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The Concept of Human Freedom and Responsibility in Islamic Theology: A Comparative Analysis of Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite Perspectives

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Abstract: Human freedom and responsibility are fundamental themes in Islamic theology, particularly in the longstanding debate concerning human free will and divine predestination. This study aims to examine human freedom and responsibility, analyze the relationship between divine sovereignty and human choice, compare Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite perspectives, and explain their implications for moral accountability. This research employs a qualitative approach through library research, using the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic theological literature as primary sources, supported by academic books and scholarly journal articles. Data are analyzed through descriptive, interpretative, and comparative theological methods. The literature analysis indicates that human freedom represents the capacity to choose and perform voluntary actions, although this capacity remains within Allah's absolute knowledge, will, and power. The three theological traditions offer different explanations of divine determination and human agency while recognizing the significance of moral responsibility. This study concludes that Islamic theology provides a foundation for balancing divine sovereignty, human choice, accountability, and ethical conduct in contemporary Muslim life.

Research Highlights:

- Examines the relationship between human freedom and divine sovereignty in Islamic theology.
- Compares Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite perspectives on free will and predestination.
- Explains the theological foundations of human moral responsibility and accountability.
- Highlights the importance of balancing human choice with the recognition of Allah's absolute power.
- Discusses the relevance of Islamic theological perspectives to ethical conduct in contemporary society.

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INTRODUCTION

Human freedom and responsibility are fundamental themes in Islamic theology because they concern the relationship between human beings, divine sovereignty, and moral accountability. Islam teaches that human beings are created by Allah with reason ('aql), will (iradah), and the capacity to distinguish between good and evil(Moris, 2013). These abilities enable individuals to make decisions, perform actions, and assume responsibility for the consequences of their choices. Human freedom, therefore, is not merely understood as the ability to act independently but also as a moral capacity that must be exercised in accordance with Islamic principles and divine guidance. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of human choice in QS. Al-Kahf [18]: 29, which explains that individuals have the opportunity to believe or disbelieve, while QS. Al-Insan [76]: 3 describes how Allah provides guidance and allows human beings to respond through gratitude or rejection.

Nevertheless, the concept of human freedom raises important theological questions concerning Allah's absolute power, knowledge, and sovereignty over creation. Islamic theology recognizes that everything exists and occurs within Allah's knowledge and divine decree (qadar), yet human beings are also instructed to make choices and remain accountable for their actions(Holtzman, 2010). This relationship has generated longstanding discussions concerning divine predestination and human free will (ikhtiyar). QS. Ar-Ra'd [13]: 11 emphasizes the relationship between human effort and transformation, while QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 286 establishes that individuals are responsible according to their capacities. Furthermore, QS. Al-Zalzalah [99]: 7–8 highlights that even the smallest good or evil actions will receive corresponding accountability. These teachings demonstrate that human responsibility occupies an important position in Islamic moral and theological thought.

The debate concerning human freedom and divine determination has also produced different interpretations among Islamic theological schools, particularly the Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite traditions. Each school provides a distinctive explanation of how human actions relate to divine power and justice. The Mu'tazilites emphasize human agency and moral responsibility, the Ash'arites explain the relationship through the concept of kasb (acquisition), while the Maturidites seek to maintain a balance between divine determination and human choice. Understanding these perspectives is important for developing a comprehensive theological interpretation of freedom and responsibility. In contemporary society, these concepts remain relevant to moral decision-making, social justice, personal accountability, and ethical behavior, particularly when individuals face challenges involving responsibility, individual rights, and the consequences of their actions.

The central theological problem in this research concerns the relationship between human freedom and Allah's absolute sovereignty(Carson, 2002). Although Islam recognizes divine predestination, it also establishes human responsibility for voluntary actions. This raises questions about how human freedom can coexist with divine determination and to what extent individuals should be held accountable for actions occurring within Allah's decree. Furthermore, differences among Islamic theological schools demonstrate that the relationship between divine power and human agency requires careful examination. Another important issue concerns how free will influences moral decisions, religious obligations, and accountability before Allah. These questions also raise the need to understand how Islamic theology can provide a balanced perspective on freedom and responsibility in contemporary life without denying either divine sovereignty or human moral agency.

