Article

Human actions and the philosophy of pluralism in Islam

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore the issue of human actions in Islamic thought, focusing on the various stances regarding determinism, free will, and the intermediate position between them. This topic is linked to an ontological question: What are the limits of human responsibility for their actions? Our view is that the different positions on human actions reflect the presence of pluralism within Islamic thought, specifically through the discipline of Islamic theology (kalām). The difference in positions about the human actions within the science of theology expresses the vitality of Islamic thought and its appreciation of the right to differ between theological schools such as the Mu'tazila, Shi'a, and Sunnis, especially in an era dominated by the rationalism of Mu'tazila thought influenced by the methodology of Greek philosophical thought. This difference was recognized, especially in the third and fourth centuries AH/ninth and tenth centuries AD. We consider this difference in discussing the subject of the human actions as evidence of the principle of pluralism in Islam, which allows us to speak of the existence of a significant degree of intellectual tolerance, a subject that has not been studied to date. The prevailing view in studies today on this subject is that the theological groups accuse each other of unbelief, which is a mistaken position, because the saying of unbelief did not appear until after the fourth century AH/tenth century AD when transmission, reliability, and conservatism prevailed in Islamic thought. In addressing this issue, we examine three major stances on human actions as represented by three theological schools: The Mu'tazila (who advocated free will in human actions), the Jabriya (who advocated determinism in human actions), and the Ash'ariyya (who upheld the theory of acquisition). Once this is accomplished, we will explore the philosophy of pluralism in Islam through the lens of kalām. The most important conclusion we reached is that the debate on human actions opened, by the mid-4th century AH/10th century CE, an intellectual horizon that laid the foundations for pluralism in Islamic theological discussions. However, this horizon was soon closed due to various factors, which we have discussed throughout the paper.

Keywords: human actions; kalām; determinism; free will; acquisition; pluralism

1. Introduction

The examination of the issue of human action within the Islamic framework, and the oscillation of Islamic perspectives between determinism (jabr: Every action a person does is something he is forced to do. It is directed by God Almighty.), free will (ikhtiyar: Man has free will to do whatever he wants), and acquisition (kasb: The middle ground between determinism and free will) renders this issue inherently philosophical and existential, particularly for the Homo Religiosus (Any person who believes in the existence of higher powers that lead him to have a religious belief). This approach is further reinforced by the emphasis placed by both monotheistic and non-monotheistic religions, as well as contemplative religious philosophies, on the question of human action. Fundamentally, this issue revolves around an ontological problem, followed by the question: What are the limits of human responsibility for

their actions? Is the human being free in their actions and behaviors, or are they subject to transcendent, external forces that dictate their destiny, direct their actions, and control them?

Such questions seem to have been at the forefront of the minds of Muslim theologians (mutakallimūn) as they engaged in the doctrine of "human actions" (afʿāl al-ʿibād), turning the issue over from various perspectives and analyzing it from different angles, depending on their theological affiliations, their knowledge of kalām (Islamic theology), and their analytical and argumentative skills in responding to the doubts raised by their opponents or dissenters.

Indeed, the issue of human actions can serve as an exemplary model for theological pluralism within kalām under the umbrella of Islamic doctrinal teachings. This necessitates an exploration of the major positions held by theologians on the issue of human actions, an evaluation of their arguments, and a comparison of their views. This will allow us to synthesize the philosophy of theological pluralism, including its origin, development, stabilization, and eventual closure. In other words, we will attempt to identify the essential epistemological conditions that allow for plurality in positions, while also examining how, conversely, certain factors may seek to restrict or even eliminate this plurality altogether.

It should be noted that our discussion below on "human actions" in this study is not solely for its own sake, but rather, it serves as a model—among many within Islamic thought—of the dialectic between pluralism and uniformity in matters of creed and other Islamic disciplines, such as Quranic exegesis, jurisprudence, and the principles of Islamic law. This dialectic brings with it dichotomies, where the relationship between each pair is one of complete opposition, such as closure vs. openness, rigidity vs. tolerance, the dominance of a particular model vs. the right to differ.

