



## RESEARCH PAPER

# A Comparative Study of the Thoughts of Spinoza and Iqbal on Freedom, Predestination, and Human Agency with Emphasis on the Light of Quranic Thought

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## ABSTRACT

This comparative analysis looks at the philosophical approach of Baruch Spinoza and Muhammad Iqbal on freedom, destiny and human agency especially in quorum about the Quranic thought. The opinions of both the philosophers are explained in both rational and metaphorical terms to enable the reader be able to make a better decision on what opinion is right and wrong. Although the works of the two are now in different historical and cultural settings, there is a close relationship between the will of God and the autonomy of the human beings in the works of both thinkers. Criticizing this deterministic approach, Spinoza has affirmed that freedom can be explained as a sense of necessity through rational comprehension, whereas Iqbal - with the help of Islamic traditions - has promoted a dynamic definition of freedom, which has self-determination, moral action and growth of personal connectivity with God. This paper examines the tensions between metaphysical materialism of Spinoza and the God-based self-knowledge of Iqbal, with the regard to identifying main areas of agreement and what restrictions there are to them, especially in terms of individual freedom versus divine omniscience. By placing their perceptions in context within discourse of the Quran, the comparative study in question asserts that as opposed to Spinoza, who emphasizes freedom as something characterized by necessity, Iqbal argues that the freedom should be acquired through active involvement and accountability.

**KEYWORDS** Determinism, Human Freedom, Spinoza, Iqbal, Khudi (Selfhood), Predestination, Human Agency

## Introduction

The connection among the freedom, predestination, and human agency is one of the key philosophical discussions both in the western and Islamic traditions of thought, especially regarding the conflict between the omniscience of God and the free will of man. Baruch Spinoza, a rationalist philosopher of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Muhammad Iqbal, a philosopher and poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Islamic background, taking up the questions differently have very different answers to those questions. Despite the divergence in their historical, cultural, and theological milieus, both thinkers grapple with fundamental questions: What constitutes human freedom? How is divine omniscience reconciled with individual autonomy? And to what extent can human beings be considered active agents within a divinely ordained cosmos?

Spinoza articulates a rigorously deterministic metaphysics in which all events, including human actions, are necessitated by the immutable laws of nature. In *Ethics*, he contends that true freedom does not lie in the capacity for uncaused choice but in the rational recognition of necessity. Human beings, as finite modes of the one infinite substance (God or Nature), are embedded in a causal nexus that admits no exceptions. Consequently, freedom is redefined as intellectual liberation—an understanding of one's place within the totality of nature's causal structure. In this context, the 'divine will' is not distinct from the course of nature but is the same as it; this is why God can be referred to as nature and the choice of human beings is merely an instance of the determinism of nature. Therefore, Spinoza criticizes the classical concepts of Creator and creation because he puts them on the same level, replacing natural necessity with desire by the Creator.

According to Muhammad Iqbal there must be dynamic human freedom that is moving and teleological in nature within the premise of Islamic metaphysics. The very core of the Iqbalian philosophy is the principle of *khudi* (selfhood), which he evolves as a metaphysical and ethical idea based on the Quranic anthropology. Iqbal, unlike Spinoza, with his passive determinism, lays a stress on the human beings as co-creators in developing the destiny. Through impact of Quranic ideas of *taklif* (moral responsibility) and *ikhtiyar* (free choice), Iqbal believes that the human self has the ability to make moral efforts (*jahd*) and self-transcendence. Freedom as conceived by Iqbal does not consist in autonomy but in the rational self-realization of man in accordance with the will of God. This creative agency is tended by the means of moral act, spiritual striving, and progressive awareness of God. Both philosophies are based upon the unresolved tension between the sovereignty of God and the cause and action of humans. Whereas Spinoza allows himself to resolve this tension by bypassing along the chain of necessity into the necessity of freedom in a pantheistic order of decision, Iqbal preserves this tension and reorganizes it by embedding a theistic stance that envisages the transcendent personality of God and the human powers of productivity. The vision of Iqbal allows contradiction between the will of God and active of man, which infers a concept of existence in which freedom is developed through sharing in the divine, but not through resignation to predetermination.

### **Putting it in epistemic perspective:**

By anchoring these views in the larger context of the debate on freedom and predestination, this venture illuminates the inevitability and possibility of human action in terms of the Western and Islamic philosophical traditions. In the end, contrasting Spinoza and Iqbal in their self-understanding of the rational necessity of determinism, on the one hand, and theocentric existentialism, on the other hand, presents not just a disparity of ontology but also a difference in self-perception concerning the meaning of humanity existing in a divinely ordered universe. The issue of freedom and predestination has been discussed in various philosophical systems including the Western and Islamic one. A few studies have been written concerning this aspect in different dimensions. A comparative approach to human freedom may also engage both rationalist and Islamic metaphysics; see Morteza Talebi, *Human Freedom in the Light of Spinoza and Sadralmuta'alin Shirazi* (University of Tehran, 2011). Much like this, the 2019 book *A Rational Exploration of Human and Freedom* by Mohammad Hussein Pajouhandeh, deals with central elements of the discussion of the concept human and human determinism. Although a lot has been written on the deterministic view of Spinoza, his perception of self and freedom, and Quranic views on human agency, there is very little made of the comparison of Spinoza with Iqbal through the light of Quranic thinking. This study seeks to address that gap by critically examining how Iqbal's Islamic framework engages with and responds to Spinoza's deterministic metaphysics, thus offering a fresh perspective that bridges Western and Islamic philosophical traditions.

