman by nature, the slave by nature, and the slave by appetite." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 183; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 243) He proceeds by advising the master to treat slaves of the first group as his own children and encourage them to "acquire a proper mode of conduct." (Ṭūsī, 2011, 183; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 243) Since "acquiring a proper mode of conduct" is reserved for sons, slaves who are "free by nature" are to be treated like the master's sons in this regard and receive an education from which the master's daughters are, in principle, excluded. In this way, Ṭūsī introduces some plasticity to the category of slave, allowing for a slight possibility of social mobility for them.

All slaves are expected to acquire a craft, which means they must receive at least a minimum level of skill development. This, in turn, facilitates their involvement in the economic and social life of the city. Since slaves are tasked with performing various duties and crafts, a form of internal categorization arises within this group, one that favors those considered most similar to the master. As a result, the slave is granted more freedom in terms of space than the woman, as he is allowed a place within the city, with no strict spatial segregation separating him from the master. In this way, the slave is placed in spatial proximity to the master and is allowed to accompany him in areas of the city, which is the only place where the attainment of perfection and happiness can occur.

From all that has been discussed in this section, it should be clear that being a male body, even when the social context deprives that body of freedom and attributes the status of slave to it, implies a horizon of possibilities, forms of agency and development that are, in principle, entirely denied to the female body.

Conclusion

The creation and preservation of power structures, on the one hand, and moral values, on the other, are so tightly intertwined in Ṭūsī's household and city that untangling their foundational relationship seems impossible. What I find particularly noteworthy in this regard, and have attempted to expound upon in the first section, is that Ṭūsī effectively elevates the perspective from which his investigation is conducted to the point where it appears to be the only possible one. This is achieved through the monopolization of the epistemological faculty of the intellect and its exclusive attribution to the ruling men: only the ruling man knows, and in principle can know, what is good. Only this class of men has actualized the faculty of intellect within itself, an ability

indispensable for grasping the universal ideas needed for the production of science, including the science of ethics. An important point in this regard is also that the faculty of intellect, as a potentiality, is presumed to exist in every soul linked to a male body, even in the bodies of slaves. This assumption justifies the education of every male body. Therefore, one could argue that although only one perspective in the science of ethics is conceivable, however, in principle, any individual among men can appropriate this perspective, share in it, and become capable of understanding and articulating ethical values.

Throughout *The Nasirean Ethics*, Ṭūsī frequently places women alongside “common people (‘awām), children, madmen, and drunken persons” (Ṭūsī, 2011, 174; Ṭūsī, 1399 Sh, 231).¹⁰ All of these groups are considered to lack intellect; however, while common people have failed to actualize it, children, i.e. sons, have not yet developed it, and the drunken person temporarily lacks it, women are entirely devoid of it. What I have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter is that, in doing so, Ṭūsī is not merely reflecting the prevailing view of his time toward women; rather, he systematically constructs the category of woman as a consistent and integral component of his ethical system.¹¹ The happiness that Ṭūsī defines, both moral and intellectual in nature, is to be realized within the space of the city. However, for a man to devote as much time as possible to his pursuits in the city, he requires someone to handle all matters related to the material and physical aspects of life, including the material aspect of his reproduction. The home is the place where material needs are fulfilled. This is where the woman enters the narrative and where she is meant to be kept. A man’s attainment of happiness, which constitutes the ultimate purpose of the science of ethics, depends on keeping the woman in the home.

Keeping the woman in the home and preventing her from achieving happiness, as men do, in the space of the city might seem unjust if she possessed the potential for intellectual and moral development. However, since she lacks this potential, no injustice is done by keeping her out of the only space where happiness can be realized. Yet, as the living being categorized as woman exhibits various signs of individual will, desire, and intelligence, much like man, a theory must be devised to discredit all these traits in her. This is precisely what Ṭūsī does in the relatively brief section on “Regulation of Wives” – by conceptualizing women and their will as morally evil, and as the source of misery, destruction, and chaos. This framework justifies the ruling man of the household in applying all possible means to control, oppress, and keep her within the boundaries of his desired order. The comprehensive and astonishingly extreme regime of control over woman can also be understood as a reaction to the perception of her similar potentialities and will. The woman represents an ‘other’ similar to the ruling man of the household, so similar that she might

¹⁰ It is also significant in this passage that women are not included in the category of “common people” and, as a result, must be mentioned separately.

¹¹ In her monograph *Gendered Morality*, Ayubi repeatedly claims that, among other tensions (Ayubi, 2019, 7), there is a “metaphysical tension” in the ethical systems of the ethicists she studies, including Ṭūsī. This idea is frequently reiterated throughout her work (e.g., Ayubi, 2019, 60, 120, 127, 160). However, she does not clearly define what she means by “metaphysical.” The theory of the soul she discusses in her book is part of psychology in classical Islamic philosophy (‘ilm al-nafs). Moreover, the ‘metaphysical’ tension Ayubi identifies pertains to the attribution of a (human) soul to women, which, according to her, would imply the full recognition of their humanity. However, as Ayubi herself acknowledges, for the thinkers she examines, there exists a spectrum of humanity within the category of “human” (Ayubi, 2019, 63). This provides a theoretical basis for expanding the scope of the concept of humanity to include even those who either lack intellectual faculty or have failed to actualize it. Beyond this point, the aim of my paper has been to clarify the remarkable consistency of Ṭūsī’s concept of woman.

wish to take on the same role and share in ruling power; thus, the fear and threat perceived from her, along with the demand for her extreme control and the prohibition of any access to resources that could help her actualize her potentialities.

As a final point, I would like to mention that Ṭūsī was not a passive heir to tradition in his reflections on woman. In the chapter "On Politics," Ṭūsī recapitulates a considerable portion of Fārābī's *Mabādī' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*, which indicates that he had studied it in depth. In that book, Fārābī explicitly asserts that men and women possess similar cognitive faculties and do not differ in this regard (Fārābī, 1985, 196). Ṭūsī was undoubtedly familiar with this passage but consciously chose to develop an approach completely opposed to Fārābī's on this matter. We may speculate, but cannot know, to what extent his biography, as a young man frequently interacting with the ruling class and aspiring to acquire power, influenced his perspective. However, it is obvious that his ethics is developed from a specific perspective, one that refuses to acknowledge itself as merely one perspective and, as a result, fails to recognize its inherent limitations. His epistemic arrogance, and resultant refusal to acknowledge of any other perspective, prevent Ṭūsī from observing things from a multi-perspectival point of view, which could have led to much richer insights into the issues he addresses in his work.

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