Previous studies on human freedom and responsibility in Islamic theology have examined the relationship between human free will (ikhtiyar), divine predestination (qadar), Allah's sovereignty, and moral accountability from various theological and philosophical perspectives. Manshur, Herlina, and Atoillah (2022), in their study entitled Doktrin Predestinasi dan Determinisme: Antara Muktazilah dan Asy'ariyah, examined the theological debate concerning divine predestination and human free will through the perspectives of the Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite schools. Their research demonstrated that the two theological traditions developed complex interpretations of qada and qadar by incorporating theological, philosophical, and Sufi perspectives. The study emphasized that the differences between these schools cannot simply be understood as absolute opposition between human freedom and divine determination. Instead, their intellectual developments reflect attempts to explain divine justice and human responsibility within the framework of Islamic theology. This research provides an important historical foundation for comparative discussions of human freedom and predestination.

Arain and Khatoon (2024), in their research entitled Quranic Concept of Predestination (Qadar) and Human Freedom (Ikhtiyaar): A Thematic Analysis, investigated the Qur'anic understanding of divine predestination and human freedom. Their study explored the relationship between Allah's absolute knowledge, will, and power and the human capacity to make moral decisions. They emphasized that although all events occur within divine decree, human beings remain accountable for their actions. Their findings highlight the importance of understanding qadar and ikhtiyar as interconnected theological concepts rather than mutually exclusive principles. This study is particularly relevant because it establishes the Qur'anic foundation for examining human responsibility within divine sovereignty.

Sayilgan (2023), in his book God, Evil, and Suffering in Islam, particularly the chapter entitled "Moral Evil, Freedom, and Predestination," examined human freedom in relation to divine justice and the problem of evil. His discussion addressed whether human beings possess genuine freedom or are predetermined to perform particular actions. He also considered the relationship between divine power, moral evil, and human accountability. This contribution is important because it demonstrates that

discussions of free will extend beyond abstract theological debates and are closely connected to questions concerning suffering, moral choices, and the justification of divine justice.

Özaykal (2024), in his article entitled The Celebrated Transcendence: al-Māturīdī's Resolution of the Determinist-Libertarian Dichotomy regarding Human Free Will, provided an in-depth examination of Abu Mansur al-Maturidi's theory of human freedom and action. The study analyzed how al-Maturidi responded to the opposing positions of determinism, represented by the Jabriyya, and human autonomy, associated with the Mu'tazila. Özaykal discussed important theological concepts, including qudrah (power), quwwah (capacity), and ikhtiyar (choice), to explain the relationship between human agency and divine creation. His analysis demonstrated the significance of the Maturidite approach in addressing the tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom. This research provides a valuable theoretical foundation for understanding the possibility of maintaining meaningful human responsibility without denying Allah's ultimate power.

Eksici (2023), in his dissertation entitled The Myth of Determinism: Sadr al-Sharia's Defense of Human Agency, investigated the philosophical and theological foundations of human agency in the thought of Sadr al-Shari'a, a Maturidite-Hanafi scholar. The study examined how human free agency functions as the foundation of normative and moral responsibility. Through historical and textual analysis, Eksici explored the development of discussions concerning free will in Islamic legal theory and compared classical arguments with contemporary philosophical perspectives. His research is relevant because it connects human freedom with the ability to make purposeful decisions and the obligation to accept responsibility for individual actions.

Previous theological discussions have extensively examined human free will, divine predestination, and the relationship between divine justice and human accountability. However, different Islamic theological traditions continue to offer distinct interpretations concerning the extent of human freedom and the nature of responsibility. A significant area requiring further examination is the integration of classical theological debates with contemporary ethical challenges. Discussions of divine sovereignty and human freedom are sometimes presented as opposing concepts, without sufficiently exploring their interconnected implications for moral agency and accountability. Therefore, this research seeks to provide a comparative and analytical examination of major Islamic theological perspectives while connecting their arguments with contemporary questions concerning ethical behavior, personal responsibility, and social justice. Through this approach, the study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of human freedom within the framework of Islamic theology.

This research aims to examine the concept of human freedom and responsibility from the perspective of Islamic theology, particularly concerning the relationship between human free will, Allah's divine power, and predestination. It also seeks to identify and compare the theological interpretations developed by the Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite schools regarding human agency and divine determination. Furthermore, the research intends to explain the theological foundations of moral responsibility and accountability in Islam, including the relationship between individual choices, religious obligations, and the consequences of human actions. Finally, this study aims to explore the relevance of Islamic teachings on freedom and responsibility in contemporary society, particularly in encouraging ethical behavior, responsible decision-making, and awareness of individual accountability.