## **Research Mythology**

The research presents a standard comparative philosophical approach, focusing on contemporary textual and conceptual analysis. Primary sources include key philosophical writings and statements by Iqbal in the light of Spinoza and the Quran, with a particular focus on his writings on freedom, destiny, and human agency.

This mythology presents critical interpretation, contextualization, and thematic comparison of philosophical ideas within the framework of Islamic theology and Western rationalism, which helps the reader form a sound opinion.

## **Results and Discussion**

A central figure of the 17th-century European Enlightenment, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) sought to apply a geometric approach to his central work, ethics and philosophy, creating a system where all creatures are governed by a single substance whose logical necessity was attempted to be used as mathematical proof. Rationalism is firmly based on a theory that describes the place of God, nature and humanity in a unified, necessary order.

On the other hand, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) emerged as a major Muslim intellectual in the 20th century. He embarked on a project of intellectual renewal in response to the challenges of modernity, which is detailed in his major philosophical work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, as well as in his poetry collection, which helps and guides the reader in introducing many new perspectives in the context of this article. Iqbal's thought, with its synthesis of traditional Islamic philosophical heritage and modern Western thought cannot be denied the influence of thinkers such as Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead. His aim was not to abandon tradition but to revive it, offering a new, dynamic understanding of Islamic philosophy for the contemporary world.

Both Spinoza and Iqbal reject the simple notion of free will without reason, arriving at fundamentally opposed concepts of human freedom and agency. According to Spinoza, rationalists, in a determinate universe where all things are interconnected by logical necessity or by the nature of matter. In contrast, Allama Muhammad Iqbal presents a modernist, Islamic, dynamic and evolving universe where the "self" is championed as an active and creative force. Iqbal's argument is based on the premise that man has the freedom to shape his own destiny according to God's will and is responsible for his own choices. When viewed in light of the teachings of the Quran, which simultaneously asserts the ultimate sovereignty (Qadar) of God and offers a framework that clarifies human dignity and purpose. The enduring compatibility of Spinoza and Iqbal lies in their unique contributions to the ongoing debate about fate and agency. The ultimate contrast between Spinoza and Iqbal lies in the "freedom from passion-based reason" and the "freedom of creative action through the affirmation of the self."

## **Spinoza: Freedom as the Understanding of Necessity**

Baruch Spinoza, a seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher, is a thinker whose understanding of freedom deviates significantly from the views prevalent in religious traditions and moral philosophy. In Spinoza's philosophical system, which is based on a monistic ontology, God, nature, and being are considered one. His famous phrase, —God or nature, summarizes this idea (Jaspers, 1998, p. 34). According to Spinoza, all beings, including humans, are manifestations or states of a single essence, which he calls God. For Spinoza, freedom does not mean absolute choice or liberation from the causal chain of

nature. In his famous work, *Ethics*, he clearly emphasizes that humans are free only when they become aware of the causal necessity that shapes them (Spinoza, 1985, p. 54). True freedom lies in understanding necessity, not in escaping it. In this framework, human actions—whether moral or otherwise—are all part of a chain of causes and effects that emanate from the divine essence. What brings a person closer to free action is not autonomous decision-making, but a rational understanding of causal laws and the alignment of the will with them. In other words, according to Spinoza, the freer a person becomes as he moves from a passive state to an active rational engagement. Spinoza argues that free will is an illusion that arises from man's ignorance of the internal and external causes behind his actions. —Man thinks he is free because he is ignorant of the cause of his actions, he writes, —but if he knew that his actions are the result of causal necessity, he would no longer deceive himself into thinking that he has free will (Spinoza, 1998, p. 32). This view has important implications for ethics, responsibility, and religion. Spinoza's ethics is based on a kind of rational virtue that is not based on free will, but on cognitive ability and alignment with the necessary structure of existence. The moral man - according to Spinoza - is one who acts in accordance with the necessity of nature and reason, not one who freely chooses between good and evil.

For Spinoza, freedom does not mean freedom from the chain of causality, but rather its active understanding and acceptance. In this view, the free man is one who, through his rational understanding, recognizes his place in the totality of existence and organizes his life according to that knowledge. Spinoza's concept of freedom is inextricably linked to his metaphysical system, which is fully explained in his *Ethics* (published posthumously in 1677) (Spinoza, 1985, p. 13). Unlike voluntarist or libertarian perspectives that emphasize free choice and moral responsibility, Spinoza presents a strictly deterministic view of the universe. For him, all events—including human thoughts and actions—follow necessarily from the nature of God, who is identical with nature itself. Freedom, in Spinoza's philosophy, is not the power to choose otherwise, but the rational understanding of the necessity that governs all things. In *Ethics*, he posits a single, infinite, self-sufficient substance—God or Nature—from which everything inevitably follows. Everything else—what he calls —states— is merely an expression of this one essence. —Everything that exists is in God, and nothing can exist or be conceived without God, he writes (Spinoza, 1998, p. 43). —All finite beings, including humans, are determined by the properties and manifestations of this one essential being. In Spinoza's metaphysics, there are no accidental events. In nature, nothing is conditioned. —Everything is determined by the necessity of the divine essence, which must exist and act in a certain way. (Spinoza, 1998, p. 33).