2. The Qur'an and the issue of human actions

The Qur'an served as a primary source from which Muslims derived legal rulings and shaped their worldview, encompassing behavior, values, and social relations. It is evident that the sacred religious text shows a significant concern with the issue of human actions, both in terms of determinism and free will. Muslims sought to interpret the verses that indicated determinism or free will in a way that aligned with divine meaning and absolute understanding. Some of the verses supporting determinism in human actions include:

- "Whomever Allah guides, he is the [rightly] guided; and whomever He sends astray—it is those who are the losers" (Al-A'raf 7:178): This verse responds to those who say that God Almighty has guided all those who are accountable and that it is not permissible for Him to lead anyone astray.
- "Say, 'I possess not for myself any harm or benefit except what Allah should will'" (Yunus 10:49): This verse was revealed when the infidels hastened the punishment of the Prophet. God said to him: Say to them, O Muhammad, I do not possess for myself harm or benefit, meaning that is not for me or for anyone else.

- "But He admits whom He wills into His mercy" (Al-Shura 42:8): The verse means, according to the commentators, that God will admit all people except those who are not good.

These verses are considered by commentators as clear, needing no interpretation to understand their implications. On the other hand, scholars identified verses confirming free will in human actions and categorized them as clear as well. These include:

- "So whoever wills—let him believe; and whoever wills—let him disbelieve" (Al-Kahf 18:29): Whoever Allah wills to have faith, he will believe, and whoever Allah wills to disbelieve, he will disbelieve.
- "And whatever strikes you of disaster, it is for what your hands have earned" (Al-Shura 42:30): God will punish you for the sins you have committed between you and your Lord, and your Lord will pardon you for many of your crimes, so He will not punish you for them.
- "Whoever does righteousness—it is for his own soul; and whoever does evil [does so] against it" (Fussilat 41:46): God will punish you for the sins you have committed between you and your Lord, and your Lord will pardon you for many of your crimes, so He will not punish you for them.

In examining the methodologies of theologians (mutakallimūn) regarding verses about determinism and free will, we find several commonalities, the most significant of which include:

- A strong focus on the reasons for the revelation of these verses. They adhere to the well-known rule in the sciences of the Qur'an that "the lesson lies in the generality of the wording, not in the specificity of the cause" (Razi, 1988).
- A tendency to extract these verses from their textual context, explaining why theologians often deal with parts of a verse rather than the whole verse. This allowed them to legislate rulings derived from the text.
- A partial view of the verses concerning human actions. Those who advocated for determinism focused on analyzing the verses that supported their stance while paying little attention to the verses affirming free will.

It is worth noting that many modern scholars have observed that most of the verses supporting free will are Meccan, whereas most of the verses affirming determinism are Medinan. They sought to explain this connection. For instance, the relationship between the concept of free will and the Meccan period is interpreted, in the words of Muhammad Abd al-Hadi Abu Rida, as "the Qur'an's initial aim to destroy the spirit of fatalism and resignation that had seeped into the Arabs from their pre-Islamic past, as reflected in their poetry and the Qur'an itself, in order to pave the way for a voluntary return to faith in God" (De Boer, 1990).

Conversely, the relationship between determinism and the Medinan phase of revelation is explained by the Prophet's warning to Muslims against delving into theological matters and disputing over them, while focusing instead on the legislative needs and institutional organization of the nascent Islamic state (Muruwwa, 1988).

The Qur'an's combination of both free will and determinism posed a significant question for theologians and thinkers: Does the scriptural evidence contradict itself by affirming both a matter and its opposite? Some scholars even pointed to two

consecutive verses in the same chapter, where the first affirms free will, and the following emphasizes determinism (Al-Imran 3:165–166).

We believe that simply reconciling the Qur'an's affirmation of both determinism and free will does not fully clarify the issue. Instead, one must provide reasoning for the coexistence of these two perspectives. For example, Ibn Rushd (1935, p. 137) leaned toward this view when discussing the doctrines of determinism and free will: "The apparent purpose of the law is not to separate these two beliefs, but to reconcile them through the middle ground, which is the truth in this matter. It is evident that God Almighty created within us powers by which we can acquire things that are opposites. But since the acquisition of those things is not achieved without the availability of external causes that God has made subservient to us and the removal of obstacles, the actions attributed to us are completed by both factors" (Rushd, 1935). This means that Rushd tried to take a middle ground between two opposing views on human actions: Compulsion and choice. Man is free to choose his actions, but the reasons that led him to do those actions were created by God, and man does not bear responsibility for their existence.