This research is expected to provide theoretical, academic, and practical contributions to the development of Islamic theological studies. Theoretically, it contributes to discussions concerning human freedom, divine sovereignty, predestination, and moral responsibility by examining their interconnected dimensions within Islamic teachings. Academically, the study offers a comparative understanding of classical Islamic theological perspectives, particularly those of the Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite traditions, thereby providing a foundation for further research on human agency and divine justice(Halverson, 2010). Practically, this research is expected to strengthen moral awareness, personal accountability, and responsible decision-making among Muslims. By understanding that human freedom is accompanied by moral obligations and accountability before Allah, individuals are encouraged to exercise their choices wisely, uphold ethical values, respect the rights of others, and contribute positively to society. Consequently, the study highlights the continuing relevance of Islamic theology in addressing contemporary moral and social challenges.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach using library research (studi kepustakaan) to examine the concept of human freedom and responsibility from the perspective of Islamic theology(Haryanto, 2022). The qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study focuses on understanding, interpreting, and analyzing theological concepts, arguments, and scholarly perspectives rather than measuring numerical variables or testing statistical relationships. Library research is used to explore the foundations of human freedom (hurriyyah), human choice (ikhtiyar), divine predestination (qadar), and moral responsibility (mas'uliyyah) through relevant Islamic literature. Furthermore, this study adopts a descriptive-analytical research design, which involves systematically describing existing theological perspectives and critically examining their underlying arguments. The descriptive aspect aims to explain how Islamic theology understands the relationship between human free will and Allah's absolute sovereignty, while the analytical aspect evaluates the theological reasoning developed by different Islamic schools of thought. Particular attention is given to the Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite traditions because they provide significant perspectives on divine determination, human agency, and moral accountability(Johnstone, 2004). Through this approach, the research seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of how human beings can be considered responsible for their voluntary actions while remaining dependent on Allah's power and divine decree. Since the research is based entirely on existing literature, it does not involve field surveys, interviews, participant observations, or experimental procedures.

The data used in this research consist of primary and secondary sources selected according to their relevance to the research objectives(Hox & Boeije, 2005). Primary sources include the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic theological literature that directly address human freedom, divine predestination, and moral responsibility. The Qur'an serves as the fundamental source for examining the relationship between human choice and divine sovereignty, particularly QS. Al-Kahf [18]: 29, QS. Ar-Ra'd [13]: 11, QS. Al-Insan [76]: 3, QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 286, and QS. Al-Zalzalah [99]: 7–8. These verses provide important foundations for understanding human capacity, moral choice, divine guidance, and accountability. Hadith literature concerning human intentions, actions, religious obligations, and divine decree is also examined to strengthen the theological interpretation of the subject. In addition, classical theological works are used to investigate the development of arguments concerning human agency and divine determination. Particular attention is given to the Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite traditions, including the theological writings of Abd al-Jabbar, Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi.

Secondary sources consist of contemporary academic books on Islamic theology (Ilmu Kalam), peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly publications, and previous research addressing human free will, predestination, divine justice, and moral accountability. These sources are used to complement the primary literature and provide broader academic perspectives on the development of Islamic theological thought. Contemporary studies examining the relationship between divine sovereignty and human autonomy are also considered to establish connections between classical theological debates and current philosophical and ethical discussions. The selection of secondary literature prioritizes academic credibility, relevance, and publication recency, particularly research published within the last ten years(Hox & Boeije, 2005). By combining classical theological texts with contemporary scholarly discussions, the research aims to establish a balanced and academically grounded understanding of human freedom and responsibility in Islam.

Data collection is conducted through systematic documentation and literature review(Fink, 2010). The process begins by identifying and collecting relevant academic materials from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, classical Islamic theological texts, Qur'anic commentaries, and scholarly research publications. Literature is obtained from credible academic sources, including scientific journals, university publications, digital academic repositories, and recognized theological references. After collecting the relevant materials, the researcher identifies theological arguments and discussions concerning human freedom, divine predestination, human agency, and moral responsibility. Particular attention is given to identifying the similarities and differences among the interpretations developed by the Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite schools. Relevant Qur'anic verses and Hadith are also selected based on their connection with the research objectives, especially those addressing human choice, divine will, individual capacity, and accountability for actions. Furthermore, the collected information is classified and organized into several thematic categories, including the concept of human freedom, the relationship between divine predestination and free will, theological perspectives on human agency, moral responsibility, divine justice, and the contemporary relevance of Islamic teachings. This classification

facilitates a systematic examination of the collected literature and ensures that the information is directly related to the research questions. The researcher also compares arguments from different academic sources to identify recurring theological principles, contrasting interpretations, and areas that require further analytical examination.