### **The Relationship between Determinism and Free Will**

One of the central questions in both philosophy and theology concerns the relationship between determinism and free will. Is human freedom genuine, or is it merely an illusion—an effect of our ignorance of deeper causal chains, as some philosophical traditions suggest? Baruch Spinoza and Muhammad Iqbal both engage with this enduring problem, yet they arrive at fundamentally different conclusions, shaped by their respective conceptions of God, nature, and the human condition. Spinoza maintains that the common belief in free will stems from ignorance. According to him, individuals assume they are free because they are conscious of their desires and actions, but they remain unaware of the underlying causes that determine them. Every thought, emotion, and decision is, for Spinoza, the outcome of an infinite causal chain within nature—each event the necessary effect of proceeding conditions. Human beings, therefore, are not exceptions to this universal determinism; they are fully embedded within it. As he states in Letter 58 to Schuller, “People believe they are free because they are conscious of their will and desires, but they are ignorant of the causes that determine them.” In Spinoza's view, true freedom

lies not in the ability to choose otherwise, but in understanding the necessity that governs all existence. (Spinoza, Letter: 58). Freedom as free will or the ability to choose differently is therefore simply a deceptive illusion caused by cognitive limitations. Spinoza not only rejects Descartes' dualism, but also any notion of divine grace or non-coercive human will. Instead, he presents a view in which knowledge becomes the key to liberation. In Spinoza's philosophy, the world is a coherent and systematic whole, and all its parts and phenomena – including human actions – are subject to necessary causes. Rejecting the idea of free will, he writes: –Man believes himself to be free because he is unaware of the causes of his actions‖ (Spinoza, 1994, Muzaffar & Rafique, 2020).

In Spinoza's philosophical system, human beings are as subject to the laws of nature as any physical object – no less determined than a stone falling under the force of gravity. For Spinoza, genuine freedom does not consist in the capacity for uncaused or autonomous choice, but in the rational understanding of necessity and one's integration within the totality of nature, which he equates with God (*Deus sive Natura*). From this standpoint, what is commonly called "free will" is, in fact, a manifestation of ignorance – an illusion that arises from our awareness of volition but ignorance of its underlying causes.

While Spinoza's determinism possesses a compelling internal coherence and is grounded in a rigorous rationalist framework, it presents significant philosophical and existential challenges. By arguing that human behavior is entirely cause-determined, the basis of sound moral concepts is left doubtful namely the moral responsibility, moral choice, ethical deliberation and accountability. The implications are on religious discourse too: the doctrines of rewards and punishments, divine justice, repentance and spiritual striving rely on some level of human freedom. Strict determinism makes the choice between virtue and vice incoherent and therefore, the judgment of morality and ethical responsibility illusory. As Spinoza of himself acknowledges, to enquire whether one ought or ought not to act in a certain way will be an inquiry of no sense at all, in case all things have already been determined by antecedent causes.

Muhammad Iqbal, engaging both with Western philosophical determinism and deterministic strands within Islamic theology, strongly critiques this reduction of human agency. For Iqbal, determinism – whether metaphysical or theological – undermines the very conditions of human selfhood, creativity, and moral development. He argues that it is not the *illusion* of freedom, but rather the *doctrine* of determinism that stifles human potential. From Iqbal's perspective, any worldview that denies the real capacity for moral choice and spiritual striving ultimately negates the ethical substance of religion and the purpose of human existence. In affirming human agency within a divinely governed cosmos, Iqbal seeks to reconcile freedom with divine will, thus preserving the integrity of moral responsibility and the transformative potential of the self. (Fazlli, 2008, p: 21). According to Muhammad Iqbal, human will is both real and efficacious, constituting a fundamental aspect of human existence. While he acknowledges that the cosmos operates in accordance with immutable laws, Iqbal contends that within this lawful order, human beings possess the capacity to actively shape their destiny through the exercise of reason, faith, and volition. He mounts a robust critique against Spinoza's deterministic framework as well as the deterministic interpretations historically prevalent in certain Islamic theological traditions, which he views as undermining the authenticity and potency of human freedom.

For Iqbal, human will is not merely possible but ontologically necessary within the structure of the world. His philosophy raises human beings to the rank of creative, responsible agents- quasi divine in their ability to create new realities and to create meaning out of their actions. He espouses determinism as a serious hindrance to the personal as well

as collective self-life, citing the demise of Islamic culture partly to be due to the surrender to human stewardship in the face of brotherly fatalism. We have accustomed ourselves to accepting whatever fate we did not choose ourselves and this is degrading, he notes.

The existence of freedom and moral choice in the contextualization of Quinnlis Iqbal revolves around the role of man as the vicegerent (caliph) of God on earth. This legitimacy of caliphate, he says assumes the freedom to pick either different courses of actions and corresponding responsibility to that choice. Absent such freedom, human beings would be reduced to mere automatons, incapable of fulfilling their divinely mandated role. Thus, Iqbal revises traditional interpretations of *qadar* (divine decree), emphasizing a dynamic equilibrium between human agency and divine ordinance. This nuanced balance preserves divine sovereignty while affirming human creativity and ethical responsibility, thereby reinvigorating the philosophical and theological discourse on freedom within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

### Freedom as Rational Necessity

In Spinoza's philosophical framework, true freedom is the realization of the necessity of nature and alignment with the rational order of the world. —Whatever acts solely on the basis of its own nature is freer, he writes (Ayini, 2010: 9). This definition redefines freedom as autonomy within the framework of necessity, or what might be called —self autonomous necessity. A person is most free not when he can act independently of causal laws (which is impossible), but when he can use his understanding of those laws and their place within them to act. In other words, a wise or rational person is not a slave to his emotions, but is guided by reason and knows how his passions and desires arise and how to control them. This understanding leads to a kind of inner liberation —a transition from passive emotions (passions) to conscious actions (actions). Freedom, therefore, changes the mental and rational state of the individual, not his innate ability to choose. This state is a state of enlightened acceptance in which the individual realizes that everything, including himself, is part of the necessary unfolding of nature. Spinoza distinguishes between two states of existence:

- Servitude (*servitus*): living under the domination of external feelings and emotions, without understanding their causes.
- Liberty (*libertas*): living based on reason, understanding causes and acting towards greater knowledge. (Harris, 2019: 10)

Indeed, the more one understands causes, the greater one's freedom, because they are no longer passively present in the world, but become an active agent of understanding. According to Spinoza, freedom is not the negation of necessity, but its active understanding and acceptance through reason. This view challenges traditional notions of freedom and lays the foundation for a kind of —rational morality‖ in which humans achieve liberation not by resisting the laws of nature but by knowing and obeying them wisely.

Genuine freedom, in Iqbal's philosophy, is realized through the harmonious integration of reason, faith, and volition. One must comprehend the world and grasp divine laws, yet the ultimate expression of freedom lies in acting through one's own initiative and creative agency. Freedom then is not the opposite of reason but only that which is helpless to causal determinism. Rather, it is a purely deliberate and intentional activity in a rational system- where there can be choice and emancipation. Dynamically considered, freedom is therefore the rational necessity, not as the passive acceptance of pre-destined fate, but as the creative power of choice directed according to the rationality of divine law. The essence of this has been most succinctly highlighted by Iqbal and reads as follows, on behalf of the

man who finds law, to use it in service of the new purpose rather than to be in its slavery. He continues to posit, Freedom without reason, is disorderly passion; and reason without freedom, is cold death. The idea of free will is utterly different with Spinoza inherently deterministic visions of freedom as a mere intellectual conception of the necessity and barely corresponds to the creative acts of Art and self-determining Acts of Morality., free will as presented in the Quran is repeatedly reiterated:

انا هديناه السبيل اما شاكرا و اما كفورا «الدهر: ٣» فمن شاء فليؤمن و من شاء فليكفر. «الكهف: ٢٩»

“Indeed we shown him the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful.” “So whoever wills- let him believe, and whoever wills- let him disbelieve.”

Iqbal concludes from these verses that free will is an integral part of human creation. Unlike Spinoza, who sees free will as an illusion arising from ignorance of causes, the Quran presents humans as free and responsible beings. (Rosenthal, 1999: 34 and 45)

### **A Comparative View of God and Freedom in the Philosophical Systems of Spinoza and Iqbal**

A central implication of Spinoza's metaphysical system is that God acts not through volition or temporal intervention, but out of the necessity of his own nature. God does not will, deliberate, or respond within the framework of creation; rather, he *is* the totality of existence — *Deus sive Natura* — a singular, infinite substance that underlies all that is. Within this philosophical schema, traditional notions of divine freedom are rendered inapplicable. There is no relational dynamic between God and creation, no divine intentionality, and no engagement with creation in terms of willful governance or providence. Spinoza categorically rejects teleology in nature, along with any conception of divine command, government, or reward and punishment. This impersonal conception of divinity stands in stark contrast to the personal, anthropomorphic God of the Abrahamic religions — a God who loves, judges, forgives, and enters into covenantal relationships. For Spinoza, God neither loves nor dispenses justice or mercy; God is identical with the immutable, rational order of the cosmos. In this light, morality is not grounded in obedience to divine will but emerges as a necessary extension of Spinoza's metaphysical naturalism. Virtue, in his system, is synonymous with intellectual clarity and the rational comprehension of one's place within the eternal order. As Copleston notes, “Spinoza's moral project is inseparable from his metaphysical naturalism; human freedom is possible only because the human mind is part of the infinite reason of God.” Thus, ethical life becomes a form of rational alignment with the structure of reality itself. (Copleston, 2001, p: 139) Freedom, therefore, becomes synonymous with rational insight into the necessary causality of all things.

In Iqbal's philosophical vision, the relationship between God and human freedom is not one of opposition but of dynamic and reciprocal coexistence. Contrary to Spinoza's deterministic monism — where God, equated with nature, is the immanent cause of all things and freedom is redefined as the recognition of necessity — Iqbal conceives of God not as a replacement for human will, but as its originator. God, in Iqbal's metaphysics, is a living, creative, and purposive will who endows human beings with genuine capacity for choice and self-determination. This conception is articulated most vividly in works such as *Javid Nama* and *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*, where God is portrayed not as an impersonal, mechanistic force, but as a relational and responsive presence — an intimate companion and interlocutor of humanity. Imposing commands in which human beings are mere spectators, the divine invites humanity into the work of self-realization, moral striving, and spiritual ascent. In such a framework freedom is not a phantasm to be dispelled in the relationship to cosmic positivity, but a sacred commission and expression of human dignity. The capacity to make

mistakes, to choose, to make something wrong, and to aim at attaining perfection in that flawsome endeavor is in itself a manifestation of the divine creative will in the soul of human being as far as Iqbal was concerned.