In our view, this opinion reflects an attempt to explain the reasons why a person sometimes believes in their freedom of choice and at other times feels resigned to fate when unable to identify the causes behind their actions.

We argue that the Qur'an portrays in human beings two fundamental aspects, which together define their existential, biological, and intellectual condition. Humans are pulled by opposing forces: Sometimes they find within themselves the will to act, while at other times they recognize the limits of their ability and submit to the overwhelming power of existence.

The early generations of Muslims' concern with the issue of human actions can be attributed to two major reasons:

2.1. First reason: Interpretation of verses indicating determinism and free will

The first reason lies in the interpretation of verses perceived by different scholars as affirming either determinism or free will. A notable observation in this regard is the diversity of interpretations by classical scholars for the same verse (such as Al-Muddathir 74:38 or Al-Tawbah 9:51) and their varied understandings of the divine meaning intended (Tabari, 1992; Zamakhshari, 1979). There is no doubt that the interpreter, when engaging with the text, is influenced by the pressures of their historical context on one hand and by the intellectual concerns of their era on the other. Moreover, the scholar's sectarian affiliation often infiltrates their interpretive work, directing the meaning of the verse toward the views of their school of thought.

2.2. Second reason: The role of politics

Political concerns also played a central role in directing Muslim attention toward the issue of human actions. This began when divisions arose among Muslims during the rule of Uthman ibn 'Affan (d. 35 AH/655 CE), who appointed his relatives and close associates to key positions in the state (Djait, 1992, pp. 74–96). The policy pursued by Uthman ibn 'Affan gave rise to several different and varied positions,

including the position that holds Uthman fully responsible for exploiting his political authority at the head of the Islamic state to distribute positions not according to competence and merit, but rather based on loyalty and kinship to the Caliph himself. His political behavior, then, was the result of free will, and therefore he must be held accountable for his political choice. This position prompted Islamic scholars to pay attention to human actions based on the example of Uthman ibn 'Affan.

The policy of Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 40 AH/660 CE) also led to differing views from the beginning of his caliphate, as Talha (d. 36 AH/656 CE) and Al-Zubair (d. 36 AH/656 CE) refused to accept his leadership. Meanwhile, Abdullah ibn Umar (d. 73 AH/692 CE) and Usāma ibn Zaid (d. 54 AH/673 CE) withdrew and formed a neutral stance, which led to the rise of the early "Mu'tazilah" in the sense of maintaining neutrality. These conflicts ultimately led to the Battle of the Camel in 36 AH/656 CE, the Battle of Ṣiffin in 37 AH/657 CE, and the subsequent Arbitration.

The question that was raised here is: Was Ali ibn Abi Talib guided in his political positions by divine care (i.e. was he compelled in his actions), or does he bear full responsibility for this matter, since his choices embodied his political vision in a historical context dominated by conflicts between Islamic sects, especially between the Shiites who consider Ali's actions successful and guided by God on the one hand, and the Kharijites who were angry with Ali after they held him responsible for his actions when he relinquished his political rights and gave up his legitimacy in carrying out the burdens of the caliphate state on the other hand.

Thus, the "Fitna Kubra" (Major Civil Strife) pushed Muslims to debate faith and its connection to actions, resulting in several notable positions:

- **Pure Determinism:** Jahm ibn Ṣafwan (d. 128 AH/745 CE) argued that rejection does not diminish faith nor lead to disbelief, as it suffices for a servant to know God, His messengers, angels, and scriptures to be considered a believer (Ash'ari, 1/132).
- **Early Qadariyya:** Represented by Ghaylan al-Dimashqi (d. 106 AH/724 CE), who considered faith as acknowledgment of God and His messengers and scriptures. To him, faith does not increase or decrease (Baghdadi, 1980, pp. 206–207).
- **Ahl al-Sunna:** Defined faith as affirmation and utterance, refraining from investigating its characteristics, such as increase or decrease. Ahl al-Sunna distinguish between faith and Islam, where declaring the shahada (profession of Islam) does not necessarily constitute genuine faith.
- **Murji'ah:** Argued that committing sins does not expel a believer into disbelief since faith remains whole and indivisible. They became known for the saying: "No sin can harm faith, just as no obedience can benefit disbelief" (Al-Shahristāni, 1992).
- **Khawarij:** Defined faith as belief, declaration, and action. They withheld the title of "believer" from those who commit grave sins, considering them eternally condemned to hell.
- **Mu'tazilah:** Combined faith with action and viewed the grave sinner as a "fasiq" (transgressor), a state between faith and disbelief (Al-Shahristāni, 1992).