The collected data are analyzed through several interconnected analytical procedures to produce a comprehensive interpretation of human freedom and responsibility in Islamic theology(Kader, 2021). First, content analysis is employed to identify, classify, and examine important theological concepts and arguments found in the Qur'an, Hadith, classical Islamic literature, and contemporary academic publications. This procedure focuses on identifying discussions concerning ikhtiyar, qadar, divine sovereignty, human agency, and moral accountability. Second, theological analysis is conducted to examine the relationship between Allah's absolute power and human freedom. This analysis considers how Islamic theological traditions explain the relationship between divine creation, human capacity, individual choice, and responsibility for voluntary actions. Third, comparative analysis is used to examine the similarities and differences among the Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite perspectives. The Mu'tazilite emphasis on human agency and divine justice, the Ash'arite explanation through the concept of kasb (acquisition), and the Maturidite understanding of human choice within divine determination are compared to identify their respective theological contributions and limitations. Fourth, interpretative analysis is applied to examine the meanings and theological implications of relevant Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and classical scholarly arguments. This process considers the relationship between textual evidence, theological interpretation, and the broader principles of Islamic teachings. Finally, synthesis is conducted by integrating the results of the content, theological, comparative, and interpretative analyses into a coherent explanation of human freedom and responsibility. Through this synthesis, the research develops an integrated understanding of how human beings possess the capacity to make choices and remain morally accountable while recognizing that their existence, abilities, and actions remain within Allah's knowledge, power, and sovereignty. The overall analytical process is intended to provide a critical theological foundation for understanding the relevance of human freedom and responsibility in contemporary Islamic moral and social life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Human Freedom in Islamic Theology

Human freedom (hurriyyah) and free will (ikhtiyar) constitute essential concepts in Islamic theology because they explain the capacity of human beings to make choices and assume responsibility for their actions. In Islamic understanding, human freedom refers to the ability to determine personal decisions and perform voluntary actions within the boundaries established by divine guidance. Unlike absolute freedom, which assumes that individuals can act independently of all external authority, Islamic freedom recognizes Allah as the ultimate Creator and Sovereign over the universe. Human beings are therefore granted a degree of freedom that enables them to distinguish between right and wrong, choose their actions, and fulfill their moral and religious obligations(Hegel, 2008). The concept of ikhtiyar emphasizes the existence of human choice, particularly in matters involving faith, morality, and daily conduct. This understanding is reflected in QS. Al-Kahf [18]: 29, which states that whoever wishes may believe and whoever wishes may disbelieve. The verse demonstrates that human beings possess the capacity to respond to divine guidance through their individual choices, although those choices carry moral and spiritual consequences.

The exercise of human freedom is closely connected to three important dimensions: reason ('aql), intention (niyyah), and will (iradah). Reason enables individuals to understand information, evaluate alternatives, distinguish beneficial actions from harmful ones, and recognize moral obligations. Intention represents the internal motivation behind an action and contributes to its ethical and religious significance. Meanwhile, will refers to the human capacity to determine and pursue a particular course of action. These three dimensions interact in the process of moral decision-making because individuals generally evaluate circumstances through reason, establish intentions, and subsequently perform actions according to their will and available capacity. Islamic teachings emphasize that moral behavior should not be evaluated solely according to outward actions but also according to the intentions underlying them(Hashi, 2011). This principle is supported by the famous Hadith concerning intentions, recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, which explains that the value of actions depends on intentions. Consequently, human

freedom in Islam involves not only the ability to perform actions but also the responsibility to maintain appropriate intentions and ethical considerations.

Furthermore, the Qur'an presents human beings as creatures who receive divine guidance and possess the capacity to choose between righteousness and wrongdoing. QS. Al-Insan [76]: 3 explains that Allah has shown humanity the right path, whether individuals choose to be grateful or ungrateful. Similarly, QS. Ar-Ra'd [13]: 11 emphasizes the relationship between human effort and transformation, indicating the importance of individual participation in changing personal and social circumstances. Nevertheless, human freedom remains limited because human existence, knowledge, abilities, and opportunities depend on Allah. Human beings cannot possess absolute independence from divine sovereignty because their choices occur within the broader framework of Allah's knowledge and power. Therefore, Islamic theology understands freedom as a responsible capacity rather than unrestricted autonomy. Human beings are expected to exercise their choices in accordance with divine guidance, recognizing that freedom carries obligations toward Allah, themselves, and other members of society. This understanding establishes the theological foundation for connecting human freedom with moral responsibility and accountability.