In one of his famous verses, he says:

خودی را چو از حق خبر شد عیان

نہان شد ز چشمش دو عالم نہان

*When the self becomes aware of the Truth, both worlds become invisible to its eyes. (Baqai, 2006, p: 89)*

It implies that, once the individual does identify his true self (khudi) and comprehends the nature of Allah Almighty, then the worldly desires and material things will have no meaning in his eyes. He ascends into spiritual heights and does not have care about the worldly things. This awareness is neither just metaphysical but existential which culminates in freedom, the sense of moral responsibility and the pursuit of meaning. This is the main idea central to Iqbal philosophical theologizing that God does not want the passive submission but the active input of a free acting moral being. In his perception, actions which are seen to be authentic prayers, repentance, love, faith can only come as a result of the depths of the freedom of an individual rather than as a result of compulsion and inherent ritual. Divine-human relations, then, are not ordered or arbitrated by a deterministic causality but by a discoursing process within which God is understood as a partner, inspirer and director of moral and spiritual development of the human person. With this model, human freedom is not synonymous or a concession that is essential to a true religiosity and personal realization.

### Determinism

It is common to distinguish two positions: strong theological determinism and the position of weak theological determinism, which lets secondary causation but makes God to have perfect knowledge of all things that will happen. This question has aroused considerable terminological debate in Islamic thought, and especially in the web of interpretation of the Quran, the problem of the relation of the divine will to the freedom of human beings.

Interpretations of the Qur'an on this issue vary. Some scholars argue that the Qur'an affirms the reality of human free will, emphasizing individual responsibility and moral accountability. Others maintain that the Qur'anic discourse upholds a vision of divine predestination, where God's will determines all outcomes, including human choices. However, the dominant position among classical Qur'anic commentators is that the Qur'an advances a **third, mediating perspective**, commonly referred to as the "*middle way*" (*amr bayn al-amrayn*).

According to this view, while human beings operate within the broader scope of divine will and providence, they nevertheless possess a limited capacity for choice and moral agency. Human actions are neither entirely independent nor fully coerced; rather, they occur in cooperation with divine will, making room for both accountability and divine sovereignty. This balanced approach seeks to preserve the transcendence and omnipotence of God while affirming the meaningfulness of human moral responsibility. (Mehri, 1375, p: 11) In summary, this perspective – grounded in Qur'anic verses and prophetic narrations – maintains that while human beings are subject to God's knowledge and will, they nonetheless possess genuine free will. God has endowed them with the capacity and



strength to resist base desires and temptations, and to choose virtuous actions of their own accord.

Within this framework, human beings participate actively in shaping their own destinies through the exercise of choice, while divine assistance supports and guides these choices. This doctrine makes a synergic interconnection between human will and God will without curdling into hard determinism.

On the contrary, determinism is in conflict with free will. It assumes that everything, including human behavior is the necessary consequence of what has existed previous to it, including no way out in terms of true autonomy. To counter this conflict there have been different philosophical stands. **Soft determinism** (or compatibilism) asserts that free will and moral responsibility are compatible with causal determinism; that the idea of being a free agent does not rely upon the non-existence of causal laws, but on the capacity to act on inner motives and rationale. **Hard determinism**, on the other hand, denies the existence of free will altogether, asserting that all human behavior is wholly determined by external and internal conditions.

For Spinoza, determinism is not a speculative theory but the very structure of reality itself. In his metaphysical system, everything—including human thought and action—follows necessarily from the nature of God, who is identified with the totality of being. As such, the notion of an "independent will" is dismissed as a psychological illusion. In a well-known analogy, Spinoza writes, "*If a stone could think, it would believe that it was falling freely,*" highlighting the subjective misperception of freedom in a world governed by necessity. (Kani, 2018, p: 64) Thus, moral responsibility is ultimately nothing more than a reflection of ignorance of causes.

In contrast, Iqbal rejects this form of determinism, viewing it as both a rational and moral deficiency. In his view, determinism undermines the significance of religious and ethical values, and fosters a sense of historical and psychological passivity that stifles individual and collective growth.

### **Determinism in the Views of Spinoza and Iqbal**

Spinoza emphasizes that there is only one substance in the universe, which he called "God" or in some places "Nature". This substance is singular, infinite, and the cause of everything. All other beings, including humans, animals, objects, and even thoughts, are merely "states" or "forms" of this singular substance. They do not have an independent existence from this substance and are merely manifestations of its aspects. In Spinoza's view, everything happens based on necessary causes. Nothing happens by chance, and every effect necessarily follows from its cause. This causality is an infinite chain of cause and effect that ultimately leads to the single substance (God/Nature). He considers this causality not only for material phenomena, but also for mental and psychological phenomena; That is, our feelings, thoughts, and decisions also necessarily arise from their antecedent causes. He strongly rejects the idea of absolute freedom and free will in the conventional sense. He argues that humans, due to their ignorance of the true causes of their actions, mistakenly believe that they are free. According to Spinoza, the only "free being" is God (nature), but God's freedom is not understood as "the ability to choose between different options" but as "acting according to the necessity of his nature." God is the cause of his own existence and nothing outside of him can force him to act.

In sum, Spinoza's determinism emerges as a logically consistent system grounded in the postulate of a single, infinite substance—*Deus sive Natura*—and the necessary laws

that follow from its essence. Within this framework, free will, as traditionally conceived, is an illusion. True freedom, for Spinoza, does not consist in arbitrary choice, but in the rational understanding of the necessary order of nature and the alignment of one's actions with that order through the guidance of reason. Iqbal believes: "Illusion is not freedom, but the illusion of deterrence that prevents human flourishing." (Fazili, 2008, p: 65)

ناچیز جہانِ مہ و پرویں ترے آگے

وہ عالم مجبور ہے، تُو عالم آزاد

*(The world of the moon and stars is insignificant before You, That world is constrained, (but) you are a free world.)*

He sees man as a free, creative, and responsible being who shapes his identity through interaction with divine tradition, history, and nature.