In summary, the exploration of faith and its relation to actions was driven not purely by intellectual curiosity but by specific political circumstances and complex

social factors. Jaberi encapsulates this notion by stating, "Faith carried the meaning of the right to 'citizenship' within the Muslim community, so challenging a person's faith effectively meant expelling them from the 'House of Islam', which could justify shedding their blood. The issue was therefore serious, and the disagreement was entirely justified" (Jaberi, 1995).

This intricate issue reappears in other theological matters, such as human actions. Even a cursory examination of the terminology reveals concepts—originally judgments—fundamentally tied to human action, such as hypocrite, sinner, disbeliever, and transgressor. These terms raise questions about human responsibility in disbelief and faith, the capacity to disbelieve after belief (apostasy), and the ability to return to belief after disbelief (repentance).

The relationship between faith and human actions is evident in certain early perspectives on predestination, such as Hasan Basri's (d. 110 AH/728 CE) view that a grave sinner is a "mushrik" (polytheist) until they repent. Thus, he linked the final judgment of the grave sinner to repentance, thereby connecting judgment to their faith, which depends on the "will of the individual" (Abdul-Jabbār, 1974, p.154).

3. The doctrine of determinism in Islamic thought

In the field of kalām (Islamic theology), determinism refers to denying true agency to the servant and attributing all action to God Almighty (Al-Shahristāni, 1992; Tahānawi, 1984). This effectively negates all human power and capability, reserving creation, action, and power exclusively for God. Determinism was not so much a distinct sect as it was an intellectual trend encompassing several groups unified in their adherence to determinism. Islamic scholars categorize determinism into three main types:

- **Pure determinism:** Attributes no action or power to the servant, who is viewed as a feather in the wind moved solely by divine power.
- **Moderate determinism:** Acknowledges a limited, ineffective ability for the servant.
- **Acquisitive determinism:** Asserts an effective power for the servant, not genuinely theirs, but created by God at the time of action, which is called "acquisition".

Among deterministic groups, theological historians mention the Jahmiyyah, followers of Jahm ibn Safwan (d. 230 AH/844 CE), the Najjariyyah, followers of Al-Husayn ibn Muhammad Al-Najjar, and the Dhirarriyah, followers of Dhirar ibn Amr (Dhahabi, 2/328).

It is also essential to distinguish between the Hanbalis and the broader Ahl al-Sunnah concerning human actions. Following their triumph over the rationalist school, the Hanbalis adhered to determinism, reflecting Ahmad ibn Hanbal's (d. 241 AH/855 CE) statement, "Good and evil are from God" (Ibn Hanbal, 1971). This stance persisted among later Hanbalis, such as Ubayd Allah Muhammad al-Ukbari (known as Ibn Batta, d. 387 AH/997 CE) (Ibn Batta, 1971). By contrast, other Sunni schools did not explicitly adopt determinism, producing numerous texts refuting pure determinism. By the 4th/10th century, the Ash'ariyya school had developed a balanced position within kalām, establishing its theological foundations.

The motivations behind the doctrine of determinism fall into two categories

Religious motivations: These largely revolve around affirming divine attributes and names as a means of defending monotheism in the actions of God, who alone is singular in action and creation, devoid of any partner or equal. Among the main attributes supporting determinism are knowledge, will, and power, leading to the belief that affirming determinism is a natural consequence of affirming these attributes (Baghdadi, 1980, pp. 320–321). Certain divine names also serve as justification for determinism, notably "The Creator", "The King", and "The Doer of all things". Thus, affirming divine attributes ultimately results in stripping humans of these attributes, as if God's will, power, and choice can only truly exist if humans lack them.

Political motivations: Theological and historical sources suggest that the doctrine of determinism emerged with the rise of the Umayyad dynasty (40 AH/660 CE). The Umayyads needed a "religious legitimacy" to support their rule and strengthen their political authority. The doctrine of determinism served as a religious theory that could fulfill this need, providing the lost religious legitimacy by implying that God had preordained the Umayyads' ascension to power and their particular conduct toward Muslims, which disturbed the devout (e.g., monopolizing power and enforcing hereditary rule) (Ibn al-Murtadha, n.d., p. 6). The Umayyads themselves were not necessarily determinists but rather used the doctrine as a religious justification for their political actions (Jadʻane, 1989).