Divine Predestination and Human Free Will

Divine predestination (qadar) and divine decree (qada) are fundamental concepts in Islamic theology that concern Allah's knowledge, will, and power over everything that exists. These concepts establish that the universe and all events within it occur within divine sovereignty and are not independent of Allah's authority. The doctrine of qadar is generally associated with Allah's knowledge and determination concerning all things, while qada is commonly discussed in relation to divine decree and the occurrence of what Allah has determined(Zakaria, 2015). However, the precise distinction between these two terms varies among Islamic theological scholars and should not be treated as universally identical across all traditions. QS. Al-Qamar [54]: 49 states that Allah created everything according to a measure, establishing the principle that creation operates within divine determination. Similarly, QS. Al-Insan [76]: 30 and QS. At-Takwir [81]: 29 explain that human will remains subject to Allah's will. These verses demonstrate that human freedom cannot be understood separately from the broader theological principle of divine sovereignty.

The relationship between divine predestination and human free will has generated significant theological debates throughout Islamic intellectual history. One central question concerns whether human actions are predetermined by Allah or whether individuals genuinely possess the ability to choose their actions. If every human action occurs within divine knowledge and determination, questions arise regarding the meaning of individual responsibility and the fairness of divine judgment. Conversely, if human beings are understood as possessing complete independence in determining their actions, this position may appear inconsistent with the Islamic belief in Allah's absolute power and sovereignty. Islamic theological traditions have therefore developed different explanations to reconcile these two principles. An important distinction in this discussion concerns the difference between Allah's knowledge of an action and the human decision to perform that action. Divine foreknowledge does not necessarily mean that individuals experience their decisions as involuntary or that they are compelled to perform particular actions. Knowing that an action will occur and compelling someone to perform that action are conceptually different matters. From this perspective, divine knowledge does not eliminate the theological significance of human choice and accountability.

Furthermore, Islamic theology recognizes that human beings possess limited capacities and operate within circumstances that they cannot completely control. Individuals may experience situations involving illness, natural disasters, poverty, or other conditions beyond their personal decisions. Such circumstances must be distinguished from voluntary actions because moral responsibility is closely related to intention, capacity, and the degree of individual control. QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 286 establishes that Allah does not burden a person beyond their capacity, providing an important foundation for understanding the relationship between divine justice and individual responsibility. Consequently, human beings should not use predestination as a justification for neglecting moral obligations or avoiding accountability for deliberate wrongdoing. Rather, belief in qadar should encourage acceptance of circumstances beyond human control while motivating individuals to make responsible choices within their available capacities. This interpretation demonstrates that divine sovereignty and human responsibility are interconnected dimensions of Islamic theological thought.

Different Theological Perspectives on Human Freedom

The relationship between human freedom and divine predestination has been interpreted differently by major Islamic theological schools. Among the most influential traditions are the Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite schools, each of which developed distinctive explanations concerning human agency, divine justice, and moral accountability. These differences emerged from broader discussions about the nature of Allah's attributes, the meaning of divine justice, and the relationship between creation and human actions. Examining these theological traditions is important because their arguments demonstrate the intellectual diversity of Islamic theology and provide different approaches to understanding the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom.

a. Mu'tazilite Perspective

The Mu'tazilite school places strong emphasis on human freedom and responsibility as essential implications of divine justice (al-'adl)(Martin et al., 2016). According to Mu'tazilite theological reasoning, human beings must possess genuine agency over their voluntary actions because holding individuals accountable for actions over which they have no meaningful control would raise questions concerning divine justice. The Mu'tazilites therefore argue that individuals are responsible for their voluntary conduct and must be able to distinguish between obedience and disobedience through their capacity to choose. This position is closely associated with their understanding of divine justice, which requires that reward and punishment be consistent with the moral choices made by human beings.