نہ مختارم توان گفتن نہ مجبور

کہ خاک زندہ ام در انقلاب<sup>1</sup>

*Translation:*

I am neither free to speak, nor compelled "that I am a living soil in my revolution.

From the perspective of the Qur'an, Iqbal's position aligns more closely with the teachings of divine revelation, wherein the human being is portrayed as both free and morally responsible. "And there is nothing for man except what he strives for." (Quran 53:39). According to this view, each individual is accountable for their own effort and will, and no external compulsion exempts them from responsibility. The well-known verse regarding humanity's caliphate also underscores the significance of human will and responsibility on earth: "Indeed, I have placed on the earth a vicegerent." (Quran 2:30). Building on a Qur'anic foundation, Iqbal articulates a vision of the human being as inherently free, creative, and morally responsible before God. Within this framework, the relationship between the human and the divine is not characterized by absolute determinism, but by a dynamic interplay of wills. God wills that the human being exercise choice, and it is precisely in the act of choosing—freely and consciously—that the individual discovers meaning, purpose, and dignity. In Iqbal's thought:

- i. Self-knowledge (Khudi): The concept of "self-knowledge" occupies a central place in Iqbal's philosophy. "Self" refers to the consciousness of man, which is dynamic and creative in nature, and which possesses willpower and authority. Strengthening "self" is the ultimate goal of human life.
- ii. Process and Responsibility: Iqbal emphasizes action, agency, and personal responsibility. He believes that the Quran presents man as a free and autonomous being who is responsible for his actions and for whom he is punished or rewarded. "And whatever misfortune befalls you, it is because of what you have earned" (Quran 42:30) supports this view.
- iii. Determinism and Fate: Iqbal rejects the concept of divine fate as a pre-ordained and unchangeable destiny that negates human free will. He sees fate as the general divine laws

<sup>1</sup> This phrase means that my true, existential nature is in a state of evolution and change. Here, "clay" symbolizes a person's material and earthly existence, and "living" means movement, movement, and evolution. "Revolution" also means change, progress, and internal transformation in its original state.

of the universe in which humans act freely. Human destiny is largely shaped by their choices and actions.

iv. The Dynamics of the World: Unlike Spinoza's view of the world as a fixed and predetermined system, Iqbal believes in the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the world. Man, as a creative being, plays a role in this dynamics and can bring about change through his will.

v. God and Free Will: Iqbal also attributes will and freedom to God. Unlike Spinoza, who equated God with nature, Iqbal considers God to be a distinct and active being who has a will and is the creator and ruler of the world. The issue of divine absolute knowledge and human free will has always been challenging for theologians, and Iqbal attempts to reconcile these two concepts with explanations such as —divine knowledge as a creative and living activity that sees the future as an open possibility and not a fixed order. (Ziauddin, 2009: 134)

### **Human agency from the perspective of the Quran**

The Quranic concept of human agency affirms the reality of moral freedom, individual responsibility, and the capacity for transformation. Rather than presenting humans as passive recipients of fate or predetermined actors within a fixed cosmic order, the Quran presents them as active, dynamic agents with both the freedom to choose and the power to shape the moral values of society. Although this freedom appears within the encompassing will and sovereignty of God, it remains real and productive. This theological vision forms a foundational basis for Islamic ethics, jurisprudence, and social philosophy. Human agency, in this context, is inseparably linked to moral accountability: because individuals possess free will, they bear responsibility for their actions and decisions. This responsibility is not merely legal or social, but ultimately metaphysical, as each person is answerable before God—both in this life and in the hereafter. Thus, the Qur'anic framework situates freedom and responsibility at the heart of human existence, grounding a coherent vision of moral order, justice, and spiritual purpose.

- The creation of humans in the —best form (the best form) and the breathing of the godly spirit: The Quran states that God created humans in the best and most beautiful form (Quran 95:4) and breathed His spirit into them (Quran 15:29, 32:72). This divine breath gives humans infinite potential and great abilities, enabling them to choose, think, and act. This distinguishes humans from other creatures and establishes the basis of their agency.
- Divine Trust and Responsibility: The Quran speaks of a —trust (amana) that the heavens, the earth, and the mountains refused to bear, but mankind accepted it (Quran 33:72). This trust has been interpreted in various interpretations as human freedom, will, and responsibility. By accepting this trust, humans become responsible for their actions and their consequences.
- Power of Choice and Free Will: —We showed him the way, whether he is grateful or ungrateful. (Quran 76:3). This verse clearly implies that humans have two paths and the power to choose between them. —So whoever wills, let him believe, and whoever wills, let him disbelieve. (Quran 18:29). This verse shows the complete freedom of human choice regarding faith and direction in life.

- Reward and punishment based on actions: The Quranic reward and punishment system is based on human choice. Each individual is responsible for his actions and his reward or punishment in the afterlife is determined by his choices and actions: —For him is what he has earned, and against him is what he has earned. (Quran 2:286). —Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it. (Quran 99:7-8). Verses such as —There are no compulsion in religion (Quran 2:256) emphasizes the freedom of human will to accept or reject faith.

The question of human choice in the Quran is often examined in terms of the concepts of divine destiny (qadar) and predestination (taqdir), which at first glance seem to challenge the concept of free will. However, the prevailing view in Islamic thought presents the theory that God's eternal knowledge is beyond human freedom and does not compromise his understanding and comprehension except to the extent that he himself grants it to man. Divine foreknowledge of human actions does not imply coercion and helplessness, but rather explains man's autonomy on the basis of scientific and rational arguments so that he can overcome his opposing arguments in every respect, which is intended to demonstrate the perception of an infinite existence and the antithetical human limitations and constraints.