When examining the arguments supporting determinism, we find they are divided into two types:

Scriptural arguments: Determinists found evidence in the Qur'an and the Sunnah (e.g., Muslim, 1/452) to support the notion that all human actions are preordained by God. However, these scriptural arguments were insufficient to resolve the issue in their favor against opponents. This is partly because their adversaries also used scriptural evidence to support their views, and because scriptural arguments, in general, remain speculative and are therefore not decisive in establishing doctrines.

Rational arguments: The rational arguments for determinism were based on denying a necessary connection between cause and effect. In this view, things, events, and actions are not causally related to their immediate and apparent causes; instead, they ultimately trace back to the first cause (the divine essence), thus affirming the singularity of the true actor and the omnipotent. Clearly, the rational foundations for determinism were weak and equally inadequate in tipping the scales in favor of the determinists. These arguments rested on assumptions like "There is no true actor but God." This led later theologians within the determinist school to re-evaluate and reformulate these arguments more coherently. Evidence of this re-evaluation is seen in the critiques of determinism presented by other groups, including proponents of the doctrine of acquisition (kasb), despite the theological proximity between the determinists and those who believed in acquisition regarding human actions.

4. The doctrine of free will in Islamic thought

The belief in free will among Islamic thinkers is largely attributed to the Qadariyya (Gardet, 1996), a term ironically applied to those who denied divine

predestination, viewing humans as creators of their actions (Van Ess, 1997). The aversion to this term can be traced to a hadith in which the Prophet referred to the Qadariyya as the "Magians of this nation" (Abdul-Jabbār, 1982). The initial stirrings of Qadari thought date back to the mid-first Islamic century/seventh century CE, with early manifestations in Basra through figures like Al-Hasan al-Basri and Maʿbad al-Juhani (d. 80 AH/699 CE), as well as in Hijaz and Damascus with Ghaylan and Amr al-Maqṣus (d. 83 AH/702 CE).

The primary doctrine of the early Qadariyyah emphasized human freedom in choosing actions, with full responsibility borne by the individual. Accordingly, one earns reward for good actions and punishment for evil. Notably, the Qadariyyah's views appear to have been more politically and socially driven than purely theological. The widespread acceptance of Qadari views on human actions had two significant effects: It shook the early Muslims' belief in predestination's authority over both their worldly lives and their afterlife, and it provoked the intervention of the Umayyad political authority to suppress proponents of Qadar, who argued for human control over both good and evil.

The political violence underpinning the state explains the tragic fates met by notable Qadari figures (Amin, 1964). Ghaylan, despite being from the generation following the Prophet's companions, was executed. Jaʿd ibn Dirham (d. 125 AH/742 CE) was killed on Aid al-Adhha in Kufa, while Amr al-Maqsus was buried alive for his alleged opposition to Umayyad rule.

Thus, upon close examination, the origins of free will doctrine among the early Qadariyyah seem a response to the deterministic stance that had been propagated among the people, largely by the Umayyad rulers. This political and social impetus overshadowed any systematic theological structure in their arguments for free will.

The Muʿtazilah, in contrast, uniformly upheld that human beings are the true creators of their actions, rejecting determinism (Kamarzaman and Mahmoud, 2014). They argued that attributing human actions to God would imply multiple agents for a single action, a notion considered impossible by those who uphold justice and monotheism (Abdul-Jabbār, 1982). For the Muʿtazilah, individuals are responsible for their actions, shaping their destiny without any predetermined fate. This freedom of choice is essential for meaningful reward and punishment, which is the foundation of accountability (Bouamarane, 1978). Indeed, divine justice necessitates that individual be judged according to their deeds (Abdul-Jabbār, 1982). The Muʿtazilah pushed this stance to its logical limit, asserting that a person is responsible for their faith or disbelief; God would not make His servants disbelievers and then punish them for that disbelief, as this would negate accountability and God's justice, rendering prophetic missions futile (Abdul-Jabbār, 1974, p.148).