The Mu'tazilite position provides a significant theological foundation for understanding personal responsibility, ethical decision-making, and individual accountability. By emphasizing human agency, this tradition highlights the importance of voluntary choice in determining moral conduct. Individuals cannot simply attribute their deliberate wrongdoing to divine predestination because they possess the capacity to make different decisions. Nevertheless, the Mu'tazilite interpretation must also be understood within its broader theological framework, particularly its commitment to divine unity and justice. Its emphasis on human freedom does not necessarily mean that human beings possess absolute independence from Allah. Rather, it seeks to explain how meaningful human agency can exist without compromising the principle of divine justice. The strength of this perspective lies in its clear defense of moral accountability, although its explanation of the relationship between human action and divine creation has been subject to criticism from other theological traditions.

b. Ash'arite Perspective

The Ash'arite school emphasizes Allah's absolute power and sovereignty over creation, maintaining that everything that exists and occurs ultimately depends on divine creation and determination. Within this theological framework, human actions are also created by Allah, while human beings acquire those actions through the concept of kasb (acquisition). The concept of kasb is central to the Ash'arite explanation of human responsibility because it attempts to establish a relationship between divine creation and human accountability. Although Allah is understood as the Creator of human actions, individuals are considered accountable for the actions they acquire through their will and capacity.

The concept of kasb demonstrates the Ash'arite effort to avoid two theological extremes: attributing independent creative power to human beings and denying the existence of meaningful human accountability. This perspective emphasizes that human beings remain dependent on Allah even when making decisions and performing voluntary actions(Abdullah & Nadvi, 2011). From this standpoint, divine power is absolute, while human responsibility exists through the acquisition of actions rather than independent creation. The strength of the Ash'arite approach lies in its strong affirmation of divine sovereignty and its attempt to preserve accountability within that principle. However, the concept of kasb has generated further theological discussions concerning the precise nature of human agency and the extent to which acquired actions can be considered genuinely voluntary. These debates demonstrate the continuing importance of examining the relationship between divine creation and individual responsibility.

c. Maturidite Perspective

The Maturidite school provides an important theological approach that seeks to maintain the relationship between divine determination and human freedom. Like the Ash'arite tradition, Maturidite theology recognizes Allah as the Creator of all things and maintains that human existence and abilities depend entirely on divine power(Nasir, 2016). However, Maturidite

scholars place particular emphasis on the human capacity to choose and intend actions. Human beings possess the ability to make decisions and direct their actions toward particular objectives, although the existence and realization of their capacities remain dependent on Allah. This understanding allows the Maturidite tradition to recognize both divine sovereignty and the moral significance of human choice.

The Maturidite interpretation is particularly significant because it attempts to explain how human beings can be morally accountable without being considered independent of divine determination. Human choice is meaningful because individuals possess the capacity to intend and select actions, while Allah remains the ultimate Creator and Sustainer of everything. This position establishes an important connection between human agency, religious obligations, and divine justice. Its strength lies in its effort to maintain a balance between the recognition of divine sovereignty and the practical significance of human decision-making. Nevertheless, the precise relationship between human capacity, choice, and divine creation remains a subject of theological interpretation and discussion.

The three theological traditions share the fundamental belief that Allah possesses absolute sovereignty and that human beings are accountable for their actions. However, they differ in explaining the nature and extent of human agency. The Mu'tazilites place greater emphasis on human responsibility and voluntary action as implications of divine justice(De Cillis, 2013). The Ash'arites emphasize divine creation through the concept of kasb, while the Maturidites emphasize the relationship between divine creation and the human capacity to choose. These differences demonstrate that Islamic theology contains multiple intellectual approaches to the same fundamental question. Rather than treating these traditions as completely opposing positions, their arguments can be examined as different attempts to explain the relationship between divine sovereignty and human moral responsibility.

d. Research Gap and Position of the Present Study

Based on the reviewed literature, previous studies have made significant contributions to understanding human freedom, divine predestination, and moral responsibility in Islamic theology. Manshur, Herlina, and Atoillah (2022) focused on the historical and comparative debate between the Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite schools, while Arain and Khatoon (2024) emphasized the Qur'anic foundations of qadar and ikhtiyar. Özaykal (2024) provided a more detailed examination of the Maturidite understanding of human agency, whereas Long, Mahmood, and Ismail (2025) explored the compatibility between divine foreknowledge and human free will through Ibn Rushd's philosophical perspective. More recent studies by Mehrez and Machery (2026) and Brodersen (2026) further developed the discussion by examining contemporary moral reasoning and the historical complexity of Maturidite human agency.

Nevertheless, several aspects still require further integrated examination. Previous studies generally concentrate on particular theological schools, individual scholars, Qur'anic interpretations, or philosophical arguments. Consequently, there remains an opportunity to develop a more comprehensive discussion that connects the different Islamic theological perspectives with the broader foundations of human moral responsibility and accountability. In particular, the relationship between human freedom, divine sovereignty, moral obligations, and ethical behavior in contemporary society deserves further analytical attention.