The Quran affirms this delicate balance by consistently emphasizing the inherent dignity of man, the divine spirit breathed into humanity, the acceptance of moral responsibility, and the capacity for conscious choice. These aspects give an excellent religious and moral basis to the human free will. Rather than being incidental, this freedom is central to the Quranic vision of man (human nature). In this case, free will is the base of both moral and legal system of Islam. It introduces man as a free, responsible and purposive agent with a potential of following the path of spiritual and moral progression in line with divine dispensation. Thus, the Quran presents a view of human life that is religiously grounded and morally authoritative.

### **Human agency from Spinoza's perspective**

The concept of human agency in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza is complex and mysterious. Javad Rabiee and Yousef Nozohour (2023) states that he conditions it primarily on its commitment to strong determination. Unlike many philosophers, Spinoza rejected the concept of "free will" understood as the ability to choose without reason, seeing it instead as an illusion arising from human ignorance of the true causes of their actions. Nevertheless, he articulates a unique concept of freedom and agency that is consistent with his deterministic framework. For Spinoza, true freedom does not lie in indeterminate choice but in understanding the necessary order of nature and acting in accordance with reason. It is through this rational alignment that individuals achieve true power and lasting happiness.(p: 248)

1. Absolute Reason: Spinoza believes that everything in existence, including human thoughts and actions, necessarily follows a prior cause and reason according to fixed natural laws, meaning that nothing happens without a cause and this chain of causes continues endlessly. Therefore, the idea of "free will" as an action without a prior cause is meaningless and frivolous.
2. The illusion of free will: According to Spinoza, humans are only aware of their actions and are unaware of the real reasons and factors that compel them to do so. This ignorance leads to the false belief that we choose freely. He writes: "People are deceived into thinking that they are free. This belief is only because they are aware of their actions but are unaware of the causes that compel them to do them. (Pasperse, 2019:78).

3. Agency through the perception of feelings: Spinoza distinguishes between actions and feelings:
  - Actions: occur when we are the sufficient and internal cause of an event, that is, when we act based on understanding and reason.
  - Feelings: occur when we are only part of the cause and are influenced by external causes and —insufficient ideas (incomplete understanding). (Jahangiri, 2011:23).
4. Human agency can also depend on increasing action and decreasing emotion. This is achieved through a full understanding of emotions and thoughts and their causes. When we fully understand the origin and cause of an emotion, it changes from a passive reaction to an active engagement and we are no longer its slave but become a dynamic being moving towards freedom.
5. Desire and Power: Every being, including humans, has an inherent power (power) or effort (conatus) to preserve itself. This desire is the essence of every being that is always there to continue it and increase the power of its action. Human agency is associated with this increase in power. When we act with understanding and reason, we increase our existential power and our ability to influence the world, while apathy reduces this power. (Parkinson, 2013:45).

### **The role of human agency in the light of the “self” in Iqbal’s poetry**

Iqbal has clearly rejected all forms in which human existence involves any act or intention against nature. In contrast to seeing man as a complete or perfect being, Iqbal conceives of an ordinary individual as a being who is capable of shaping his own destiny through conscious will and purposeful effort. Whereas Spinoza finds freedom in the rational understanding of imperative necessity, Iqbal sees it as a creative capacity completely independent of rational understanding.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of self in Iqbal's philosophy denotes individuality, self-realization, and the inner essence of man. Cultivating and strengthening self-service as the basis of human agency and moral will Iqbal claims that every person possesses a unique self in which lies the immense potential for spiritual and existential growth and the essence of development. For Iqbal, the realization of this potential is the goal of human life and the highest standard of freedom. In his view, human free will is summarized as:

Iqbal emphasizes the free will of man and believes that individuals have the ability to shape and change their own destiny and there is no doubt that they are also free to progress spiritually.

تو اگر تقدیر نو خواهی، رواست

زانکه تقدیرات حق لا انتہاست

*Translation:*

(If you seek a new destiny, that’s fine. Your destiny is without a doubt infinite.)

In Iqbal's poetry, human invention is reflected in his creation and creative abilities. By empowering himself, man gains the power to create a new world, meaning that whatever he strives for, he will eventually achieve on some stage.

خویشتن را چون خودی بیدار کرد

آشکارا عالم پندار کرد

*Translation:*

(When he awakened his own selfness, clearly he shaped the world of thoughts.)

Iqbal reminded humanity of its divine role as God's representatives on earth, lest man forget his place at the top. This position greatly enhances human freedom and responsibility, while also introducing his place in spreading justice in the world and achieving divine goals.

گر بتابد یک زمان خود را به خود

نور او گردی که هستی از تو شد

*Translation:*

If you shine a light on yourself even for a moment, you will become the embodied light, because existence comes from you.

True freedom is not possible without effort and struggle. Destiny calls humans to jihad, that is, to struggle to achieve a goal (in its broader sense, which includes the struggle with the self and the struggle for truth).

چون موج مست خودی باش و سر به طوفان کش

ترا که گفت که بنشین و پا به دامن کش؟

*Translation:*

Be like the wave, recognize the truth of yourselfness and throw your head into the storm. Who told you to sit unconscious and pull your feet into your lap?

Iqbal values a person who believes in self-reliance and striving and does not depend on anyone but God. This self-reliance is one of the important signs of strong agency.