While the Muʿtazilah held individuals accountable for their choices, they did not see this as implying a lack of divine care. They believed that God encourages good actions and dissuades people from evil, a concept they termed divine guidance, which refers to divine benevolence in guiding humans toward what benefits them. They emphasized that rewards and punishments pertain only to intentional actions, distinguishing between deliberate actions and those arising from necessity or coincidence.

The Mu'tazilah also investigated the compatibility between human free will and divine power, particularly concerning the presence of injustice and oppression in the world: Are these attributable to human action, or are they the result of divine decree? They divided evil into two categories: Actions inherently tied to the agent, such as deliberate deception or falsehood, which are blameworthy because the agent has the option not to engage in them; this type of evil, therefore, cannot be ascribed to God. The second type consists of misfortunes beyond the agent's control, like illness or hardships, which may be termed "evil" metaphorically. Upon reflection, these can be seen as signs of God's justice and wisdom (Abdul-Jabbār, 1982, pp. 171–172). The Mu'tazilah stressed that suffering and adversity never invalidate divine commands to act within human capabilities.

The Mu'tazilah presented several rational arguments to support their stance on human agency:

- Human actions include injustice and oppression, attributes from which God is wholly free.
- Ascribing choice to human actions affirms divine justice and validates God's promises of reward and warnings of punishment.
- Human reason can discern the praiseworthy from the blameworthy in evaluating actions.

They supported these rational arguments with scriptural evidence, noting that human actions display variation, while God's creations are without flaw, as in "You will not find in the creation of the Most Merciful any fault" (Al-Mulk 67:3). Additionally, while human actions include both good and evil, all of God's actions are inherently good, as exemplified in "Who perfected everything which He created" (As-Sajdah 32:7).

The Mu'tazilah's doctrine of free will in human actions was shaped by several influences, falling into two main categories:

- •**Cultural influences:** The Mu'tazilah scholars were exposed to Greek philosophical traditions advocating human freedom, particularly in opposition to the Epicurean philosophy that promoted determinism (Amin, 1964).
- •**Social influences:** Most prominent Mu'tazilah figures were mawali (non-Arab converts or clients) or of non-Arab descent, often socially and politically marginalized. Their prominence within the Mu'tazilah movement can thus be seen as part of a broader social dynamic, challenging class, racial, and ethnic barriers in pursuit of intellectual and social recognition. The Mu'tazilah's advocacy for free will in human actions was partly rooted in the early Qadari stance, and they sought through this theological distinction to assert their intellectual and social status among the Arabs.

5. The Ash'ari doctrine of acquisition (kasb)

From the stances of determinism and free will in human actions, a third position emerged, with proponents seeking a middle ground between the two. This led to the gradual formation and development of the doctrine of acquisition (kasb), pioneered by the founder of the Ash'ari school, Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 324 AH/935 CE).

In Ash'ari thought, kasb means that everything God wills to occur in a servant's actions will happen, and what He does not will does not happen (Atri, 2022). This definition required distinguishing between "created" and "acquired" actions, allowing the servant a degree of choice in their actions. This choice, however, only occurs because the servant has the ability to differentiate between two types of movements (Al-Shahristāni, 1992):

- **Involuntary movements:** These are actions over which the servant has no choice, such as the movements of someone suffering from paralysis or shaking due to a fever. Here, the servant is under the rule of necessity.
- **Acquired movements:** These are actions in which the servant has a degree of power and ability to act, such as going or coming. Thus, acquisition differs from creation.

The essence of kasb is that an action occurs in conjunction with the servant's created capacity, yet the servant's capacity has no real impact on the action itself. Consequently, the Ash'ari concept of kasb is based on two principles: The ability to act and the absence of effective causation by the servant in the act.

The doctrine of kasb led to several implications summarized as follows:

- Affirmation of the simultaneous occurrence of capability and action.
- Acceptance that a servant can be tasked with what is beyond their capacity, given God's absolute power.
- Limitation of human ability in action, reducing human will to a formal capacity limited to distinguishing between involuntary and voluntary movements.
- Establishment of a middle-ground discourse, positioned between pure determinism and absolute free will (Ahmad, 2023).