Therefore, the present research, entitled The Concept of Human Freedom and Responsibility in Islamic Theology, seeks to address this gap by examining human freedom and responsibility through an integrated theological approach. Unlike studies that primarily concentrate on one theological tradition or a specific philosophical argument, this research compares the Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite perspectives while examining their implications for moral accountability, divine justice, and contemporary ethical challenges. The study is expected to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic theology recognizes human beings as morally responsible agents while maintaining the absolute sovereignty and power of Allah.

Human Responsibility and Moral Accountability in Islam

Human responsibility (mas'uliyyah) is a fundamental principle in Islamic theology because it establishes that individuals are accountable for their actions, decisions, and moral conduct before Allah(Wahab & Ismail, 2019). This responsibility is closely connected to the concept of taklif, which refers

to the obligations imposed upon individuals who possess the necessary conditions of accountability, particularly reason and maturity. Through taklif, Muslims are expected to fulfill religious obligations, avoid prohibited actions, and maintain ethical conduct in their personal and social lives. Individuals are expected to uphold justice, honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, and respect for the rights of others. These principles demonstrate that Islamic responsibility is both spiritual and social because human actions influence not only individual relationships with Allah but also the well-being of other people.

The relationship between freedom of choice and moral accountability is further strengthened by the importance of intention (niyyah) in Islamic teachings. Intention provides an important foundation for evaluating the moral and religious significance of human actions because it reflects the motivation and purpose underlying individual behavior. The Hadith concerning intentions, narrated by Umar ibn al-Khattab and recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, establishes that actions are evaluated according to their intentions. This principle indicates that ethical responsibility involves both internal motivation and external conduct. An individual who performs an apparently beneficial action for dishonest purposes may not receive the same moral evaluation as someone who performs that action sincerely. Human freedom becomes meaningful when it is accompanied by the awareness that every deliberate decision carries moral implications.

Furthermore, Islamic theology establishes the concepts of reward (thawab) and punishment ('iqab) as important dimensions of divine accountability. Good actions performed in accordance with divine guidance are associated with reward, whereas deliberate wrongdoing may result in punishment. QS. Al-Zalzalah [99]: 7–8 emphasizes that whoever performs even a small amount of good or evil will encounter its consequences. This teaching demonstrates that accountability is not limited to major actions but also includes seemingly insignificant behavior. At the same time, Islamic teachings recognize human limitations and emphasize that responsibility must be evaluated according to individual capacity and circumstances. QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 286 explains that Allah does not burden a person beyond their capacity. Consequently, the relationship between freedom and accountability requires consideration of intention, knowledge, ability, and the circumstances surrounding an action.

The Relationship Between Human Freedom and Divine Justice

Divine justice represents an essential foundation for understanding human freedom and responsibility in Islamic theology(Rahemtulla, 2017). The concept of divine justice (al-'adl) establishes that Allah is perfectly just and that divine judgment is not characterized by wrongdoing or unfairness. This principle has important implications for human accountability because individuals are expected to receive judgment according to their actions, intentions, and capacities. If human beings are held responsible for voluntary decisions, their capacity to understand and choose becomes an important consideration in explaining the fairness of divine judgment. Consequently, the theological discussion of human freedom cannot be separated from the broader question of divine justice. Islamic teachings emphasize that Allah knows the circumstances of every individual and judges human actions with complete knowledge and wisdom. Human responsibility therefore exists within a framework of divine justice that considers both the nature of an action and the conditions under which it is performed(Shweder et al., 2013).

The relationship between human freedom and divine justice also involves understanding the distinction between voluntary actions and circumstances beyond individual control. Voluntary actions are generally associated with conscious decisions, intentions, and the capacity to act, whereas involuntary circumstances may include natural disasters, unexpected illness, physical limitations, and other conditions that individuals cannot determine. This distinction is important because not every event experienced by a human being should be treated as the result of an individual moral choice. Islamic theology recognizes that human beings possess limited knowledge and power, and therefore their accountability must be understood in relation to their actual capacities. QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 286 provides an important foundation for this principle by emphasizing that Allah does not burden individuals beyond their capacity.

Moreover, divine justice must be understood together with Allah's mercy and forgiveness. Islamic teachings recognize that human beings are imperfect and may commit mistakes, yet they are also encouraged to repent, seek forgiveness, and improve their conduct(Muhammad, 2020). The relationship between justice and mercy demonstrates that divine judgment is not limited to punishment but also includes opportunities for spiritual correction and moral transformation. Human freedom therefore creates the possibility of both wrongdoing and repentance. Individuals are responsible for their deliberate actions, but they are also encouraged to acknowledge mistakes and return to the path of righteousness. From this perspective, belief in divine predestination should not become an excuse for irresponsible behavior or an

obstacle to personal improvement. Instead, it should strengthen awareness of human limitations while encouraging individuals to make ethical decisions and trust in Allah's wisdom.