برون از سینه کش تکبیر خود را

به خاک خویش زن اکسیر خود را

خودی را گیر و محکم گیر و خوش زی

(Lahori, 2007, p: 145)

*Proclaim the call of Takbir from your chest, pour your own nectar on your own soil, recognize yourself, hold it tightly, and live happily.)*

### **Iqbal's Divine Selfhood vs Spinoza's Pantheism**

Iqbal's divinity and Spinoza's monotheistic conception of God - often called the unity of being - represent fundamentally different religious and philosophical worldviews. These opposing perspectives are not limited to their respective doctrines but go deep into their ethical and metaphysical frameworks, shaping their positions on human free will, moral responsibility, and humanity's role in the universe.

The point of this discrepancy lies in a deep metaphysical disagreement: for simple monism of Spinoza views God as nature-identical, infinite, self-subsistent self-subsisting material being but also without will, feelings, and rationality. Instead, divine personhood as projected by Iqbal would suggest a God that is a responsive, open, and sensitive being in an interactive relationship with his/her creations. Such religious belief and difference have far-reaching connotations. It does not only tell about their conceptions of freedom and determination, but forms their views upon moral agency, the matter of spiritual development and the importance of human life to the existential level. For Iqbal, the personal nature of God serves as the basis for human dignity and creative potential, whereas for Spinoza, liberation lies in rational submission to the necessary order of an impersonal cosmos. (Anwar, 1991: 89)

Iqbal's worldview is fundamentally based on human freedom, based on the belief that reality is shaped by interaction, development, and moral struggle. In the Quranic vision, he believes that God is not an abstract, impersonal principle but a personal and active presence who hears the prayers of his servants, guides them, and rewards good deeds. This concept is in stark contrast to Spinoza's essentialist monism, in which God is free from will, outside the realm of temporal preoccupation, and is not only indifferent but also completely uninvolved in personal relations with creation. Iqbal explains it more clearly:

"Spinoza's God is simply another name for the vast universe. He is not a human personality, nor will a creative... Islam believes in a God who loves, chooses, and reveals himself in time." (Lahore, 2011: 147)

For Iqbal, the concept of freedom is rendered meaningless in a universe governed by an indifferent deity and entirely subject to the rigid mechanisms of fate. Such a worldview, he argues, undermines the foundations of moral responsibility, erases the demands of justice, and makes the possibility of spiritual development a hypothetical one. Iqbal envisions an autonomous and responsible freedom that is completely free—whether it inclines toward evil or whether humanity becomes the bearer of higher values—and invites individuals to participate in the unfolding of their own destiny. This God does not impose a predetermined order under absolute coercion, but calls upon humans to become co-creators in the ongoing process of creation, thus affirming their freedom, dignity, and moral agency.

## **Conclusion**

Iqbal's concept of freedom offers a powerful response to Spinoza's rationalist ambitions, situating him within the "ideological foundations of human agency" and "existentially dynamic vision." Iqbal describes the reality of the self as an evolving, morally responsible being endowed with the capacity to choose, create, and actively respond to the divine call. Stark contrasting the Spinoza, defining the freedom as ascertaining rationality to necessity, Iqbal portrays the term of freedom as a potential power that can mature and blossom in the continuing process of creation in conscious union with the divine will. This division is not merely a philosophical conflict of views in mechanism of the reason. It represents a radical metaphysical divergence on grounds of the kind of God, the way of

construction of reality and how human beings make sense of themselves, and a rational resolution. Spinoza also directs his objections to the traditional concept of God as an impersonal infinite substance that is deity itself and nature together, absolute and eternal, governed by finite immutable laws according to which everything, including men, operates. Instead of being reached through will, freedom is attained, in this system, by intellectual explanation: when all is as it ought to be. The will, considered as commonly understood, is somehow only a psychological illusion brought forth by the lack of knowledge of the real causes of the actions.

Iqbal, in turn, states that as long as there is no freedom, concepts of responsibility, justice, and spiritual development are meaningless. For Iqbal, human freedom is not a metaphysical paradox to be explained but the axis around which the theory of existence revolves. He sees and believes in God as an absolute and active being who is the creator of the world, without a counterpart. Iqbal emphasizes the true freedom of human choice that arises from the concept of the "self." Iqbal presents man as a responsible, creative and cognitively dynamic agent who can influence the destiny through conscious action and constructive layers of the world coming up. Far more than mere grazers on a prescribed order, man, in this system, is a co-worker in history, an active and resolute effort and pursuit towards the divine ends through conflict.

This is a sharp contrast to determinism in the metaphysics of Spinoza where the universe presents a self-complete causally closed world in which freedom is redefined as the intellectual assent to necessity. As initially, Spinoza finds liberation in rational understanding of unchangeable laws, Iqbal, lending to the teachings of the Quran insights about anthropology, views a world that is in process: that is subject to moral and spiritual growth. Free will can and must exist in this world: it is without which there is a possibility of moral action, of existential meaning and presence before God. The core of this dispute is an irreconcilable theological and ontological conflict: the God according to Iqbal is individual, volitional, and sovereign-supreme shepherd who directs and causes everyone to become part of a cooperative society to build morality according to the sense of human existence, whereas the God of Spinoza is an impersonal substance of nature, wholly deprived of volition and relation, indifferent to all the others. Such contradiction not only destroys the sense of life, the structure of moral responsibility, and the extent of human potential, but also has large consequences.

In the end, the position of Iqbal confirms the innate giant nature and creative genius of the human soul by making the will the distinctive power of the transformation an element in existence. By doing this, he surmounts the restrictions on determination that Spinoza has presented, but also illustrates more as a spiritual and ethical direction to the freedom, responsibility and human trajectory.



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