Although the doctrine of kasb received significant theological attention from its founder (al-Ash'ari), his contemporary Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH/944 CE), and later Ash'ari scholars such as Abu Bakr al-Baqillani (d. 430 AH/1038 CE) and Abu al-Ma'ali al-Juwayni (d. 478 AH/1085 CE), kasb essentially remains a form of determinism in its core structure.

6. The philosophy of pluralism in the doctrine of human actions

Our synthesis of the doctrine of human actions through the theological positions of various Islamic sects shows that pluralism within this doctrine was generally accepted in both Islamic thought and history. This is evidenced by numerous debates and refutation literature produced among these sects. Even the trials or executions of proponents of free will in human actions were clearly politically motivated, aiming to eliminate those who exposed the ideology of determinism promoted by autocratic regimes. Political authority often relies on religious legitimacy to gain public acceptance and historical efficacy. In this context, political figures found support among allied religious scholars who issued religious decrees authorizing, ostensibly from a religious standpoint, harsh punishments for political opponents. An example of this is Abdul Rahman al-Awza'i's (d. 157 AH/773 CE) fatwa allowing Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik (d. 125 AH/742 CE) to execute Ghaylan al-Dimashqi.

As Joseph Van Ess explains, "Jahm and Ghaylan were executed after being accused of heresy; however, their fates drew particular interest due to their close ties

to the court and politics. Unlike later scholars who lived isolated from the rulers, these figures were politically involved. Political opposition represented a viable alternative for these scholars and jurists, who acted out of a sense of moral and ethical responsibility" (Van Ess, 1997).

According to Ghaylan al-Dimashqi, man is free in what he does. This position, which expresses the beginnings of rational thinking in Islamic culture, cost him his life, because the official religious establishment at that time was conservative and had mutual interests with the existing political authority. This explains how the fatwa to kill Ghaylan al-Dimashqi found quick political support from Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik. This means that saying that man has free will in his actions was considered apostasy that required death. It was necessary to wait until the beginning of the third century AH ninth century AD for the Mu'tazila to impose their intellectual authority and rational methodology in dealing with doctrinal issues and theological questions in general.

In essence, pluralism in kalām was accessible, with possibilities for debate, argumentation, and rebuttal available to theologians regardless of their differing interpretations of Islamic doctrines. Evidence of this pluralism is the presence of three theoretical possibilities under discussion and analysis: Determinism (belief in divine decree), free will (belief in human agency), and acquisition (a middle path). The Qur'anic verses discussing determinism and free will provided grounds for these pluralistic theological positions. It is crucial to note that the conflict between determinism and free will is largely superficial, as the Qur'an reflects the reality of humans within the cosmic order. Humans, like all other creatures, are subject to biological and natural determinisms on one hand, yet they are also endowed with intellect, enabling them to discern and choose on the other.

Beyond this, theological pluralism in the doctrine of human actions was not solely a response to the complex, pressured reality of historical circumstances. It also stemmed from philosophical reflection, articulated in theological terms based on the knowledge and methods available to Muslim theologians. Evidence of this philosophical reflection is seen in the scrutiny of the arguments for determinism, free will, and acquisition, as well as in the examination of textual and rational arguments supporting or undermining each of these doctrines.

This created an intellectually rich environment for establishing the foundations of theological pluralism in matters of doctrine within Islamic thought. However, this pluralistic horizon was soon closed off due to ideological and political influences, as well as narrow individual disputes, which restricted the objective theological discourse that had accepted differences in opinion, as long as these opinions did not undermine the core of Islamic belief—monotheism.

If today's Muslims, inspired by the doctrine of human actions, seek to renew Islamic thought in light of contemporary changes, they are called upon to establish a "kalam jadid" (new theology) that addresses the doctrine of human actions based on philosophical foundations and modern methodologies. Sheikh Muhammad Mujtahid Shabastari has illustrated how Kantian philosophy shifted the focus from "What can I know and what can I not know?" to "What can I do?" This shift in questioning can liberate individuals from all forms of imposed determinism. Shabestari concludes that "the human mind identifies the universal ethical law and the moral duty that derives

from it. Will is connected to this universal moral law in determining one's human duty. Therefore, it is the mind that answers the question, 'What should I do?' and the individual who defines their own obligations and responsibilities" (Shabastari, 2009).