The Relevance of Human Freedom and Responsibility in Contemporary Society

The Islamic understanding of human freedom and responsibility remains highly relevant to contemporary society, particularly in addressing moral challenges, social problems, and changing patterns of human interaction. In modern life, individuals frequently encounter situations that require them to make decisions concerning personal interests, professional obligations, social relationships, and religious commitments. Islamic theology provides an ethical framework for understanding that freedom should not be separated from responsibility(Sachedina, 2009). Individuals are encouraged to exercise their choices carefully and consider the consequences of their actions for themselves and others. This principle is particularly important in situations involving dishonesty, corruption, discrimination, exploitation, and other forms of unethical conduct

In the context of social justice, the concept of human responsibility emphasizes the importance of fairness, equality, and respect for human dignity. Human freedom should not be used to justify actions that violate the rights of others or create social injustice. Individuals who possess authority or influence are expected to exercise their responsibilities ethically and avoid using their positions for personal benefit at the expense of society(Hendry, 2004). Islamic teachings concerning justice and accountability provide a foundation for promoting honest leadership, responsible governance, and social solidarity. In this sense, human freedom is not merely an individual privilege but also a moral responsibility that must be exercised with consideration for the rights and interests of others.

Human freedom and responsibility are also important for personal development and education. Islamic teachings encourage individuals to use their intellectual abilities, develop self-discipline, and make decisions based on knowledge and moral principles. Education therefore has an important role in developing responsible individuals who understand the relationship between freedom, obligations, and the consequences of their actions. Students and young people should be encouraged to develop critical thinking, honesty, respect, and accountability in their personal and social interactions. These values help individuals recognize that freedom does not mean acting without limits but making responsible choices in accordance with ethical principles. Religious education can strengthen this understanding by connecting theological knowledge with practical moral behavior and encouraging individuals to apply Islamic values in everyday situations.

In addition, the development of digital technology has created new challenges concerning the exercise of human freedom and responsibility. Social media platforms allow individuals to express opinions, distribute information, and interact with different communities(Halpern & Gibbs, 2013). From an Islamic theological perspective, digital freedom must be accompanied by accountability, honesty, and respect for others. Individuals are responsible for the information they share and the consequences of their online behavior. The principles of truthfulness, avoiding harm, and maintaining good character provide important foundations for responsible digital participation. Consequently, the Islamic understanding of freedom and responsibility can contribute to developing ethical digital behavior and encouraging individuals to use technological opportunities for beneficial purposes. Overall, these principles remain essential for strengthening personal integrity, social justice, responsible citizenship, and religious awareness in contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that human freedom and responsibility are fundamental concepts in Islamic theology, emphasizing the relationship between human moral agency and Allah's absolute sovereignty. Human beings are endowed with reason ('aql), intention (niyyah), and will (iradah), enabling them to make choices and assume responsibility for their voluntary actions. However, human freedom is not absolute because human existence, abilities, and actions remain within Allah's knowledge, power, and divine determination (qadar). The comparative analysis demonstrates that the Mu'tazilite school emphasizes human free will and divine justice, the Ash'arite school explains human responsibility through the concept of kasb, while the Maturidite school seeks to balance divine determination with human choice. These perspectives collectively establish the theological foundations of moral accountability, religious obligations, and ethical conduct. Theoretically, this research contributes to Islamic theological discussions by presenting an integrated understanding of human freedom and divine sovereignty. Practically, its findings

highlight the importance of Islamic education in developing moral awareness, responsible decision-making, social justice, and personal accountability. However, this study is limited by its reliance on library research and existing literature. Future research should employ empirical approaches to investigate how Islamic understandings of freedom and responsibility influence Muslim ethical behavior in contemporary society. Ultimately, human freedom and divine sovereignty are interconnected principles that encourage responsible choices and accountability before Allah.

AUTHORS' DECLARATION

Authors' Contributions and Responsibilities

The author was responsible for conceptualizing the research, developing the research framework, collecting and reviewing relevant literature, analyzing Qur'anic verses and Hadith, comparing classical Islamic theological perspectives, interpreting the findings, and preparing the manuscript.

Competing Interests

The author declares that there are no competing interests related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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