This invitation for individuals, particularly Muslims, to act freely underscores a desire to transcend the doctrine of determinism that came to dominate kalām from the fourth Islamic century/tenth century CE onward, which led to the suppression of pluralism that was previously accepted even within a single sect, as seen with the diverse views and reasoning paths among the Mu'tazilah regarding free will. Gradually, a dichotomy emerged between "dominant doctrines" and "marginalized doctrines." Understanding this outcome requires situating the issue of pluralism in doctrinal beliefs within its historical and epistemological contexts. In pre-modern Islamic societies, pluralism—especially in matters of faith—was met with apprehension as it could lead to division, fragmentation, or even conflict within fragile social fabrics that were largely segmentary and lacked state-like structures in the modern sense. These societies were instead organized around the wills of individuals. This explains why early Islamic scholars emphasized the doctrine of consensus (ijmā') across various Islamic sciences. Yet, this came at a high cost, as consensus inadvertently entrenched a form of orthodoxy within Islamic thought.

In this context, Van Ess notes, "Islam has known a kind of 'orthodoxy' in its sociological sense, implying the existence of a form of doctrinal consensus that occasionally manifests as a 'creed' (…). When something resembling orthodoxy appeared in Islam, it was always a dynamic orthodoxy, one that could be continually replaced by another form of orthodoxy" (Van Ess, 1997).

7. Conclusions

Pluralism in the issue of human actions and other topics within Islamic thought, both past and present, opens doors for dialogue, discussion, and debate among scholars, safeguarding the right to difference. We believe that acknowledging the principle of pluralism is an explicit acknowledgment of the relativity and historicity of religious truth and knowledge.

However, this pluralism requires political and social will that actively supports and protects pluralism in historical practice. It also necessitates the recognition of religious freedom (Champion, 1999). Without these conditions, "theological pluralism" risks becoming a hollow slogan, devoid of meaning, with those diverging from the prevailing doctrinal position facing accusations of heresy, innovation, and misguidance.

Nevertheless, theological pluralism represents a form of religious diversity—whether within a single religious framework or between two or more religions—thereby promoting interfaith dialogue. Contemporary studies have shown that, when effectively implemented in historical reality, theological pluralism also upholds the principle of citizenship (Milot, 2010).

We believe that Islam's recognition of pluralism serves as evidence of its confidence in itself, its civilizational significance, the depth of its heritage, its religious scholarship, and its impact on history. Conversely, any religion, in periods of intellectual stagnation and civilizational decline, tends to reject pluralism, opposing

the values of religious tolerance and dialogue, both within its own community and with other faiths.

Ultimately, we see the potential for the institutionalization of theological pluralism in a positive sense. This means structuring "theological pluralism" around the triad of organization, rationality, and utility, leading to what could be termed "structured theological pluralism." This concept envisions an organized pluralism that interacts positively with current historical developments, liberating itself from the authority of inherited religious.

We believe that religious pluralism within Islam represents, here and now, a positive step towards establishing an interfaith dialogue that believes in the relativity of religious truths and respects the various religious perceptions, beliefs, and collective representations held by those belonging to different religions. Our contemporary world is in dire need today to highlight the religious commonality between religions, which is essentially a moral commonality represented in the universal human values that humanity has agreed upon, such as freedom, justice, equality, and dignity. Adhering to these values in our daily behavior and in building our social relationships helps us confront the intellectual and ideological conflicts, tensions between cultures, and regional wars that dominate our contemporary reality in various parts of the world.

The implementation of this valuable project that triumphs pluralism and the right to differ in opinion is entrusted to decision-makers, whether representatives of political authority or the scientific group that represents the educated elite present in university institutions and in Think Tanks. Today, humanity has only two options: Either to coexist and accept pluralism and difference, thus saving itself and achieving its peace and salvation, or to fight and produce discourses of hatred and violence and kill each other, and our fate will be to fall into the abyss. When will the universal human spirit awaken within us again so that we can put an end to the conflict of identities and the clash of cultures and civilizations?

Author contributions: Conceptualization, BJ and NS; methodology, BJ; software, NS; validation, BJ, NS, SZ and SAE; formal analysis, BJ; investigation, BJ; resources, BJ, NS, SZ, SAE; data curation, NS; writing—original draft preparation, BJ; writing—review and editing, SAE; visualization, SZ and SAE; supervision, BJ; project administration, BJ, NS, SZ, and SAE; funding acquisition, BJ, NS, SZ, and SAE. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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